

The Hairy Ape Character

Writer: Eugene O'Neill | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Major Characters

- **Yank (Protagonist):** The central character of the play. He is a stoker in the ship's engine room, shoveling coal. At first, he believes he is the one who keeps the world moving. But after Mildred insults him as a "beast," his confidence shatters. He becomes alienated from society and begins searching for his identity. In the end, he identifies himself with a gorilla in the zoo and meets a tragic death. He symbolizes the alienation and identity crisis of workers in modern industrial society.
- **Mildred Douglas:** A young woman of the upper class, daughter of a steel magnate. She boards the ship under the pretense of "seeing people up close." But when she visits the engine room and sees Yank, she screams in fear and calls him a "filthy beast." This incident pushes Yank into alienation and an identity crisis. She symbolizes the arrogance of the elite class, their detachment, and their disdain for laborers.

Minor Characters

- **Paddy:** An old Irish sailor who nostalgically recalls the days of sailing ships. He is dissatisfied with the hardships of modern mechanized ships and labor. His character represents the humane working life before industrialization.
- **Long:** An English worker who is politically conscious. He speaks against the hypocrisy and inequality of the upper class. However, unlike Yank, he is not physically strong. He symbolizes labor movements and class struggle.
- **Second Engineer:** A senior officer on the ship who supervises the workers. Through him, the distance between laborers and authority is revealed.
- **The I.W.W. (Industrial Workers of the World) Members:** A revolutionary workers' organization. Yank tries to join them, but they do not trust him and reject him. This shows that Yank is not accepted anywhere in society.
- **The Gorilla:** An animal in the zoo. In the final scene, Yank embraces it and tragically dies. The gorilla symbolizes the fall from human to beast, representing the loss of human dignity in modern society.

- **Firemen and Stokers:** Yank's fellow workers in the engine room. They respect Yank as their leader, but later, when his mental crisis begins, they start to view him as strange.
- **Ladies on Fifth Avenue:** Wealthy women of Fifth Avenue who appear briefly. They avoid Yank, symbolizing the hypocrisy, arrogance, and disdain of the elite class toward workers.
- **Men in the Jail:** Prison inmates with whom Yank converses. They mock him and provoke his anger and helplessness. This highlights his complete alienation from society.
- **I.W.W. Secretary:** The leader of the workers' organization who rejects Yank when he tries to join. They believe Yank is driven only by emotion, lacking real political consciousness.
- **Couple and Relationship**
- **Yank and Mildred:** Their relationship is one of hostility. Mildred insults Yank by calling him a "beast." Yank desires to prove his dignity within society. However, in the end, he finds no place anywhere. Their relationship symbolizes the deep conflict between the upper class and the working class.

Community and Society

- **Stokehole (Engine Room):** Not a character, but a symbolic place. Here, the workers toil in darkness, sweat, and smoke, just like coal. It symbolizes the imprisonment of laborers within industrial machinery.
- **Fifth Avenue (New York):** One of the key stage settings. It represents the arrogance, luxury, and neglect of the wealthy class toward the workers.
- **The Prison:** The place of Yank's inner crisis. It symbolizes the worker's powerlessness and isolation in society.
- **The Zoo:** The location of the final scene. Here, Yank and the gorilla come together. It symbolizes the erasure of boundaries between man and beast.