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COMEDY IN THE PLAYS OF EUGENE O'NEILL

by

Harold Levitt

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ABSTRACT

COMEDY IN THE PLAYS OF EUGENE O'NEILL

by

Harold Levitt

Adviser: Professor Bernard F. Dukore

This is a study of the comedy that appears in the texts of O'Neill's plays. Comedy is defined in terms of the variety of comic elements that are found in all plays. The paper establishes the nature and extent of the comedy O'Neill put into his plays, and leads to a formulation of the ways he used comedy to affect his plots, themes, and structures. Finally, the relative importance of comedy in any thorough critical assessment of O'Neill's works is emphasized.

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## INTRODUCTION

As the title indicates, this is a study of the comedy in O'Neill's plays. Textual analysis will include the interpretation of comic dialogue as well as the author's stage directions indicating actors' gestures, movements, and attitudes, and elements of setting, costume and lighting. The selection of what is and what is not comic will be made on the basis of what O'Neill intends to be comic, if that intention is explicit or implicit in the text.

It will be necessary to put together a viable set of criteria to detect and identify comic textual material. One may use such abstract terms as "comic spirit" and "playfulness" in determining whether or not words, phrases, ideas, events, or characters are comic, but the measurement of any large body of work in this manner would introduce too subjective a bias, even though these terms are quite common to general criticism. Therefore, comedy will be defined in terms of the variety of comic elements that are found in the plays; these elements will be placed within a framework of categories applicable to all plays.

Ambiguities may arise in attempting to identify the specific nature of a comic element, e.g., a character may use a comic expression

at the same time that he engages in a comic physical action. It would be an act of falsification to select one and eliminate the other. Therefore, where it seems feasible, I have tried to locate the main source of humor, and where not practicable, I have discussed one or more aspects of it in the appropriate categories.

Establishing the nature and extent of the comedy that O'Neill puts into his plays is the primary aim of this paper, which will attempt to formulate the ways O'Neill uses comedy to affect the plots, themes, characters, and structures of his plays. In addition, I will try to establish the relative importance of comedy in O'Neill's works.

Up to the present time, no comprehensive study has been made of O'Neill's use of comic elements in his plays. In his article "O'Neill and The Comic Spirit,"<sup>1</sup> Drew B. Palette identifies many of the plays in which comic elements appear, but he also suggests that much of O'Neill's comedy is unintentional. He cites the mask-changing in The Great God Brown as an example of gestures that become comic in performance though they are not so intended. In this study, what is not intended to be comic will not be cited as a comic element; I will thereby avoid the pitfall of having to determine objective data through the use of highly subjective evidence gathered from interpretation in performance. This paper will show that O'Neill's comedy is not unintentional; to the

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<sup>1</sup>Drew B. Palette, "O'Neill and The Comic Spirit," Modern Drama, III (December, 1960), pp. 273-279.

contrary, it is quite intentional and is conceived as an integral element in his dramatic construction.

In analyzing the varieties of comic effect, Alan Thompson distinguishes six classifications of the more important sources of laughter in plays: (1) obscenity, (2) physical mishaps, (3) plot devices, (4) verbal wit, (5) inconsistencies of character, and (6) comedy of ideas.<sup>2</sup> I will use these categories as points of departure for classifying the varieties of comic elements used to produce comic effect. However, for reasons to be explained below, it will be necessary to make certain changes.

Obscenity is considered by Thompson as indecent expression, and is, therefore, an element of dialogue. I will expand this category to include related taboo elements: not only obscenity, but also blasphemous and irreverent language, gestures, body movements, and scenic elements that provide similar comic shock. The first category will be called *Comic Taboo*, a more inclusive term than obscenity. The physical mishaps Thompson cites for his second category refer to the comedy of the body in physical action; I have made a slight modification to include the comic effect of physical appearance as well as movement; I will call my second category *Physical Comedy* rather than *Physical Mishaps*. Thompson refers to his fourth category as *Verbal*

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<sup>2</sup>Alan Reynolds Thompson, *The Anatomy of Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1942), pp. 193-203.

Wit but as his explanation makes clear, he means to include all linguistic elements of humor. Since wit is only one of the many ways language can be made comic, I have called this category Verbal Humor. In his fifth category, Thompson isolates inconsistencies of character from the many kinds of character behavior used to provide comic effect. I will broaden this category extensively to include related considerations of comic characterization and comic character types; Comic Characters is this category's title. Plot Devices and Comedy of Ideas, Thompson's third and sixth categories, will remain the same.

#### I. Comic Taboo

In dialogue, comic taboo includes words, phrases, and ideas that explicitly or implicitly refer to prohibited things, or that violate accepted norms in a shocking manner. Taboo gestures and movements are the manipulations of parts of the body to suggest or symbolize erotic or excretory functions. Scenic elements of taboo in the theatre include setting, costuming, and lighting that publicize the experiences society considers private and personal, or that is openly abusive of things normally treated with respect. Since the taboos of today are different from those of, say, 1932, when Ah, Wilderness! was written, a determination of comic taboo in any of O'Neill's plays will take into account the prohibitions and accepted norms of the society contemporaneous with the play's date of composition.

## II. Physical Comedy

As noted above, physical comedy will include all textual references to the physical appearance or the bodily movement of a character.<sup>3</sup> "We laugh," Bergson says, "every time a person gives us the impression of being a thing."<sup>4</sup> But George Duckworth observes that we laugh not primarily because of the ridiculous effect of the mechanization of a human being, but rather because of the incongruity suggested to us by this kind of automation.<sup>5</sup> A character who acts differently from what is customary (e.g., a timid policeman, a graceful fat man, a drunken uncle, a pretentious beggar) may have imposed an uncommon mechanical regularity on his human nature--which we regard as possessing the irregularity of freedom--but it is the manner in which his actions belie expectations that causes us to laugh at him. Therefore, I have included in this category of Physical Comedy the appearance as well as the movements of character.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>However, when that appearance or movement is comic essentially because it is an element of taboo it will, of course, appear in the chapter on comic taboo.

<sup>4</sup>Henri Bergson, "Laughter," in Comedy, ed., by Wylie Sypher, Doubleday Anchor Books (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1956), p. 97.

<sup>5</sup>George E. Duckworth, The Nature of Roman Comedy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 327.

<sup>6</sup>Bergson's "automatism" implies a living being in motion, whereas the idea of physical appearance being comic (e.g., Marco's outlandish costume in Act II, Scene 1 of Marco Millions) suggests the incongruous more than it does the mechanical.

### III. Comic Plot Devices

The structure of comedy almost always turns upon plot devices that are related to an initial misapprehension usually (but not always) corrected at some later time. One of the devices of comic construction is the use of mistaken identities that are eventually corrected so that earlier prohibitions may be lifted and new freedoms of action be made available. When people learn who they are they learn, for one thing, whom they can marry. Deliberate trickery and guileful deceptions constitute a series of frequently used devices whose humor often hinges on a feeling of derision and superiority in the audience. Errors, confusion, and innocent mistakes form still another category. All these plot devices usually lead to a reversal and a discovery or recognition of the truth for the full appreciation of their comic effect, but this is not necessary; they may also appear as unresolved comic elements meant to produce laughter.

### IV. Verbal Humor

Most of the comedy in O'Neill's plays is verbal. I am indebted to Duckworth, who in his chapter on language and style in Roman comedy, outlines a comprehensive list of the many features of the language of Roman comedy--the vocabulary, phraseology, style, and expression. Categories derived from his outline will serve as a basis for a classification of the verbal humor in O'Neill's plays: (A) Colloquial Language,

(B) Stylistic Devices, (C) Comic Formations, (D) Word-play and Wit, (E) Jests and Comic Stories, and (F) Linguistic Reversals.

#### V. Comic Characters

Thompson's "comic inconsistencies of character" will be expanded to the more general consideration of comic character. A discussion of the evolution of character types in modern comedy must take into consideration the characters and characterization of Plautus and Terence; the influence of the stock types of Roman comedy has been pervasive, particularly among those comedies whose central issue is the requital of young love. Of the limited number of types often associated with Roman comedy, Duckworth says that "the characters of Roman comedy are far richer and more varied than such lists would indicate. There are numerous variations within each type, and the characters display a wide range of human virtue and frailty."<sup>7</sup> My discussion of comic characters in O'Neill's plays will seek to identify these characters according to their Roman prototypes--as identified by Duckworth in his chapter on the characters of Roman comedy--thereby developing some broad type classifications which may prove helpful in studying O'Neill's comic characters.

A word should be said, at this point, about the advisability, generally, of reducing characters in a play to basic stock types for analysis. A reference to characters as typical is not an intention to

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<sup>7</sup>Duckworth, The Nature of Roman Comedy, p. 236.

reduce their lifelike qualities to stock types. The stock type is not a character, but it is the skeletal framework on which the character may be fleshed.

The purpose of this chapter will be to identify the comic characters and the nature and extent of their comic actions in O'Neill's plays, to measure their characteristics against the broad, general types they may resemble, and to form conclusions about O'Neill's treatment of comic characters and characterization in the structures and themes of his plays.

## VI. Comedy of Ideas

As a comic element, comedy of ideas often appears as satire, defined as the uses of certain humorous techniques to censure the vices, follies, or shortcomings of mankind with an explicit or implicit intent to cure them. The dual aspects of censure and intended cure will be considered as important barometers of the satire in O'Neill's plays. The manner of censure will be illustrated by the method of satire used (the certain humorous techniques mentioned above), and the matter of cure will be determined by the subjects O'Neill uses as satirical targets. I will classify O'Neill's satiric techniques according to my own formulation, because among the many commentaries, essays, and studies on satire I have examined, none defines satirical techniques with sufficient clarity. Four major satirical categories seem serviceable: (1) satiric wit, (2) irony, (3) ridicule, and (4) abuse. Within

them fall various devices, for instance: burlesque, parody, and derision as types of ridicule; and the sarcastic, the sardonic, and invective as types of abuse.

After I have presented this material I will attempt to formulate conclusions about the nature and extent of the comedy that O'Neill uses, and its importance in a critical analysis of his plays.

## CHAPTER I

### COMIC TABOO

Among the varieties of comic elements in plays, the most closely associated with the farcical is that Thompson refers to as "the shock of indecency or obscenity,"<sup>1</sup> which is one aspect of "comic taboo." This category includes language, gestures, body movements, props, and settings that produce the shock of obscenity, blasphemy, or irreverence. The taboo elements of comedy fall into three distinct groups: (A) language, (B) gestures and body movements that appear in stage directions or that can be inferred from the text, and (C) scenic elements, such as costumes, props, and settings. Language, the first and most common of the three groups, is the most easily recognizable. Its shock depends entirely on the immediate recognition of the lewd, coarse, blasphemous, or irreverent remark. The most elemental forms of linguistic taboo include oaths; blunt references to sex, body parts, and functions; and indecent commands.

The second group, taboo gestures and body movements appears less frequently, but in production they can be as effective as

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<sup>1</sup>Thompson, The Anatomy of Drama, p. 194.

language. More easily detected when incorporated in dialogue or stage directions, they are more difficult to recognize when they are only implicit in the latter. Recognizable by a majority of the audience as absence, they include motions of the fingers, arms, and legs; gestures of the mouth and tongue; as well as movements of the body in erotic or indecent suggestion.

The third group consists of scenic elements--costumes, properties, and settings--that may be used to evoke the shock of comic taboo. In Scene iii of Aristophanes' Lysistrata, for example, the text clearly indicates the need for a specific costume to show Kinesias' erection, an element that would not have been overlooked in the production of 411 B.C. However, in O'Neill's plays, there are no instances of the use of scenic elements for comic taboo.

I will now take up the question of the extent to which O'Neill uses comic elements of taboo, the kinds of comic taboo he uses, the ways in which they are used, and the uses, if any, he makes of these elements in informing the themes and ideas of his plays. I will consider first the comic taboo expressed in language, which will be presented in chronological order according to the approximate dates of composition.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>All dates of composition, production, and publication, as well as title verification used in this paper are from the "Alphabetical Check list of Plays" in O'Neill and His Plays, ed. by Oscar Cargill, N. Bryllion Fagin, and William J. Fisher (New York: New York University Press, 1963), pp. 479-482, in which appropriate sources and authorities are cited for all statistical information about the plays.

A. THE COMIC TABOO IN LANGUAGE

(1) The Sexual Act

When Bella, Susie, ~~Violet~~, and Pearl board the British tramp steamer Glencairn, at anchor off an island in the West Indies, in O'Neill's early play, The Moon of the Caribbees,<sup>3</sup> "they wear light-colored, loose-fitting clothes and have bright bandana handkerchiefs on their heads," But the men of the Glencairn are more interested in making the necessary arrangements for the sale and consumption of pint bottles of Jamaica rum at three shillings apiece than they are with getting to know the ladies. "Never mind the girls. Where's the dhrink?" says Paddy, as Bella and Driscoll negotiate the conditions. Big Frank, the good-natured Dutchman, has other ideas:

DRISCOLL: ...(BIG FRANK leans over and says something to him in a low voice. DRISCOLL laughs and slaps his thigh.) Listen, Bella, I've somethin' to ask ye for my little friend here who's bashful. Ut has to do wid the ladies so I'd best be whisperin' ut to ye meself to kape them from blushin [sic]. (He leans over and asks her a question.)

BELLA: (Firmly.) Four shillin's.

[Caribbees, 18].

And with a comically ribald slap the party is in full swing. Contractual arrangements are made--spiced amusingly by a few whispers to keep the whores from blushing--and the crew and their guests go below to get the festivities underway. But the issues of the play have been joined, and

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<sup>3</sup>The first reference to a play will be made with its full title; subsequent references will be given in abbreviated form.

in Smitty's attempts at "thinking and--drinking to stop thinking" the theme of the bitter memories of the woman who hopelessly loved him, and of his dissipation and despair, is sounded. On board the Glencairn negotiations are uncomplicated. Matters are not so simple in the world; the prices one pays are the memories that "haunted you when you were awake and when you were asleep," memories that recur while listening to "the mournful cadence of the song from the shore." Smitty can buy his rum, as the others do, but he cannot buy his woman. "I'm merely-- a ranker. And a rotter," he tells the girl who solicits him, and though he is drawn to her his efforts at love are disgusting to him. The price exacted for love from Smitty is the burden of an unrelieved guilt that renders him impotent. "An' she said she threw you over 'cause you was drunk; an' you said you was drunk 'cause she threw you over....Queer thing, love, ain't it?" says the Donkeyman, as Smitty unsuccessfully drinks his rum to forget (Caribbees, 20-22).

The men of the Glencairn may be interested in the business of sex, but Emma Crosby, in Diff'rent, resembling "some passé stock actresses of fifty made up for a heroine of twenty," has the technique of sex on her mind when she cajoles her nephew Benny to tell her "what are those French critters like?" O'Neill sets up the audience for Emma's prurience in the stage direction in which she

unconsciously hitches her chair nearer his. The turn the conversation has taken seems to have aroused a hectic, morbid intensity in her. She continually wets her lips and pushes back her hair from flushed face as if it were stifling her.

Benny taunts her with mysterious suggestions of "the ways of dressin' and doin' their hair--and lots of ways" of the girls the American dough-boys knew in France. Emma cannot contain herself.

EMMA: (eagerly) Tell me! Tell me all about 'em. You needn't be scared--to talk open with me. I ain't as strict as I seem--about hearin' things. Tell me! I've heard French girls was awful wicked.

BENNY: I don't know about wicked, but they're darned good sports. They'd do anything a guy'd ask 'em. Oui, tooty sweet! (Laughs foolishly,)

EMMA: And what--what'd you ask 'em, for instance?

BENNY: (with a wink) Curiosity killed a cat! Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies.

[Diff'rent, II, 230].

O'Neill pinpoints the self-destructive nature of Emma's desperate need to experience the sexual act in this absurd scene, in which the audience is as eager as Emma to hear about "anything a guy'd ask 'em." But she is suddenly rebuffed by Benny's smug remark, and she is forced to keep silent. The scene then turns toward the devastation of Benny's rejection of her and her lover's suicide.

In Scene v of The Hairy Ape, Yank experiences a similar frustration when he is confronted with "the procession of gaudy marionettes" on Fifth Avenue, "the women...rouged, calcimined, dyed, overdressed to the nth degree." But he uses the shock of a reference to the sexual act to demand attention. He insults the first woman he meets:

YANK: ...(He approaches a lady--with a vicious grin and a smirking wink) Hello, Kiddo. How's every little ting? Got anyting on for tonight? I know an old boiler down to de docks we kin crawl into.

[Ape, v, 70].

Yank then stands back and waits for the reaction but "the lady stalks by without a look..." O'Neill uses Yank's coarseness to contrast the studied hauteur of his intended victim, but the shock has more effect on the audience than it does on the lady. The theme of the frustration of Yank's rebellion is illuminated in this scene. The blunt allusion to the sexual act in a dark boiler between a "hairy ape" and a lady of "Fifth Avenue in the Fifties" is an intended comic shock, but the response of total disinterest is equivalent to the cruel let-down of Benny's response to Emma. The comedy becomes ironic. This short scene, whose humor partly derives from comic taboo, is a microcosm of the larger theme of the play--the frustration of the individual in a systematic world.

Sexual taboo takes on local, New England color in Desire Under the Elms in the scene between Eben Cabot and his half-brothers over the favors of Min, the town prostitute:

EBEN: I'm gittin' stronger. I kin feel it growin' in me--growin' an' growin'--till it'll bust out--! (He gets up and puts on his coat and a hat. They watch him, gradually breaking into grins. EBEN avoids their eyes sheepishly) I'm goin' out fur a spell--up the road.

PETER: T' the village?

SIMEON: T' see Minnie?

EBEN: (defiantly) Ay-eh!

PETER: (jeeringly) The Scarlet Woman!

SIMEON: Lust--that's what's growin' in ye!

EBEN: Waal--she's purty!

PETER: She's been purty fur twenty year!

SIMEON: A new coat o' paint'll make a heifer out of forty.

EBEN: She hain't forty!

PETER: If she hain't, she's teeterin' on the edge.

EBEN: (desperately) What d'yew know--

PETER: All they is...Sim knew her--an' then me arter--

SIMEON: An' Paw kin tell yew somethin' too! He was fust!

EBEN: D'ye mean t' say he...?

SIMEON: (with a grin) Ay-eh! We air his heirs in everythin'!

EBEN: (intensely) That's more to it. That grows on it! It'll bust soon! (Then violently) I'll go smash my fist in her face! (He pulls open the door in rear violently).

SIMEON: (with a wink at PETER--drawlingly) Mebbe--but the night's wa'm--purty--by the time ye git thar mebbe ye'll kiss her instead!

PETER: Sart'n he will! (They both roar with coarse laughter...)  
[Desire, I, ii, 144].

The laughter may be coarse, but in these first few minutes of the play O'Neill has presented, in comic fashion, the major themes of incest and inheritance that govern the action. Father and son can share the same partner when lust is the only issue, but when sex determines succession the issue leads to incest and infanticide.

In Marco Millions, the sex act is considered a businessman's diversion. Marco has reached puberty and he is on the verge of meeting his first prostitute. But his uncle Maffeo intercepts her, and while he and Marco's father "laugh with coarse familiarity," and Marco turns from one to the other bewilderedly, Maffeo displays his worldliness:

MAFFEO: (jokingly) So here you are again. You're like a bad coin--always turning up.

PROSTITUTE: (smiling) Shut up. You can bet it isn't old folks like you that turn me.

[Marco, III, 231].

Money may not be everything to prostitutes and princesses, but to Marco it is enough. Commerce conquers all; even the prostitute later learns from Marco the lesson of driving the hardest bargain for services rendered. A commercial success, Marco will live to an old age, like a prostitute without a heart of gold.

The comic chorus of townspeople in Mourning Becomes Electra stand outside the mansion two days after the death of Ezra Mannon. The wizened, sharp-eyed Josiah Borden and the kindly old Doctor Blake take up the question of the possible cause of death. Blake suggests that Mannon died during the act of love, after having been away from his wife too long a time. Borden considers the suggestion: "Can't say as I blame him! She's a looker! I don't like her and never did but I can imagine worse ways of dying!" (Mourning, Part II, I, 757). Ironically, the issue of Mannon's death is indeed the act of sex, but not the way the townspeople think. Josiah Borden can imagine worse ways of dying, and Mannon did die a worse way, but only Lavinia is aware of it. The comic coupling of death and sex reflects directly on the subject of the play. The implication of the joke is that there are worse ways of dying; the implication of the play is that the Mannons die the worst ways.

"But wait, watch and listen," says Uncle Sid in Ah, Wilderness!, after having read three lines of Swinburne from a note his young nephew had surreptitiously given to his sweetheart, "the worst is yet to come!" Then, Sid reads the remainder of the quotation:

SID: ... (He recites with added comic intensity)

"That I could drink thy veins as wine, and eat  
Thy breasts like honey, that from face to feet  
Thy body were abolished and consumed,  
And in my flesh thy very flesh entombed!"

MILLER: (an irrepressible boyish grin coming to his face) Hell and halleluyah!...

[Wilderness, I, 27].

Miller's boyish grin gives way to fatherly concern as he weighs the possible implications of Richard sending such "warm stuff" to Muriel. He wonders if his boy might not be "hanging around her to see what he can get?"

The Swinburne quotation expresses Richard's exuberant love for Muriel; he is honest, innocent, and oblivious to the implications suggested by his uncle. It is precisely this tension between innocence and honesty that characterizes his nature, and that helps create the comedy of his progress toward maturity that is central to the theme of love that informs the play.

Uncle Sid has an enlightening comment to make on the same subject as he contemplates the lobster in his plate at dinner:

SID: In this cage you see the lobster. You will not believe me, ladies and gents, but it's a fact that this interesting bivalve only makes love to his mate once in every thousand years--but, dearie

me, how he does enjoy it!

[Wilderness, II, 56].

Everyone roars with laughter. Even Mrs. Miller and Aunt Lily "laugh in spite of themselves." O'Neill has succeeded in this play in rendering sexual taboo in such affectionate terms that although the comic elements relate to the sexual act, in the minds of all the good people of the Miller household it is indistinguishable from love.

O'Neill uses the barroom scene with Richard and the young prostitute Belle to present lust as the antithesis of the middle-class virtues extolled in the play. To a popular tune "Bedelia," Belle provides her own lyrics, "Bedelia, I'd like to feel yer," as she sings seductively to Richard (Wilderness, III, 1, 63). When the boy tries to explain that he is not cold and indifferent to her, but that he has "a weight" on his mind, Belle orders him to "get it off your mind and give something else a chance to work" (Wilderness, III, 1, 65). When Richard refuses to accept her invitation, intimating that he intends to be faithful to Muriel, Belle tells him: "Bet you she's out with a guy under some bush this minute, giving him all he wants. Don't be a sucker, Kid! Even the little flies do it!" (Wilderness, III, 1, 70).

Belle's field of vision is the same as Rocky's Ploggi's, who in Harry Hope's back room recalls Hickey's joke about the time he cried over his wife's picture after having "left her in de hay wid de iceman" (The Iceman Cometh, I, 13). In Hope's bar on that early morning in the summer of 1912, all the humor is, in fact, biting and sardonic. Willie

Oban, the Harvard Law School alumnus, has just completed a long, cynical appraisal of his life for the benefit of the disinterested Parritt, the latest entrant to the group. Willie turns away with disgust. "Would that Hickey or Death would come!" he says to Larry Slade, expressing what will become the governing idea of the play--that both Hickey and death will come, that Hickey's "reality" is a death of the spirit, a return to the isolation of their individual anxieties, and a loss of the balm of their communion, and that Hickey, as Death, will almost succeed in killing them all. But Willie turns to song to dispel the mood of gloom that has come over him. After two introductory stanzas he launches into the third:

WILLIE: (. . . rapping on the table with his knuckles at the indicated spots in the song . . . He sings:)

"Oh, come up," she cried, "my sailor lad,  
And you and I'll agree,  
And I'll show you the prettiest (Rap, rap, rap)  
That ever you did see."

(He speaks) You see, Larry? The lewd Puritan touch, obviously, and it grows more marked as we go on.

(He sings:)

"Oh, he put his arm around her waist,  
He gazed in her bright blue eyes  
And then he--"

[Iceman, I, 40].

But that is as far as Willie is allowed to go. The other characters blink their eyes, grumble, and curse, and Rocky and Hope threaten to lock Willie in his room if he does not keep quiet. The suggestion of obscenity is taken as an intrusion, which is an indication of their emotional

bankruptcy and of the extent to which they have removed themselves from the force of life.

But Rocky's "tarts" are not so disengaged. For them, life is a series of deals and adventures. Pearl is amused by the idea of Cora getting married to Chuck: "Imagine Cora a bride! Dat's a hot one! Jees, Cora, if all de guys you've stayed wid was side by side, yuh could walk on 'em from here to Texas!" (Iceman, II, 99).

Hickey starts his confession "in a tone of fond, sentimental reminiscence." He tells the others about Mollie Arlington, the "madame of the cathouse," who staked him to his railroad fare to the city, where she knew he "could kid people and sell things.":

HICKEY: . . . (He chuckles) Mollie was all right. She gave me confidence in myself. I paid her back, the first money I earned. Wrote her a kidding letter, I remember, saying I was peddling baby carriages and she and the girls had better take advantage of our bargain offer.

[Iceman, IV, 233].

Hickey, as the apostle of death refers to birth. The ironic baby carriage joke is aimed at the "suckers for pipe dreams" just as surely as Hickey's efforts in the play are similarly aimed.

The subject changes from baby carriages to babies, but the taboo still relates to the act of sex when Erie Smith in Hughie interrogates the new hotel night clerk, who reminds him of the previous clerk:

ERIE: . . . Kids, too, I bet?

NIGHT CLERK: Yes, sir. Three.

ERIE: You're worse off than Hughie was. He only had two. Three, huh? Well that's what comes of being careless!

[Hughie, 267].

The night clerk, whose name happens to be Hughes, doesn't "get" the joke. In his exchange, O'Neill uses Erie's remark on the peril of ineffective birth control to help define the conflict in him between the insensitivity of the tough Broadway gambler and the good nature, friendliness, and charm of the lonely occupant of Room 492.

Erie, who considers himself "a sucker for blondes," tells the night clerk, "You shoulda seen the doll I made night before last" (Hughie, 266). Because he also loves horses, he admits, "I'd rather sleep in the same stall with old Man O' War than make the whole damn Follies" (Hughie, 276). Later, in a mood of heartfelt sorrow for his old friend Hughie, he launches into a lyrical flight of fanciful successes he knows Hughie would have been pleased to hear:

ERIE: Christ, I wish Hughie was alive and kickin'. I'd tell him I win ten grand from the bookies, and ten grand at stud, and ten grand in a crap game! I'd tell him I bought one of those Mercedes sport roadsters with nickel pipes sticking out of the hood! I'd tell him I lay three babes from the Follies--two blondes and one brunette!

[Hughie, 287].

The taboo subject is explicit. Since Erie has worked himself up to a strong degree of anguish over the death of his friend, he reverts to his toughest Broadway slang to express his deep emotional despair. Later, when he warms up to the first sign of life in the night clerk, he clasps the man's limp hand and delivers a final, spirited soliloquy:

ERIE: . . . Why, one time down in New Orleans I lit a cigar with a C note, just for a gag, y'understand. I was with a bunch of high class dolls and I wanted to see their eyes pop out--and believe me, they sure popped! After that, I coulda made 'em one at a time or all together!

[Hughie, 291].

Warmth, self-assurance, and some of the old confidence return to Erie, and this time O'Neill uses the potent boast as an expression of the joy and exuberance of life. Erie's answer to the night clerk's question about whether or not he knows Arnold Rothstein is a surprisingly frank admission that "he wouldn't loan a guy like me a nickel to save my grandmother from streetwalking" (Hughie, 289). But the unfamiliar humility coming from Erie serves only to increase the respect the night clerk is gaining for him. He interprets the remark as confirmation that Erie does know Arnold Rothstein, and from this moment to the end of the play Erie has found a new "Hughie."

