

## **The Intruding Gaze: A Lacanian Reading of O'Neil's *The Hairy Ape***

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Slavoj Žižek, while interpreting Hitchcock's *Birds* in Lacanian terms, says:

We humans are not naturally born into reality. In order for us to act as normal people who interact with other people, who live in a space of social reality, many things should happen; like we should be properly installed in the symbolic order and so on. When this – our proper dwelling within a symbolic space – is disturbed, reality disintegrates.

In *The Hairy Ape* Yank, the protagonist, confronts a similar dilemma. His initial symbolic space which defines his primary 'looking-glass self' is, eventually, shattered by the intruding gaze of Mildred. As his initial reality disintegrates and his 'mirror stage' begins, Yank tries to reconcile with the 'image' setting out in search of an identity which would fit the socio-sexual definition of a modern day society; and finds his reconciliation in death, finally accepting the 'reflected image' as his. The limited scope of this paper applies Lacanian notions of 'mirror stage', 'gaze' and 'jouissance' to the text of the play, staying strictly within the Lacanian context; and contends that Yank's mirror stage starts with the intruding gaze of Mildred and ends on the acceptance of the image which results in his death.

Yank's primary milieu is defined by the rhythmic movements of lifeless objects. Buried within the structure of the ship, he works with his crew to fuel the ship's engines and proudly accepts his place. However, Mildred's intruding gaze displaces his existence and begins his mirror stage. He struggles to find his identity in the broader social construct and his final 'I' comes when he accepts the image, identifying himself with an encaged ape, a visual representation of the very image on the stage.

The firemen's forecabin of transatlantic liner an hour after sailing from New York for the voyage across... the room is crowded with men, shouting, cursing, laughing, singing... a confused inchoate uproar swelling into a sort of unity, a meaning... the bewildered, furious, baffled defiance of a beast in a cage. [...]. The effect sought after is a cramped space in the bowels of a ship, imprisoned by white steel. (956)

Stage settings for Act 1 define the primary space in which introductory action takes place. Buried deep within the ship, Yank and his crew outline the primary mode of existence of man. Their milieu, basically, is defined by three things: a) their underground confinement b) the absence of natural light and c) the surrounding water. All of these contribute to their behaviour and interaction.

As '[he] cannot stand upright' (956) Yank's existence, symbolically, is reduced to that of a child in foetal position, tied to the mother's body by an umbilical cord, surrounded by fluid of life. This mechanical womb of the ship is also surrounded by sea in which the ship progresses by force of its engines. He exists within this space, encompassed by the architecture of the ship, without any light from the outside world. In an intra-uterine pregnancy, the human foetus floats within amniotic fluid, taking its nourishment, through the umbilical cord, from placenta, which is attached to the uterine wall.

See that my analogy of Yank existing in a foetal position is based on the three similarities between his milieu and the milieu of an intra-uterine foetus: they are situated within a surrounding body, exist

without natural light and are both surrounded by fluid. This space, thence, becomes the symbolic womb for Yank. The similarities, however, are not only in terms of the external and internal milieu. Lacan, himself, acknowledges the foetal neurax and cortex, which form in an early stage within a uterus, as the 'intra-organic mirror' (4) in which the 'ideal-I' (2) is formed:

It is worth noting, incidentally, that this is a fact recognized as such by embryologists, through the term foetalization, which determines the prevalence of the so-called superior apparatus of the neurax, and especially of the cortex, which psycho-surgical operations lead us to regard as the intra-organic mirror. (4)

It is important to note, also, that although in Lacan's view the 'ideal-I' is formed in an infant who is 'still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursling dependence' (2), yet this form of the 'ideal-I' (which is the first form in the mirror stage) 'situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a functional direction' (2). Thence my analogy stays intact as I argue that Yank's first form of 'I' is not determined by the society (or the other), but is formed by his milieu and is a mirror-glass self in its very early stage. This 'I' is 'functional' in the 'direction' of the space within which he works with his team and, consequently, is not a 'socio-functional' ego which forms later in a mirror stage when the child becomes fully aware of his social surroundings in the broader sense and accepts the social constraints.

Also, note that in contrast to the rest of his crew only he 'belongs'. The rest of the crew maybe slaves in 'the bowels of a bloody ship' (1.122) but to Yank 'dis is home' (1.102), (as I will discuss in detail later in the paper).

Yank is the leader of his crew and is 'more sure of himself than the rest' (956). His umbilical cord is his primary 'I' which is defined by the looking-glass self that is formed by this milieu and infused into his conscience by the means of mechanical rhythm<sup>i</sup>. In contrast to the rest, he 'belongs' and the rest do not.

Diana Kendall writes while explaining the term 'looking-glass self':

According to the sociologist Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929), the looking-glass self refers to the way in which a person's sense of the self is derived from the perceptions of others... Cooley asserted that we base our perception of who we are on how we think other people see us and on whether this opinion seems good or bad to us... Consequently, our sense of self is not permanently fixed; it is always developing as we interact with others in the larger society' (86-87).

