

English 323
Questions 3 & 4
by
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As Malcolm Cowley says in the introduction to our version of Winesburg, Ohio its structure lies midway between the novel

The Hairy Ape is an allegorical play and in order to emphasize his point Eugene O'Neill distorted his characters to an extreme degree. The Hairy Ape can be seen as an allegory of the class conflict between the lowest sweating laboring class and the modern minded American "nobility." Yank is a type of moronic Beefyman figure he understands little but his strength and his vague feeling of his low state in society, which he takes blundering steps to correct. The whole play is distorted and close to the surreal due to O'Neill's use of character, setting, and situation. This distortion lends to the social allegory in the same way Orwell's animal figures form a social situation in 1984. O'Neill's distortion is used to simplify the contrast between the lowest and highest in our socio-economical system and make sure his readers will not perceive any other moral from his play.

O'Neill's working man is simply a distorted brute. He is a gorilla with a 200 word vocabulary, bulging sinew and dripping sweat, ejaculating phrases to keep him jumping in the hellish joy of a ship's engine hold. The reader feels a certain association with these last of the natural men who function on a strictly ~~social~~ physical plane. Since muscle counts, not brains, the main character Yank is the head stoker as he is indisputable prince of muscle. In the stage directions of the first scene O'Neill describes his protagonist thusly "He (Yank) seems broader, fiercer, more truculent, more powerful, more sure of himself than the rest. They (the other stokers) respect his superior strength—the grudging respect of fear. Then, too, he represents to them a self-expression, the very last word in what they are, their most highly developed individual." Yank is the character of the play representative of the stokers his relation to the rest is of a demigod, he hears their ideas and fantasies and tells them what they are to think with the whole boiler room chorusing their assent. Yank's socio-political-economic cosmos looks like this, "De Bible, huh? De Cap'tlist class, huh? Aw nix on dat Salvation Army-Socialist bull. Git a soapbox!.... Say! What's dem slobs in de foist cabin got to do with us? We're better men dan dey are, aint we? Sure! One of us guts could clean up de whole mob wit one mit." Strength and muscle are Yank's law and he is not adverse to violence, he feels a hatred for the upper class, not because he realizes he is the underling, but because he feels them to be inferior specimens of Homo Sapiens.

Yank gets an awakening from his brutish universe by a visit below deck by Mildred Douglas, a steel heiress in Park Avenue apparel, who gets one look at Yank sweating, bulging, simian, countenance wretches and flees in a sort of panic at the sight of the brutish coal shovelers. This upsets Yank and gives him a newfound anger for the upper class in a social framework. Directly after Yank is