Josie Hogan and her father, in A Moon for the Misbegotten, complain to the Standard Oil millionaire that not only are they innocent of having encouraged their pigs to wallow in his ice pond, but that he was the one who had the fence between the properties broken, which caused the pigs to be "enticed" onto the pond where they "caught their death of cold . . . and died of pneumonia." Harder is appalled by their cheek and tries to retain his dignity, but Josie has the last word:

JOSIE: (Leers at him idiotically) Sure, you wouldn't go without a word of good-bye to me, would you, darlin'? Don't scorn me just because you have on your jockey's pants. (In a hoarse whisper) Meet me tonight, as usual, down by the pigpen. (HARDER'S retreat becomes a rout . . .)

[Misbegotten, I, 339].

Josie's humor is robust and colorful, which effectively serves O'Neill's purpose of having her perpetuate the deception of her wide experience with men. Josie has never been intimate with anyone. Although Hogan and Jim Tyrone are able to laugh with her, they know that the harshness of her manner is meant to hide her innocence and the shame of her virginity. The taunt of her promiscuity contains a major idea of the play: The use of cynicism to mask innocence. Josie and Tyrone want to be monogamous, but their vulnerability and their self-doubts force them into a kind of spiritual hiding. Josie turns a promiscuous grin to the world to hide her great capacity for love, and Tyrone is promiscuous to help prove to himself that he is worthless.

(2) Parts of the Body

Second in the sub-categories of the comically taboo language in O'Neill's plays is reference to taboo parts of the body.

In the Fifth Avenue scene of Ape, Yank cries out to a lady who ignores him:

YANK: . . . Holy smokes, what a mug! Go hide yuhself before de horses shy at yuh. Gee, pipe de heine on dat one! Say, youse, yuh look like de stoin of a ferryboat.

[Ape, v, 70].

Ironically, it is Yank who is ugly and frightening, and it is his ape-like body that is grotesquely proportioned. The comic shock stems from the explicit insult, but the themes of alienation and subhuman appearance are strongly sounded and sharply drawn.

Harry Hope falls into one of his sentimental moods when he recalls his wife, Bessie, who had died twenty years earlier. Eager for a handout, his brother-in-law Mosher goes along with the spirit of tender reminiscence. "Good old Bess. A man couldn't want a better sister than she was to me," he says. But Harry resents the intrusion:

HOPE: . . . (Scathingly) You talking of your dear sister! Bessie had you sized up. She used to tell me, "I don't know what you can see in that worthless, drunken, petty-larceny brother of mine. If I had my way," she'd say, "he'd get booted out in the gutter on his fat behind." Sometimes she didn't say behind, either.

[Iceman, I, 58].

The comic effect is sharp, and the character of Bessie is revealed. We are shown something of the tough, endearing relationship, the love and the hate, that existed between Hope and his wife. At his most despairing mood in the play he refers to her as "that nagging bitch." Both attitudes are not only compatible but necessary to reveal the illusions and inconsistencies that constitute reality.

Lewis, the British captain, and Wetjoen, the Boer general, indulge good-naturedly in one of their frequent interpretive wrangles on the details of the Boer War:

LEWIS: (Smiling amiably) As for you, my balmy Boer that walks like a man, I say again it was a grave error in our foreign policy to set you free, once we nabbed you and your commando with Cronje. We should have taken you to the London Zoo and incarcerated you in the baboons' cage. With a sign: "Spectators may distinguish the true baboon by his blue behind."

[Iceman, I, 44].

As in almost all of O'Neill's uses of comic taboo involving parts of the body, the reference is to the fundament. This time, however, the comic

effect is particularly "shaggy" and visual. When the specter of Hickey's destructive influence has been banished with the revelation of his crime, Lewis and Wetjoen return to the world of their illusions and O'Neill repeats the joke in its former comic spirit to signal the rapprochement:

LEWIS: . . . (He grins with affectionate kidding at Wetjoen) And lo and behold, who was on the neighboring bench but my old battlefield companion, the Boer that walks like a man--who, if the British government had taken my advice, would have been removed from his fetid kraal on the veldt straight to the baboon's cage at the London Zoo, and little children would now be asking their nurses: "Tell me, Nana, is that the Boer General, the one with the blue behind?" (They all laugh uproariously. LEWIS leans over and slaps WETJOEN affectionately on the knee) No offense meant, Piet, old chap.

[Iceman, IV, 252].

In Long Day's Journey into Night, dusk finds the Tyrone's maid, Cathleen, and her mistress in the living room sharing confidences. The tray with the whiskey, glasses, and ice water is on the table. Showing the effects of drinking, Cathleen, holds an empty glass in her hand and rambles on incessantly, although Mary Tyrone pays no attention to her:

CATHLEEN: Bad cess to it. I was scared out of my wits riding back from town. I thought that ugly monkey, Smythe, would drive us in a ditch or against a tree. You couldn't see your hand in front of you. I'm glad you had me sit in back with you, Ma'am. If I'd been in front with that monkey--He can't keep his dirty hands to himself. Give him half a chance and he's pinching me on the leg or you-know-where--asking your pardon, Ma'am, but it's true.

[Journey, III, 98].

O'Neill uses Cathleen's brash conviviality in striking counterpoint to the dark, searching introspection of the Tyrone family. The frank,

uninhibited nature of her confidences contrasts strongly with the tortured introspection that characterizes the experience, expression, and behavior of the others. Her embarrassed reference to Smythe's liberties distinguishes between the vital simple-mindedness of herself, Smythe, and Bridget, the fussy cook, and the haunted, anxiety-ridden Tyrones, a contrast that serves to sharpen the sense of the suffering of the Tyrones.

Jim Tyrone, in Misbegotten, is older and even more ravaged by the effects of his debauchery when he embarrasses Josie Hogan by contradicting her statement that he prefers the "dainty dolls" of Broadway for companionship:

TYRONE: . . . Anyway, who told you I fall for the dainty dolls? That's all a thing of the past. I like them tall and strong and voluptuous, now, with beautiful big breasts.

[Misbegotten, I, 326].

Tyrone intends the remark as a compliment to his amply-bosomed hostess, but Josie responds with painful embarrassment. It is ironic that the "dainty dolls" are whores and the voluptuous woman with "beautiful big breasts" is a virgin. Josie's virginity contrasts with Tyrone's promiscuity, just as her worldliness in dealing with people contrasts with his insularity.

### (3) Blasphemy

When the comic effect derives from the blunt association or juxtaposition of recognizable religious imagery with the immoral, the disreputable, or the scandalous, a shock of irreverence is produced.

In The Long Voyage Home, Cocky gets unsteadily to his feet in Fat Joe's bar to propose a toast: "'Ere's a toff toast for yer: The ladies, Gawd--(He hesitates--then adds in a grudging tone,)--bless 'em." Kate breaks into a silly giggle and exclaims "Oo-er! That wasn't what you was goin' to say, you bad Cocky, you!" (Voyage, 69).

The far-off, insistent beat of the tom-tom in The Emperor Jones reminds Brutus Jones it is time to leave, but he hesitates long enough to engage in debate with Smithers, the Cockney trader. Jones disparages the heathens and takes refuge in the Baptist church which, he is certain, will protect him and punish his oppressors. Smithers calls him a hypocrite. Jones makes an admission: "It don't git me nothin' to do missionary work for de Baptist Church. I'se after de coin, an' I lays my Jesus on de shelf for de time bein'" (Jones, I, 15). "The coin" is half the story of Jones' ambition; the other half is power. The black Jones is a victim of racism and he has learned the lesson of the advantages of oppressing the defenseless. Jesus and the Baptist Church are useful tools in the process of disinheritin' the meek from the earth. Jones's cynicism is traditional: all activities are measurable in terms of value received.

Value received is also the issue in Ephraim Cabot's search for a wife. Making a comparison between his new step-mother and the town prostitute, Eben concludes she will be an improvement. Although his two half-brothers decide to wait and see, Simeon cannot resist

commenting on the old man's motives: "'I'm ridin' out to learn God's mes- sage t'me in the spring like the prophets done,' he says. I'll bet right then an' thar he knew plumb well he was goin' whorin', the stinkin' old hypocrite!" (Desire, I, 111, 149). But Cabot is not a hypocrite. O'Neill identifies the themes of lust, inheritance, incest, and the antagonism between the generations in this exchange among the brothers. Cabot's search for a wife is inspired by the poetic excesses of the Song of Solomon as much as it is prompted by his miraculous virility. Though Cabot was not "goin' whorin'" the wife he brings home becomes a whore in his eyes.

In the anniversary celebration of the Battle of Talavera in the dining room of Melody's Tavern, in A Touch of the Poet, Patch Riley tunes up his bagpipe with a few quavers and launches into a spirited song:

.....

She'd a pig and boneens,  
She'd a bed and a dresser,  
And a nate little room  
For the father confessor;  
With a cupboard and curtains, and something, I'm towld,  
That his riv'rance liked when the weather was cowld.  
And it's huroo, huroo! Biddy O'Rafferty!"

[Poet, III, 199].

The others roar. Melody smiles with lordly condescension, pleased by the song's irreverence. He could have defended the sanctity of "his riv'rance," which would have dampened the celebration. The tension between the heroic ideals of his imagination and the base actions of his

life is at the heart of Con Melody's character. But the song reminds him of Nora, his wife, who still has the faith. And it is precisely this faith, this firm, peasant resolve, that ultimately prevails over his pretensions.

Another blustering Irishman, Phil Hogan, is not so constrained; the blasphemy casually rolls off his tongue for emphasis:

HOGAN: . . . Have you seen him?

JOSIE: Have I seen who?

HOGAN: Mike! Who else would I be after, the Pope?  
[Misbegotten, I, 308].

On the very next page he refers to his son as "that lousy altar boy." When he learns that Harder, the Standard Oil millionaire will be stopping by to see him, he cries, "O Holy Joseph, don't let the bastard change his mind!" (Misbegotten, I, 331). O'Neill infuses Hogan's blasphemous dialogue with rich, pertinent imagery. Hogan associates his self-righteous son with the Pope, stealing money with altar boys, and bastardy with Jesus' father. What is established early in the play is the vigorous, free-wheeling nature of Hogan's iconoclasm, which will provide sharp contrast to his tender and fatherly attempt in the last act to arrange a marriage for his daughter so that she may escape having to live with him.

#### (4) Verbal Obscenity

Elements of comic taboo in this sub-category rely on the sudden shock of an obscene remark.

Mosher and McGloin are faced with the prospect of Harry Hope heeding Hickey's advice of taking a walk around the Ward and probably hearing others tell him what a sucker he is to put up with all the hangers-on at his place. Fearing that Hope will call on his dead wife's people, McGloin points out, ". . . you know what that bitch and all her family thought of me." His partner comments with a sharp comic peripeteia, "Remember, Lieutenant, you are speaking of my sister! Dear Bessie wasn't a bitch. She was a God-damned bitch!" (Iceman, II, 132). In the first act, Mosher had sighed tenderly and had referred to his sister as "dear old Bess" when faced with Hope's self-indulgent sentimentalism. Later, the scurrilous references to Bess are made by Hope, Mosher, and McGloin after Hickey has induced them to discard their illusions. Once Hickey has been removed and peace returns with their "pipe dreams," Bess again becomes, in Hope's exultant outburst at the end of the play, "the Sunshine of Paradise Alley."

Josie Hogan has stolen money from her father to give to her self-righteous brother, Mike, to help him leave the farm. She sends him off as Hogan hurriedly approaches. When father and daughter confront each other, Hogan roars, "Where is he? Is he hiding in the house? I'll wipe the floors with him, the lazy bastard! . . . Haven't you a tongue in your head, you great slut you?" (Misbegotten, I, 307). The insults roll on, but a rich source of comic effect is the understanding that this is one of the ways Hogan and his daughter translate the respect and

affection they have for each other. The shock is pronounced and sustained. It builds with the repetition of comic indignity heaped upon comic indignity. But O'Neill is expressing larger issues relating to the theme of the quest for love among the misbegotten.

#### B. THE COMIC TABOO IN GESTURE AND MOVEMENT

By telling a story Marco Polo attempts to enliven the proceedings among a group of salesmen and merchants:

MARCO: . . . Just a moment! I've got a good one an idol-polisher told me in Tibet. This is the funniest story you ever heard! It seems an Irishman got drunk in Tangut and wandered into a temple where he mistook one of the female statues for a real woman and--  
(He goes on, laughing and chuckling to himself, with endless comic pantomime. The two TARTAR MERCHANTS fall asleep, NICOLO stares at his son bitterly, MAFFEO with contemptuous pity. Finally MARCO finishes to his own uproarious amusement)  
[Marco, I, v, 238].

The "endless comic pantomime" suggests a repertoire of obscene gestures and movements, and serves to display, better than words, the ludicrous nature of Marco's development. The travelling salesman has finally emerged.

By contrast, the humor in Wilderness is fit for the family. Uncle Sid and Nat Miller have just returned from the July Fourth Sachem Club picnic, where, by drinking too much, they have managed to live up to everybody's expectations. Mrs. Miller orders dinner to be served immediately, but not before her husband, in a burst of affection, "pulls her to him and gives her a smacking kiss on the ear as she jerks her head away." "Don't, you Crazy!" is her embarrassed response, as she

tries to hide her blushing face. Then, Nat makes his next move:

MILLER: (beamingly) Now, Essie, don't be critical. Don't be carpingly critical. Good news can stand repeating, can't it? 'Course it can! (He slaps her jovially on her fat buttocks, TOMMY and MILDRED roar with glee, And NORAH, who has just entered from the pantry with a huge tureen of soup in her hands, almost drops it as she explodes in a merry guffaw)

[Wilderness, II, 46].

The jovial slap is a comically taboo act, but it is also an expression of the love that binds the members of the Miller household into an insoluble union that will prevail throughout the play.

#### O'NEILL'S USE OF COMIC TABOO

The evidence shows that O'Neill was governed in his choice of comic taboo elements by the structural and thematic requirements of his texts, and that he was not restrained by considerations of audience sensibilities. More than half of all the taboo elements O'Neill used are references to the act of sex. For sheer diversity of treatment, and for full coverage of the aspects and effects of coition, the range of examples is astonishingly complete: the issue is price in the deckside scene in Caribbees, techniques in the scene between Benny and Emma in Diff'rent, the brutishness of the act in Ape, its unholiness in Welded, male competitiveness in the scene among the brothers in Desire, sex as sin in Simeon's cynical remark in Desire, a whore's preference and a salesman's joke in Marco, sexual exertion leading to death in Mourning, its lyric excesses and its frequency in Wilderness, a priestly fall in Poet, its

lure and its results in Iceman, the skill required in Hughie, and its baseness in Misbegotten,

O'Neill uses so many linguistic references to the sexual act because the dramatic issues--from the frustrations of Yank in Ape, to the small-town gossip of the chorus of comic townspeople in Mourning--congeal around the theme of sexuality as a prime motivating force for the actions of his plays. Whatever the taboo element--whether it is found in the many references to the human fundament in Iceman, in the audacious name-calling between Josie and Hogan in Misbegotten, in the hilariously irreverent song rendered by Patch Riley in Poet, or even in Marco Polo's comic pantomime--O'Neill never uses it merely for comic shock values. Instead, he uses it to reveal or strengthen the serious themes of his plays. Emma's prurience in Diff'rent, Yank's coarseness in Ape, the death-bringing Hickey's joke about baby carriages in Iceman, Josie's promiscuous remarks and Hogan's blasphemy in Misbegotten, are all uses of comic taboo by characters ignorant of the ironic implications of their remarks. Comic taboo in O'Neill's hands is a vital ingredient of his dramaturgy.

## CHAPTER II

### PHYSICAL COMEDY

Alan Thompson calls the second category of comic elements "the comedy of the body in physical action: 'pratt falls' [sic] and custard-pie combats and beatings and the rest of the stock-in-trade of clowns."<sup>1</sup> However, I shall broaden the type to include the comic elements that depend on the appearance as well as the bodily movements of characters. For example, the appearance of Bottom, the Weaver, in his ass's head, would be classified in the same category as his movements while wearing that head. This chapter will deal with those instances in O'Neill's plays in which the physical, both as appearance and movement, is used for comic effect.

At the climax of Caribbees, the door of the forecastle is thrown open and the drunken seamen of the S. S. Glencairn and their West Indian ladies spill out on deck for a deckside orgy. To avoid being detected by the captain, Bella tries to quiet the men. Pearl laughs shrilly and drinks from Yank's bottle. Paul staggers to the hatch and attempts to play his accordion. Driscoll grabs Bella and dances wildly with her.

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<sup>1</sup>Thompson, The Anatomy of Drama, p. 194.

A bottle smashes on the steel deck. Paul then plays a note-skipping rendition of "You Great Big Beautiful Doll," as four couples dance "a jerk-shouldered version" of the Turkey Trot "made more grotesque by the fact that all the couples are drunk and keep lurching into each other. . ." (Caribbees, 28). Two of the men begin dancing with each other and intentionally bump into the others. Pearl slaps Smitty across the face and for a moment everyone becomes tense as the raucous comedy subsides, but Yank smiles bitterly and sits down. Driscoll whirls the wheezing Bella around the deck as Paddy extends his foot to trip Cocky and Susie. This lusty, comic, physical intensity is in direct contrast to the brooding Smitty. O'Neill uses a boisterous comic mob-scene as musical counterpoint to the "saddened voice of that brooding music, faint and far-off," that helps express Smitty's loneliness and guilt-ridden despair (Caribbees, 32).

When Driscoll attempts to awaken Ivan in Voyage, he pulls Ivan's derby over his ears but it only makes the Russian snore more loudly. He pulls the derby off and jams it back on again and is greeted with another snore. As in the deckside scene in Caribbees, the comic physical action anticipates the violent action to come. Olson will be drugged and impressed aboard the Amindra. The good-natured laughter will disappear when the men leave, and it will never return to the scene whose grim business will be to destroy the hope in a man who had carefully prepared himself for his return home, and who will never get there.

The expressionistic "procession of gaudy marionettes" in Ape, suggesting the overdressed, overstuffed caricatures of George Grosz in his series of post World War I German sketches, is anything but comic. In describing them O'Neill refers to "the relentless horror of Franksteins" (Ape, v, 69). But they suddenly come to life in ridiculous comic fashion and "scurry to the furrier's window" (Ape, v, 71) when one of the women gasps with ecstatic delight at the sight of a display of monkey fur. Then the others join in with a chorus of exclamations of joyous surprise. Yank is enraged at what he takes to be a criticism of himself; he must finally be subdued by a platoon of policemen. But the crowd at the window continues squealing with delight. O'Neill uses the ridiculous physical activity of the comic chorus to express dramatically the mechanized opposition of society to the frustrated attempts of Yank to disrupt the system from which he suffers and to which he contributes.

In Part III, Scene 1 of Desire, Ephraim Cabot is "in a state of extreme hilarious excitement" as he serves drinks from a keg of whiskey during the festive dance in his kitchen to celebrate the birth of Abbie's son. He orders his guests to dance, and unable to restrain himself, he leaps into their midst, scatters them to the sides of the room, and lunges into a solo performance:

CABOT: (starts to dance, which he does very well and with tremendous vigor. Then he begins to improvise, cuts incredibly grotesque capers, leaping up and cracking his heels together, prancing around in a circle with body bent in an Indian war dance,

then suddenly straightening up and kicking as high as he can with both legs. He is like a monkey on a string. And all the while he intersperses his antics with shouts and derisive comments) Whoop! Here's dancin' fur ye! Whoop! See that! Seventy-six, if I'm a day! Hard as iron yet! Beatin' the young 'uns like I allus done! Look at me! I'd invite ye t'dance on my hundredth birthday on'y ye'll all be dead by then. Ye're a sickly generation! Yer hearts air pink, not red! Yer veins is full o' mud an' water! I be the on'y man in the country! Whoop! See that! I'm a Injun! I've killed Injuns in the West afore ye was born--an' skulped 'em too! They's a arrer wound in my backside I c'd show ye! The hull tribe chased me. I outrun 'em all--with the arrer stuck in me. An' I tuk vengeance on 'em. Ten eyes fur an eye, that was my motter! Whoop! Look at me! I kin kick the ceilin' off the room! Whoop!  
[Desire, III, 1, 187].

Cabot's tremendous burst of physical energy is a joyous comic riposte to his critics, and "like a monkey on a string" he capers, kicks, and prances his cynical neighbors into submission. He spices his heel-cracking performance with an apocryphal story of his peppery encounter with Indians. The result is a cold silence and a subdued hostility among the assemblage. However, O'Neill also infuses a sense of freedom, superhuman will power, and boundless living energy into Cabot's dance that elicit admiration.

The humor before the dance is biting and sardonic, and after the old man leaves, the chorus once again turns to "celebrate the old skunk gittin' fooled!" (Desire, III, 1, 189). In this scene, the horned goat of the deception and the Dionysian reveler become one and the same. O'Neill illuminates the themes of cuckoldry, the impending public involvement in the affairs of the house, and the spiritual and physical vitality of the father.

Marco Polo's uncle Maffeo meets two of his competitors and proceeds to observe the salesman's amenities. He accompanies his words with appropriate gestures:

MAFFEO: (with a wink) I'll tell you a good one an Armenian dolly-dealer told me down in Bagdad. (They all bend their heads toward him with expectant grins. He looks around--then begins in a cautious lowered tone) Well, there was an old Jew named Ikey and he married a young girl named Rebecca--(He goes on telling the rest of the story with much exaggerated Jewish pantomime. . .)

[Marco, I, iii, 230].

The "exaggerated Jewish pantomime" is the stereotyped Jewish burlesque routine that was usually considered good for a laugh from audiences of 1925. O'Neill uses the device to help dramatize the contrast between the commercial, brash, and insensitive Polos and their dignified hosts.

The ridiculous appearance of Marco Polo at the summer palace of the Kaan is another scene of comic pantomime whose humor hinges on the bizarre incongruity of Marco's appearance in the "atmosphere of aloof dignity and simplicity" of the little bamboo throne room (Marco, II, i, 248). Princess Kukachin has just told her grandfather that she loves Marco but that she will marry the Arghun of Persia as he wishes her to do. She is grief-stricken at the prospect of losing Marco who, for his part, is and remains blissfully unaware of the passion he inspires in the royal breast. As the strains of a blaring brass band signal the entrance of the Polo clan, the sage, Chu-Yin, refers to Marco as "our clown." Marco's father and uncle enter first, their costumes

a queer jumble of stunning effects that recall the parade uniforms of our modern Knights Templar, of Columbus, of Pythias, Mystic

Shriners, the Klan, etc. They are absurdly conscious and proud of this getup--like two old men in a children's play.

[Marco, II, 1, 254].

They are greeted with smiles and "amused astonishment" by their hosts as they prostrate themselves at the foot of the throne. The comic effect derives from the absurdity of "two old men in a children's play" acting like pompous fools. After these preliminaries, the grand entrance of Marco, "preceded by a conscious cough," is then effected:

. . . MARCO POLO makes his entrance. Over his gorgeous uniform of Mayor, he wears his childishly fantastic regalia as chief of the Mystic Knights of Confucius. As he steps on, he takes off his gilded, laced hat with its Bird of Paradise plumes and bows with a mechanical dignity on all sides. He has the manner and appearance of a successful movie star at a masquerade ball, disguised so that no one can fail to recognize him. His regular, good-looking, well-groomed face is carefully arranged into the grave responsible expression of a Senator from the South of the United States of America about to propose an amendment to the Constitution restricting the migration of non-Nordic birds into Texas, or prohibiting the practice of the laws of biology within the twelve-mile limit.

[Marco, II, 1, 254].

O'Neill intends Marco to be funny. The stage direction is meant to contribute to the humor as well as provide inspiration for the actor doing the part. Marco is an absurd clown, and this is the first time in the play that he is allowed to parade that fact before the public. The contrast between Oriental grace and Occidental gaucherie, between Oriental aestheticism and Occidental garishness is revealed in the physical appearance and conduct of Marco before the wise and cultured Kaan and his court. This contrast resonates throughout the play; it is the basis of the satiric humor behind Marco's successes. In this absurdly comic scene O'Neill theatricalizes the play's thematic contrast.

The initial action of Wilderness is a spontaneous burst of comic energy by Tommy, the youngest Miller, "... a chubby, sun-burnt boy of eleven with dark eyes, blond hair wetted and plastered down in a part, and a shiny, good-natured face, a rim of milk visible about his lips," He appears in the doorway of the sitting room "bursting with bottled-up energy," but he hesitates when his mother orders him back to finish his milk:

TOMMY: . . . Aw, I'm full, Ma. And I said excuse me and you said all right. (His father's voice is heard speaking to his mother. Then she calls: "All right, Tommy," and Tommy asks eagerly) Can I go out now?

MOTHER'S VOICE: (correctingly) May I!

TOMMY: (fidgeting, but obediently) May I, Ma?

MOTHER'S VOICE: Yes. (Tommy jumps for the screen door to the porch at right like a sprinter released by the starting shot.)  
[Wilderness, I, 6].

Tommy is propelled onto the stage in an explosive entrance whose fundamental purpose is to start the laughter going. The comic effect of his mother's concern for his use of grammar in the midst of all his fierce physical exuberance, and his appearance itself, is salutary. In these few opening lines, O'Neill establishes the effervescent innocence of youth, the concerned, considerate, and understanding natures of the elder Millers, and the general tone and mood of affectionate memory that will prevail throughout the play.

Richard succumbs to the lure of a dish of olives in the midst of one of his poetic flights. He has just surveyed the heavily laden

table, uttering a scornful "Food!" to express his disgust with things mundane, but he steals a few olives nevertheless, and is caught by the maid (Wilderness, II, 41).

In Act II, Nat Miller and Uncle Sid have returned from the July Fourth Sachem Club picnic, both of them "weaving in the wind." Miller slaps his wife on the buttocks, makes a few familiar remarks to the maid, then tries to soften up the others to the impending entrance of Uncle Sid:

A moment later SID makes his entrance from the back parlor. He is in a condition that can best be described as blurry. His movements have a hazy uncertainty about them. His shiny fat face is one broad, blurred, Puckish, naughty-boy grin; his eyes have a blurred, wondering vagueness. As he enters he makes a solemnly intense effort to appear casual and dead, cold sober. He waves his hand aimlessly and speaks with a silly gravity.

[Wilderness, II, 48].

After a few inane remarks about the weather he bumps into Lily's chair, becomes overly polite and courteous, affects a grave expression to appear sober, but finally discards any further attempt to hide his condition by denouncing soup spoons and drinking his soup directly from the plate (Wilderness, II, 49). Everyone but Lily laughs. The farce of the stage drunk is appreciated by all but the woman who suffers from his alcoholism. O'Neill uses a good deal of uninhibited physical "business" in Ah, Wilderness! as sharp focal points of memories he wants to share with his audience. Each incident is meant to evoke nostalgia through identification: the boy repressed, then released by his mother; the drunk uncle attempting to appear sober; and finally, the antics of the absent-

mind, bumbling maid, who responds to the audacious slap Miller gives his wife: ". . . And NORAH, who has just entered from the pantry with a huge tureen of soup in her hands, almost drops it as she explodes in a merry cuffaw" (Wilderness, II, 46-51). Mrs. Miller assumes control and order Norah to bring the soup to her: "She sets the soup tureen down with a thud in front of MRS. MILLER and passes around the other side, squeezing with difficulty between the china closet and the backs of chairs at the rear of the table," Mr. and Mrs. Miller make a few preparatory comments to the others as the meal gets underway. Then "NORAH exits into the pantry and lets the door slam with a bang behind her." She returns and begins the laborious procedure of serving soup but is interrupted by Uncle Sid's unsteady entrance. O'Neill then has Norah curtail her bumbling activities to allow Sid the full stage for his soup-drinking act. The two acts are then coordinated when Norah enters once again, this time with a plate of broiled fish. Then she gives Miller a nasty swipe on the side of the head with the edge of the dish. The children explode with laughter, Norah almost drops the dish, but Miller calms her fears as she thumps the dish down on the table with a sigh of relief. When Lily finally orders Sid to stop making such a fool of himself, Norah intercedes by giving Lily "a reassuring pat on the back" and advising her that when he drinks there is no harm in him, so that she need not worry. Mrs. Miller erupts, as Norah completes her act:

NORAH exits hastily into the pantry, letting the door slam with a crash behind her. There is silence for a moment as MILLER serves

the fish and it is passed around, NORAH comes back with the vegetables and disappears again . . .