The important point to note here is that the 'social self' which is developed through others' 'gaze' is a) confined to its social milieu and b) is always developing with social exposure. It is confined to its social milieu because one's 'looking-glass self' is dependent on the way other people react and behave towards the subject. These people form the social milieu for the subject and if someone lives within an enclosed social group, his or her 'looking-glass self' would be formed according to the mores and norms of that very enclosure. This explains the phenomena of 'urbanized identity', a term which is used, in a broader context, to label the personality traits of someone living in a city as opposed to someone who is living in a village. Through social research, it has been confirmed that the 'urbanized looking-glass self' forms a deeper and broader ego because of the subject's contact with many groups and various types of people living within them. Yank's self, in this context, is confined to the social group that he belongs to. His ego has had no exposure to the broader social realities and we do not have any evidence that he even had a sound familial upbringing ('I runned away from mine [house] when I was a kid' (1.103-1.104)). His 'I', thence, is not a psychological I which is formed through a mirror-stage and is deep rooted into the social constraints thus structuralizing the unconscious like a language. His 'I' is the primary 'I' of a foetus, formed by his instant social milieu.

The *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* defines the looking-glass self in these terms:

Charles Cooley's theory of the self highlighted the ways in which an individual's sense of self is derived from the perceptions of others. Just like the reflections in a mirror, the self depends on the perceived responses of others... The looking-glass self has three components: the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of their judgment of that appearance; and self feelings, such as pride.

The only available mirror for Yank is his instant social milieu. There is no female presence in his milieu and, consequently no separation from the m/other which is important for the formation of an 'I'. His 'I' at this stage can be dubbed as 'self feeling' at the best.

It would be interesting to note that one can, at this point, argue against my thesis saying that Yank is well beyond his infant age and, thence, his 'I' is formed and the mirror stage already accomplished. But it would be naïve to reduce Lacanian theories to mere biological functioning. Jean-Michel Rebaté, giving us an insight into the Lcanian struggle, writes:

'... the relative scarcity of clinical presentations and the curious discretion facing the cases [Lacan] himself studied... seem to be offset by an almost equivalent increase in literary analyses, as if the lack of case histories was compensated by a wealth of literary and cultural exegeses'. (2)

Lacan's psychoanalysis is not confined to the boundaries of mere biological functions and real-life mental diseases, his theories can be applied to inner psychological patterns of literary characters and, consequently, can help us to answer many previously unanswered questions. While discussing Lacan's reading of Shakespeare's Hamlet, Rebaté sums up Lacan's conclusion about Hamlet's dilemma in these words:

The source of Hamlet's inhibition does not stem from his desire for this mother, but from his own 'fixation' within his mother's desire. The shift from a subjective genitive (where 'mother's desire' means 'desire for the mother') to an objective genitive ('mother's desire' as her 'desire for another man') has never been better [...]

Lacan draws the conclusion that we have come back to a mirror stage in which Hamlet and Laertes are still caught in an imaginary rivalry (based on a more general deception).  
(61-66)

Lacan's perception of Hamlet's desire and his mirror stage clearly transgresses the biological explanations. Hamlet is well beyond his infant stage (similar to Yank) but Lacan identifies the dilemma of his situation with the beginning of the mirror stage, hinting at the validity of his theory in literary genres (because otherwise his mirror stage theory would be reduced only to the psychoanalytical and psychiatric fields of medical practice).

As the play progresses, Yank continues to assert his 'umbilical I'. On hearing 'a very drunken sentimental tenor' sing a nostalgic song, he tells him to 'shut up' (1.99) with fierce contempt and adds that 'dis is home, see?' (1.102). Long, continuing the argument against Yank's 'I', quotes the Bible and says that man is 'born free and ekal' (1.118) but the capitalists 'dragged [them] down 'til [they are] on'y wage slaves in the bowels of a bloody ship' (1.121-122). To this Yank replies: 'we belong, don't we? We belong and dey don't. Dat's all' (1.146-1.147). Paddy, however, is a more elaborate orator and goes on to compare his past and present saying:

'Twas them days men belonged to ships, not now. 'Twas them days a ship was part of the sea, and man was part of a ship, and the sea joined all together and made it one. Is it one wid this you'd be, Yank? – black smoke from the funnels smudging the sea... the bloody engines pounding and throbbing and shaking... caged in by steel from a sight of the sky like bloody apes in the zoo... (1.216-1.227)

Yank's reply to Paddy's nostalgic speech is full of the kind of egoistic energy which we find in a foetal child for whom the outside world does not exist<sup>ii</sup>. The speech that follows is full of first person singulars. There are so many sentences that begin with the 'I' that one can easily lose count after the first couple of them. Yank's primary 'I' is formed in the sort of naivety which is attributed to the self-identity shaped by the instant milieu and does not include any knowledge of the broader social hierarchy<sup>iii</sup>. This is the 'I' (and, as Derrida would have it, the 'eye') that links him to his primary surroundings (within the ship). Yank goes on saying:

He can't breathe and swallow coal dust, but I kin, see? Dat's fresh air for me! Dat's food for me!... hell in de stokehole? Sure! It takes a man to work in hell. Hell, sure, dat's my fav'rite climate. I eat it up! I git fat on it!... I'm de end! I'm de start! (1.263-1.274)

Yank's words 'dat's food for me' and 'I eat it up! I git fat on it!' are significant. Similar to a foetus which gets its nourishment from placenta through the umbilical cord, Yank gets his nourishment from the milieu that he works in through his primary 'I', which, in turn, is linked to it and formed and defined by it.