[Wilderness, II, 51].

In this farcical July Fourth dinner scene O'Neill has created a routine of hilarious hi-jinks performed by two clowns: "short and fat, bald-headed . . . [Sid] . . . with the puckish face of a Peck's Bad Boy who has never grown up," and Norah, the "clumsy, heavy-handed, heavy-footed, long-jawed, beamingly good-natured young Irish girl." The awkward, unsteady, blundering behavior of both characters is used to establish the mood of homespun humor that lubricates the action of the play. But the physical ungainliness of Sid and Norah help serve another purpose more closely related to the play's theme: the errors and pains of adolescence etched sharply in the dilemmas of young Richard, and the love and understanding with which his indiscretions are treated by his parents, are here vividly paralleled by the farcical errors and "pains" of Sid and Norah, and the understanding and indulgence with which their mishaps are received by the entire family. This indulgence, born of affection, motivates all the main characters of the play. It is evident in the climax of Act III, Scene ii, when Richard duplicates Uncle Sid's performance and comes home "only soused" and not "crazy," as Uncle Sid assures all. Richard quotes Ibsen one moment and turns green before his family's eyes the next.

In Act IV, Scene i, Uncle Sid performs a short coda to his earlier drunk scene:

MILLER: Darn women, anyway! They always get you mixed up. Their minds simply don't know what logic is! (Then he notices that Sid is dozing--sharply) Sid!

SID: (blinking--mechanically) I'll take the same. (Then hurriedly) What'd you say, Nat?

[Wilderness, IV, 1, 96].

Uncle Sid even dreams of drinking. His mechanical response, his absent-mindedness, and the way his habit pervades his being, conscious and unconscious, exemplify Bergson's idea of the repetition of a gesture in a living thing, a movement toward the mechanical, that provokes laughter.<sup>2</sup> But in contrast to his automatic response, a fully-awakened Sid becomes a most helpful confidant. He is not the fool his usual behavior suggests; his brother-in-law is quite aware of his good sense and judgment when he is sober, and Miller unhesitatingly takes his advice on the matter of Richard's punishment.

For his part, Richard indulges in his share of comic physical activity when he waits for the scene of rapprochement with his sweetheart. He "starts to stroll around with exaggerated carelessness . . . hands in pockets, whistling with insouciance . . ." once he knows Muriel is coming up the path to meet him, after he had tearfully doubted she would ever be there (Wilderness, IV, 11, 108). When Muriel does arrive, a good deal of anguish accompanies their mutual attempts to clear the air of misunderstanding. In a moment of anger and frustration Muriel suddenly bites his hand and they both jump with astonishment (Wilderness,

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<sup>2</sup>Bergson, "Laughter," p. 83.

IV,ii,116). They announce they hate each other and part company for a few seconds. The comic incident serves better to bring them together. Muriel will be ashamed of having resorted to biting him, and "magnanimously" getting back into her good graces, Richard will disavow sympathy.

O'Neill creates physical comedy in the buffonery of the three rustics of Poet: Dan Roche, Paddy O'Dowd, and Patch Riley. Con Melody has suggested to his daughter that he has been considering the matter of the settlement he intends to accompany her when she marries Simon Harford. Sara is astounded. She shatters his illusions about his credit in the community; she tells him he is destitute as well as disreputable. Melody contains his violence, but he is frightening enough to make Sara shrink from him in fear. At that moment, the street door is flung open and Melody's three drinking cronies "attempt to pile in together and get jammed for a moment in the doorway" (Poet,I,167). Roche immediately harangues O'Dowd and Riley. He invokes the name of Andrew Jackson as the common man's hero in the struggle against the rich Yankees. Melody inflates with suppressed rage at this mention of the enemy in his presence. O'Dowd is warned with whispers to heed the gathering storm. Roche and O'Dowd try to placate Melody who, in turn, vents some of the fury he feels toward his daughter on them. The spectacle of Roche and O'Dowd fawning before the raging major while old Patch Riley, oblivious as usual to the drama going on in his presence, blesses Sara who, in his admiring opinion, "looks like a fairy princess

as beautiful as a rose in the mornin' dew," is a comic scene of calculated mayhem. Roche and O'Dowd cower, busy themselves with other physical activities, and attempt anything but face the wrath of their benefactor.

At the opening of Act III, Patch Riley has sung his blasphemous song about Biddy O'Rafferty, who has something "that his riv'rance liked when the weather was cowld," and the dinner guests roar with drunken laughter. Melody condescends to smile and the others are relieved they haven't overstepped their limits. He then calls for silence so that he and Corporal Cregan may continue their reminiscences of the Battle of Talavera, and the unctuous O'Dowd, eager to please, shouts "Be quiet, Patch," to the silent old man. Then

(He gives the old man, who is lost in dreams, a shove that almost knocks him off his chair. RILEY stares at him bewilderedly. O'DOWD and ROCHE guffaw.)

[Poet, III, 200].

The comedy of the three churls takes the form of the innocent scapegoat Riley being hounded and pushed around by his drinking companions who want to please Melody. But there are other reasons more fundamental to the structure of the play for the running comic effect of the robust scenes with O'Dowd, Roche, and Riley. The scenes form a counterpoint to the unfolding drama of Sara's struggle for Simon, which leads to the disillusionment of Melody and his reversion, after the shock of self-recognition, to brawling on the streets of Boston. His three rustic associates serve as a chorus of "low Irish micks" of the sort from which he

has waged the fiercest struggle of his life to disengage himself. He believes he is "among them, but not of them" (Poet, I, 162), but ironically, he is very much of them, and he will arrive at that conclusion of his own accord. Their slapstick comedy reflects their slapstick style of existence, sponging here and there for whatever handouts they can get. His noble steed and his grand memories contributing to the deception, Con Melody presumes to be above such rowdyism.

The hounding of Riley by Roche and O'Dowd reflects the recurrent theme of "victimization." Melody abuses them, as he abuses Cregan, Maloy, and Nora. He falls with his daughter, who is the thorn in his side, the kill-joy, the reminder of his desperate pretensions. But Sara victimizes Simon Harford into promising to marry her, as her mother had victimized Melody before her. The lawyer Gadsby attempts to suppress Melody with a bribe, and Simon's mother tries to intimidate Sara to keep her from marrying her son. Only Sara's intimidation succeeds; all the others are intimidated in turn by events that run against them, events they imagined they could control.

Hugo Kalmar's exhausted "sleep act" (Iceman, I, 11 and 34) symbolizes the uneasy balance between protest and despair that exists in Harry Hope's back room before the intrusion of Hickey. Many of the characters talk much and do little; Hugo's sudden threats against the "Bourgeois stool pigeons" and his immediate return to sleep identifies the condition. O'Neill has Hugo repeat his comic routine throughout the

play; finally Hugo sings his revolutionary song and hurls his invective without falling asleep and with a vigorous enthusiasm that had not seemed possible for him. Without the interference of Hickey, life can go on.

At the beginning of Act III of Journey, Mary Tyrone has invited the maid to sit with her in the living room to await the arrival of Tyrone and the boys. Cathleen is discovered standing by a table laden with whiskey, glasses, and a pitcher of ice water, holding "an empty whiskey glass in her hand as if she'd forgotten she had it, She shows the effects of drink, Her stupid, good-humored face wears a pleased and flattered simper" (Journey, III, 97). Throughout the scene in which Mary reveals some of the painful experiences of her early life with Tyrone, Cathleen is innocently preoccupied with more practical matters. When she speaks to her mistress her tone is more familiar than usual, but she still "stares at her, stupidly puzzled" by the enigmatic conversation Mrs. Tyrone seems to be directing toward her. She grins with relief when told her absence from the kitchen will be explained to Bridget, the cook. Then she pours another drink for herself, without a chaser, replaces with water, the whiskey removed from the bottle, assumes a philosophic style in defending drinking and the drinking man, courageously engages in "fighting the effect of her last drink and trying to be soberly conversational," becomes blunt, indignant, stupidly puzzled, and sentimental in turn, and then, "fighting tipsy drowsiness," she fidgets nervously to attract her mistress' attention because she "ought to be in the

kitchen." Disappearing through the back parlor, she returns to close the act with an invitation to dinner. But the time lapse has not diminished her comic behavior. She is "uncertain in her walk and grinning woozily," she speaks louder than necessary, she addresses Tyrone with "good-natured familiarity," and she departs "with huffy dignity" in reaction to the stares of the family. This comic treatment of the tipsy, ignorant menial with her healthy, outgoing manner contrasts with the reserved, mentally-active but physically inactive Mary Tyrone, whose introspective behavior reflects the guilt that torments her and that is destroying her mind and health.

In the beginning of Act II of O'Neill's last play, Misbegotten, there is a vigorous scene of ribald comedy that depends entirely on physical activity for its humor. Josie has been waiting two hours in "her Sunday best" for her date with Jim Tyrone. Angry and humiliated, she tears at the flower pinned to her bosom and throws it away. At that moment she hears her father on the road, "wailing an old Irish lament." Going into her room and then returning with her broomstick club, she vows she is in no mood to put up with his usual drunken capers. He "bellows belligerently" toward the house, and Josie bellows back with equal belligerence. He pounds on the door with his fist, then loudly protesting her disrespect, he begins kicking the door in. Josie tells him the door is not locked; he turns the knob and stamps into the house:

HOGAN: It's time I taught you a lesson. Be Jaysus, I'll take you over my knee and spank your tail, if you are as big as a cow!  
(He makes a lunge to grab her.)

JOSIE: Would you, though! Take that, then! (She raps him smartly, but lightly, on his bald spot with the end of her broom handle.)

HOGAN: (With an exaggerated howl of pain) Ow! (His anger evaporates and he rubs the top of his head ruefully--with bitter complaint) God forgive you, it's a great shame to me I've raised a daughter so cowardly she has to use a club.

[Misbegotten, II, 345].

Just as Josie is able to put her father in his place "with the end of her broom handle," so do Josie and Hogan, in a scene of "theatrical mirth" outside their farmhouse door, put Harder, the Standard Oil millionaire, in his place (Misbegotten, I, 333-339). Harder attempts to maintain his dignity before the coordinated attack of the Hogans, but he only appears more ridiculous. He is hounded by father and daughter, and when he finally attempts to "make some sort of disdainfully dignified exit" Josie shocks him with an invitation to a sexual encounter in the pigpen, and his "retreat becomes a rout." Their abusive insults toward Harder and the beating that goes on between Josie and Phil Hogan serve to bring them closer together. Tyrone will leave her but Hogan will always be there, and at the end of the play Josie expresses her feelings when she tells her father that "living with you has spoilt me for any other man, anyway. There'd never be the same fun or excitement." Father and daughter share an intimacy that is often punctuated by a highly-charged emotional exchange in which threats and even physical contact occur. In this play, the resort to violence is comic because O'Neill makes it clear that neither Hogan nor Josie intends to hurt each other.

### O'NEILL'S USE OF PHYSICAL COMEDY

O'Neill's plays have some robust comic effects that depend for their humor primarily on the appearance of, or the bodily movements of, individuals or groups. The early realism of the comic deck orgy in Caribbees shifts to the nostalgic, sentimental horseplay of the characters in Wilderness and the slapstick antics of the maid in Journey. The three Irish rustics in Poet share with the Hogans in Misbegotten the exaggerated style of the burlesque routine rich in shoves, jolts, smacks, and bewildered victims. Ephraim Cabot's grotesque dance before his astonished neighbors in Desire and Marco Polo's grand entrance before the Kaan in Marco are both highly theatrical comic events.

When he uses it, O'Neill employs physical comedy to express an exuberance in his characters that dialogue cannot accomplish. Cabot's dance, Marco's entrance, and the deck orgy aboard the Glencairn are also big acting scenes that require elaborate, well-choreographed staging. The July Fourth dinner scene in Wilderness is an intricate exercise in the coordinated physical "business" of two characters: Uncle Sid and Norah. Boldly and uninhibitedly, O'Neill uses stage movement, physical action, and spectacle. Keenly aware of the theatrical values in farcical horseplay and absurd costume and behavior, he uses physical comedy in serious plays (Desire, Poet, and Journey, for example) as well as in comedies.

## CHAPTER III

### COMIC PLOT DEVICES

According to Duckworth, a common feature of Plautus' and Terence's plays is error, or misapprehension, and it is the movement from misapprehension to comprehension that is the basis of comic plot structure.<sup>1</sup> The devices upon which comic plots turn are related to an initial misapprehension usually corrected at some later time. These devices include mistaken identities, ignorance of the characters about the workings of the plot, deliberate trickery to create misunderstanding, errors which create danger and threat to a character's well being, impersonations to deceive, innocent mistakes, and other guileful deceptions. They usually lead to a reversal and a discovery or recognition of the truth.

After the use of a comic plot device that backfires in Dynamo, O'Neill creates comic plot situations that generate the actions and help formulate his themes. These devices, the third category of comic elements in O'Neill's work, will be identified and discussed chronologically, in terms of their thematic importance.

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<sup>1</sup>Duckworth, The Nature of Roman Comedy, p. 140.

Much of the action of the 1928 expressionistic tragedy *Dynamo* hinges on the machinery of a comic device that has backfired. In Act I, Scene ii, Ramsay Fife makes a bet with his daughter Ada that Reuben Light, the young man next door, is "yellow," and that Fife will prove it by having a talk with him if she brings him that night. In Scene iii, with tongue-in-cheek, Fife tells Reuben a fictitious secret of the family, swearing him never to repeat a word of it to anyone. He confesses to Reuben that he is a fugitive murderer who killed a man twenty years earlier in a fight for the girl they both loved. The same story, including the murderer having been turned in by his daughter's fiancé twenty years later, had actually appeared as a news item that day. Assuming correctly that Reuben has not read the paper yet, Fife exacts a promise from him never to reveal the secret, even though, as he reminds him, "I've made you an accessory in the murder for you'll be shielding me unlawfully by keeping silence. And the devil knows what sin you'll think it in the sight of God!" The last remark is punctuated by a rumble and clap of thunder as Reuben "summons his manhood" to help overcome his fear.

The comic effect of Reuben's gullibility throughout the scene, and of his ridiculous reaction to the heavenly accompaniment of lighting and thunder, is short-lived. But it is intensified by the absurd antics of Reuben's mother sneaking in the bushes outside the Fife windows, trying to overhear the conversation and, at the same time, voicing fearful

soliloquies on the consequences of being caught. The backfired joke causes the young people to part, the Light family to disintegrate, Reuben to become an atheist, and Reuben and Ada to die violently. In this play, in order to illuminate the serious theme of the failure of mortal and immortal authority in a world driven by man's technical ingenuity O'Neill uses a comic plot device that fails.

He introduces Part Three ("The Haunted") of Mourning with a comic "chorus of types representing the town as a human background for the drama of the Mannons." Seth Beckwith, the raw-boned, stoop-shouldered gardener, and Amos Ames, a garrulous gossip-monger, are joined by three other men. The short but important scene they play introduces the final agony of the Mannon saga. It is meant to be a comic parallel to the theme of the ghosts of the past haunting the present that informs this third and last part of the play.

The five men are drunk; they pass a stone jug from hand to hand. A stage direction notes that "there is a grotesque atmosphere of boys out on a forbidden lark about these old men." They entertain themselves by betting Abner Small ten dollars and a gallon of whiskey that he will not go into the Mannon house and stay there until the moon rises. Beckwith explains that there has been so much town gossip about the house being haunted that he thought it would be a good idea "to stop it by turnin' it all into a joke." The joke succeeds and the gulled Small dashes out of the house, his face chalky white and his eyes popping, "having seen a ghost dressed like a judge comin' through the wall."

In this tragedy based on the Oresteia, O'Neill employs the Elizabethan method of using a comic scene to parallel a tragic action. The absurd antics of the chorus of five old men with their ruse of a haunted house reflects the tragic decisions of the principals of that house to destroy the ghosts that paradoxically succeed in destroying them.

Early in Act II of Wilderness, Mrs. Miller discusses with her sister-in-law, Lily, the reason Lily broke off with Sid some sixteen years earlier: ". . . his taking up with bad women." Essie Miller accurately concludes: "You're a good woman, Lily--too good for the rest of us." Mrs. Miller then illustrates one of the reasons Lily is too good for the rest of them by telling her about her own deception. For years, Nat Miller has been "carrying on" about not being able to eat bluefish because he believes it contains a certain oil that poisons him. His wife confesses to Lily that because she likes bluefish she has been serving it to the family all along, telling Nat that he was eating weakfish instead. The deception revealed, O'Neill sets the stage for the comic issue. Essie searches for her youngest son, Tommy, to warn him "to keep his face straight" when the course is served during the coming meal. The family assembles for dinner. Mrs. Miller reminds Tommy to "remember what I told you about that fish." The men enter drunk, the meal commences, Sid's comic soup scene is completed, and maid Norah introduces the fish deception by butting Nat Miller (who is to be the butt of the joke) on the head with the dish of bluefish, almost letting it fall, but finally setting it down before him. Miller serves the fish:

MILLER: (is about to take his first bite--stops suddenly and asks his wife) This isn't, by any chance, bluefish, is it, my dear?

MRS. MILLER: (with a warning glance at Tommy) Of course not. You know we never have bluefish, on account of you.

MILLER: (addressing the table now with the gravity of a man confessing his strange peculiarities) Yes, I regret to say, there's a certain peculiar oil in bluefish that invariably poisons me. (At this, TOMMY cannot stand it any more but explodes into laughter, MRS. MILLER, after a helpless glance at him, follows suit; then LILY goes off into uncontrollable, hysterical laughter, and RICHARD and MILDRED are caught in the contagion, MILLER looks around at them with a weak smile, his dignity now ruffled a bit) Well, I must say I don't see what's so darned funny about my being poisoned.

SID: (peers around him--then with drunken cunning) Aha! Nat, I suspect--plot! This fish looks blue to me--very blue--in fact despondent, desperate, and--(He points his fork dramatically at MRS. MILLER) See how guilty she looks a ver--veritable Lucretia Georgia! Can it be this woman has been slowly poisoning you all these years? And how well--you've stood it! What an iron constitution! Even now, when you are invariably at death's door, I can't believe--(Everyone goes off into uncontrollable laughter,)

MILLER: (grumpily) Oh, give us a rest, you darned fool! A joke's a joke, but--(He addresses his wife in a wounded tone) Is this true, Essie?

MRS. MILLER: (wiping the tears from her eyes--defiantly) Yes, it is true, if you must know, and you'd never have suspected it, if it weren't for that darned Tommy, and Sid poking his nose in. You've eaten bluefish for years and thrived on it and it's all nonsense about that peculiar oil.

MILLER: (deeply offended) Kindly allow me to know my own constitution! Now I think of it, I've felt upset afterwards every damned time we've had fish! (He pushes his plate away from him with proud renunciation) I can't eat this.

[Wilderness, II, 51].

Nat Miller will not give up so easily; he retains his comic consistency to the end, attempting to have the last word, but thwarted by his brother-in-law, who reminds him of the deception whenever the opportunity arises.

In this scene of comic discovery Miller displays much of the classic quality of a comic character governed by an unreasonable obsession. He is met with ridicule by Sid and with geniality and indulgence by the rest of the family. Deception in this family is used as comic contrast to the loyalty they really feel toward each other. Even Sid and Lily have managed to come to an acceptable compromise; they treat each other with kindness and consideration despite their disappointments.

The two scenes involving comic plot devices in Poet feature a comic misunderstanding and a scene of cross purposes, both events being spiced with elements of mistaken identity. In Act II, Deborah Harford enters the inn to discover Melody preening before the mirror in his dress uniform. In Act III, Nicholas Gadsby, the Harford lawyer, does the same. On both occasions, Melody is interrupted in the midst of his favorite Byron quotation, which he recites aloud to his own admired and admiring image in the mirror:

"I have not loved the World, nor the World me;  
I have not flattered its rank breath, nor bowed  
To its idolatries a patient knee,  
Nor coined my cheek to smiles, --nor cried aloud  
In the worship of an echo; in the crowd  
They could not deem me one of such--I stood  
Among them, but not of them . . ."

[Poet, II, 178].

In Act II, Deborah smiles at the ridiculous sight. When Gadsby enters in Act III, he is impressed by the sight of "Melody's handsome distinction." Both scenes hinge on comic misunderstandings. And in both,

Melody corrects his visitors' attempts to identify him. He tells them that he is not the innkeeper Melody; he is "Major Cornelius Melody, one time of His Majesty's Seventh Dragoons." Deborah is impressed. Melody's language becomes more euphuistic than usual: "I have a pride unduly sensitive to any fancied slight." "I would be both wiser and happier . . . if I could abjure pride and forget the past." Then, in an all-out effort to win the lady, he becomes, in turn, arrogant, coldly formal, gallant, insinuatingly caressing, confident and bold. His voice takes on a "calculated melancholy cadence" that soon turns into the throaty gutturals of "coarse passion" as he takes one of her hands in his and attempts to kiss her. Proximity to Melody is a devastating experience for anyone:

DEBORAH: Pah! You reek of whiskey! You are drunk, sir! You are insolent and disgusting! I do not wonder your inn enjoys such meager patronage, if you regale all your guests of my sex with this absurd performance!

[Poet, II, 181].

When Gadsby makes his entrance in Act III, Melody has had time to adjust to the shock of being interrupted during his mirror ritual. The rigid family attorney and the romantic poseur confront each other by bowing stiffly and observing a few necessary courtesies. Then, a comic scene of cross-purposes follows in which Melody brings up the matter of a settlement in the affair between his daughter and Harford's son. Gadsby is astonished at the effrontery of the man; he had been prepared to broach the subject more delicately. The misunderstanding centers upon the nature of the "settlement." Whereas Gadsby regards it as a

bribe from Harford to sever the relationship, Melody considers it a dowry from himself to cement it. The misunderstanding is cleared up when Gadsby insolently offers three thousand dollars to Melody, who rages so fiercely he has to be restrained by Sara to prevent him from beating Gadsby.

Gadsby mistakes Melody for a low Irish innkeeper who can be bought off easily. He is bewildered by Melody's response; he cannot understand how a man in his circumstances can afford such excessive pride. Deborah learns that Major Cornelius Melody is really Melody the innkeeper, whereas Gadsby learns that Melody the innkeeper is really Major Cornelius Melody.

O'Neill uses both plot elements to reveal important sides of Melody's character. The grotesque absurdity of his behavior with Deborah focuses on his comic presumptuousness, his insufferable male arrogance, and his ridiculous fancies. He comes off a fool. With Gadsby, his fierce pride and his strong sense of personal dignity and family honor are sounded so vigorously that even his daughter shares his feelings with "tears of humiliated pride."

Both scenes begin as comic intrusions and their unfolding actions are comic, but the humor rapidly disappears and is replaced by burning humiliation. O'Neill uses the comedy to arrive at the pathetic, and to reflect the larger movement of the play: from the comic to the pathetic to the final scene of self-discovery in which Melody's split character becomes whole for the first time.

The gulling of James Tyrone in Journey, not only by all three members of his family, but by Cathleen as well, takes the form of the repeated incident of "watering the whiskey" in Act II, Scene 1, and again in Act III. In the earlier scene, Edmund and Jamie are engaged in "sneaking one" before the elder Tyrone returns for lunch:

JAMIE: (He comes back and takes a drink.) And now to cover up from his eagle eye. (He memorizes the level in the bottle after every drink. He measures two drinks of water and pours them in the whiskey bottle and shakes it up.) There. That fixes it. (He pours water in the glass and sets it on the table by Edmund.) And here's the water you've been drinking.

EDMUND: Fine! You don't think it will fool him, do you?

JAMIE: Maybe not, but he can't prove it.

[Journey, II, 1, 54].

When Tyrone enters, the first thing he does is to study the whiskey bottle; the gesture is so familiar to all that Jamie comments, even though his back is turned: "It's all right. The level in the bottle hasn't changed."

In Act III Cathleen is invited by Mary Tyrone to have another drink. Mary persuades her to stay rather than join the cook, and Cathleen reaches for the bottle with the observation that "maybe one more won't harm." But her insouciance is short-lived:

CATHLEEN: (Worried again.) The master's sure to notice what's gone from the bottle. He has the eye of a hawk for that.

MARY: (Amusedly.) Oh, we'll play Jamie's trick on him. Just measure a few drinks of water and pour them in.

CATHLEEN: (Does this--with a silly giggle.) God save me, it'll be half water. He'll know by the taste.

MARY: (Indifferently.) No, by the time he comes home he'll be too drunk to know the difference . . .

[Journey, III, 100].

When Tyrone does come home he is not too drunk to notice her drug-induced euphoria, and it saddens him, but Mary is oblivious to the effect her exaggerated behavior has on her husband and son. "Here's the whiskey, dear," she says. "Shall I pour a drink for you?" Without waiting for a reply she pours his drink, then turns to her ailing son: "And you, Edmund? I don't want to encourage you, but one before dinner, as an appetizer, can't do any harm." O'Neill has the two men "make no move to take the drinks."

O'Neill uses the comic device of the repeated deception of Tyrone by every member of the household. Not only does it reveal the old man's miserliness, but it draws attention to the addictions of the family. The planned deception of Tyrone starts as a broadly comic event and becomes an integrated element in the tragic suffering of the family. From this moment on, the men of the Tyrone family will drink with such vehemence that in trying to blunt the pain of living it will lead them to stupor. The hopelessness of the four Tyrones is presented in causal relation to their addictions. Each of them has had to face the disillusionment of the destruction of early ambitions and desires, a destruction self-imposed and uncompromising, only made bearable by addictions that blunt the painful memories invading the present. The hopelessness lies in their refusal to banish the past; the addictions to drugs and alcohol

are continuing attempts to retain that which is most painful. At the same time, they are aware of their absurdity; each member of the family laments the past and is keenly aware of the ridiculous spectacle he is making of himself. The appearance of the measure of living, just as the appearance of the measure of whiskey in the bottle, is what they are willing to accept, as impotent and as "watered down" as the reality of both life and the bottle may be.

The despair in the lives of the haunted Tyrones contrasts sharply with the Dionysian exuberance of Josie and Phil Hogan in Misbegotten, whose Act I climax is a plot device that reflects in its comic gusto the vigorous mood and spirit of the play. T. Stedman Harder, the Standard Oil millionaire whose estate abuts the Hogan farm, has decided to complain in person to the crusty Hogans about their hogs who evidently have been breaking the fence separating the two properties in order to bathe in his ice pond. The incident has occurred enough times to prompt Harder to look into the matter himself. He approaches the dilapidated Hogan farm on horseback, "dressed in a beautifully tailored English tweed coat and riding breeches. . . ." determined to be authoritative and to command the respect of the Hogans, who sit nearby waiting for him. O'Neill notes that "it would be hard to find anyone more ill-equipped for combat with the HOGANS. . . . The experienced strategy of the HOGANS in verbal battle is to take the offensive at once and never let an opponent get set to hit back" (Misbegotten, I, 334). Harder never gets a chance

to regain his balance after the initial shock of Hogan's aggressive verbal attack and Josie's insolent and obscene remarks. In desperation he announces, "My name is Harder," expecting some abatement, but the emboldened Hogans step up the tempo. Words lead to threats, threats to a kind of slapstick violence, as Harder is physically subdued. Before he can mention the reason for his visit, Phil Hogan shoves his unshaven face close to Harder's and launches his coup de théâtre: "What I want to know is, what the hell d'you mean by your contemptible trick of breaking down your fence to entice my poor pigs to take their death in your ice pond?" (Misbegotten, I, 337). Hogan not only accuses him of a deliberate crime, but he goes on to demand restitution for his dead pigs. Harder's retreat becomes a rout.

The gulling of Harder is an example of what Bergson refers to as inversion, a technique of light comedy in which roles are reversed, the villain becomes the victim of his villainy, the cheat is cheated, the robber robbed.<sup>2</sup> The initial baiting of Harder by the Hogans has a kind of robust Gaelic humor to it, but the comic punch is delivered by Hogan's sudden inspiration to accuse the accuser. It catches everyone off balance: Harder is speechless with consternation, and Josie and Jim Tyrone shout with laughter. O'Neill brings into focus the jovial spirit that exists between Hogan and his daughter, but the scene also contributes to a principal idea in the play, the uses of comic intrigue in the games the Hogans play.