Feminine absence in Yank's initial space is noteworthy. The mother (or the m/other in the psychoanalytical context) is absent from Yank's primary space of existence. The first female figure that we are introduced to is that of Mildred, which resides outside Yank's 'primary space', another peculiar similarity to a foetus within the womb of its mother.

The concept of 'm/other' is an important one in Lacanian psychoanalysis because her 'separation' initiates the infant into the mirror stage (much similar to what happens in the occurrence of the Freudian Oedipal complex). de Latour writes:

The main characteristic of the newborn child's bodily being is its total detachment from all the surrounding world except its mother. [...]

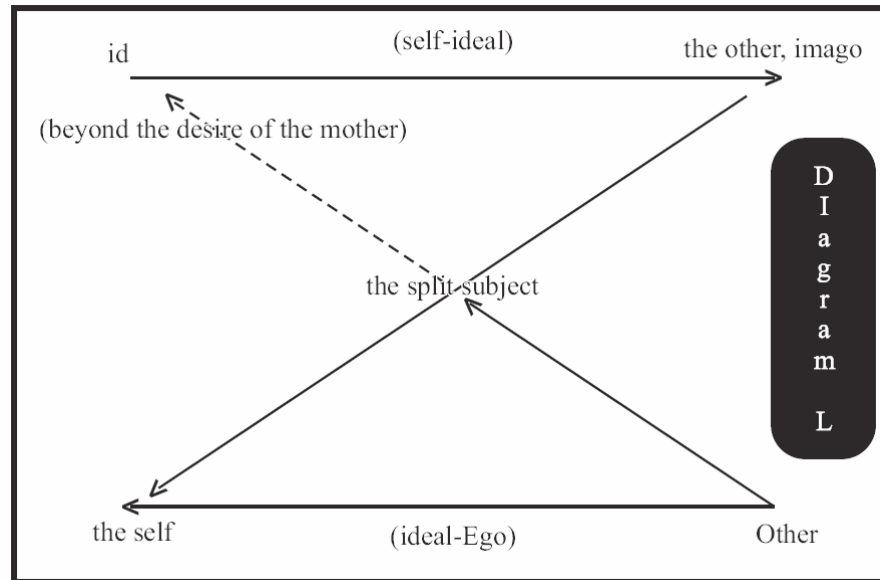
The relationship of the newborn child with those around it is governed not only by the forming of the imago, but also and simultaneously by its bodily relation to a privileged object upon which nutritional life depends: the breast and its substitutes... To the infant [the mother] becomes the first symbol (present/absent) that it can make its own. [...]

For Freud the central phase of the Oedipal complex occurs when the infant turns away from its mother to identify with its father. Although this identification with an idealised male figure is laden with potential hostility, it serves to detach the child from its mother and, in so doing, institutes the incest taboo. Lacan develops this theory by emphasizing the mother's role and by insisting on the symbolic nature of the identification with the father. [...]

[For Lacan,] The Name-of-the-Father... lets the infant make the transition from autonomous demand to heteronomous[sic] desire; from a dual relationship focused on the mother object to a tripartite relation focused around an object referring to the father. Replacing an internal maternal object by an external parental one is both an act of deprivation and a displacement. (154-157)



This concept can be further elaborated through the diagram below:



Printed in de Latour 160

The second act begins in a world (or rather with the stage settings) quite opposite to that of Yank. 'The impression to be conveyed by this scene' writes O'Neill in the stage settings for the Scene 2 of the play, 'is one of the beautiful, vivid life of the sea... sunshine on the deck in a great flood, the fresh sea wind blowing across it' (959). In between all this, present on the promenade deck, is Mildred 'looking as if the vitality of her stock had been sapped before she was conceived' (959). She is the 'bloody daughter' (4.60) of the system and, consequently, is the representative of the capitalist social class<sup>iv</sup> (which feeds the working class). If the forecastle is the mechanical womb of the ship and the ship belongs to Mildred's father, then Mildred becomes the mother, Yank's initial space her womb, and Yank her child. This can, arguably, be an analogy with extraordinary complexities. But the point here is to see that Mildred's 'gaze' initiates Yank into his mirror stage, pronouncing the separation of the m/other. Thence, in psychoanalytical terms, Mildred could very well

symbolize the mother, the other, the mirror and the reflection at the same time.

The confrontation between the (symbolic) mother and Yank comes in Scene 3. Buried within the mechanical rhythm of ‘steel against steel’ (961), Yank fuels the ship, shovelling coal into the furnace. The whistle from ‘dim regions above’ (3.36) makes him and his crew uneasy and enraged. But he doesn’t care about this intruding sound which symbolizes authority. ‘Aw, to hell with him!’ (3.52) is his answer to it. But the intruding gaze<sup>v</sup> of Mildred, who comes into his world from her own, shakes him off his feet. It causes his separation from the womb, his birth unto the social world where stratifications rule and social classes define human existence. In words of Slavoj Žižek<sup>vi</sup>:

We humans are not naturally born into reality. In order for us to act as normal people who interact with other people, who live in a space of social reality, many things should happen: like we should be properly installed within the symbolic order and so on. When this – our proper dwelling within a symbolic space – is disturbed, our reality disintegrates. (*The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema: Lacanian Psychoanalysis and Film* 00:07:01-00:07:25)

Yank’s reality disintegrates when his proper dwelling within his symbolic order is disturbed. The confronting scene initiates Yank into a<sup>vii</sup> mirror stage<sup>viii</sup> by the intruding gaze of the (m/)other.

Yank is working in the stokehole, enraged at the whistle blower, cursing him with animalistic shouts when he ‘suddenly... becomes conscious of all the other men staring at something directly behind him’ (3.79-3.80). This gaze of his crew is directed towards the intruding Mildred. And when he turns around ‘he sees Mildred, like a white apparition in the full light from the open furnace doors. He glares into her eyes, turned to stone’ (3.83-3.85). But as the gaze is a ‘property of the object rather than of the subject’ (*Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory*), he becomes aware that the ‘object’ is gazing back at him (‘As she looks at his gorilla face, as his eyes bore into hers, she utters a low, chocking cry and shrinks away from him,

putting both hands up before her eyes to shut out the sight of his face, to protect her own' (3.88-3.91)). She faints, calling Yank 'the filthy beast'<sup>ix</sup> (3.95-3.96). Yank 'roars' (3.99) and 'hurls his shovel after [her]' (3.100) but it hits the closed door and falls 'clattering on the steel floor' (3.101).

This 'beast-image' finds its own peculiar parallels in the gaze of Lear (in Edward Bond's *Lear*) when he stares into the mirror:

No, that's not the king... this is a little cage of bars with an animal in it... who shut that animal in that cage? [...] No, no! Where are they taking it now! Not out of my sight! What will they do to it? O god, give it to me! Let me hold it and stroke it and wipe its blood... (49)

It is also interesting to note the implications of gaze while performing on the stage. In a recent performance of the play at the Punjab University, the actress who played Lear interpreted her own image as a part of herself, being presented on the stage, while the audience was unable to look at it. She reacted to the image in a paradoxical way, accepting it and rejecting it at the same time. It was as if the stage itself has become the mirror in which she had to act in sameness and difference. Pearce hints at this quality of theatre in his journal article saying that 'the mirror image posits the sameness and difference. It is, of course, tied up with the traditional *topos* of theatre-dream, one of the perennial embodiments of the epistemological question' (1139). Faria Cheema, the actress who played Fontanelle, said in an interview:

I was vaguely aware of the feminist theories of 'self-gaze' and the 'male gaze' which, especially, define a woman's appearance in visual arts. My personal interpretation is that the image that Lear sees in the mirror is his schizophrenic other. While he gazes at it, the mirror becomes alive, and returns the gaze. That is why he sees the encaged beast in the mirror and vaguely associates with it.

Yank, in contrast to Lear, cannot accept the image in the beginning at all. He comes to identify with it in the final scene, and is instantly killed with his realization. It is, however, important to note that Yank begins to see the encaged beast (like Lear) in his dream (mirror) early in scene 6 ('I musta been dreamin'. I thought I was in a cage at de Zoo' (6.10-6.11)) which indicates that he is beginning to accept his reflected image at that point... and like Lear, is associating with it and rejecting it at the same time.

In simpler terms, the mirror stage is Lacan's alternative explanation to the formation of ego. In Freudian terms the ego is formed when the child, from the fear of castration, accepts the social role of the father (Cf. de Latour 157). Lacan, on the other hand, pins the formation of the ego on realization of his own image as reflected in a mirror. This realization initiates him into desiring his m/other and he finally accepts this image as his own.

Yank's movements are in perfect sync with the movements of a child who is initiated into the mirror stage. Yank's awareness of Mildred's gaze, his reaction to the image that she displays ('filthy beast' 3.95-3.96), and his reaction towards it, exemplify the situation of a child being initiated into the mirror stage. The child first sees his own image in the mirror, feels frustration, leans forward to hold it in his gaze, and finally realizes that this is his own image and accepts it. The image that Yank sees in her gaze is that of a 'filthy beast'. This is the image that Yank has to identify with in order to form his social identity, his psychological ego. Just as 'the child sees its body in the mirror... and feels frustration' (*Encyclopedia of Postmodernism*), Yank cannot, at this point, identify with it. He, thence, desires the m/other that showed him his image. One interesting fact to note about human desire is that:

The problem for us is not [whether] our desires [are] satisfied or not. The problem is how do we know what we desire. There is nothing natural, nothing spontaneous about human desires. Our desires are artificial. We have to be taught to desire. (*The Pervert's Guide to Cinema: Lacanian Psychoanalysis and Film* 00:00:06-00:00:30).