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<sup>2</sup>Bergson, "Laughter," pp. 121-123.

The play's most important plot device, that also uses comic inversion, is the deception Hogan initiates to force Tyrone to marry Josie. When he recognizes that, though they love each other, nothing will ever come of it unless some drastic measures are taken to force the issue, he concocts the story of Tyrone selling the farm from under their noses. He also manages to mention to Josie that Tyrone admitted he loved her, and that when Tyrone stays away it is precisely because he means to avoid temptation. Josie believes her father because she wants to; she is angry about having been jilted by Tyrone, but she is also eager to see him again. The circumstance seems right for a plan to force the drunken Tyrone into a compromising incident with Josie so that both Hogans may then appeal to Tyrone's sense of honor to marry her. The gulling of Tyrone is a comic plot device on which the entire play is based. However, when Josie confronts Tyrone, she realizes that the poor man is beyond redemption: even a good woman's love would be incapable of overcoming his despair. What starts as a comic element does not work out comically in the end. Again the duper is duped; Hogan is cheated of victory in his deception, but, ironically, he wins his daughter when his plan backfires. He had attempted a bold stroke to guarantee a future for her independent of him; what results is a stronger bond of mutual affection and interdependence between them.

Scenes of gulling and deception form the main action of the play--from the initial hoax played on Hogan by his daughter and her

brother Mike, to the scene with Harder, to the planned gulling of Jim Tyrone by Josie and Hogan, to the attempt by Hogan to deceive Josie into a fait accompli with Tyrone to get her married, even to the self-deception of Tyrone revealed in his final scene with Josie.

### O'NEILL'S COMIC PLOT DEVICES

O'Neill concentrates his use of comic plot devices in his later plays.<sup>3</sup> In all but two instances, the comedy takes the form either of the gulling of an innocent or of the gulling of a victim of some rigid obsession. The first exception is the confrontation between two rigid characters, Con Melody and Gadsby in Poet, in which a mutual misunderstanding is used to generate the comic effect. The humor evolves from an initial misunderstanding of the motives and position of each by the other, a misunderstanding that centers upon two different interpretations of the word "settlement." The comedy increases in proportion to the obstinacy each displays in maintaining his point of view. Melody is the vain, unbending disciplinarian shielded by an absurdly rigid code of honor; Gadsby is the excessively efficient, solemn professional exhibiting the kind of callousness one finds in Molière's doctors who, as Bergson says, "treat the patient as though he had been made for the

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<sup>3</sup>Movie Man (1914), Anna Christie (1919), Marco (1925), and Hughie (1941), contain comic plot devices but in each instance the comic effect derives from the inherent comic idea rather than from the scene's inclusion as a structural element in the play. This material will appear in Chapter VI on comic ideas.

doctors."<sup>4</sup> It is Melody who finally breaks the comic deadlock by sheer physical force and by calling on his reserves. O'Neill tries to sustain the comedy by introducing the raucous, slapstick element of Melody's two cronies, who grab Gadsby, throw him out, and kick him down the street. The comic effect barely survives this last offstage action.

The second instance of comic misunderstanding is the scene with Melody and Deborah Harford, in which the misunderstanding comes close to a social disaster when Melody's seductive technique almost succeeds. But the moment of recognition, brought about by Melody's whiskey breath, shatters both the illusion and the comedy as Deborah regains her composure and humiliates her would-be seducer by ignoring his presence in his own house.

The rigid characters who are gulled by associates and impostors include Nat Miller in Wilderness, who is the butt of the family "bluefish" joke; the elder Tyrone in Journey, whom the other characters steal from and dupe; and Harder, the millionaire whom Josie and Phil Hogan abuse "for the poor and oppressed." Two gullible innocents are deceived by their neighbors in similar manner when Ramsay Fife tricks young Reuben Light into believing the secret of his homicidal past in Dynamo, and a somewhat uncertain Abner Small is shamed into entering the Mannon house in Mourning, and is subsequently routed by his own vivid imagination, seeded by the taunts of his tormentors.

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<sup>4</sup>Bergson, "Laughter," p. 175.

With the exceptions of Days Without End and the unfinished More Stately Mansions, all of the late plays, from 1931 on, contain strong comic plot elements based on the gulling of innocent and rigid characters, and the misunderstandings between antagonists. O'Neill often changes direction in his comic scenes, so that what begins as a farcical situation becomes, before the scene is over, an event heavy with serious, sometimes tragic, overtones. The lie of homicide in Dynamo, the ghost scene in Mourning, the two misunderstandings in Poet, and the bottle-watering in Journey, all lead directly to the disastrous or desolate conclusions of the plays.

## CHAPTER IV

### VERBAL HUMOR

The largest portion of comic elements in O'Neill's plays falls into this category, which consists of comic language: vocabulary, phraseology, style, and expression. In his chapter on language and style in Roman comedy, Duckworth comprehensively outlines many features of the language of Roman comedy which can serve equally well for the verbal humor in O'Neill's plays.<sup>1</sup> While a few specific types of comic dialogue appearing in Roman comedy do not appear in his plays,<sup>2</sup> the general categories are applicable, and in order to assemble all of O'Neill's verbal comic references into reasonable groupings, I have made minor additions and deletions.

The linguistic comic material in O'Neill's plays falls into six categories of verbal humor. Under each, a variety of types will be defined and indicated as they occur. These six categories consist of

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<sup>1</sup>Duckworth, The Nature of Roman Comedy, pp. 331-360.

<sup>2</sup>Such comic elements as pleonasm, or the use of more words than are necessary to express an idea; ellipsis, or the omission of a verb or other part of the sentence; the frequently appearing triadic structure as a stylistic device of Roman comedy; and certain formations of coined comic names are not found in O'Neill's plays.

(A) colloquial language, the comic dialogue of familiar, everyday speech; (B) stylistic devices, the comedy of the sound of words and the repetition of the same or similar letters; (C) comic formations, the coining of words, phrases, comic names, and titles (including the invention of new words or names, the imaginative and comic use of nouns as adjectives or verbs, the invention of laughable compounds, and new uses or meanings ascribed to words and names); (D) word-play and wit, the double meanings, extended meanings, and otherwise comically altered usages, pronunciations, and meanings of words, phrases and ideas; (E) jests and stories, the verbal humor of comic raillery and narrative; and (F) linguistic reversals, verbal arrangements whose humor hinges on the element of surprise.

#### A. COLLOQUIAL LANGUAGE

The eighteen different categories of colloquial language are (1) proverbs, maxims, aphorisms, and cliches, (2) expressions of abuse, (3) diminutives, (4) eroticism, (5) enthusiasm, (6) exaggeration, (7) hyperbole, (8) greetings and farewells, (9) metaphor, (10) parody, (11) interjections, (12) personification and vivification, (13) lyrics and poetry, (14) oaths, (15) foreign language and dialect, (16) parataxis, (17) deception, and (18) soliloquy.

##### (1) Proverbs, Maxims, Aphorisms, and Cliches

This type of verbal humor includes comic sayings in general use, general truths drawn from experience, and short, pithy comments.

a. The related subjects of love and womanhood are treated in Royston's reference to love being the world "upside down," in which "sense is drivel and drivel is sense" (Servitude, III, 285), and his comment that the most soothing narcotic a woman can possess is "the memory of another's sacrifice for love of oneself" (Servitude, III, 285). Nina Leeds is reminded of men's "smart crack" about women: ". . . you can't live with them and you can't live without them" (Strange Interlude, III, 533). Finally, on two occasions, young Richard Miller has the last male-chauvinistic word when he compares women to trolley cars-- ". . . there's always another one along in a minute" (Wilderness, II, 39)--and when he scornfully announces that "a woman's only a woman, but a good cigar's a smoke" (Wilderness, III, 1, 72).

b. Sin receives passing comment in Benton the butler's underhanded remark about his master's underhanded behavior, "Once caught, twice shy, they say . . ." (Servitude, II, 255). And the adventurous Richard Miller in defense of his drunkenness, sees himself "curing the soul by means of the senses" (Wilderness, IV, 1, 101).

c. Individual initiative is treated in Uncle Maffeo's reminder to Marco to remember that "any climate is healthy where trade is brisk" (Marco, I, iv, 234), and in Marco's admonition to the Kaan's sage to "take a fool's advice and don't think so much or you'll get old before your time" (Marco, II, ii, 271).

d. The nadir of banality is reached by Marco's sincere reminder to the astonished Kaan that "there's no place like home, Your Majesty!" (Marco, II, I, 260), and his sentimentally solemn remark that his mother is "the best friend I ever had!" (Marco, II, III, 277).

e. Drinking is treated colloquially in Roger's emphatic clarification of drunkenness: ". . . he's soused, pickled, stewed, boiled--" (Movie Man, 176), Driscoll's "I'm dhry as a loime kiln" (Voyage, 64), the Woman's accusation of Michael Cape: "You been lap-pin' up some bum hooch" (Welded, II, II, 286), and Jamie Cregan's reference to his condition the night before, "with the lashings of whiskey in me" (Poet, I, 139).

f. A concise descriptive colloquialism occurs in Carmody's "Irish as Paddy's pig!" (Straw, I, II, 59).

## (2) Colloquial Expressions of Strong Abuse

Abusive names used for comic effect range from Cocky's "Blarsted fat 'eads!" (Bound East for Cardiff, 37), to Little Nora and Tom's name-calling: "Slow poke!", "Brick-top!" "Cheater!", "Tattle-tale!", and "Cry-baby!" (The Straw, I, I, 39, 40), Richard Bigelow's reference to Martha Jayson's family as "a swarm of mosquitoes" (First Man, II, 175), the taunting of Ella by the other girls: "Painty face!" (All God's Chillun Got Wings, I, I, 92), the invective exchange of the Buddhist's "superstitious sheep!", the Christian's "idolatrous dogs!", and the Magian's "blasphemous hogs!" (Marco, Prologue, 213), Maffeo's

" . . . Kneel, you ass!" (Marco, I, vi, 243), Marco's " . . . you kidney-footed gang of thumb-fingered infidels!" (Marco, II, ii, 271), Cybel's reference to Dion as "ham fats" (Brown, I, iii, 330), the Chantyman's recollection of the "yaller-haired pig" who ran off with his money (Mourning, "Hunted," IV, 791), Hugo's "Capitalist swine! Bourgeois stool pigeons!" (Iceman, I, 11), "Gottamned stupid bourgeois!" (Iceman, IV, 254), and "Stupid bourgeois monkeys!" (Iceman, IV, 260), Margie's admonition to Rocky to "shake the lead outa your pants, Pimp!" (Iceman, IV, 255), Erie Smith's "Jesus, what a dummy!" (Hughie, 271), when faced with the inattention of the night clerk, and Josie and Phil Hogan's spirited exchanges: "Where's my dinner, you lazy cow?" "There's stew on the stove. You bad-tempered runt . . ." (Misbegotten, I, iii, 321), and

JOSIE: . . . Don't be calling me names, you bad-tempered old hornet, or maybe I'll lose my temper, too.

HOGAN: To hell with your temper, you overgrown cow!

JOSIE: I'd rather be a cow than an ugly little buck goat. . .  
[Misbegotten, I, 307].

More detailed expressions of disparagement include Rogers' reference to the Spanish language sounding "almost like real talk" (The Movie Man, 171), Driscoll cursing Bella for "havin' such big feet" when he finds himself unable to dance with her (Caribbees, 28), Cocky's shocked disbelief when the native ladies make their first appearance: " . . . Gawd blimey, look at 'em! Ain't they 'orrible?" (Voyage, 67), Mildred's careful description of what her aunt reminds her of: " . . . a

cold pork pudding against a background of linoleum tablecloth in the kitchen of a--but the possibilities are wearisome" (Ape, II, 51), the Chantyman's final rejoinder to Brant: ". . . I see ye ain't got much ear fur music. Good night" (Mourning, "Hunted," IV, 794), Lewis' sudden outburst when he mistakes Joe Mott for "a bloody Kaffir" (Iceman, I, 42), Wetjoen's claim that he will never forgive himself for having shot ten better men "clean in the mittle of the forehead," and for having missed Lewis (Iceman, I, 44), Margie's endearing description of Rocky as "stinko" (Iceman, IV, 256), Erie Smith's sarcastic "Sorry if I'm keeping you up, Sport" (Hughie, 270), and Phil Hogan's inclusive

. . . I can't think of anyone crazy enough unless it'd be some damn fool of a millionaire buying up land to make a great estate for himself, like our beautiful neighbor, Harder, the Standard Oil thief, did years ago. . . . May he roast in hell and his Limey superintendent with him!

[Misbegotten, I, 319].

Abusive generalizations are found in O'Dowd's ". . . Och, lave it to the priests, divil mend thim!" when he comments on Riley's obscene lyrics (Poet, III, 199), and Phil Hogan's robust ". . . Hurroo! Down with all tyrants, male and female! To hell with England and God damn Standard Oil!" (Misbegotten, II, 345).

Finally, instances to the threat of physical abuse occur in the Chantyman's vow to "go back an' give her a seaboot in her fat tail that'll learn her--!" (Mourning, "Hunted," IV, 791), in Richard Miller's drunken defiance:

SALESMAN: Sssh! This is a scream! Wait! (He addresses RICHARD in tones of exaggerated melodrama) Curse you, Jack Dalton, if I won't unhand her, what then?

RICHARD: (threateningly) I'll give you a good punch in the snoot, that's what!

[Wilderness, III, i, 73],

in Joe Mott's reminder to Larry to "wake me up if you has to bat me wid a chair" (Iceman, I, 24), in Rocky's order to his girls, Margie and Pearl, to "sit down before I knock yuh down" (Iceman, I, 64), in Hugo's threat to an amused Larry by calling him "Renegade! Traitor! I vill have you shot!" (Iceman, II, 104), in Act III, when he threatens everybody: "Got-tanned stupid proletarian slaves! Buy me a drink or I vill have you shot!" (Iceman, III, 206), and in Con Melody's command to his cronies to rid him of the presence of Nicholas Gadsby and "throw this thing out! Kick it down the crossroads!" (Poet, III, 218).

### (3) Diminutives

Used mostly to express affection or sympathy, the diminutive exaggerates smallness of size, but it can decrease the good as well as the bad in a descriptive term. Freda, one of the women in Fat Joe's bar, delicately refers to her drinking as merely "a nip o' brandy now an' agen fur my 'ealth" (Voyage, 69). An ecstatic Margaret taunts Billy Brown by chanting in the moonlight, ". . . Peggy is Dion's little girl. . . Dion is my Daddy-O!" (Brown, Prologue, 314). Hugo Kalmar comes out of his stupor a number of times in the back room of Harry Hope's bar to hurl seemingly affectionate diminutives at the assemblage: "Hello, leedle

Rocky! Leedle monkey-face! Vere is your leedle slave girls?" (Iceman, I, 11), and some minutes later he addresses Parritt with "Hello, leedle Don? Leedle monkey-face" (Iceman, I, 34). In the last act, Hugo reverts to his familiar wheedling tone as he confronts Parritt for the last time: "Hello, leedle Don, leedle monkey-face! Don't be a fool! Buy me a trink!" (Iceman, IV, 249), and he giggles familiarly at the others, "Hello, leedle Harry! Hello, nice, leedle, funny monkey-faces!" (Iceman, IV, 254). Rocky's girls join in the spirit of rapprochement at the play's end by playfully teasing him:

MARGIE: . . . Our little bartender, ain't he, Poi!

PEARL: Yeah, and a cute little Ginny at dat!

[Iceman, IV, 256].

Only once does O'Neill use the diminutive to express open dissatisfaction, when Hugo abruptly changes his intent with "laugh, leedle bourgeois monkey-faces! Laugh like fools, leedle stupid peoples!" (Iceman, I, 89).

#### (4) Eroticism

Colloquial references to sexual love and sexual symbolism that appear in a more acceptable form than comic taboo occur in Devlin's description of Anita Fernandez having "the swellest lamps I've ever seen on a dame; and a figure--my boy! my boy!" (Movie Man, 174); in the Donkeyman's sarcastic comment on the deckside orgy, "There's love at first sight for you . . ." (Caribbees, 23); in Mat Burke's appeal

to Anna Christie that "It's wan of your kisses I'm needing to take the tiredness from me bones. Wan kiss, now!" (Christie, II, 53); in Captain Crosby's defense of Caleb William's escapade with a native woman, "after a year or more aboard ship, a man'd have to be a goll-durned geldin' if he don't--" (Diff'rent, I, 218); in Jack Crosby's appraisal of the "heathen critters" in the South Sea islands being "purty as pictures, Benson says, . . . and mighty accomodatin' in their ways" (Diff'rent, I, 214); in Paddy's ridicule of Mildred Douglas' motives: "Kiss me, Engineer dear, for it's dark down here and me old man's in Wall Street making money! Hug me tight, darlin', for I'm afeerd in the dark and me mother's on deck makin' eyes at the skipper!" (Ape, IV, 62); in Cybel's suggestive erotic childhood reminiscence, "They hug and kiss you and take you in their laps and pinch you and want to see you getting dressed and undressed . . ." (Brown, I, iii, 331); in Joe Silva's impertinent comment, "By God, if ghosts look like the livin', I'd let Ezra's woman's ghost set on my lap! M'm!" (Mourning, "Haunted," I, 816); in Richard Miller's description of the bar he had visited as "a secret house of shame" (Wilderness, IV, ii, 114); in Sara Melody's teasing remark, ". . . Now, Joel darlin', you shouldn't look at me like that, and me your brother's wife" (Mansions, III, i, 143); and in Mickey Maloy's appreciative remark to Nora Melody:

MALLOY: . . . Sure, it'd be the joy av me life to have a mother like you to fight for me--or better still, a wife like you.

NORA: . . . Arrah, save your blarney for the young girls!  
[Poet, IV, 226].

(5) Enthusiasm

Colloquial expressions of enthusiasm register a buoyant spirit of joie de vivre in Cocky's "Wot a bloody lark!" (Caribbees, 8), in Yank's "Oh, you kiddo!" (Caribbees, 12), in Driscoll's "Play us a dance, ye square-head swab! --a rale, Godforsaken son av a turkey trot wid guts to ut" (Caribbees, 27), during the festivities on the Glencairn deck, in Harry Hope's "Bejees, let's sing! Let's celebrate! It's my birthday party!" (Iceman, IV, 259), in Roche and O'Dowd's "Hurroo, hurroo! Biddy O'Rafferty!" (Poet, III, 199), and in the elder Tyrone's affectionate comment on the story of the duping of his millionaire neighbor by Shaughnessy, the pig farmer: "The damned old scoundrel! By God, you can't beat him!" (Journey, I, 25).

(6) Exaggeration

Colloquial language often takes the form of exaggeration that is used for emphasis, overstatement, or grandiloquent expression.

a. Braggadocio, Boasting, and Praise

Two of the most prominent types of colloquial exaggeration found in O'Neill's plays are statements of braggadocio and its milder form of boasting (focusing on oneself) and statements of praise (focusing on another). Mat Burke makes light of the rigors of being shipwrecked by telling Anna, "Ah, it was nothing--aisy for a rale man with guts to him, the like of me" (Christie, II, 51). When Captain Crosby

overhears his daughter refer to him as "good as good can be," he loses no time in confirming the observation: "I always told ye I was good, ain't I--good as hell I be!" (Diff'rent, I, 217). "De long green, dat's me every time!" boast Brutus Jones to Smithers by way of explaining his affinity to money (Jones, 1, 7). On the verge of embarking on his sea voyage with the Princess Kukachin, an ebullient Marco Polo informs the court sage to "tell the Kaan--anything he wants--write me--just Venice--they all know me there--and if they don't, by God, they're going to!" (Marco, II, 11, 271). In the next scene Marco is given the opportunity to explain, in more detail, the reasons for his prominence:

KUKACHIN: . . . was it not you who swam to me as I was drowning?

MARCO: . . . Venetians make the best swimmers in the world.

KUKACHIN: When the pirates attacked us, was it not your brave sword that warded off their curved knives? . . .

MARCO: I was out of practice, too. I used to be one of the crack swordsmen of Venice--and they're the world's foremost, as everyone knows.

[Marco, II, 11, 276].

Seth Beckwith, the gregarious handyman of the Mannon house, is unconcerned about being called a "reprobate," but he bristles at an allusion to his age: ". . . Old nothin'! On'y seventy-five! My old man lived to be ninety! Licker can't kill the Beckwiths!" (Mourning, "Homecoming," I, 689). And liquor is the issue again when Richard Miller attempts to answer the question of whether he ever drank anything stronger than soda pop: "Sure. Lots of times. Beer and sloe-gin fizz and--Manhattans," he adds, somewhat hesitantly (Wilderness, II, 42).

However, in Act IV, Richard launches into his big scenes with his mother and with his girl, Muriel, in which he threatens suicide: ". . . Life is all a stupid farce! I'm through with it! (With a sinister smile) It's lucky there aren't any of General Gabler's pistols around-- or you'd see if I'd stand it much longer!" (Wilderness, IV, i, 101). He confronts his destiny mock-heroically: ". . . It was only my despair talking. But I'm not a coward. I'll face--my fate" (Wilderness, IV, i, 101), and he advertises his contemplation of suicide to Muriel: ". . . If there'd been one of Hedda Gabler's pistols around, you'd have seen if I wouldn't have done it beautifully! I thought, when I'm dead, she'll be sorry she ruined my life" (Wilderness, IV, ii, 113), and he proudly exaggerates his drunkenness: ". . . I was worse later. . . . You ought to have seen me when I got home! I was on the verge of delirium tremens!" (Wilderness, IV, ii, 115).

Willie Oban is mildly offended when Larry fails to take notice of him. "An unpardonable slight," he declares, "especially as I am the only inmate of royal blood. . . . Educated at Harvard, too" (Iceman, I, 37).

The dead Brutus Jones gets exaggerated praise in Smithers' ". . . Silver bullets! Gawd blimey, but yer died in the 'eighth o' style, any'ow!" (Jones, viii, 35). The old farmer flatters Ephraim Cabot: "They hain't many t' touch ye, Ephraim--a son at seventy-six. That's a hard man fur ye! I be on'y sixty-eight an' I couldn't do it" (Desire, III, i, 185).

Marco's uncle Maffeo takes a defensive stance:

THE OLDER ALI: He greatly resembles a youth I saw back on the road buying a piece of Noah's Ark from a wayside sharper.

MAFFEO: . . . It wasn't Mark. Mark would have sold him the lions of St. Mark's for good mousers!

[Marco, I, iii, 231].

"Isn't this kid of mine a whopper for his age, though!" Sam Evans exclaims to a tense Ned Darrell (Interlude, VII, 633), while a similar kind of exuberant praise is expressed by Richard Miller about his cohorts in the back room of the hotel bar downtown: ". . . There wasn't anyone there but a Princeton Senior I know . . . he belongs to Tiger Inn and he's fullback on the football team . . . and he had two chorus girls from New York with him, and they were all drinking champagne" (Wilderness, III, 114).

No less enthusiastic is Phil Hogan's open admiration for his daughter's competence:

JOSIE: Didn't I help you in the trade for the horse, when you got the Crowleys to throw in the satchel for good measure? I was up all night fixin' that nag's forelegs so his knees wouldn't buckle together till after the Crowley's had him a day or two.

HOGAN: (Forgets his anger to grin reminiscently) You've a wonderful way with animals, God bless you.

[Misbegotten, I, 308].

#### b. Women

Comically exaggerated references to women appear in Devlin's "Back in God's country we'd use her photo for a before-taking ad" (Movie Man, 185), in Mat Burke's awakening statement of appreciation when he reaches out to touch Anna: "Aye, rale flesh and blood,

divil a less" (Christie, II, 51), and in his comment that "in an hour we'll be as old friends as if we was born in the same house" (Christie, II, 55).

Emma Crosby's gregarious nephew Benny calls her a "regular, up-to-date sport--the only live one in this dead dump" (Diff'rent, II, 224), and in his encounter with Tilly Small he recalls having told her "to cut through the rough work and behave--and a nice time was had by all" (Diff'rent, II, 229). Emma is jealous of Tilly and of the French girls Benny claims to have known. ". . . Oh, them French girls ain't the only ones knows how to fix up," she says (Diff'rent, II, 232). Reuben Light reminds Mrs. Fife to tell her daughter, "I've read up on love in biology, and I know what it is now, and I've proved it with more than one female" (Dynamo, II, 1, 91). To his girl friend, Muriel, Richard Miller recounts his experiences with the woman in the bar:

RICHARD: . . . She had yellow hair--the kind that burns and stings you!

MURIEL: I'll bet it was dyed.

RICHARD: She kept smoking one cigarette after another--but that's nothing in a chorus girl.

[Wilderness, IV, 11, 114],

and he invents a heroic defense of her honor: "I had a fight with the bar-keep and knocked him down because he'd insulted her" (Wilderness, IV, 11, 115).

Con Melody would "charge a square of Napoleon's Old Guard" for one kiss of Deborah Harford's lips (Poet, II, 181), and he wages "his all against a penny that even among the fish-blooded Yankees there's

not a man whose heart doesn't catch flame from your beauty! . . . As mine does now!" (Poet, II, 181). Later, after suffering her disdain, he defends his wounded ego, "I never had an eye for skinny, pale snips of women--" (Poet, II, 195), and he resorts to calumny with "Naturally, the lady was a bit discomposed when she heard you and your mother coming, after she had just allowed me to kiss her" (Poet, III, 206).

Erie Smith has the last word in his description of his late friend Hughie's wife: "Not that she was nothin' Ziegfeld would want to glorify. When you call her plain, you give her all the breaks" (Hughie, 280).

c. Marriage

The subject of marriage is given exaggerated comic expression in Emma Crosby's coy "Married? You 'n me? Oh, Benny, I'm too old" (Diff'rent, II, 238), and in Caleb Williams' sarcastic "Bein' married to Alf Rogers for five years'd pizin' any woman's life" (Diff'rent, II, 243). But Mat Burke, anticipating his union with Anna Christie, shouts with a wild, Irish exuberance, "I'll be roaring it out like a foghorn over the sea! You're the girl of the world and we'll be marrying soon and I don't care who knows it!" (Christie, II, 61). In the last act, he confirms the impending marriage by announcing that old Chris "himself here will be having a grandchild to ride on his foot, I'm telling you!" (Christie, IV, 112). The elder Mayo prods his brother-in-law to "get right out and hunt up a wife somewheres . . . (He looks at his watch with exaggerated

concern) You ain't got much time to find her, Dick" (Beyond the Horizon, I,ii,43). But for sustained loquacity, Richard Miller's response to Muriel's suggestion that they visit Niagara Falls on their honeymoon, is unmatched by other O'Neill characters:

RICHARD: (scomfully) That dump where all the silly fools go? I should say not! (With passionate romanticism) No, we'll go to some far-off wonderful place! (He calls on Kipling to help him) Somewhere out on the Long Trail--the trail that is always new--on the road to Mandalay! We'll watch the dawn come up like thunder out of China!