The entire fourth scene is dedicated to Yank's vent to his violent desire towards Mildred and his frustration in not being able to identify with the mirrored image. 'He stands out in contrast to them, a blackened, brooding figure', the stage settings for Scene 4 tell us, 'He is seated forward on a bench in the exact attitude of Rodin's 'The Thinker'' (962). Whereas his first contrast to the surroundings was in terms of a more well defined ego, in this scene he is an alien to his environment, the alienation being caused by the intruding gaze which has delivered this 'beast' unto the external world, and this is precisely why he will travel to the Fifth Avenue, the outside world. But at this point he finds it extremely difficult to reconcile with the image: 'Hairy ape, huh? Sure! Dat's de way she looked at me, aw right. Hairy ape! So dat's me, huh?' (4.31-4.32). He is not willing to accept his image at this stage. Instead, he nurtures violent feelings towards Mildred. 'I'll fix her', says Yank, 'I'll tell her where to git off! She'll git down on her knees and take it back or I'll bust de face offen her!' (4.187-4.189). This desire to 'bust de face offen her' is his jouissance<sup>x</sup>, and he remains obsessed with it till the end.

Scene 5 shows Yank's journey to the Fifth Avenue in search of Mildred. His expatriation, in post-colonial terms, becomes a metaphor for the migration of his 'self' from periphery to the core, which, in Marxian terms, controls and exploits the resources of the periphery where Yank was initially placed. His gaze, however, is not returned, and no one even takes notice of his voice and gestures. In dismay and in an attempt to attract attention, he violates the 'human rights' of a 'citizen' (5.175-5.188) and has to go to gaol for it, where he spends his time, in Scene 6, cursing and swearing. The dream that Scene 6 starts with (965) dramatizes his unconscious mechanism, as it is an indication that at the unconscious level he is beginning to reconcile with the image of the beast. On conscious level, nevertheless, he is still in defiance of it: 'I'll show her who belongs! I'll show her who's in de move and who ain't. You watch my smoke!' (6.67-6.69).

Yank's identification with his image has not yet come. In goal, everyone around Yank talks about politics but his thoughts are fixated on the egotistical ideas of freedom and belonging:

It don't belong, dat's what! Cages, cells, locks, bolts, bars –  
 dat's what it means! – holding me down wit him at de top!  
 But I'll manage trou! Fire, dat melts it! I'll be fire – under de  
 heap – fire dat never goes out – hot as hell – breakin' out in  
 de night – (6.159-6.163)

Yank's articulation is full of energy. He speaks in defiant exuberance, desperately trying to belong. He has not yet accepted the image (fully) and, consequently, is filled with distress and anger, trying, vehemently, to break free. He tries to break free from the societal norms, from the captivity that the image offers and, above all, from the bars which, literally, hold him back. This, however, changes at the end of the next scene, when he is not even accepted by the I. W. W. people as a new recruit.

In Scene 7 he goes to the 'Industrial Workers of the World' in order to work for them (967). He is there because he had this idea that this very organization 'blow[s] up tings' (6.142). In order to get back at the social class of Mildred he wants to blow up things too. His desire directed, initially, towards Mildred, is already generalized (thence becoming a desire for the 'generalized other') by Long (5.56) and now he wants to avenge himself by getting even with her class. Psychoanalytically speaking, this is his desire directed towards his m/other's social class, consequently generalizing the jouissance in terms of 'social otherness'. The people at the I. W. W., however, pose as the champions of 'legitimate direct action' (7.100) and suspect him of being associated with the Secret Service (7.136) because of his explicit referrals to bombings and bloodshed. He is thrown out of the building with 'gusto and éclat' (7.150) and 'lands sprawling in the middle of the narrow cobbled street' (7.151). It is at this point that we see his energy and defiance change into resignation and acceptance. 'Pathetically impotent' (7.153) and thinking in a psycho-existentialist manner, Yank, for the first time in the play, begins to realize that he doesn't belong. Here he enters the final 'form' of the mirror stage, where the child in order 'to relieve this tension and aggression... comes to identify with the image' (*Encyclopedia of Postmodernism*). 'So dem boids don't tink I belong, neider' (7.156) is his conclusion, 'I am a busted Ingersoll, dat's what.

Steel was me, and I owned de woild. Now I ain't steel, and de woild owns me' (7.168-7.170). Certainly he owned the world (his very own 'society') when his social ego was not fully formed. Now that he is beginning to identify with the image, his 'I' is getting linked to the elaborate social conditions, as Lacan points out:

This moment in which the mirror-stage comes to an end inaugurates, by the identification with the *imago* of the counterpart..., the dialectic that will henceforth link the *I* to socially elaborated situations. (5)

As Yank anticipates the maturation of his identification with the mirrored reflection (what Lacan calls 'power'), he begins to see the big picture... the social surrounding in its broader context. This anticipation, however, is an existential one. Gallop writes in a journal article:

Lacan says that the infant 'anticipates the maturation of his power'. Yet now we see that the anticipation is much more complicated than a simple projection into a future. For the anticipated maturation will never simply arrive. Not that the infant will not grow up, learn to walk, become capable of independent survival. But the very process of 'natural maturation' is now affected by the anticipation [...] Any 'natural maturation' simply proves that the self was not mature before, and since the self was founded upon an assumption of maturity, the discovery that maturity was prematurely assumed is the discovery that the self is built on hollow ground. (122)

Yank's first immature 'self' belonged shallowly to his atmosphere. His anticipated self, however, doesn't belong anywhere. His mirror stage has progressed to its end, terming for him, in existential mode, the end of his 'self'. He will belong in death, thence, ending his 'self' but realizing the matured 'I' which comes with the identification with the mirrored image; as his existential anticipation ('Say, where do I go from here?' (7.190)) is answered with an equally existential solution ('Go to hell!' (7.191-7.192)).

This discussion brings us to scene 8 of the play, which is the (grand?) finale. It is important to note that this scene is overcrowded with stage settings and any lingual interaction is absent. The whole scene is a monologue of Yank, who gazes into the encaged space of the ape, and actually talks to his own self. As he now fully recognizes the image ('so yuh're what she seen when she looked at me' (8.20-8.21)), the mysteries of the self and the 'I' begin to resolve in his mental space. In saying what he says ('so yuh're what she seen when she looked at me'), he accepts this image as his own and identifies himself with it, saying (while actually addressing the chimpanzee): 'Yuh don't belong with 'em and you know it. But me, I belong wit 'em – but I don't, see? Dey don't belong wit me, dat's what' (8.54-8.56). This acceptance of him belonging with the guerrillas marks the end of his mirror stage. His 'I' is now socially functional as the social rejection has transformed his self from the 'primary narcissism' to the 'alienating function of the I' (Lacan 6). This alienating function of the 'I' (as is hinted at by Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*) has formed his ego, but, at the same time, has displaced him not only from his initial milieu but from the social milieu in general as well. Yank's alienation, which started from the intruding gaze of Mildred, ends here, in the realization of the very fact that one cannot be free without the encaging bars, that one cannot belong while being alive (conscious). Lacan notes in this regard:

...Unfortunately [the existential] philosophy grasps negativity only within the limits of a self-sufficiency of consciousness, which, as one of its premises, links to the *méconnaissances* that constitute the ego, the illusion of autonomy to which it entrusts itself. This flight of fancy, for all that it draws, to an unusual extent, on borrowings from psychoanalytical experience, culminates in the pretension of providing an existential psychoanalysis.

At the culmination of the historical effort of a society to refuse to recognize that it has any function other than the utilitarian one, and in the anxiety of the individual confronting the 'concentrational' form of the social bond that seems to arise to crown this effort, existentialism must be



judged by the explanations it gives of the subjective impasses that have indeed resulted from it; a freedom that is never more authentic than when it is within the walls of a prison; a demand for commitment, expressing the impotence of a pure consciousness to master any situation; a voyeuristic-sadistic idealization of the sexual relation; a personality that realizes itself only in suicide; a consciousness of the other that can be satisfied only by Hegelian murder. (6)

This realization places Yank 'in' the moment. No history or future exists for him now ('But me – I ain't got no past to tink in, nor nothin' dat's comin', on'y what's now – (8.54-8.55)). His self exists only in the present, accompanied by the realization that no 'future' can accept his 'presence'.

In this scene the encaged chimpanzee becomes the personified representation of the image ('so yuh're what she seen when she looked at me'). Yank's psychological identification with the image is dramatized on stage as he frees the chimpanzee and tries shaking hands with him: 'Shake – de secret grip of our order' (8.87). But at the same time he anticipates that the identification means death for him and that is precisely why, when the chimpanzee squeezes the life out of him in a fatal hug, there is no surprise for Yank ('Hey I didn't say kiss me!' (8.91)). His mocking tone stays intact to the end and he dies without any regrets. His last uttered words read:

He got me, aw right. I'm trou. Even him didn't tink I belonged. Christ, where do I get off at? Where do I fit in? Aw what de dell! No squawkin', see! No quittin', get me! Croak with your boots on! Ladies and gents, step forward and take a slant at de one and only – one and original – Hairy Ape from de wilds of – (8.98-8.108)

He cannot go anywhere from here. The rhetorical question 'where do I fit in?' is answered with the determined slang expression 'No quittin', get me!'. The world that he is conscious of now consists of both the sexes ('Ladies and gents') and, as he attracts the gaze of this world, he dies, slowly, painfully, but proudly and devoid of remorse.

His mirror stage ends, and so does his life... but his ego lives on, in the echoes of his true identity ('Hairy Ape').