[Wilderness, IV, ii, 119].

d. The Physical

Comic exaggeration having to do with aspects of the physical other than the erotic (i.e., bodily conditions, the body in movement) is illustrated in such expressions as Freda's "Gawd, 'ow I 'ates to 'ear snorin'" (Voyage, 67), Captain Scott's "God A' mighty, mountin' this damned hill is worsen' n goin' aloft to the skys' l yard in a blow. I got to lay to a while" (Horizon, II, ii, 90), the prostitute's complaint to Michael Cape: "Gawd, I'm tired! My feet hurt fierce! I been walkin' miles. I got corns, too" (Welded, II, ii, 285), Abner Small's "I seed Ezra's ghost dressed like a judge comin' through the wall--and, by God, I run!" (Mourning, "Haunted," I, i, 820), Mrs. Miller's protest to her daughter to "sit up straight in your chair. Do you want to grow up a humpback?" (Wilderness, II, 47). Joe Mott reminds Larry to "wake me if you has to bat me wid a chair" (Iceman, I, 24), and Rocky orders his girls to "sit down before I knock yuh down" (Iceman, I, 64).

e. Ridicule and Sarcasm

Comic expressions of ridicule and sarcasm occur in Driscoll's orders for "Irish whiskey for the rist av us--wid the excipshun av our timperance friend, God pity him!" (Voyage, 68), in Andrew Mayo's chiding of his brother to contribute to the homestead when he becomes a success: "We could use a lot of money right here on the farm without hurting it any" (Horizon, I, 1, 20), in Captain Mayo's reaction to the gloom in the house because of Robert's impending voyage: "You folks look as if you was settin' up with a corpse . . . God A'mighty, there ain't anyone dead, be there?" (Horizon, I, 11, 33), in Captain Crosby's comment on his daughter's puritanism: "If she ever got religion that bad, I'd ship her off as female missionary to the damned yellow Chinks" (Diff'rent, I, 218), in Benny's insolent description of Emma Crosby being "all dolled up like a kid of sixteen and enough paint on her mush for a Buffalo Bill Indian . . ." (Diff'rent, II, 233), and in the jesting of the comic chorus with Abner Small before he enters the dark Mannon house:

MACKEL: . . . Would you like me fur one o' your pallbearers, Abner?

AMES: I'll comfort your old woman--providin' she'll want comfortin', which ain't likely!

SILVA: And I'll water your grave every Sunday after church! . . .

SETH: . . . We'll all jine in, Joe! If he ain't dead, by God, we'll drown him!

[Mourning, "Haunted," I, 1, 818].

Mildred Miller offers specimens of her signature to her father, seeking his approval. Miller exclaims, "It's overpowering--no

other word for it, overpowering! You could put it on the Declaration of Independence and not feel ashamed" (Wilderness, III, 11, 78). Some moments later, Miller's eldest son, Arthur, refers to Richard disdainfully as being "at the foolish age" (Wilderness, III, 11, 82), and not to be outdone, Richard informs his sister that "the trouble with you is, you don't understand what love means!" (Wilderness, IV, 1, 105).

An innocent Harry Hope suggests that his sixtieth birthday would be the right time to reform. Sixty, after all, he says, "ain't too old." His brother-in-law and his crony lose no time to confirm Hope's hope in their own interest:

MC GLOIN: . . . It's the prime of life, Harry.

MOSHER: Wonderful thing about you, Harry, you keep young as you ever was.

[Iceman, I, 51].

Rocky, the bartender, laments the possibility that his cohort, Chuck, will marry Cora and move to New Jersey: "Jees, can yuh picture a good barkeep like Chuck diggin' spuds? And imagine a whore hustlin' de cows home! For Christ sake! Ain't dat a sweet picture!" (Iceman, I, 69).

Jim Tyrone describes the Hogans' antagonist:

TYRONE: . . . A leading aristocrat in our Land of the Free and Get-Rich-Quick, whose boots are licked by one and all--one of the Kings of our Republic by Divine Right of Inherited Swag. In short, I refer to your good neighbor, T. Stedman Harder, Standard Oil's sappiest child, whom I know you both love so dearly.

[Misbegotten, I, 328].

f. Numbers

Exaggerated amounts are detailed in the ecstatic response of the Venetians to the Polo's munificent feast:

ALL: . . . See! What a turkey! Such a goose! The fattest pig I ever saw! What ducks! What vegetables! Look at the wine! A feast for the Gods! And all those servants! An army! And the orchestra! What expense! Lavish! They must be worth millions!  
[Marco, III, i, 293].

Very much "under the influence," Uncle Sid expostulates against the use of soup spoons:

SID: . . . Just think of waste effort eating soup with spoons-- fifty gruelling lifts per plate--billions of soup-eaters on globe-- why, it's simply staggering! (Then darkly to himself) No more spoons for me! If I want to develop my biceps, I'll buy a Sandow Exerciser!

[Wilderness, II, 49].

He goes on to correct his brother-in-law on the distance between the pile and the place in the lake where Red Sisk was drowning: "Two hundred and fifty! I've taken down the distance every time you've saved Red's life for thirty years and the mean average to that pile is two hundred and fifty feet!" (Wilderness, II, 55). Richard Miller explains his feelings toward Muriel to his sister: "I'd wait a million years and never mind it--for her!" (Wilderness, IV, i, 105). But Harry Hope talks in terms of ten millions when he upbraids Joe Mott for telling his story "ten million times and if I have to hear it again, that'll give me D.T.s anyway!" (Ice man, I, 46). In Act IV, Hope multiplies his fears when he complains about the streets being "full of automobiles. "Bejees, I could feel myself getting sunstroke, and an automobile damn near ran over me"

(Iceman, IV, 250), and he continues, a short time later, by inviting Hugo to "sit down! Have a drink! Have ten drinks, bejees!" (Iceman, IV, 254). Hugo, of course, picks up the cue: "Give me ten drinks, Harry. Don't be a fool" (Iceman, IV, 255). Still on the subject of drinks, Josie Hogan greets Jim Tyrone with "How's my fine Jim this beautiful day? You don't look so bad. You must have stopped at the Inn for an eye opener--or ten of them" (Misbegotten, I, 325).

g. Social Entities

The last type of comic exaggeration in O'Neill's plays has to do with social entities (i.e., religion, nationalities, politics, patriotism, etc.). A sarcastic Devlin comments on the stifling heat: "Mexico, my nice cool Mexico!" (Movie Man, 170). Mat Burke has his own salvation in mind when he reacts to the religious affiliation of the Christophersons: "Is it Catholic ye are?" he asks Anna. "No. Why?" she replies. "Oh, God, help me!" (Christie, IV, 111). A few moments later, he makes a last attempt to save his soul by pressing Chris to reveal his religion, whatever it may be. When the old man tells him the family had been Lutheran, Burke abandons all hope: "Luthers, is it? . . . Well, I'm damned then surely . . ." (Christie, IV, 113).

Richard Miller does not believe in "this silly celebrating the Fourth of July--all this lying talk about liberty--when there is no liberty!" (Wilderness, I, 15). A moment later, he comments on the American worker being "ground under the heel of the capitalist class, starving,

crying for bread for his children, and all he gets is a stone! The Fourth of July is a stupid farce!" (Wilderness, I, 15),<sup>3</sup> and he threatens his family with the suggestion that the revolution is not far off: "Why shouldn't the workers of the world unite and rise? They have nothing to lose but their chains!" (Wilderness, I, 17).

Nora Melody condemns the Boston police as "dirty cowards! Always takin' sides with the rich Yanks against the poor Irish!" (Poet, IV, 241), and Jamie Cregan confirms the vast political implications of his street brawl with "But, be the Powers, we wint down fightin' to the last for the glory av auld Ireland!" (Poet, IV, 242).

#### (7) Hyperbole

In almost half of O'Neill's plays his characters resort to hyperbole to register their opinions; that is to say, they exaggerate so excessively that what they say cannot be taken literally.

In the early Movie Man (1914), Rogers uses hyperbole on six occasions: when he threatens to quit Mexico and go north to marry an "Esquimau" and live on "an exclusive, refined, accordion-pleated, little iceberg" (Movie Man, 170), when he begs for the opportunity to "take one swing" at General Virella and have him carried "home in a white-pine kimono" (Movie Man, 173), when he refers to Mexican girls

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<sup>3</sup>O'Neill wrote Wilderness in 1932, during the depression, so that to many in the audience Richard's garrulity might not have seemed comic, but it is clear O'Neill meant Richard to express, through his intellectual flights, the comedy of excess, an uncritical and heroic romanticism bordering on the farcical.

as "so homely the mules shy at them" (Movie Man, 174), when he warns Devlin that Miss Fernandez would have "operated on you with her stil-  
leto in another second" (Movie Man, 174), and that he "wouldn't trust  
one of these dolls as far as I could hit Walter Johnson's fast one" (Movie  
Man, 174). Finally, his comment on Pancho Gomez' plan of attack is a  
sarcastic "That Scotch is great stuff. One more drink and Napoleon  
would be a piker" (Movie Man, 181).

Driscoll's diagnosis of the after-effects a cannibal of New  
Guinea might expect after digesting Cocky for Christmas dinner is death  
"av the bellyache the day after Christmas, divil a doubt av ut" (Cardiff,  
37). Cocky "weeps dolorously" as he complains he "ain't never 'ad no  
mother" (Voyage, 65), but he is his old self again, moments later, when  
he describes Joe's girls: "They'd fair blind yer, they're that 'omely"  
(Voyage, 66). Driscoll describes Ivan's drunken stupor by suggesting  
that "Gabriel's trumpet itself cudn't rouse him" (Voyage, 73). Yank com-  
ments on the suggestion that the dirge-like melody whose strains can  
be heard from the shore is funeral music: "They don't plant 'em down  
here, Dutchy. They eat 'em to save fun'ral expenses. I guess this guy  
went down the wrong way an' they got indigestion" (Caribbees, 5), but  
Cocky's response is a terse "Down't yer know as them blokes 'as two  
stomacks like a bleedin' camel?" (Caribbees, 5). Cocky comments on  
Bella, the native woman, in his usual inimical manner: "Looked like a  
bloody organ-grinder's monkey, she did" (Caribbees, 12).

Mrs. Mayo comments on her brother's story about the sleeping habits of sea gulls: "You men folks are too smart to live, aren't you?" (Horizon, I, ii, 33). Bill Carmody affectionately taunts his daughter: "Sure it's you can beat the divil himself!" (Straw, I, i, 40). Stephen Murray is chagrined at having referred to Eileen Carmody's father as being "well lit up," and he suggests "I ought to have my tongue operated on--that's what's the matter with me!" (Straw, I, ii, 63). Benny Rogers tells his mother how successful he thinks she will be if she informed on him to Emma: "You'll get fat runnin' me down to her!" (Diff'rent, II, 233). Brutus Jones exudes confidence when he declares that "trees an' me, we'se friends . . ." (Jones, i, 15). And Lily Jayson tries her hand at interpreting her sister-in-law's attitude toward the family: "She said you could all go to the devil!" (The First Man, I, 164).

A grinning Paddy describes the way Yank heaved his shovel at Mildred Douglas as "touching, I'm telling you! It put the touch of home, swate home in the stokehole" (Ape, iv, 62). When Yank later refers to himself as "a hairy ape" in his prison cell on Blackwell's Island, an anonymous voice expresses, in superb hyperbole: "When you spit, it bounces!" (Ape, vi, 73). But Yank forgets his surliness when he admires Fifth Avenue and describes the sidewalk as being "clean, ain't it? You could eat a fried egg offen it" (Ape, v, 66).

"Hot as hell!" says the Christian. "Hotter!" says the Magian in response (Marco, Prologue, 211). As further confirmation of

climatic conditions, Nicolo Polo refers to the weather: "if you put an egg in their rivers it will be boiled" (Marco, I, iv, 234). The new Pope comments on the merchandising ability of the Polo clan: "On the last day one of your seed will interrupt Gabriel to sell him another trumpet" (Marco, I, ii, 227). In the same enterprising spirit, a sardonic Cybel comments on the doorbell interrupting her scene with Dion Anthony: "I better join the A.F. of L. and soap-box for the eight-hour night!" (Brown, I, iii, 331).

The Roman senators in Lazarus Laughed provide a comic interlude to the impending martyrdom of Lazarus; one of them is so tired from having feasted the night before that he declares, "I could welcome my own murder as an excuse for sleeping!" (Lazarus, II, ii, 423), and another informs Caligula, "I shall take care to die before you become Caesar . . . and life becomes too idiotic!" (Lazarus, II, ii, 425). Even these casual remarks of the comic chorus of senators mirrors the play's theme of self-sacrifice.

In alluding to Sam Evans' fidelity to Nina, Charlie Marsden suggests that he should be put "in the museum among the prehistoric mammals!" (Interlude, VI, 598), and a little later, Evans beams proudly and announces his baby son "was sleeping so soundly an earthquake wouldn't have made him peep!" (Interlude, VI, 601).

Elsa Loving, at her dressing table, wonders "~~why~~ is it every one decides to turn up when you look your worst?" (Days, II, 59).

The comic Chantyman on the wharf in East Boston ironically warns Brant to "steer clear o' gals or they'll skin your hide off an' use it fur a carpet!" (Mourning, "Hunted," IV, 793). Seth Beckwith, the leader of the comic chorus of townspeople grouped in front of the Mannon house, warns the frightened Abner Small that "the graveyard's full of Mannons and they all spend their nights to hum here! (Mourning, "Haunted," I, 1, 817), and he agrees to allow Abner to enter the house before dark because they "don't want you runnin' into furniture an' breakin' things when them ghosts git chasin' you!" (Mourning, "Haunted," I, 1, 817).

Hyperbole sparks the conversation between the bartender and his salesman customer over the question of the legality of Richard Miller's presence in the bar. The bartender says that the boy had told him he was over eighteen. "Yes," replies the salesman, "and I tell you I'm the Pope--but you don't have to believe me" (Wilderness, III, 1, 74).

The uses of hyperbole in Poet include Cregan's thanks to the bartender for a free drink, "Sure, the good Samaritan was a crool haythen beside you" (Poet, I, 138); his appreciative "God bless you, Whiskey, it's you can rouse the dead!" (Poet, I, 139); and Nora's proud boast of her husband's strength, "Not the whole dirty force av thim [the police] will dare interfere with him!" (Poet, IV, 233).

Iceman is a mine of hyperbole, with the subjects of death, whiskey, and animals forming the largest number of references. Death is hyperbolized in Harry Hope's "You'd steal the pennies off your dead

mother's eyes!" (Iceman, I, 16); his "You and the other bums have begun to give me the graveyard fantods" (Iceman, I, 61); his remark about his wife "doing somersaults in her grave!" (Iceman, I, 62); Joe's announcement that if he ever refuses a drink they can "take Joe's body away, 'cause he's sure enuf dead" (Iceman, I, 22); Margie's "Hello, Old Wise Guy, ain't you died yet?" (Iceman, I, 63); Cora's "Hello, Old Wise Guy! Ain't you croaked yet?" (Iceman, I, 70); Rocky's comment about decreasing the number of candles on Harry's cake: ". . . if the old guy took that big a breath, he'd croak himself" (Iceman, II, 95); his later remark about the same cake: "If he ever et a hunk, it'd croak him" (Iceman, II, 95); and finally, Hugo's opinion of Hickey: "When I lead the jackass mob to the sack of Babylon, I will make them hang him to a lamppost the first one!" (Iceman, III, 200).

Drink is described as "cyanide cut with carbolic acid to give it a mellow flavor" (Iceman, I, 23); Hope advises Mosher that "anytime you only take one sip of a drink, you'll have lockjaw and paralysis!" (Iceman, I, 55); and when told that Cora wants a sherry flip for her nerves, Rocky asks, "What's she tink dis is, de Waldorf?" (Iceman, III, 165).

Comic hyperbole using animals as subject matter is found in Hope's "He'd make a cat laugh!" (Iceman, I, 61); his "Bejees, you've even borrowed fish from the trained seals and peanuts from every elephant that remembered you!" (Iceman, I, 60); Rocky's "Dey'd get D.T.s if dey ever heard a cricket choip!" (Iceman, I, 68); his "Jees, a roll dat'd choke

a hippopotamus!" (Iceman, I, 80); Cora's "You and your crickets! Yuh'd tink dey was elephants!" (Iceman, II, 99); Rocky's "Yuh'll come runnin' in here some night yellin' for a shot of booze 'cause de crickets is after yuh!" (Iceman, III, 166); and finally, his "Jees, dere ain't enough guts left in de whole gang to battle a mosquito!" (Iceman, IV, 216).

Other examples of hyperbole in Iceman include Hickey's observation that his father "could sell those Hoosier hayseeds building lots along the Golden Street!" (Iceman, I, 81); Rocky's complaint to Pearl, "Aw, bury it! What are you, a voigin?" (Iceman, II, 101); and finally, Hope's comment on his bartenders' honesty, "You and Chuck ought to have cards in the Burglars' union!" (Iceman, IV, 250).

In Journey, accidents are the subject of Mary Tyrone's "No one else in the world could . . . [eat as Tyrone does] . . . without dying of indigestion" (Journey, I, 14), and Jamie's "Had serious accident. The fron [sic] steps tried to trample on me" (Journey, IV, 155). The elder Tyrone comments affectionately about Shaughnessy, the pig farmer, being "a wily Shanty Mick, that one. He could hide behind a corkscrew" (Journey, I, 22).

Erie Smith demands attention from the night clerk with a sarcastic "Better lay off them headache pills Pal. First thing you know, some guy is going to call you a dope" (Hughie, 279); he registers his opinion of Brooklyn: "I'd sooner take a trip to China" (Hughie, 280), and of Broadway characters: ". . . if every guy along Broadway who kids

himself was to drop dead there wouldn't be nobody left" (Hughie, 284); and he comments on the chances of a horse winning: ". . . he'll be so full of hop, if the jock can keep him from jumpin' over the grandstand, he'll win by a mile" (Hughie, 291).

In O'Neill's last play, Misbegotten, Phil Hogan hyperbolizes on the subject of food and drink. On two occasions he chides his daughter for being hospitable to Jim Tyrone: "I can turn my back so the sight of him drinking free won't break my heart . . ." (Misbegotten, I, 331), and "A fine daughter! I tell you a small glass and you give him a bucket!" (Misbegotten, I, 332). He exchanges hyperboles with Jim Tyrone on the same subject:

TYRONE: Here's luck, Phil.

HOGAN: I hope you drown . . .

TYRONE: The best chicken medicine I've ever tasted.  
[Misbegotten, I, 332].

At the end of the play he consoles Josie in "his old, fuming, irascible tone" with "Are you going to moon at the sunrise forever, and me with the sides of my stomach knocking together?" (Misbegotten, IV, 408).

#### (8) Greetings and Farewells

Prominent in the language of comic dialogue are expressions of greeting and farewell. O'Neill's characters say their "hellos" and "goodbyes" in vigorous, highly individual ways, almost always revealing something of their natures or attitudes.

a. A spate of cheerful greetings flows from the characters of the one-act sea plays, from Joe's "Ship ahoy, mates!" (Voyage, 62), to Cocky's "Cheero, ole dear, cheero!" (Voyage, 63), to Kate's "Cheero, ole chum, 'ows [sic] Russha?" (Voyage, 68), again to Cocky's "Cheero, ole dear!" (Caribbees, 5), and his "Cheero, ole love!" (Caribbees, 9), and finally, to Driscoll's exultant greeting to the ladies: "Hurroo, ye scuts!" (Caribbees, 11).

Harriet Rogers greets her son Benny, "Ain't you got sense enough, you big lump, to answer me when I call, and not have me shouting my lungs out?" (Different, II, 232). A sarcastic Lily Jayson signals the arrival of her family: "Here comes the rest of our Grand Fleet" (First Man, I, 162). A redoubtable Marco Polo greets the next "territory" on his itinerary, "Welcome to that dear old Motherland, Mongolia" (Marco, I, v, 237). Uncle Sid announces the presence of Norah, the Miller household maid, "Ah, Sight for Sore Eyes, my beautiful Macushla, my star-eyed Mavoureen--" (Wilderness, II, 50), and in Act IV he greets young Richard, "Well, how's my fellow Rum Pot, as good old Dowie calls us? Got a head?" (Wilderness, IV, i, 102).

The characters in Harry Hope's back room are far less restrained by social forms. "Here's the old son of a bitch!" Rocky greets Hickey (Iceman, I, 75). Margie announces the arrival of Pearl and herself, "Gang-way for two good whores!" (Iceman, IV, 255); Rocky replies, "Well, look who's here! . . . Hello, dere, Sweethearts! . . ." (Iceman,

IV, 255); and Harry extends the ultimate invitation: "Bejees, sit down, you dumb broads! Welcome home! Have a drink! Have ten drinks, bejees!" (Iceman, IV, 257).

"God bless all here--even the barkeep," shouts Jamie Cregan, and Mickey Maloy adds his "Top o' the mornin'" (Poet, I, 138), while Con Melody with seductive charm gallantly greets Deborah Harford, "Good morning, Mademoiselle. It is an honor to welcome you to this unworthy inn" (Poet, II, 179). But Jamie Tyrone arrives home in the dead of night and signals his entrance to his brother with a flip "What ho! What ho!" (Journey, IV, 154).

b. As character after character expresses an intense individualism in the way he exits, farewells register as much enthusiasm as greetings. Brutus Jones's "See you in jail sometime, maybe!" (Jones, I, 16) leads to his final word of farewell to Smithers: "Well, if dey ain't no whole brass band to see me off, I sho' got de drum part of it. So long, white man" (Jones, I, 17). Mildred Douglas cheerfully sings "So it's ho! for the stokehole" (Ape, II, 53), as she descends into the bowels of the ship for her adventure, and Marco Polo, on his grand adventure, cries out "Giddap! Cathay or bust!" (Marco, I, v, 241).

A tired, sarcastic Cybel answers the knock on her door by telling Dion "He's hunting for you. Put out the lights when you go. I'm going to sleep" (Brown, I, iii, 331), and Dion answers her in the next scene (seven years later) with "Well, homeward Christian Soldier! I'm off!

By-bye, Mother Earth!" (Brown, II, I, 338). Seth Beckwith a New Eng-  
lander, is more to the point: "Wal, I'll trot along!" (Mourning, "Home-  
coming," III, 729).

Uncle Sid, as usual, is more effusive: "Good night, ladies--  
and gents. We will meet--bye and bye!" (Wilderness, II, 58). Tommy  
and Mildred Miller tell each other exactly what they think of each other  
with his terse "Good night, you," and her "Good night, you" in response  
(Wilderness, II, II, 80). In the final scene of the play, Mr. and Mrs.  
Miller go to their bedroom in an appropriate spirit of good cheer:

MRS. MILLER: . . . I'm going to turn out the light. All ready?

MILLER: Yes. Let her go, Gallagher.

[Wilderness, IV, III, 131].

Mickey Maloy has the last word. "And the back o' my hand  
to you, your Ladyship!" is his "burning . . . parting shot at SARA" (Poet,  
I, 146).

### (9) Metaphor

a. Allusions to animals appear throughout the plays,  
with a large proportion of farm and domestic animals represented. Fowl  
is the subject of Carmody's reference to the nurse as "that cacklin' hen"  
(Straw, I, II, 58), Mrs. Crosby's decision to sit down because "I don't  
relish roostin' on my feet" (Diff'rent, I, 211), Caleb Williams telling  
Emma Crosby "that don't make you out no spring chicken" (Diff'rent, II,  
241), Mrs. Miller's reference to her sister-in-law being "like a hen

that's hatched a duck" (Wilderness, IV, iii, 124), Lily Jayson's description of Richard Bigelow as "a wet hen with a brood of ducks" (First Man, I, 155), and Patch Riley's reminder to his cronies that he can still play the pipes: "Does a duck forget wather?" (Poet, III, 202).

Pigs are invoked in Driscoll's reference to Ivan as "gruntin' loike a pig in a sty" (Voyage, 68), Doctor Gaynor calling Carmody "a hog on two legs" (Straw, I, 1, 46), and Rocky's identification of Margie and Pearl: "Aw, dat's on'y my two pigs" (Iceman, I, 61).

Ramsay Fife feels he "might as well be married to a cow" (Dynamo, I, ii, 27), Devlin observes that Anita Fernandez "looked at me as if I was a wet dog" (Movie Man, 174), and Benny tells Emma Crosby that his uncle will be "busy as a bird dog for an hour getting himself dolled up to pay you a call" (Diff'rent, II, 226).

Undomesticated animals appear in Mrs. Frazer's description of Roylston as "a poor blind bat, not a butterfly" (Servitude, III, 283), Roylston's "first I am a bat, then a mole!" (Servitude, III, 287), and Hickey's reminiscence of having once been told, "With that grin of yours and that line of bull, you ought to be able to sell skunks for good ratters!" (Iceman, IV, 233). Mildred Douglas suggests that since her grandfather was a puddler she should have "inherited an immunity to heat that would make a salamander shiver" (Ape, ii, 52). "Poor, delicate, fragile butterfly!" is Lucy Townsend's description of "Bull" Herron (Abortion, 143), and Erie Smith warns the desk clerk that he will be

caught "with a butterfly net" if he continues to be absentminded (Hughie, 288). Rogers complains about his itching back by announcing he would have to be "a centipede to follow this flea-game properly" (Movie Man, 175). "Tell him to salt de tail of dat eagle!" shouts a voice in the stokehole criticizing the speech of Senator Queen (Ape, vi, 75). Lewis comments on Hickey's cuckoldry with the rejoinder that he has "sprouted horns like a bloody antelope," but Wetjoen adds, "Pigger, py Gott! Like a water buffalo's!" (Iceman, II, 149). Nina Leeds considers Charlie Marsden to be "as sleek and satisfied as a pet seal!" (Interlude, III, 533), and James Tyrone refers to the foghorn sounding all night long "like having a sick whale in the back yard" (Journey, I, 17).

b. Drunkenness, drinking, and the desire for whiskey are treated metaphorically in Rogers' "He'll be all lit up like a torch tonight" (Movie Man, 176), Edmund's "He must have a peach of a bun on" (Journey, IV, 154), and Jamie Tyrone's "I'm as drunk as a fiddler's bitch" (Journey, IV, 155). Drinking is represented by Abner Small's "God A'mighty, Seth, be you glued to that jug?" (Mourning, "Haunted," I, 1, 816), Rocky's "I didn't say, take a bath!" (Iceman, I, 17), the longshoreman's request for a drink: "Gimme a shock. Number Two" (Christie, I, 14), Marthy's "Blow me to another scoop, huh?" (Christie, I, 23), and Joe Mott's "One drink guy. Dat well done run dry" (Iceman, I, 23).

c. The effects of drinking are expressed by Driscoll's description of West Indies rum as having "a kick in ut loike a mule's

hoind leg! (Caribbees, 11), and the Chantyman's drunken soliloquy: "Hard down! Heavy gales around Cape Stiff! All is sunk but honor, as the feller says, an' there's damn little o' that afloat!" (Mourning, "Hunted," IV, 791).

d. Food is the subject of Driscoll's complaint aboard the Glencairn:

And the dishwather they disguise wid the name av tea! And the putty they call bread! My belly feels loike I'd swalleyed a dozen rivets at the thought av ut! And sea-biscuits that'd break the teeth av a lion if he had the misfortune to take a bite at one!

Cardiff, 40].