If Yank attained alterity through his movement from the periphery to the core, then his vehement struggle to get even with Mildred was strife in the paradigm of the socialist class-struggle. His journey was the journey of a proletariat to confront the bourgeoisie and get back at the ruling class in the process, which has ended in his destruction. The point, however, is that it was not merely class-struggle. His journey was a journey of the self, a journey of identification and belonging.

Reading the play as part of greater American tradition in drama (especially), Yank's character becomes representative of an average American, struggling to find his place in society, not only in terms of class but in terms of male identity itself. In a way, there are apt similarities between Yank's and Hoss's (from *The Tooth of Crime* by Sam Shepard) characters. Hoss struggles with the new order, unable to find his place and reinvent an identity when his primitive identity is challenged by the Crow. He is displaced from his original symbolic order only to find himself within another, more complex and stylish one. In order to identify himself with this new order, he has to develop an image ("Just help me into the style. I'll develop my own image" (241)) which could correspond to the one shown (/mirrored) by another of his kind (the Crow), only slightly better and sharper in style. It is important to note that Hoss's final identification also comes in destruction. He puts a gun in his mouth and "pulls the trigger" (249) to display a "true gesture" (id) of identification. Where Yank is crushed by a visual representation of his mirrored image onstage, Hoss commits suicide in order to invent a new image, an image rooted only in the collective conscious of a memory.

On one hand the encaged beast becomes Yank's identity, whereas on the other hand, he learns that even this image which offered a promise of wholeness was a fake<sup>xi</sup>. He realizes that death is the only answer to his question of belonging, because he doesn't even belong to this image that he has finally come to identify with ('Even him didn't tink I belonged'). In this existential manner, his struggle

comes to an end, pronouncing the 'comedy' in the 'tragedy' of the modern man<sup>xii</sup>.

The above discussion ventures to settle the fact that Mildred's gaze initiates Yank into his mirror stage, which ends with his final identification with the image, resulting in his death.

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Cf. The stage settings for scene 3:

The men shovel with a rhythmic motion... there is a tumult of noise – the brazen clang of the furnace doors as they are flung open or slammed shut, the grating, teeth-gritting grind of steel against steel, of crunching coal. This clash of sounds stuns one's ears with its rending dissonance. But there is order in it, rhythm, a mechanical regulated recurrence, a tempo. (960-961)

<sup>ii</sup> Cf. Above, where I argue that according to Lacan, the foetal child also has an ego, formed by the intra-organic mirror, though very basic in its nature.

<sup>iii</sup> Cf. His answer to Long in scene 1:

De Bible huh? De Cap'tlist class, huh? Aw nix on dat Salvation Army-Socialist bill. Git a soap box! Hire a hall! Come and be saved, huh? Jerk us to Jesus, huuh? Aw g'wan! (1.134-1.137)

<sup>iv</sup> Cf. 'I wants to convince yer she was on'y a representative of 'er clarss' (5.56)

<sup>v</sup> The *Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory* defines the term gaze in this manner:

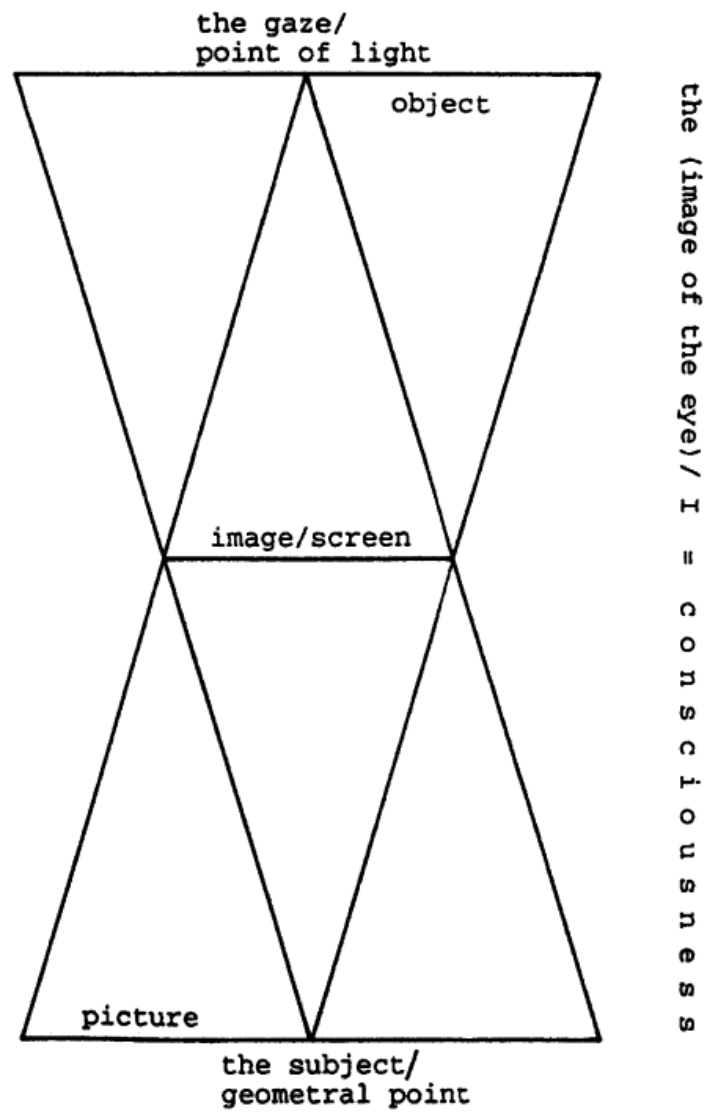
The expression *le regard* (the gaze) is used by both Sartre and Lacan [...]