When the maid Norah accuses Richard Miller of eating the olives before dinner, and he indignantly complains, she says, "Oho, no, of course not, divil fear you, you was only feeling their pulse!" (Wilderness, II, 41).

e. Metaphors expressing geniality and approval occur in Devlin's good-natured "Boy, page an iceberg for Mr. Rogers!" (Movie Man, 171), Murray's "Go to the head of the class" (Straw, II, 1, 73), Marthy's "Yuh're a scream, Square-head--" (Christie, I, 22), Marco's "He's fat as butter!" (Marco, I, iii, 230), Evans' "Good egg! Good old Charlie!" (Interlude, II, 529), Mildred Miller's pride in the way she writes her name: "Don't you think it's the real goods?" (Wilderness, III, ii, 77), Richard Miller's "I want to--drink in--all your beauty" (Wilderness, IV, ii, 111), Sara Harford's "we're not goint to eat you, Darling, if

you are that sweet" (Mansions, II, iii, 129), and Nora Melody's appreciative comment on her daughter's ability to "charm a bird out of a tree when you want to" (Poet, I, 151).

f. Metaphors of derogation occur in Cocky's "An' you're a bleedin' angel, I s'pose?" (Voyage, 63), Driscoll's "Shut up, ye Rooshan baboon!" (Voyage, 64), Sweeney's "If he owned the ocean he wouldn't give a fish a drink..." (Rope, 202), Jack Crosby's "Butter won't melt in your mouth, no siree!" (Diff'rent, I, 204), Benny Rogers' remark about his uncle's parsimony: "He'd give me one look and then put a double padlock on his roll" (Diff'rent, II, 227), the Blackwell's Island prisoner's remark to Yank: "You're a hard boiled duck, ain't you!" (Ape, vi, 73), Lily Jayson's scurrilous "Sssh, you empty barrel!" (First Man, I, 67), Ramsay Fife's disdainful insult to his wife: "How can I think in the same room with you? It's like trying to swim in glue!" (Dynamo, I, ii, 38), Hugo's "Gottammed stool pigeon!" (Iceman, I, 33), the maid Cathleen's sly innuendo to Edmund: "Butter won't melt in your mouth, I suppose" (Journey, II, i, 52), and the ironic shock of truth in her remark to her mistress: "Well, I can't imagine you a holy nun, Ma'am. Sure, you never darken the door of a church, God forgive you" (Journey, III, 202).

g. Metaphors describing the condition of another person appear in Devlin's "Phew! Talk about the icy onceover!" (Movie Man, 174), Rogers' "Better get a pair of cheaters for those bum lamps of yours" (Movie Man, 185), Yank's "Yuh're as sore as a boil about somethin'"

(Caribbees, 7), Lucy Townsend's "You look more like a god of darkness than one of light" (Abortion, 142), Shorty's "And den--flat on his pan--dead to de world--de bodies singin' in de trees--ten--out!" (Chillun, I, iii, 104), Seth Beckwith's "You're lookin' a mite pale about the gills a'ready!" (Mourning, "Haunted," I, i, 817), Harry Hope's "She coulda bit a piece out of a stove lid..." (Iceman, I, 58), and the second girl Cathleen's "The damp is in Bridget's rheumatism and she's like a raging divil. She'll bite my head off" (Journey, III, 99).

h. Metaphors of self-description include "Bull" Herron's "She is breaking me on the wheel" (Abortion, 143), Roylston's "You are breaking me on the wheel" (Servitude, III, 283), his self-ridiculing "Poor clayfeet!" (Servitude, III, 284), and his melodramatic "My house of cards is tumbling about my ears" (Servitude, III, 286), Benny Rogers' "I ain't in my cradle, get me!" (Diff'rent, II, 229), Richard Bigelow's "I'm knocking at the door of fatal forty" (First Man, I, 153), young Billy Brown's "Mine [his voice] is a regular fog horn!" (Brown, Prologue, 307), Lucy Hillman's "I'm in the dust at your feet" (Days, II, 60), and her comment about being "vain enough not to crave any male viewing the wreckage until I've spruced up on a bath and cocktails" (Days, II, 61), Richard Miller's "I might as well forget her and lead the pace that kills, and drown my sorrows!" (Wilderness, IV, ii, 113), Cora's complaint on sitting down at the piano: "I ain't laid my mits on a box in Gawd knows when" (Iceman, II, 120), Jamie Cregan's "Top o' me head....Be the saints,

there's a blacksmith at work on it!" (Poet, I, 138), and Con Melody's heroic "I am but a ghost haunting a ruin" (Poet, II, 174).

i. Physical movement is treated metaphorically in the tubercular Flynn's comments at the hospital weighing-in: "Me to the plate!" and "I hit 'er for a two-bagger, Steve" (Straw, II, 1, 87), Benny Rogers' reference to being "dragged up" by his uncle (Diff'rent, II, 225), Brutus Jones telling himself "And de Emperor better git his feet smokin' up de trail" (Jones, I, 12), his reference to his impending escape being "easy as rollin' off a log" (Jones, I, 13), Nina Evans' complaint to her son: "You jumped off my lap as though you'd sat on a tack!" (Interlude, VII, 638), and Jamie Cregan telling Con Melody "Oh, it'd do your heart good, Con, to see the way they're kicking his [Gadsby's] butt down the street!" (Poet, III, 219).

j. Metaphors for talking and listening occur in Flynn's reference to "this gang of skirts chewin' the fat" (Straw, II, 1, 86), Caleb Williams' embarrassed "S'cuse me, Emmer, it jumped out o' my mouth afore I thought" (Diff'rent, I, 198), the Woman's comment on Michael Cape's absentmindedness: "Say, you got ear-muffs on?" (Welded, II, 11, 286), Nora Melody's rebuke to her daughter: "Himself went in the bar to be out of reach of your tongue" (Poet, II, 176), and Erie Smith's "Yeah, Hughie lapped up my stories like they was duck soup, or a beakful of heroin" (Hughie, 284).

k. Metaphors of place and incident are expressed in Fat Joe's reference to his London "dive" being "like a bleedin' tomb" (Voyage, 58), Andrew Mayo's statement that "mystery and spell . . . they're probably lying around somewheres" on the farm (Horizon, I, 1, 21), Captain Crosby's dutiful response to his wife: "Aye-aye skipper! You're boss aboard here" (Diff'rent, I, 218), Larry Slade's ironic comment that tomorrow will be a great day, "The Feast of All Fools, with brass bands playing!" (Iceman, I, 9), Harry Hope's sarcastic "Leave that Dago to keep order and it's like bedlam in a cathouse . . ." (Iceman, I, 42), Larry's appraisal of Hope's birthday party as "a second feast of Belshazzar, with Hickey to do the writing on the wall!" (Iceman, II, 120), Jamie Tyrone's remark about his father's habit of turning off the lights: "Can't expect us to live in the Black Hole of Calcutta" (Journey, IV, 155), and Erie Smith's observation that the hotel is "about as homey as the Morgue" (Hughie, 282).

1. Hell, the devil, and the beyond are invoked in Driscoll's "Hell roast that divil av a bo'sun!" (Voyage, 64), the Woman's remark to Cape: "Say, you're beginning to give me the creeps" (Welded, II, 11, 289), Harry Hope's announcement that "there ain't going to be no more drinks on the house till hell freezes over!" (Iceman, I, 42), Nora Melody's "The divil was in the toast. One lot burned black as a naygur when my back was turned!" (Poet, I, 169), and the maid Cathleen's comment that the foghorn is "like a banshee" (Journey, III, 98).

m. Two examples of personifying metaphors occur in the bartender Chuck's reference to "Uncle Sam" as a "sap" (Iceman, I, 73), and Erie Smith's sarcastic remark about "Old Man Success" waiting at Grand Central Station to welcome all visitors (Hughie, 278).

n. Military metaphors appear in Lily Jayson's expression of support for her sister-in-law on the arrival of the relatives: "The first wave of attack, Martha! Be brave! The Young Guard dies but never surrenders!" (First Man, I, 159), and in Sara Melody's scornful "I'll have your plate, av ye plaze, Major, before your gallant dragoons charge over it and break it" (Poet, III, 200).

o. Metaphors of love are used in the gardener Weson's observation that his master "Makes hay while the sun shines . . ." (Servitude, II, 254), Jack Crosby's sarcastic "Waal, love is blind--and deaf, too, as the feller says--" (Diff'rent, I, 204), Nat Miller's affectionate reminder to his wife: ". . . we seem to be completely surrounded by love!" (Wilderness, IV, iii, 124), and Josie Hogan's teasing remark to her father: "A ginger-haired, crooked old goat like you to be playing Cupid!" (Misbegotten, IV, 408).

#### (10) Parody

The comic ridicule of something serious by imitation takes two distinct forms in O'Neill's plays: (1) a deliberate, colloquial distortion of a recognizable saying, or an acceptable opinion, to produce comic effect, and (2) a serious expression that becomes comic

because the character expressing it takes himself seriously but is considered ludicrous by others.

a. Deliberate parody occurs in the Older Man's curtain line, "Greater love hath no man than this, that he giveth his wife friend" (A Wife for A Life, 223); in John Townsend's ironic suggestion to his unhappy son that "the wages of sin are rather exorbitant (Abortion, 157); in Roylston's reminders to Mrs. Frazer that "certainty goeth before disappointment" (Servitude, I, 233) and that "Caesar's wife was above harboring suspicion" (Servitude, II, 273); in Stephen Murray's "tubercular" variation on the Rubaiyat,

A glass of milk, and thou  
Coughing beside me in the wilderness--  
Ah--wilderness were Paradise enow!

[Straw, I, ii, 69];

in Reuben Light's sardonic ". . . let there be electric light!" (Dynamo, II, i, 102); in Larry Slade's parody of the proverb: "When man's soul isn't a sow's ear, it will be time enough to dream of silk purses" (Iceman, I, 30); in Willie Oban's "As Vesparian remarked, the smell of all whiskey is sweet" (Iceman, I, 39); and in Jim Tyrone's sarcastic reference to Phil Hogan being analogous to Keats' nightingale: "Thou was not born for death, immortal bird" (Misbegotten, II, 364).

b. Parody whose comic effect derives from comic irony--the character takes himself seriously but is considered ludicrous by others--occurs with two O'Neill characters: Richard Miller in Wilderness, and Con Melody in Poet.

Richard threatens the Republic with a quotation from Carlyle's *The French Revolution*: "The days grow hot, O Babylon! 'Tis cool beneath thy willow trees!" (*Wilderness*, I, 17). Offended by his mother's remarks, he stalks out of the house with a quotation from *Candida*: "Out then, into the night with me!" (*Wilderness*, II, 40). He recklessly and defiantly announces that he will solve the problems of his existence with "drink": "Drink, for you know not whence you come nor why. / Drink! for you know not why you go nor where!" (*Wilderness*, II, 60) and "Yesterday this Day's Madness did prepare / Tomorrow's Silence, Triumph, or Despair. / Drink! for--" (*Wilderness*, III, ii, 89); he turns a cynical eye toward love and womanhood: "But I wouldn't do such, 'cause I love her too much, / But I learned about women from her" (*Wilderness*, III, i, 71); and he quotes from Wilde's *Ballad of Reading Gaol*: "Yet each man kills the thing he loves, / By each let this be heard" (*Wilderness*, III, i, 72). On two occasions he glories in Hedda Gabler's second-act curtain line: "And then--at ten o'clock--Eilert Lovberg will come--with vine leaves in his hair!" (*Wilderness*, III, i, 73), and "And then--I will come--with vine leaves in my hair!" (*Wilderness*, III, i, 90). Finally, in a more conciliatory mood, while awaiting the return of his girl, he muses:

"Nay, let us walk from fire unto fire  
From passionate pain to deadlier delight--  
I am too young to live without desire,  
Too young art thou to waste this summernight--"  
[*Wilderness*, IV, ii, 107].

His uncle recites with comic intensity lines from Swinburne's *Anactoria*

that Richard had given to Muriel:

"That I could drink thy veins as wine, and eat  
Thy breasts like honey, that from face to feet  
Thy body were abolished and consumed,  
And in my flesh they very flesh entombed!"

[Wilderness, I, 27].

"Dressed with foppish elegance in old, expensive, finely  
tailored clothes," Con Melody faces his mirror and squares his shoulders defiantly, as he quotes from Byron's Childe Harold:

"I have not loved the World, nor the World me;  
I have not flattered its rank breath, nor bowed  
To its idolatries a patient knee,  
Nor coined my cheek to smiles--nor cried aloud  
In worship of an echo: in the crowd  
They could not deem me one of such--I stood  
Among them, but not of them . . ."

[Poet, I, 161].

"Thank God for you, Lord Byron--poet and nobleman who made of his disdain immortal music!" he then exclaims, as his daughter enters and announces she hoped he saw something in the mirror he was able to admire (Poet, I, 162).

#### (11) Interjections

Comic interjections, outbursts of exuberant expression, include exclamations of laughter, disgust, annoyance, grief, surprise, astonishment, embarrassment, approval, delight, and silence or attention demanded. O'Neill uses colloquial interjections comically in Devlin's "Help! Help! I'm a nut!" (Movie Man, 170), little Mary Carmody's "Ow!" (Straw, I, 1, 40), Chris Christopherson's "By yiminy

crickens, Ay calabrate date!" (Christie, I, 24), Marthy's "Gawd!" (Christie, I, 26), Caleb Williams' "Hell, yes!" (Diff'rent, I, 198), Jack Crosby's "Caught ye that time, by gum!" (Diff'rent, I, 202), Benny's "Oh, baby! Some jazz, I'll tell the world!" (Diff'rent, II, 224), his "Oh boy! They're some pippins!" (Diff'rent, II, 230), and his comment on Emma's odd behavior: "She's a scream, honest!" (Diff'rent, II, 233).

Ada Fife gets Reuben Light to agree to meet her: "Good boy!" she cries out (Dynamo, I, ii, 36). "What's that? Who's funny?" mutters Uncle Sid, half asleep, in response to his nephew (Wilderness, IV, i, 100). In the back room of Harry Hope's bar, Rocky quiets the group with a "Nix! Piano!" (Iceman, I, 62), and Harry, himself, having gotten over the effects of Hickey's visit, cries out "Bejees, I'm cock-eyed!" (Iceman, IV, 254).

#### (12) Personification and Vivification

Colloquial expressions that bestow human and living qualities on animals and objects for comic effect appear in Old Pete's observations that "me and money never could get on . . ." (Wife, 212), and "I never could get along with civilization and (laughing) civilization never cared overmuch for me" (Wife, 215), in Rogers' expression that "any well-bred Mexican flea is hep" to the proverb of discretion being the better part of valor (Movie Man, 170), his realization of "what a poor dog has to put up with" (Movie Man, 170), and in his remark

about "the happy, contented expression on a polar bear's face," by way of commenting on the heat (Movie Man, 171).

Ceely Ann searches for a match and exclaims" "Hit beat all how dem pesky little sticks done hide umse'fs. Shoo!" (The Dreamy Kid, 16), On two occasions Brutus Jones addresses his feet" "Feet, do yo' duty!" (Jones, i, 13), and "Feet, you is holdin' up yo' end fine . . . cool yo'selfs" (Jones, ii, 18). Joe Mott reminisces about how he "could make dem dice behave" (Iceman, I, 45). Phil Hogan comments on ticks: "I never picked one off me yet was a hypocrite" (Misbegotten, I, 314).

### (13) Lyrics and Poetry

This type of verbal humor contains original compositions, lyric expressions, and versification whose comic effect derives primarily from the colloquial exuberance of the language rather than the device of rhyme.<sup>4</sup>

The O'Neill characters that resort to colloquial lyricism include Driscoll, who roars a song, "We ar're the byes av We-e-exford who fought wid hearrt an' hand! (Speaking) To hell wid Ulster!" (Voyage,

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<sup>4</sup>I have made a distinction between classifications of "lyrics and poetry" under Colloquial Language and "rhyme," one of the types under the sub-category of Stylistic Devices. The governing principle is the determination of whether the comic effect derives from the colloquial nature of the expression, or whether it derives from the use of rhyme. For example, the paean of praise to beer (Ape, i, 41) is a burst of comic exuberance, while Marco's love poem to Donata (Marco, I, ii, 224) is comic because of the absurd effect of its rhyme scheme and its prosaic poetry.

65); the voice of the character in the firemen's forecandle singing "Beer, beer, glorious beer! / Fill yourselves right up to here" (Ape, i, 41); the Fiddler's "calling" for the dance in Ephraim Cabot's kitchen (Desire, III, i, 86); the Chantyman's

A bottle o' wine and a bottle o' beer  
And a bottle of Irish whiskey oh!  
So early in the morning  
The sailor likes his bottle oh!

[Mourning, "Hunted," IV, 790].

Joe Silva's repetition of the same song, and his melodic comment on his wife's visit to her relatives in New Bedford, "Hurrah! Hurrah! I sing the jubilee / Hurrah! Hurrah! Her folks has set me free!" (Mourning, "Haunted," I, i, 816); and finally, Hickey's performance on making his entrance at Hope's back room:

(sings in a falsetto tenor) "It's always fair weather, when good fellows get together!" (Changing to a comic bass and another tune) "And another little drink won't do us any harm!" . . . Do your duty, Brother Rocky, Bring on the rat poison!

[Iceman, I, 76].

#### (14) Oaths

These are exclamations of profanity or imprecation; an implication of threat is usually present.

They appear in Captain Scott's "if that don't beat all hell--" (Horizon, I, ii, 33), and in his "You can go to thunder, Jim Mayo!" (Horizon, I, ii, 44), in Mat Burke's "God stiffen it!" (Christie, II, 53), in Lily Jayson's "Oh, I wish the ducking stool had never been abolished!" (First Man, I, 167), in Abner Small's "To hell with ye!" (Mourning,

"Haunted," I,1,818), in Richard Miller's comment on his incident at Pleasant Beach House: "They won't forget me in a hurry!" (Wilderness, IV,11,114), and finally, in Dan Roche's exhortation to Con Melody: "For the love of God, clout the damned Yankee, Major!" (Poet, III,218).

(15) Foreign Language and Dialect

The use of strange vocabulary, pronunciation or idiom for comic effect appears in the dialogue of many of the characters in the one-act sea plays, the Mexicans in Movie Man, Captain Crosby, Jack, and Benny Rogers in Diff'rent, Brutus Jones in Iones, Chris and Marthy in Christie, the stokehole and prison characters in Ape, the street urchins in Chillun, the Chantyman, Seth Beckwith, and the townspeople in Mourning, the maids Norah in Wilderness and Cathleen in Journey, the prostitutes Cybel in Brown, Belle in Wilderness, and Pearl, Margie, and Cora in Iceman, Roche, O'Dowd, and Riley in Poet, Erie Smith in Hughie, Hugo, Rocky, and Wetjoen in Iceman, Phil and Josie Hogan in Misbegotten, and other less prominent characters. In most instances, the humor in what they say derives both from the strangeness of their dialects as well as from other comic elements. In fact, in almost all cases, these other sources of comic effect provide more humor than does the dialect; therefore, the examples will appear in the appropriate categories.

Two foreign languages are employed for comic effect:

(1) French, spoken by Benny Rogers: "Oh, oui! My foot slipped!"

(Diff'rent, II, 225); "Jealous? Oh, oui! Sure I am!" (Diff'rent, II, 226);

and "Gosh, that'd be a real stunt aw right, aw right. Oui, oui!"

(Diff'rent, II, 249), and (2) Latin, in the comic entrance of Jim Tyrone,

before the Hogan farm:

TYRONE: "Fortunate senes, ergo tua rura manebunt, et tibi magna satis, quamvis lapis omnia nudus."

HOGAN: . . . Is it Mass you're saying, Jim! That was Latin. I know it by ear. What the hell--insult does it mean?

TYRONE: Translated very freely into Irish English, something like this. (He imitates Hogan's brogue) "Ain't you the lucky old bastard to have this beautiful farm, if it is full of nude rocks."

HOGAN: I like that part about the rocks.

[Misbegotten, I, 323].

#### (16) Parataxis

Defined as the placing of clauses one after another without using the usual connective words to indicate coordination, this type of verbal expression appears quite frequently in everyday conversation. It is used much less frequently as a comic element. O'Neill uses parataxis when he wants to depict a character who is "of two minds." The result is absentmindedness.

This occurs when Martha Jayson takes leave of her husband's relatives. "I'll be with you again in a minute, I hope," she says (First Man, I, 161), making it quite evident that she will neither be with them nor does she hope she will. Nat Miller falls victim to parataxis when he tries to advise his son on the distinctions between different types of women:

. . . Here's what I'm driving at, Richard. They're apt to be whited sepulchres--I mean, your whole life might be ruined if--so, damn it, you've got to know how to--I mean, there are ways and means--(Suddenly, he can go no farther and winds up helplessly) . . .

[Wilderness, IV, 111, 128].

(17) The Language of Deception

In the third act of Christie, old Chris and Mat Burke fight over the issue of whether or not Burke is to marry Anna. The old man draws a knife, and in the ensuing struggle he is relieved of it. When Anna enters, the men suddenly feign peace, and Burke answers her questions by attempting to make light of the evidence of the knife and the overturned furniture:

BURKE: . . . I've not laid a hand on him, Anna. . . . Let you not be worried at all. 'Twas only a bit of an argument we was having to pass the time till you'd come.

[Christie, III, 76].

(18) Soliloquy

The comedy of a character talking to himself appears a number of times in O'Neill's plays. The technique is often used to display an attempt by a person to exult in a kind of spirited self-assurance. The comic effect often derives from the absence of any doubt in the character of his invincibility.

Instances of O'Neill's use of comic soliloquy include Lucy Townsend's "I'm going to be just the most stunning bridesmaid" (Abortion, 147), Sam Evans' self-rallying "Hey, you! . . . what's the matter

with you? . . . don't quit . . ." (Interlude, II, 512), Ada Fife's address to her mirror image: "I got to hand it to you, baby, you're there!" (Dynamo, I, 11, 29), and the Chantyman's self-complaining "Don't be so damn pertic'lar! What ye want anyways? Featherbed an' a grand piany?" (Mourning, "Hunted," IV, 790).

## B. STYLISTIC DEVICES

Linguistic comedy may derive from the sounds of words and from the repetition of the same or similar letters, syllables, or words. Although O'Neill used eight different types of "stylistic devices"--asyndeton, anaphora, alliteration, assonance, etymological figure, onomatopes, gemination, and rhyme--he used them sparingly. Duckworth's definitions of these devices as they appear in comic dialogue, and examples of O'Neill's use of them will be given in this category.

### (1) Asyndeton

In a rhetorical figure of speech, asyndeton is the omission of the conjunction. It refers to the omission of any connective words in a series of words or phrases that normally requires them. The absence of the connective gives the effect of a heaping up of nouns, verbs, or adjectives, creating a staccato quality which on stage often produces striking comic effect.

On two occasions O'Neill resorted to asyndeton: (1) the Donkeyman offers his opinion to Smitty: "They're [women] all the same--

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<sup>5</sup>Duckworth, The Nature of Roman Comedy, pp. 331-360.

white, brown, yeller 'n' black" (Caribbees, 26), and (2) Lily Jayson complains to her sister-in-law: "I'm only a Victor record of their misgivings. Shall I switch it going? Well, ~~then~~, father thinks, brother John and wife, sister Esther and husband all think that you are unwisely intimate with the same Bigelow" (First Man, I, 155).

(2) Anaphora

Duckworth defines anaphora in comic dialogue as the repetition of a word or phrase, often at the beginning of--but sometimes within--successive clauses.

This device appears in Mrs. Frazer's remark to Roylston to find out if "my you was the real you" (Servitude, III, 289). Ivan complains: "I don' li-ike dis place! I wan' see girls--plenty girls. . . . I don't li-ike dis place. I wan' dance with girl" (Voyage, 64). Benny Rogers recounts the way his friend, Bill Tinker, helped placate Tilly Small by seeing to it that "if we hand her a line of talk maybe she'll drag out the old bottle! So we did--and she did" (Diff'rent, II, 229). But Emma Crosby is intent on winning Benny for herself; she hints that she had her living room refurnished "not for me, not for me!" (Diff'rent, II, 228), and when Benny decides to leave, Emma complains, "No don't go. Not yet--not yet. No, don't go" (Diff'rent, II, 231). With a last gesture of defiance Simeon Cabot takes the front gate off its hinges, puts it under his arm, and shouts "We harby 'bolishes shet gates, an' open gates, an' all gates, by thunder!" (Desire, I, iv, 155). Dion Anthony

responds to being told that Margaret loves him: "I love, thou lovest, he loves, she loves! She loves, she loves--what?" (Brown, Prologue, 316). Mr. and Mrs. Miller discuss the talents and abilities of Richard:

MRS. MILLER: . . . You mark my words, that boy's going to turn out to be a great lawyer, a great doctor, or a great writer, or--

MILLER: (grinning) You agree he's going to be great, anyway.  
[Wilderness, IV, 111, 122].

### (3) Geminatio

Distinguished from anaphora, which is the repetition of words within successive clauses, geminatio is the duplication of words in series.

O'Neill duplicates words for comic effect when Joe, the proprietor of the London "dive," accuses his bar girl of "a-moppin', an' a-moppin', an' a-moppin' the blarsted bar fur a 'ole 'our' (Voyage, 59), and when a joyous Swede, Chris Christopherson, sings his version of the Italian "si-si":

My Yosephine, come board de ship.  
Long time Ay wait for you. De moon,  
she shi-i-i-ine. She looka yust  
like you.  
Tchee-ichee, tchee-tchee, tchee-tchee,  
tchee-tchee.

[Christie, I, 16].

Jack Crosby teases his recalcitrant sister: "Puss, puss, puss! Nice kitty!" (Diff'rent, I, 202). The two Cabot boys lumber toward home "like two friendly oxen toward their evening meal":

PETER: . . . I smells bacon!

SIMEON: . . . Bacon's good!

PETER: . . . Bacon's bacon!

[Desire, I, 1, 139].

Marco Polo speaks above the clamor of the "delicatessen-style" banquet in Venice: "Millions! . . . millions! . . . millions! . . . millions!" (Marco, III, 1, 297). A slightly drunk Nat Miller takes his place at the head of his July Fourth banquet: "Well, well, well. Well, well, well. It's good to be home again" (Wilderness, II, 47). Hickey makes his entrance laden with bottles of champagne for Harry Hope's birthday party:

HICKEY: (Booms in imitation of a familiar Polo Grounds bleach-erite cry--with rising volume) Well! Well!! Well!!! (They all jump startedly. He comes forward, grinning).

[Iceman, II, 111].

#### (4) Alliteration

The use of the same letter or sound to begin words that are closely connected to or in close association with each other appears with comic effect in the comment made by one of the ship's stokers about Yank's refusal to eat: "Yank feeda da fire, no feeda da face" (Ape, iv, 59), in Hugo Kalmar's prophecy that "Ve vill trink vine beneath the villow trees!" (Iceman, II, 114), and in Erie Smith's boast to the desk clerk that there were "Some queens I've brought here in my time, Brother--frails from the Follies, or the Scandals, or the Frolics, that'd knock your eye out!" (Hughie, 271).

#### (5) Assonance

The resemblance of sounds in different words, or the rhyming of one word with another in the accented vowel, appears when

Smitty explains to Pearl that he is "thinking and, . . . drinking to stop thinking" (Caribbees, 24), when the men in the forecastle answer with "hard, barking laughter" Yank's call for silence to be able to think: "Drink, don't think! / Drink, don't think! / Drink, don't think!" (Ape, 1, 43), and when Hickey describes himself: "You've heard the old saying, 'Ministers' sons are sons of guns'" (Iceman, IV, 231).

(6) Etymological Figure

One example exists in O'Neill's plays of an etymological figure, that is, the repetition of different words that are closely related etymologically, but whose different meanings produce comic effect. The instance is Harry Hope's comic use of the words "Movement" and "move" in his threat to the I.W.W. men, Larry Slade and Hugo Kalmar, to pay their room rents. He tells them "I'll start a Harry Hope Revolution! I'll tie a dispossess bomb to your tails that'll blow you out in the street! Bejees, I'll make your Movement move!" (Iceman, I, 54).

(7) Onomatopes

On two occasions O'Neill uses words which derive from sounds that resemble those associated with an object or animal. In the first instance the words formed are nothing more than the sounds themselves, but in the second, the sound is actually transformed into a verb. Both examples produce strong comic effect because of their onomatopoeic qualities.

Jack Crosby teases his sister Emma about her sudden determination to call off the wedding with Caleb Williams, and about her stoic silence: "Don't she look like she'd scratch a feller's eyes out! Phew! Look at her back curve! Meow? Sptt-sptt!" (Diff'rent, I, 211). In the same teasing spirit, Uncle Sid offers mock condolence to his nephew Richard, who is suffering in public because of his romance with Muriel: "Never mind, Dick. Let them--scoff! What can they understand about girls whose hair sizzchels, whose lips are fireworks, whose eyes are red-hot sparks--" (Wilderness, II, 53).

(8) Rhyme

O'Neill rhymes words in a comically ludicrous manner when Driscoll attempts to awaken Ivan from his drunken stupor: "Arise an' shine, ye dhrunken swine!" (Voyage, 68), when Peter Cabot comments on his newly-acquired freedom from the farm: "Nary a toil 'r spin 'r lick o' wuk do we put in!" (Desire, I, iv, 150), when the young Marco Polo writes a love poem to his Donata:

You are lovely as the gold in the sun  
Your skin is like silver in the moon  
Your eyes are black pearls I have won.  
I kiss your ruby lips and you swoon,  
Smiling your thanks as I promise you  
A large fortune if you will be true,  
While I am away earning gold  
And silver so when we are old  
I will have a million to my credit  
And in the meantime can easily afford  
A big wedding that will do us credit  
And start having children, bless the Lord!