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Visual perception is an important theme in Lacan's earliest paper; the infant-subject is, that is, entranced by its own image in the mirror-phase... Lacan describes the phenomenology of intersubjective relations in terms similar to those of Sartre's analysis of being-for-others, but he subsequently develops a different theory of the gaze and of the scopic drive. The gaze is now viewed as a property of the object rather than of the subject. As the subject gazes at the object of its perception, it senses that the object is gazing back at it from a point that lies outside the field of subjective perception. The subject is thus lured into the image of the object by the mechanism illustrated by the 'anamorphis' of Holbein's *The Ambassadors*.

This is what happens when Yank looks at Mildred: he instantly becomes aware that she is looking back at him. The gaze, thence, becomes the property of Mildred (the m/other).

The Lacanian 'gaze' can be visually represented in the following picture:



1a. Lacan's operational montage.  
The structure of the scopic field.

(Printed in Holm 22)

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<sup>vi</sup> Žižek goes on to elaborate this concept by referring to the intrusion of Ms. Daniels in Hitchcock's *Birds*. Her intruding gaze disturbs the symbolic order for the protagonist, which is defined by the authoritative control of maternal superego, and as his reality disintegrates, the birds attack the inhabitants to symbolize this disturbance.

<sup>vii</sup> Used here instead of 'the', with caution.

<sup>viii</sup> In the *Encyclopedia of Postmodernism*, the definition for the term reads:

The mirror stage describes the process by which subjectivity comes into being... The process of becoming a subject via the mirror stage depends on a conception of the infant as premature in an important sense: a six-month-old lacks bodily coordination, but its vision is already well developed. Because of this developmental gap, the child sees its body in the mirror as whole and integral but does not possess the coordination necessary to experience it as such, and feels frustration. Thus to relieve this tension and aggression, the child comes to identify with the image... [and] it is this identification that brings the ego in being. The ego is, therefore, a product of alienation, deferral and lack: the child mistakes the self for the image, and assumes that the coordination, integrity and power that the image seems to possess will accrue back to it at some idealized later point in time.

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The mirror stage is defined in terms of the child's gaze into the mirror, thus becoming conscious of the image being reflected as his own. Jacques Lacan writes while explaining the mirror stage:

The child, at an age when he is for a time, however short, outdone by the chimpanzee in instrumental intelligence, can nevertheless already recognize as such his image in a mirror [...] This act, far from exhausting itself, as in the case of the monkey, once the image has been mastered and found empty, immediately rebound in the case of the child in a series of gestures in which he experiences in play the relation between the movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it reduplicates – the child's own body, and the persons and things, around him.

This event can take place... from the age of six months and its repetition has often made me reflect upon the startling spectacle of the infant in front of the mirror. Unable as yet to walk, or even to stand up, and held tightly as he is by some support... he nevertheless overcomes, in a flutter of jubilant activity, the obstructions of his support and, fixing his attitude in a slightly leaning-forward position, in order to hold it in his gaze, brings back an instantaneous aspect of the image. [...]

We have only to understand the mirror stage as an identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image – whose predestination to this phase-effect is



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sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term *imago*.

This jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the *infans* stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursling dependence, would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the I is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject.

(1-2)

<sup>x</sup> Lacan defines *jouissance* in these terms:

What I call *jouissance* – in the sense in which the body experiences itself – is always in the nature of tension, in the nature of a forcing, of a spending, even of an exploit. Unquestionably, there is *jouissance* at the level at which pain begins to appear, and we know that it is only at this level of pain that a whole dimension of the organism, which would otherwise remain veiled, can be experienced. (qtd. in Braunstein).

<sup>xi</sup> Cf. Parkin Gounelas:

The other, in Lacan's reading of Hegel, is that which by its very nature 'frustrates' the human being. In gazing in the mirror, the infant experiences two contradictory responses, not necessarily simultaneously. On the one hand, it fulfils that

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perpetual human desire for identification and fusion when it 'recognizes' itself with a 'flutter of jubilant activity'. Yet on the other, it learns that this image, which offers a promise of wholeness and (self-) identity, is in fact a mirage, a mere reflecting surface which disguises the fragmentation of the infant's felt experience. This realization that the image is a fake, that its representation does not fit, is the founding experience of alienation on which all human subjectivity is based. (6)

<sup>xii</sup> Cf. the subtitle of the play.

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