[Marco, I, ii, 224].

and when Richard Miller criticizes the United States: "The land of the free and the home of the brave! Home of the slave in what they ought to call it" (Wilderness, I, 15).

### C. COMIC FORMATIONS

Comic formations will be listed under two type classifications: (1) the coining of words and phrases, and laughable compounds, and (2) comic or tell-tale names, titles, and places. Comic names will include coined names as well as epithets and humorous associations used to ridicule.

#### (1) The Coining of Words and Phrases, and Laughable Compounds

O'Neill's dialogue, rich in the vernacular, contains a good deal of the free association that typifies colloquial expression. His characters coin words and phrases, and they combine words in original ways.

Driscoll buys drinks for his friends and, referring to the man who will impress Olson aboard the *Amindra*, orders the bartender to "see what that crimpin' son av a crimp'll be wantin'--" (Voyage, 63). "Caleb's a Sunday go-to-meetin' Saint," Jack Crosby shouts sarcastically, and a moment later he refers to him as "one o' them goody-goody heroes . . ." (Diff'rent, I, 203). Criticizing his daughter's puritanism Captain Crosby asks her, ". . . what the hell d' you want Caleb to be-- a durned, he-virgin, sky-pilot?" (Diff'rent, I, 217). Emma tries

desperately to convince Benny Rogers she is young in spirit and believes jazz is "not like them slow, old-timey tunes" (Diff'rent, II, 224).

In a rare moment of comedy in Interlude, Charlie Marsden and Nina Evans exchange greetings. Marsden says it is "a gorgeous morning without, the flowers are flowering, the trees are treeing with one another," whereupon Nina invokes Browning: "God's in his heaven, all's right with the world! And Pippa's cured of the pip!" (Interlude, III, 533). Father Baird describes one of John Loving's philosophical positions as having existed "In what I'd call his middle hide-and-go-seek period" (Days, I, 35).

Larry Slade is called "De old Foolsopher" by Rocky, the bartender (Iceman, I, 10). And an accusing Harry Hope orders Mosher and McGloin to "take that I'll-have-the-same look off your maps!" (Iceman, I, 42).

(2) Comic and Tell-tale Names,  
Titles, and Places

Name calling, comic titles, and the use of titles and names for comic effect occur when Rogers addresses his friend, Devlin, as "Captain Sweeney of the Marines" (Movie Man, 174), in Lucy Townsend's call to her boyfriend: "Come on, Jumbo" (Abortion, 148), in Driscoll's reference to Bella as "Mrs. Old Black Joe" (Caribbees, 12), in Pearl's flirtatious "Come ahn in, pretty boy" (Caribbees, 20), in Davis' "This way, Rose, or Pansy, or Jessamine, or black Tulip,

or Violet, or whatever the hell flower your name is" (Caribbees, 23), and in Driscoll's invitation to the Caribbean native girl, "Dance wid me, me cannibal quane" (Caribbees, 27).

"You little crab, you!" Mag shouts at Nick, the crimp (Voyage, 59), while Cocky refers to Olson as "our blarsted love-child 'ere" (Voyage, 63). Mat Burke chides Anna Christie's father with a good-humored "And how is the world treating you this afternoon, Anna's father?" (Christie, III, 70). Juan Ponce de Leon toasts his friend, Luis de Alvaredo:

JUAN: Your health, Sir Lying Poet!

LUIS: And yours, Sir Glory-Glutton! (They laugh, clink goblet and bottle, and drink . . .)

[The Fountain, I, 117].

"What's that?" asks Marco Polo. "Nothing. Enigma!" answers the sage of Kublai (Marco, II, II, 27). Nat Miller addresses his brooding son: "Well, Melancholy Dane, what are you doing?" (Wilderness, II, 60). Larry Slade suggests several names for Harry Hope's bar: "It's the No Chance Saloon. It's Bedrock Bar, The End of the Line Cafe, the Bottom of the Sea Rathskeller!" (Iceman, I, 25). After Larry has introduced everyone but Willie Oban to Parritt, Willie asks "Why omit me from your 'Who's Who in Dypsomania, Larry?'" (Iceman, I, 37).

When Jamie Tyrone turns on the three light bulbs he thinks of his father in the role of the villain in The Bells: "To hell with old

Gaspard" (Journey, IV, 155), and he later refers to "the Old Master, John Barleycorn, playing soft music" as having accompanied him in the incident with Fat Violet (Journey, IV, 160).

When Jim Tyrone approaches, he greets Hogan: "Well, how's the Duke of Donegal this fine day?" (Misbegotten, I, 324). And when a singing Hogan makes his exit, Tyrone notes the occasion with "Hark, Hark, the Donegal lark!" (Misbegotten, II, 364).

#### D. WORD-PLAY AND WIT

Duckworth includes in this category double meanings, extended meanings, and otherwise comically altered usages, pronunciations and meanings of words, phrases, and ideas. It contains four different types: (1) puns, which include *equivoca*, in which a word intentionally means something other than expected, and *paronomasia*, in which a word of similar sound is put beside of in place of another word to produce a ludicrous contrast in meaning, (2) linguistic perversions, that is, distortions of meaning, comic mispronunciation, the ungrammatical, and pretentious language, (3) witticism and the witty exchange, that is, any remark that gives intellectual pleasure through a meaning arrived at by a combination of words or ideas, or a duel of wit between two adversaries, and (4) semantics, here used to mean a comic explanation of or a comic argument over the meaning of words.

(1) Puns

Charlie Marsden puns on the word conceivable:

When I remembered Gordon and looked at his father I had either to suspect a lover in the wood pile or to believe in an Immaculate Conception . . . that is, until I saw his mother: Then a stork became the only conceivable explanation!

[Interlude, IV, 557].

The second girl, Cathleen gets off a spirited pun in her observation that "I wouldn't give a trauneen for a teetotaler. They've no high spirits" (Journey, III, 101). Phil Hogan asks his daughter if she is "going to moon at the sunrise forever," instead of getting him something to eat (Misbegotten, IV, 408). Mildred Douglas corrects her aunt:

AUNT: . . . as long as you observe the amenities--

MILDRED: (drawling) the inanities?

[Ape, II, 51],

and puns on the wealth she inherited from her father (sire) and mother (dam) by declaring she was "sired by gold and damned by it, as they say at the race track--" (Ape, II, 52). Michael Cape puts a question to the prostitute: "How long have you and I been united in the unholy bonds of--bedlock?" (Welded), II, II, 287). To the wise Kaan young Marco Polo gives some smug advice: "you can't consider souls when you're dealing with soldiers, can you?" (Marco, II, I, 260).

An amusing exchange occurs between Charlie Marsden and Nina, in his flippant "Pippa is certainly a pippin this morning!" and her "Bah! That for you, 'Fraid-cat Charlie, you slacker bachelor!"

(Interlude, III, 533). Uncle Sid puns on the difficulty of getting a drink in Waterbury, Connecticut: "Waterwagon--Waterbury--Waterloo!"

(Wilderness, I, 9). Mrs. Miller comments on Oscar Wilde being put in jail "for heaven knows what wickedness," but her son, Arthur, enlightens her: "He committed bigamy" (Wilderness, I, 18). Sid chastises his brother-in-law for not having stopped the two of them from getting drunk at the Sachem Club picnic: ". . . you knew full well-- even if you were full" that things would not go well for them (Wilderness, II, 57). When Richard threatens suicide by calling for General Gabler's pistols, his mother reprimands him, "you're a silly gabbler yourself when you talk that way!" (Wilderness, IV, 1, 101).

## (2) Linguistic Perversions

Distortions of words or phrases create a misplaced emphasis that is comic and that may result either from the deliberate distortion of the language by a character or from the meaning placed on the expression because of the character who expresses it. Subtypes include (a) distortions, which are images, ideas, or values that are made ludicrous, (b) mispronunciations for comic effect, (c) the ungrammatical, and (d) the overgrammatical, or words that are comic because they are unnecessary.

### a. distortions

At his homecoming banquet, after confessing he is really "a silent man given to deeds not words" Marco bores his fellow

Venetians with a long-winded speech on the silk industry (Marco, III,1,296).

b. comic mispronunciation

In a rare moment of humor in Cardiff, Driscoll complains about the food aboard ship, and Paul suddenly stops playing his accordion and slowly adds, ". . . And rot-ten po-tay-toes!" (Cardiff, 41). "What's that--po'try?" the prostitute asks Michael Cape after he quotes a line of verse to her (Welded, II,11,288). When Richard Miller extols "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" he pronounces "gaol" as "goal" (Wilderness, I, 18). "The impidence of him!" is maid Cathleen's comment about the attitude of the druggist when she handed him Mary Tyrone's prescription (Journey, III, 103).

c. the ungrammatical

Anna Christie answers Mat Burke's question about her work by telling him "I'm a governess, see? I take care of kids for people and learn them things" (Christie, II, 56). And Benny Rogers taunts his aunt when he refuses to go into detail about his experiences with French girls: "Can't be did, Aunt Emma, can't be did!" (Diff'rent, II, 231). "Is it hurted you are?" asks the maid Norah, after she hits Nat Miller with the fish dish (Wilderness, II, 51).

d. the overgrammatical

An embarrassed Richard Bigelow, reminded of an indiscreet remark he had made, becomes formal with his friends: "He--

prevaricates, Mrs. Jayson" (First Man, II, 177). And Con Melody reminds Deborah Harford "I have a pride unduly sensitive to any fancied slight" (Poet, II, 180) in the same spirit as he asks Nicholas Gadsby to "accept my apologies, sir, for my animadversion against your profession" (Poet, III, 215).

### (3) Witticism and the Witty Exchange

The Older Man concedes that women are "angels," but adds that "their angelic attributes lack staying qualities" (Wife, 215). The businessman who learns that the poet is unmarried suggests that "you people with artistic temperaments run more to affinities than to wives" (Fog, 97). Ideas are the only things David Roylston sees as worth stealing in his house, and he adds that "the thieves of ideas are not usually housebreakers" (Servitude, I, 228). Mrs. Frazer, the imposter in his house, tells Roylston that his "idol's feet [are] -- well--at least only plated" (Servitude, III, 288).

Aboard the Glencairn, Ivan complains of the coffee giving him a belly-ache, but Scotty reminds him that if the ship is torpedoed "ye'll not be mindin' the pain in your middle" (In the Zone, 89).

Harriet Williams defends her brother's reputation by reminding Emma Crosby that "if you're looking for saints, you got to die first and go to heaven" (Diff'rent, I, 213).

Brutus Jones makes two witty comments: "For de little stealin' dey gits you in jail soon or late. For de big stealin dey

makes you Emperor and puts you in de Hall o' Fame when you croaks" (Jones, I, 8) and "Must be bad news from de happy way you look" (Jones, I, 11).

Lily Jayson, the family wit, comments on her contemporaries: "How well you say what you don't mean, Emily!" (First Man, I, 164), and "That stupid minister--whining away through his nose! Why does the Lord show such partiality for men with adenoids, I wonder!" (First Man, IV, 206).

Mildred Douglas notes that her great-grandmother was "too distant a relative to be vulgar" (Ape, II, 50).

All the major characters in Marco attempt to be witty when they comment on each other's behavior. Nicolo tells Marco, his son, that "unless your jokes improve you'll never sell anything" (Marco, I, v, 235). Chu-Yin believes that "what can be proven cannot be true" (Marco, II, I, 261). Marco declares that "all play and no work makes Jack a dull boy" (Marco, II, I, 263). The Kaan deduces that "Life is so stupid, it is mysterious!" (Marco, II, I, 264). And Marco decides that "If you look before you leap, you'll decide to sit down" (Marco, II, II, 271).

When Dion Anthony is asked to take more interest in his children, his answer is "Become a father--before breakfast? I'm in too delicate a condition" (Brown, I, 321). When Cybel suggests he go home to bed he tells her she's being maternal, and he questions whether she should "pin

my soul into every vacant diaper" (Brown, I, iii, 330). But a moment later, he begs her not to "stop stroking my aching brow. Your hand is a cool mud poultice on the sting of thought!" (Brown, I, iii, 330). Cybel confides in him and tells him, "when you got to love to live it's had to love living" (Brown, I, iii, 331). When he agrees to take the job Brown offers him, to pass the time "while one is waiting--for one's next incarnation," Brown suggests it is "a bit too early to be worrying about that" (Brown, I, iii, 333). The play ends with the Police Captain asking the name of the man he has just killed. Cybel answers "Man!" "How d'yuh spell it?" is his corny but **supposedly comic response**.

When Richard Miller condescends to advise his father that a quotation from Carlyle's French Revolution is prose rather than poetry, the elder Miller counters with "I've heard there was a difference between 'em" (Wilderness, I, 17). Because Richard announces that Swinburne "tells the truth about real love," Sid asks to be "next on that one, Dick. I feel the need of a little poetical education" (Wilderness, I, 19). When Miller describes a boyhood chum as having been called "red because he had the darndest reddest crop of hair," his brother-in-law mutters "Remarkable!--the curious imagination--of little children" (Wilderness, II, 54). In the last act, Miller refers to the Hedda Gabler quotation once again by suggesting to his son that the vine leaves in his hair "turned out to be poison ivy" (Wilderness, IV, iii, 126).

Con Melody comments on the cause of Irish freedom: "Ireland? What benefit would freedom be to her unless she could be freed from the Irish?" (Poet, I, 160).

Larry Slade expresses his attitude toward life as "a seat in the grandstand of philosophical detachment" (Iceman, I, 11) and his feelings toward his comrades as analagous to Horace Walpole's attitude about England, "that he could love it if it weren't for the people in it" (Iceman, I, 30). He makes an additional comment about not being able to "build a marble temple out of a mixture of mud and manure" (Iceman, I, 30). Willie Oban confesses that at Harvard he was "accepted socially with all the warm cordiality that Henry Wadsworth Longfellow would have shown a drunken Negress dancing the can can at high noon on Brattle Street" (Iceman, I, 38), and when he quotes a Yale song about the pleasures of college days, he adds "that is a Yale hymn, and they're given to rah-rah exaggeration at New Haven" (Iceman, I, 38). His father, says Willie, wanted him to be a lawyer so that he would have "a thorough knowledge of the law close at hand in the house to help him find fresh ways to evade it" (Iceman, I, 38). When he introduces his bawdy ditty, Willie refers to it as having been "composed in a wanton moment by the Dean of the Divinity School on a moonlight night in July, 1776, while sobering up in a Turkish bath" (Iceman, I, 56).

"Sorry," says Lewis, in answer to the question of how much room rent he owes, "adding has always baffled me. Subtraction is my

forte" (Iceman, I, 48). Ed Mosher mentions that his sister Bess "somehow never had the confidence in me a sister should," after she discovered he had short-changed her (Iceman, I, 59). Hope announces "they'd have to padlock the pockets of the dead," if there were a war and Mosher were in it. But Ed answers that "there wouldn't be no fun robbing the dead," because he always "gave a sucker some chance" (Iceman, I, 59).

Cecil Lewis asks Mosher to tell him more about his alcoholic doctor friend who considered work unhealthy. He adds that "I think we should appoint him house physician here without a moment's delay" (Iceman, I, 89). Hugo Kalmar's usual heavy-handed threats give way to the aristocratic side of his nature when he vows, "Ve vill eat birthday cake and trink champagne beneath the villow tree! --Dis vine is unfit to trink. It has not properly been iced" (Iceman, II, 143). Chuck is unhappy about flowers at Harry's party: "What de hell can Harry do wid flowers? He don't know a cauliflower from a geranium" (Iceman, II, 96).

Deborah Harford discusses her husband's family's involvement in the slave trade as "a triumphant climax, you understand, of their long battle to escape the enslavement of freedom by enslaving it" (Poet, II, 89).

Sara Harford agrees to her husband's proposal that she become his "office mistress," and she concludes the discussion

of terms with a request for payment. He obliges by telling her he has the papers drawn but "I won't sign them until after--." She suggests he might "refuse to sign after--" (Mansions, III, i, 146).

When Mary Tyrone tells her husband that Jamie will "turn out all right in the end," he says, "He'd better start soon, then. He's nearly thirty-four" (Journey, I, 18). Jim Tyrone suggests the hot weather seems to call for a drink; Phil Hogan offers him the alternative of a glass of water or a walk to the inn (Misbegotten, I, 327). In discussing the incident of Hogan's pigs having invaded Harder's ice pond, Hogan refers to his pigs as "fine ambitious American-born pigs and they don't miss any opportunities." Tyrone agrees, but he suggests that "for some strange reason" Harder may not like the taste of his ice water after the pigs have wallowed in it (Misbegotten, I, 330).

#### (4) Semantics

Comic discussions about the meanings and usages of words and phrases occur when Tommy Miller refers to the "water closet" upstairs, and his mother interrupts with a "where?"

TOMMY: The bathroom.

MRS. MILLER: That's better.

Wilderness, III, ii, 80],

when Richard Miller describes himself as having been "wounded to the heart," and his uncle declares "I like to the quick better myself!" (Wilderness, IV, i, 102), and when Richard and Muriel argue the fine points about whether or not she had promised to kiss him (Wilderness, IV, ii, 110).

Rocky and his girls indulge in running commentaries on the semantic differences between pimps and bartenders, whores and tarts. Carefully distinguishing between a pimp and a bartender, Rocky refers to himself as the latter while he describes his pimp-like activities (Iceman, I, 12). He tells Margie and Pearl that if he were not around they would probably give their money "to some pimp" but Margie claims they would never have a pimp "like we was reg'lar old whores," and Pearl adds, "We're tarts, but dat's all" (Iceman, I, 66-67). Cora abides by the distinction when she tells Pearl "I may be a tart, but I ain't a cheap old whore like you" (Iceman, II, 100). When all is well again and Hickey has been taken away, Rocky shouts a defiant, but proud "I'll knock the block off anyone calls you whores!" (Iceman, IV, 256).

In a mood of contrition, Nora Melody vows she will go to the priest to confess her life of sin. "Well, why don't you go, Mother?" asks Sara. "Ain't I goin'?" Nora answers, referring to the technicality of her movement toward the door (Poet, IV, 229).

Josie Hogan comments on her father's casual mixture of metaphors:

HOGAN: (Thickly) . . . I'll say this for Harder, you know what to expect from him. He's no wolf in sheep's clothing, nor a treacherous snake in the grass who stabs you in the back with a knife--

JOSIE: (Apprehensive now--forces a joke) Sure, if you've found a snake who can stab you with a knife, you'd better join the circus with him and make a pile of money.

[Misbegotten, II, 348].

## E. JESTS AND COMIC STORIES

The Oxford Dictionary defines a jest as the use of humorous banter to taunt. The raillery of jest is lighter and less serious than that of satiric abuse, treated in Chapter VI. A comic story is a narrative whose purpose is to recount a comic situation.

### (1) Jests

Charlie taunts his sister Dolly by telling her that the boy she likes "can't see straight or he'd never look at you" (Warnings, 63). Arthur Baldwin prods his maid to speak up by reminding her that he loves "to comfort beauty in distress" (Recklessness, 121). Lucy Townsend tells Bull Herron he reminds her of Pluto but "Pluto was not as fat . . . nor as clumsy" (Abortion, 143). Rogers observes that the reason the fleas don't bother Devlin is because "they've got some class" (Movie Man, 170), that he never heard the general say "basta" when he was pouring him a drink (Movie Man, 171), and that Anita Fernandez may have been crying because "one of her husbands got killed in the war" (Movie Man, 174). Roylston describes to Mrs. Frazer the letter he writes to his women admirers and he jests with her on the subject of unrequited love (Servitude, 284-286).

Luke decides to step outside to give the others a chance "to git all the dirty things yuh're thinkin' about me off your chest" (The Rope, 198). Driscoll ribs Cocky when he suggests that the woman who had been "fallin' in love wid a beauthiful divil-may-care rake" like Cocky, must have been a "quane av the naygurs" (Cardiff, 37). He notifies Cocky that

if he could see his own face "wid the big red nose av ye all screwed up in a knot, ye'd never shed a tear the rist av your loife" (Voyage, 65).

Stephen Murray suggests that after Eileen Carmody has read his writing she "won't type it at any price" (Straw, I, ii, 68); he taunts Miss Howard when she announces that a comic quotation he recited was not his own, "Aha, you've discovered it's a parody, have you, you sly minx!" (Straw, I, ii, 69); and he reminds Eileen that the only way she would be able to break Fred Nicholls' heart would be "to deprive him of his meals" (Straw, II, i, 77).

Marthy tells Chris to "take a slant in the mirror and yuh'll see "what there is to laugh at" (Christie, I, 22). Captain Scott jests with the ladies about the mystery of where the sea-gulls sleep at night (Horizon, I, ii, 32), and James Mayo asks his son Robert whether he has been "countin' the stars to see if they all come out right and proper" (Horizon, I, ii, 38).

"Even a woman'd find it hard to git jealous of a whale!" Caleb Williams tells Emma Crosby in a reference to his long voyage away from her (Diff'rent, I, 201). Luis refers to his shipmates asleep on the deck of Columbus' flagship as "clods [who] would snore through the Last Judgment" (Fountain, ii, 121). Paddy tells Yank that Mildred Douglas is probably in bed "wid ten doctors and nurses feedin' her salts to clean the fear out of her" (Ape, iv, 64). A nobleman comments on Juan's search for the fountain of youth, "with all the water he has drunk in the

past four months, he must be flooded" (Fountain,viii,173). Mickey's opinion about being good enough to earn a good conduct medal is, "Dey kin pin it on de seat o' me pants" (Chillun,I,1,97).

Young Marco Polo criticizes harems: "In the West we've learned by experience that one at a time is trouble enough" (Marco,II,ii,267). Chu-Yin observes Marco's grand entrance and comments that even though they cannot be housebroken, he prefers monkeys because they are less noisy (Marco,II,ii,267).

Charlie Marsden compares Ned Darrell's calculated manner to "freshman from Ioway cultivating broad A's at Harvard" (Interlude,II,516).

"What's the bad news, Pop?" Ada Fife greets her father, "Has another Fundamentalist been denying Darwin?" (Dynamo,I,ii,30). When Mrs. Fife asks him if he supposes she ever had been a fish, he answers, "Aye, a jellyfish, I'm thinking" (Dynamo,III,i,138).

Father Baird describes John Loving's intellectual voyage from atheism to communism as "throwing spitballs at Almighty God (Days,I,33). He comments on Loving's interest in "passionless contemplation" and suggests that he "had a mental view of him regarding his navel frenziedly by the hour and making nothing of it" (Days,I,34).

The Chantyman describes another chantyman's voice, "Screech owls is op'ry singers compared to him" (Mourning, "Hunted," IV,790).

"Pure as the driven snow, that's me," says Uncle Sid. "They're running me for president of the W.C.T.U." (Wilderness,I,10). Nat Miller

comments on his son's revolutionary zeal, "if I didn't know it was you talking, I'd think we had Emma Goldman with us" (Wilderness, I, 16). After having quoted a line of verse on temperance, Sid adds, "I've always noticed how beset my path was with gin" (Wilderness, I, 20). When he reads some lines of Swinburne ("My life is bitter with thy love, etc.") Miller interrupts him and says he never read Swinburne, but he "heard something like that was the matter with him" (Wilderness, I, 27). Miller comments later on Richard's unexpected cheerfulness, "I thought you were the original of the Heart Bowed Down today" (Wilderness, II, 52). When Sid mentions he cannot understand why he feels so tired, his brother-in-law suggests that "maybe that demon chowder you drank at the picnic poisoned you" (Wilderness, IV, 1, 94). Sid recalls that he had a healthy appetite as a youth, but Miller remarks that that was "before eating lobster shells had ruined your iron constitution" (Wilderness, IV, 1, 94).

Deborah Harford refers to her son Joel as "God's most successful effort in taxidermy" (Mansions, I, iii, 60), and his brother Simon tells him "I can trust you to listen without hearing much" (Mansions, II, 1, 72).

Larry Slade considers it his bad luck "to be cursed with an iron constitution that even Harry's booze can't corrode" (Iceman, I, 10). Willie Oban reminds Parritt that "when meeting a Prince the customary salutation is 'What'll you have?'" (Iceman, I, 38). Cecil Lewis criticizes Hope's seeming inability to hear whenever someone else asks for a drink

on the house, but Harry tells him, "I don't have to hear, bejees! Booze is the only thing you ever talk about" (Iceman, I, 47). McGloin hints to Harry that "it's hot, parching work laughing at your jokes so early in the morning on an empty stomach" (Iceman, I, 55). But Harry refuses to believe that Hickey is on the wagon: "Take that bottle away from him, Rocky. We don't want to tempt him into sin" (Iceman, I, 55).

Rocky and Chuck's girls are both the initiators and the objects of jest when Pearl suggests that "Cora don't know which end of de cow has de horns" (Iceman, I, 69), and Cora twits Harry when he shouts "This ain't a cathouse!" with a "My, Harry! Such language!" (Iceman, I, 70). Margie wants to know what Larry would do "wid beautiful dolls, even if he had the price, de old goat" (Iceman, II, 106). Rocky is appalled by the idea of "whores goin' on strike!" (Iceman, III, 164). Chuck, his partner, explains there is no egg for Cora's sherry flip "unless she laid one" (Iceman, III, 165).

McGloin talks about being reinstated on the police force, and about the graft money he intends to get, but his friend Mosher calls for "fresh peanut oil in the lamp and cook the Lieutenant another dozen pills!" to bring him back to reality (Iceman, II, 134). Hickey tries to bring Hugo back to the world of the living by asking Chuck to "wake up our demon bombtossor. . . . We don't want corpses at this feast" (Iceman, II, 143). Hope taunts Moran, the detective, with the hoary reminder that "when Saint Patrick drove the snakes out of Ireland they swam to

New York and joined the police force!" (Iceman, IV, 244), and he threatens him by announcing "I'll have him back in uniform pounding a beat where the only graft he'll get will be stealing tin cans from the goats!" (Iceman, IV, 245).

Sara Melody considers it necessary to do the bar accounts herself because Mickey Maloy "can't put two and two together without making five" (Poet, I, 150). Her father answers Gadsby's suggestion that he is being made a fool of, "As for making a fool of you, sir, I would be the fool if I attempted to improve on God's handiwork!" (Poet, III, 216). Her mother says, "I'm glad you had the dacency to blush," when Sara admits having done so before she got into bed with Simon Harford (Poet, IV, 232).

Jamie Tyrone suggests that the character of Old Gaspard, the miser in The Bells, is a part his father could play without makeup (Journey, IV, 158). His comment on his father's snoring--"The Moor, I know his trumpet"--is answered by the elder Tyrone, "If it takes my snoring to make you remember Shakespeare instead of the dopesheet on the ponies, I hope I'll keep on with it" (Journey, I, 21). When Edmund reminds his father of the time he won five dollars by learning the part of Macbeth and reciting it letter perfect, Tyrone recalls, "I kept wishing I'd paid over the bet without making you prove it" (Journey, IV, 136). Mary Tyrone has the last word on her husband's snoring: "It must have been only the foghorn I heard" (Journey, I, 29).

Edmund believes "a Standard Oil millionaire ought to welcome the flavor of hog in his ice water as an appropriate touch" (Journey, I, 25). Tyrone complains that when Captain Turner "starts gabbing you can't get away from him," but Jamie suggests, "You mean once he starts listening" (Journey, I, 1, 65). Mary Tyrone observes that it is difficult to know by Bridget's cooking "whether she's doing her best or worst" (Journey, II, 11, 72). And Jamie caustically reminds his father, "I don't notice you've worn any holes in the knees of your pants going to Mass" (Journey, II, 11, 77).

Erie Smith says of Hughie's wife, "With her puss and figure, she'd never make no one except she raided a blind asylum" (Hughie, 267). Ribbing the night clerk about his absentmindedness, he suggests that if Hughes is deaf he will "keep it confidential" (Hughie, 282). His observation about the need for silence in Hughie's hospital room is to consider telling Hughie's wife, "Just leave you with him and he'll never get excited" (Hughie, 285). When the night clerk tells Erie that he will forget the house rules if he sees him come in one night with a blond, Erie suggests, "The manager wouldn't like you to remember something he ain't heard of yet" (Hughie, 292).

Josie Hogan tells her father, "You've the same bad luck in sons I have in brothers" (Misbegotten, I, 310). Hogan comments on the rocks on his farm, "If cows could eat them this place would make a grand dairy farm" (Misbegotten, I, 323). Josie suggests to Jim Tyrone that he need not

deny himself certain pleasures because she is certain that "the ones [tarts] you know on Broadway, New York, wouldn't neglect their business" (Misbegotten, I, 326). An ecstatic Hogan could "kiss you, Jim, for this beautiful news, if you wasn't so damned ugly. Maybe Josie'll do it for me. She has a stronger stomach" (Misbegotten, I, 331), but he ridicules her later for having "wiggled your backside, and stuck out your beautiful breasts" to tempt him (Misbegotten, II, 350). Finally, he tells her that "I was thinking after you'd gone I'd drown myself in Harder's ice pond. There was this consolation in it, I know that the bastard would never look at a piece of ice again without remembering me" (Misbegotten, IV, 408).

(2) Comic Stories

Jack Crosby goes into intimate detail about the affair between Caleb Williams and the "brown gal" who had to be shot at before she would swim away from the departing ship (Diff'rent, I, 207). A young, gullible Marco tells his uncle and father about the relic of Noah's Ark he bought, and he confirms its authenticity by showing them Noah's initials scratched on it (Marco, I, iii, 229). The sage Chu-Yin describes the ridiculous antics of Marco, in his grand Mayor's uniform, when he opened his mouth to speak "in position one of the five phonetic exercises" (Marco, II, i, 253). Seth Beckwith describes the desperate, frightened behavior of Abner Small in the dark Mannon house (Mourning, "Haunted," I, i, 819).

Ed Mosher tells about the time he short-changed his sister, Bess, and he adds that "in those days I could have short-changed the Keeper of

Mint" (Iceman, I, 59). Margie and Pearl describe their two drunk customers who stayed up all night arguing politics (Iceman, I, 64), and they reminisce about the time Cora and Chuck acted like two innocents planning to be married (Iceman, I, 68). Cora tells of the time a drunken sailor asked her the way to the Museum of Natural History at two in the morning, and of how she obliged by picking his pockets and directing him to the river (Iceman, I, 73).

Jamie Cregan tries to calm the women's fears about Con Melody's condition, after he was beaten by the Boston police; Cregan describes how he once was "clouted with the butt av a whip and . . . went around tellin' every stranger all my secrets" (Poet, IV, 243).

Edmund Tyrone tells the family the Shaughnessy pig farmer story, and elicits a mingled response of laughter, pride, and reproach (Journey, I, 23). The second girl, Cathleen, confides in Mary Tyrone the details of her running affair with Smythe, the "shriveled [sic] runt" of a chauffeur who refuses to admit defeat (Journey, III, 99).

Erie Smith explains how a "doll" once refused to stop crying in a crowded restaurant until he promised her a diamond engagement ring to sober her up (Hughie, 277); he describes the surprisingly pleasant behavior of Hughie's children, "No throwin' spitballs in my soup or them kind of gags" (Hughie, 280); and he tells about the prostitute who insisted he promised her ten dollars, while he tried to convince her that he had a speech impediment, "Maybe it sounded like ten, but it was two" (Hughie, 28).

Phil Hogan explains how he usually avoids paying the rent to Jim Tyrone by getting drunk together and being "too busy cursing England" (Misbegotten, I, 316). Jim tells about the time he brought a prostitute into college, introduced her as his sister, and succeeded in spending the day with her until she said goodbye to Father Fuller: "Christ, Father, it's nice and quiet out here away from the damned Sixth Avenue El. I wish to hell I could stay here!" Jim adds that she didn't, and neither did he (Misbegotten, I, 324).

#### F. LINGUISTIC REVERSALS

Last of the categories of verbal humor, Duckworth defines linguistic reversals as verbal arrangements whose humor hinges on the element of surprise. Three types occur in O'Neill's plays: (1) the surprise turn, in which a common word, phrase, or colloquialism is given a new twist, or leads to an unexpected turn; or in which a character suddenly defies expectation by saying something opposite; (2) inversion, a surprise turn in which there is an unexpectedly expressed distortion of meaning, value, or intent;<sup>4</sup> and (3) a change to absurdity, or a surprise turn in which a sudden appearance of the ludicrous provides the major comic effect.

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<sup>4</sup>Inversions are similar to the perversions listed under Word-Play and Wit; in fact, some inversions are actually perversions expressed as reversals. If the humor derives primarily from the distortion of meaning it was treated as an element of word-play; if it is attributable primarily to the surprise of the unexpected it is treated here as a reversal.

(1) The Surprise Turn

When Cocky tells of his short love affair with a New Guinea native--"Appened ten years ago come Christmas"--Scotty and Davis conclude she was really interested in having Cocky for Christmas dinner (Cardiff, 37).

Rogers declares that the courage and spirits of the Mexican troops are related to the supply of rum (Movie Man, 173), and he impressively announces that the power behind the presidential ambitions of Gomez is "The Earth Motion Picture Company" (Movie Man, 182). When Rogers tells Anita that the generalissimo is "stewed, boiled," she asks, "You mean he is cooking . . . ?" (Movie Man, 176).

Arthur Baldwin declares "There is nothing that consoles one so much for the loss of a lover as--another lover" (Recklessness, 122).

When Mrs. Knapp offers her daughter, Lizzie, a piece of candy to stop crying, the response is an immediate end to the tears accompanied by a sudden "Where's the candy, Mama?" (Warnings, 59). Her brother Charlie tells his mother about having discovered Lizzie and her boy friend kissing in the hallway, and he ends his sordid tale with the unexpected "And he's cross-eyed!" (Warnings, 63).

On being introduced to Kate, Driscoll compliments her on having "A good Irish name," but he adds, "you're English by the trim av ye, an' be damned to you" (Voyage, 67).

The Donkeyman explains that he preferred to beat his women so that when he returned home "they always had somethin' special nice cooked fur me to eat" (Caribbees, 23). Big Frank is invited to dance. He answers, "Dance? I don't dance. I trink!" (Caribbees, 27).

Luke returns after five years and tells his sister, "You ain't changed, that's sure--on'y yuh're homelier'n ever" (Rope, 196), and on four other occasions he observes that everyone must be "tickled to death" to see him, and that he and Annie "used to get on so fine together," ending each statement with a pause, and a cynical "like hell!" to set the record straight (Rope, 196-206).

Little Davie Roylston does not want to play the prince to his sister's princess; he would rather play the dragon. When he is reminded that the dragon is wicked he declares, "Tha's why I wanta be him" (Servitude, II, 258). Mrs Frazer remarks that at the conclusion of her formal education she knew what a young lady in her position should know, "nothing of any value" (Servitude, I, 234). Roylston suggests that when he outgrew his governess he was given Benton, the butler, who would not allow himself to be outgrown (Servitude, III, 278). After Mrs. Frazer sarcastically consoles Roylston, he concedes, "I surrender to the super-woman--only don't hit me when I'm down" (Servitude, III, 281). When Mrs. Frazer recounts a long description of Roylston's early married life, he answers with an equally long confirmation of all the chores and drudgery his wife endured, but he adds, "I did use to dry the dishes, you know"

(Servitude, III, 291). Royston declares that if another woman writes him letters he will have them "burned by the--no, we haven't one--I'll hand them over to the police" (Servitude, III, 294). He suggests that for all the loving interest he has taken in his children, they might as well be "the gardener's--or Benton's" (Servitude, III, 294).

Fred Nicholls' retort to the question of whether he is related to Albert Nicholls is, "He's sort of a near relative--my father" (Straw, I, 1, 46). Eileen's father laments the cold, heartless way his daughter wishes him farewell. He complains of his loneliness. "You'll miss your train, Father," is her response (Straw, I, 11, 62). Carmody gives Eileen news of home when he tells her about her younger brother's girl--"the pop-eyed one with glasses, you remember--as ugly as a blind sheep, only he don't think so" (Straw, III, 104).

Anna Christie orders "a whiskey--ginger ale on the side--And don't be stingy, baby," and the bartender asks, "Shall I serve it in a pail?" (Christie, I, 25). Later, when her father complains about Mat Burke, Anna asks him, "d'you want me to sit all day and night in this cabin with you--and knit?" (Christie, III, 66).

Caleb William's sister, Harriet, "wouldn't give a darn about a man that was too goody-goody to raise Cain once in a while--before he married me, I mean" (Diff'rent, I, 213). When Caleb returns from the sea to find Emma considerably changed he asks her, "wa'n't your hair turnin' grey last time I was to home?" She tells him it was, but that "it started

to come in again black as black all of a sudden" (Diff'rent, II, 240).

When he asks her if she has "paint and powder" on her face, she explains, "it's awful good for your complexion, they say . . ." (Diff'rent, II, 240).

Emma defends Benny by reminding Caleb, "he went away over to France to shed his blood for you and me." Caleb remarks that "if he shed any blood, he must have got a nose bleed" (Diff'rent, II, 245).

When Brutus Jones rings the bell to call his "woods' niggers," and he is greeted with silence, he smiles and tells Smithers, "was I sayin' I'd sit in six months mo'? Well, I'se changed my mind den. I cashes in and resigns de job of Emperor right dis minute" (Jones, I, 12). During "prohibition," Lily Jayson declares that she loves to serve drinks and that if she were a man she would be a bartender. After a pause, she adds, "in Mexico or Canada" (First Man, I, 161). Her brother asks for his cup of tea and "a stick . . . to put in it," but Lily counters, "here's tea--but no stick for you, sot" (First Man, I, 163). She predicts Martha Jayson will give birth to a boy so that--she reminds her relatives--"you and Emily will burst with envy among your daughters" (First Man, I, 166). When Curtis Bigelow suggests that his wife gets along with anyone, even aboriginal natives, his friend asks, "with the aboriginal natives of Bridgetown?" (First Man, II, 175).

Margaret Anthony greets her husband: "Good morning--at four in the afternoon!" (Brown, I, 1, 321). He refers to their marriage as "this domestic diplomacy! We communicate in code--when neither has the

other's key!" (Brown,I,1,322). Cybel tells Dion Anthony, "you look like a good boy, too--when you're asleep" (Brown,I,iii,330).

The Buddhist explains to the Christian that there is a new import tax and that trade is very unsettled in Delhi, but then he incongruously adds, "we make prayer beads" (Marco,Prologue,212). The Magian announces that he sells a block-printed book "all full of lechery--at least so they instructed me to tell people to get them to buy" (Marco, Prologue,212). Nicolo Polo describes "Mahometans" as simple creatures whose women wear cotton dresses to look large in the hips because their men consider it beautiful (Marco,I,iii,229). Maffeo makes a snide comment about their competitors, the Ali brothers, but when they are within hearing he adds, "Well, well. You folks are a welcome sight!" (Marco, I,iii,229). In India, Maffeo explains why the merchants make great profits because of the exotic products they sell, and almost in the same breath he adds that "the Kings have five hundred wives apiece" (Marco, I,iv,234). Before the Great Wall of China, Maffeo observes that business is in cattle and crops and that "in short, the people live like beasts" (Marco,I,v,237). The Kaan challenges Marco's faith by suggesting that if he believes in eternal life, cutting off his head can do him no harm. Says Marco, "I might--catch--cold!" (Marco,I,vi,244). Later, Marco boasts of his success in governing Yang-Chau. He tells the Kaan, "Well, you wouldn't know the old town now. Sin is practically unseen" (Marco,II,i,257). Upon leaving Yang-Chau, Marco announces

that he has appointed five hundred committees to replace him, and that everything will function automatically, "and brains are no longer needed," but he adds that "it's lucky they're not so Yang-Chau would soon be a ruin!" (Marco, II, i, 257).

Chu-Yin attempts to force Marco to respond to the love of the Princess Kukachin by ordering him each day "to look carefully and deeply into the Princess's eyes and note what you see there." Marco concludes that Chu-Yin is "afraid she'll get fever in the tropics" (Marco, II, ii, 268). When Marco and Kukachin confront each other, overwhelmed by mutual passion, the moment is topped and the action is stopped by Maffeo's (who has been counting money) ecstatic shout, "One million!" Commerce wins the day (Marco, II, iii, 279). Hurt by Marco's insensitivity, Kukachin tells Ghazan Kaan to provide Marco with large amounts of food because he is "an exquisite judge of quantity" (Marco, II, iii, 283). When Ghazan asks if Marco has offended her, and if he should be killed, Kukachin says, "No. He has amused me. Let him be fed" (Marco, II, iii, 284).

General Bayan is infuriated by the unscrupulous Japanese who "are breeding and maintaining silkworms for purposes of aggression!" (Marco, III, i, 287). Invoking Buddha, "the Gentle one, The Good, The Kind, the Pitiful, etc." Bayan threatens death to the Christians who deny Him. The Kaan looks up and comments on the absence of a thunderbolt; he concludes that "there is no God!" (Marco, III, i, 287). Finally,

on his return to Venice Marco meets his betrothed, Donata, and he tells her that during "all the twenty-odd years I kept thinking of you, and I was always intending to write--" (Marco, III, 1, 295).

The Third Roman Senator suggests that an order from Caesar is "some new whim of Tiberius, naturally--or rather I should say, unnaturally!" (Lazarus, II, 11, 422). The First Senator dramatically announces, "I long for death." The Third Senator advises him, "Your stomach must be out of order" (Lazarus, II, 11, 424). When Lazarus ignores the First Senator's order to "turn around! In the name of the Senate," Lucius remarks, "So much for our authority!" (Lazarus, II, 11, 424).

Charlie Marsden reminds Nina that "the first word you ever spoke in this world was an insult to me. 'Dog,' you said, looking right at me--at the age of one!" (Interlude, I, 496). Sam Evans feels that he should say something about Charlie Marsden's books but he "can't even remember a title of one" (Interlude, II, 511). Ned Darrell refers to Marsden as "one of those poor devils who spend their lives trying not to discover which sex they belong to!" (Interlude, II, 516). When Marsden, concerned about his mother's health, tells Darrell the poor woman has a pain in the stomach, the doctor suggests that "possibly she eats too much" (Interlude, IV, 558). Holding roses in his hand, Marsden declares that flowers have the power to soothe grief, which leads "to their general use at funerals--and weddings!" (Interlude, IX, 670).

Mrs. Fife tells of her infatuation for her husband before they were married: "Pa and Ma warned me linesmen were no good . . . they just ruined you and went their way . . . they were wrong about Ramsay . . . except he did ruin me . . ." (Dynamo, I, 11, 28). Mr. Fife refers to Lucifer as a "better electrical expert" than Jehovah (Dynamo, I, 111, 45). Hearing the noises of Mrs. Light slinking in the garden, Mrs. Fife imagines that "some animal's in the garden . . . maybe it's a skunk . . . I'd love to have a skunk skin coat next winter . . ." (Dynamo, I, 111, 48). She absentmindedly comments on lightning: "I love to watch lightning . . . the thunder clouds are getting nearer the moon . . . I'd like to be a cloud . . ." (Dynamo, I, iv, 58). In a rare show of affection, Ada kisses her mother, and Mrs. Fife wishes she would kiss her father once in a while. She declares that "she does it now as if she wished she was a mosquito with a stinger . . . the screen up in her room has a hole rusted in it . . ." (Dynamo, II, i, 88). When Reuben Light returns he extols Ada's eyes, hair, and mouth; kisses her "hungrily;" then breaks away, forces a laugh, and announces: "Continued in our next!" (Dynamo, II, i, 97).

The Chantyman cries into the darkness for someone to buy him a drink, and when he gets no response he mutters to himself, "Go to hell then! I kin buy it myself!" (Mourning, "Hunted," IV, 790).

Bill Eliot consoles his partner, John Loving, when he advises him not to "let our little depression get you. There's always the poor-house. Quite cozy, too, they say" (Days, I, 20). Elsa Loving tells Lucy Hillman she looks wonderful. "Thanks, liar!" responds Lucy. (Days, II, 62).

Uncle Sid tells his brother-in-law that "you can see life in Waterbury, all right--that is, if you're looking for life in Waterbury!" (Wilderness, I, 9). Richard Miller believes that "life is a joke! And everything comes out all wrong in the end!" (Wilderness, II, 39). When his brother's friend, Wint, reminds him to use cloves to mask the smell of whiskey on his breath, he proudly exclaims, "I know what to do" (Wilderness, II, 43). Mrs. Miller is shocked by her son's condition: "Richard! You're intoxicated!--you bad, wicked boy, you!" "Fancy that, Hedda!" is his response, but he suddenly becomes sick. "Ma, I feel rotten!" is his last comment before he is whisked upstairs (Wilderness, III, ii, 90). Fully recovered, he cynically suggests that "women never know when the curtain has fallen. They always want another act" (Wilderness, IV, i, 104). But he muses that he "didn't go upstairs" with Belle, the prostitute, that "Muriel's a million times prettier" than Belle, and finally, he adds that he and Muriel will go upstairs "when we're married . . ." (Wilderness, IV, ii, 106). Muriel arrives on time, only to be greeted by Richard's casual "Oh, hello. Is it nine already? Gosh, time passes--when you're thinking" (Wilderness, IV, ii, 109). When Muriel asks him how he was affected by her letter, Richard sententiously tells her to "let the dead past bury its dead," but then he adds, "What I'll catch when Pa gets hold of me!" (Wilderness, IV, ii, 112). He also tells Muriel that "suicide is the act of a coward," and he concludes that that is what stopped him from considering it (Wilderness, IV, ii, 113). He spent

the eleven dollars he had saved for Muriel's birthday because he thought "she's dead to me now," but he hastily suggests "I've still got almost five left, Muriel, and I can get you something nice with that" (Wilderness, IV,ii,113). Muriel considers forgiving him:

MURIEL: (drifting nearer) Then you didn't--love her?

RICHARD: I hated her! She wasn't even pretty!  
[Wilderness,IV,ii,117].

She does forgive him, and she tells him she is sorry she hurt his hand. Richard claims "it felt wonderful--even to have you bite!" (Wilderness, IV,ii,118).

Uncle Sid sings in praise of little Tommy Miller:

Dunno what ter call 'im  
But he's mighty like a Rose--velt.  
[Wilderness,I,10].

He swears to Lily Miller that "if any man offers me a drink, I'll kill him--that is, if he changes his mind!" (Wilderness,I,11). When Lily tells him she will never marry him, he good-naturedly agrees, adding that his dying mother had told him he should "never marry a woman who drinks! Lips that touch liquor shall never touch yours!" (Wilderness,II,57). His brother-in-law asks him if he might recognize the prostitute's handwriting on the note describing Richard's barroom escapade, but Sid self-righteously asserts: "Nat, I resent the implication that I correspond with all the tramps around this town. (Looking at the letter) No, I don't know who this one could be" (Wilderness,IV,i,96). He adds that "the Pleasant Beach House

is nothing but a bed house--(Quickly) At least, so I've been told" (Wilderness, IV, i, 97).

Mimicking Richard's dramatic exit quotation from Candida, Mrs. Miller declares he should be on the stage. "Out--into the night," she says, "and it isn't even dark yet!" (Wilderness, II, 40). Miller reminds her that she had decided to punish Richard by not giving him any dinner, to which she explains, "in his weakened condition--I thought it best . . ." (Wilderness, IV, i, 94). But she insists that Miller "punish him good and hard," as well as take care not to be too harsh because "he's like you inside--too sensitive for his own good" (Wilderness, IV, i, 95). When she expresses her approval of Muriel, Miller reminds her that she once considered Muriel stupid. Mrs. Miller tells him that her mother thought the same of him but "she changed her mind when she saw I didn't care if you were or not" (Wilderness, IV, iii, 123). Miller suggests that Muriel "will get as big as a house after she's married, the same as her mother did," but his wife tells him even that is a better condition than to "be built like a string bean and bore a hole in a chair every time I sat down--like some people!" (Wilderness, IV, iii, 123).

Mildred is chastised at the dinner table for discussing her friend's mother's bunions, and after a moment of embarrassed silence, Miller continues the story his wife was trying to force out of the conversation with a "well, as I was saying, there was I and Red . . ." (Wilderness, II, 55). Miller admires Bernard Shaw "even if his ideas are so crazy

they oughtn't to allow them to be printed," and he appreciates Swinburne but wishes "he'd only choose some other subjects besides loose women" (Wilderness, IV, iii, 120). He enjoys The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam more each time he reads it--those parts, he emphasizes, "where it isn't all about boozing" (Wilderness, IV, iii, 121). He reassures his wife that Richard's strange behavior is "love, not liquor, this time" (Wilderness, IV, iii, 125). Richard is ecstatic when his father tells him he will not be able to go to Yale; Miller counters with "then you'll go to Yale and you'll stay there till you graduate, that's the answer to that!" (Wilderness, IV, iii, 129).

Spoofing his Uncle Sid, Arthur Miller, the family's present Yale student, tells him that if he sees him and Aunt Lily spooning on a bench he will have to do his duty and call a cop (Wilderness, I, 12), and he warns Richard that "McComber may be coming to see if your intentions toward his daughter are dishonorable, Dick!" (Wilderness, I, 21). Mildred Miller, however, envies her brother's intentions and tells him, "Gee, it must be nice to be in love like you are--all with one person" (Wilderness, IV, i, 103).

Sara Melody confides to her mother-in-law that they both should do "anything to give him [Simon] his way, as long as it's our way!" (Mansions, II, iii, 128).

"Don't mock the faith," says Larry Slade to Rocky. "Have you no respect for religion, you unregenerate Wop?" (Iceman, I, 9). After

claiming the police ignore Hope's bar because they think it is "as harmless as a graveyard," he adds, "be God, they're right" (Iceman, I, 25). Joe Mott prefers a Socialist to an anarchist because "he's bound by his religion to split fifty-fifty wid you," but he adds that "if dey's broke, den dy's no-good bastards, too" (Iceman, I, 20). Willie Oban tells Don Parritt he considers him a plutocrat, his "pockets stuffed with ill-gotten gains. Two or three dollars at least" (Iceman, I, 38). "Piano! What d'yuh tink dis dump is, a dump?" shouts Rocky (Iceman, I, 41). Pearl explains how she and Margie had told their two customers they would meet them around the corner; Margie adds, "So here we are" (Iceman, I, 65). After Larry calls Pearl and Margie his "great big beautiful baby dolls," Pearl notifies him that "we ain't big. And we ain't your baby dolls!" Then: "But we admit we're beautiful" (Iceman, II, 106). Mosher dreams of his old, carefree, circus life, and he says that "the old gang [will] be tickled to death when I show up on the lot." "Maybe," McGloin says, "if they've got a rope handy" (Iceman, II, 133). "I love only the proletariat! I vill lead them! I vill be like a Gott to them!" exclaims Hugo. "They vill be my slaves!" (Iceman, III, 169). He expresses the same sentiment later when he announces he will drink champagne beneath the willow tree, "but the slaves must ice it properly!" (Iceman, III, 200).

Jamie Cregan toasts Mickey Maloy: "Your health and inclinations--if they're virtuous!" (Poet, I, 139). When Nora Melody twits her daughter for the fine opinion she has of herself, Sara answers, "Haven't

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I, though!" (Poet, I, 154). Con Melody decides he will have no more liquor, then adds, "Besides, it's a bit early in the day" (Poet, I, 156). But when his wife persuades him that it might give him an appetite, he reconsiders: "Perhaps a drop wouldn't come amiss" (Poet, I, 156). When Melody makes preparations for the dinner to celebrate the anniversary of the battle of Talavera, he orders his companions, whom he has been commending for their virtues and talents, to be put at a table away from him because "I may tolerate their presence out of charity, but I'll not sink to dining at the same table" (Poet, I, 158). Nora's statement that he is still handsome and that "no woman could take her eyes off you" pleases Melody; though he rejects the idea as "blarney," he adds a moment later, "But it's true, in those days in Portugal and Spain--" (Poet, I, 159). Deborah Harford reminisces about her husband's father who was a "rabid Jacobin" and who longed to die on the guillotine, but who was ignored because of his unimportance to the cause (Poet, II, 189). Lapsing into Irish brogue, the metamorphosed Con Melody calms his wife's fears about his condition by telling her, "me brains, if I have any, is clear as a bell" (Poet, IV, 248).

Jamie Tyrone comments on Cathleen's call to lunch: "I was halfway up the walk when Cathleen burst into song. Our wild Irish lark! She ought to be a train announcer" (Journey, II, 1, 54). Mary Tyrone is depressed by the lonely sound of the foghorn, though she is quick to mention to Cathleen that she loves the fog itself. "They say it's good

for the complexion," notes Cathleen innocently (Journey, III, 98). The elder Tyrone reverses his usual attitude about wasting electricity by dramatically turning the light bulbs on and announcing "The poorhouse is the end of the road, and it might as well be sooner or later!" Says Edmund, "That's a grand curtain" (Journey, IV, 128). Edmund later quotes Baudelaire on the glories of being drunk "with wine, with poetry, or with virtue, as you will," but his father advises, "I wouldn't worry about the virtue part of it, if I were you" (Journey, IV, 132). Then he asks,

TYRONE: . . . Who wrote it?

EDMUND: Baudelaire.

TYRONE: Never heard of him.

[Journey, IV, 133].

Jamie rails about a man being nothing but "a God-damned hollow shell" without a good woman's love, but his brother's comment is "you're a nut" (Journey, IV, 158). Finally, Jamie claims he has a new career in sight. He sees great success for himself, not in acting, but in performing as "the lover of the fat woman in Barnum and Bailey's circus!" (Journey, IV, 160).

Erie Smith tells of the time he came close to being the victim of a shotgun wedding:

Then one day she wakes up and finds she's going to have a kid . . . she didn't have no idea who, so she holds a lottery all by herself. Put about a thousand guys' names in a hat--all she could remember--and drew me out and I was it.

[Hughie, 269].

He tells of the good deed he accomplished in getting Hughie to return two

dollars he had taken from his wife's purse. "Boy Scouts got nothin' on me, Pal, when it comes to good deeds," he says. "It's too bad I can't remember no others" (Hughie, 277). Erie knows all the "big shots . . . to say hello, and sometimes they hello back" (Hughie, 283). He rolls the dice and makes his number by manipulating them, but his comment to the night clerk is a casual "easy when you got my luck--and know how. Huh, Charlie?" (Hughie, 293).

Josie Hogan seems to agree with her father that money means nothing to him. "You'd give your last penny to the first beggar you met--if he had a shotgun pointed at your heart!" (Misbegotten, I, 310). She reminisces about how her father used her to charm old James Tyrone, the landlord, so that he would forget about collecting the rent, and how she would

skip down to the path to meet him, and make him a courtesy [sic], and hold on to his hand, and bat my eyes at him and lead him in the house, and offer him a drink of the good whiskey you didn't keep for company . . .

[Misbegotten, I, 315].

Cynical at Hogan's suggestion that she might manage to get Jim Tyrone alone that evening because "there'll be a beautiful moon to fill him with poetry and loneliness," she is assured by her father that "that's every woman's scheme since the world was created. Without it there'd be no population" (Misbegotten, I, 317). Jim Tyrone's Latin quotation (see above, p. 115) elicits Hogan's remark, "It's easy to see you've a fine college education. It must be a big help to you, conversing with whores

and barkeeps" (Misbegotten, I, 323). Hogan takes his leave of Josie and Jim with a crisp "Bad luck to you both" (Misbegotten, II, 363). But the last surprise turn in the play is Jim Tyrone's theatrical comment on the sunrise: "God seems to be putting on quite a display. I like Belasco better. Rise of curtain, Act-Four stuff" (Misbegotten, IV, 405).

## (2) Inversions

This is a surprise turn in which there is an unexpectedly expressed distortion of meaning, value, or intent.

Stephen Murray complains about the boredom of being a newspaperman in a small town, and how he "used to pray that our Congressman would commit suicide, or the Mayor murder his wife--just to be able to write a real story" (Straw, I, ii, 64). Rebuffed by her sister-in-law, Esther Sheffield remarks that "even people touched by a smattering of science seem to get rude, don't they?" (First Man, I, 162). Dion Anthony announces, "I've given up exercise. They claim it lengthens your life" (Brown, I, iii, 331).

When the Christian is reminded of his usual past behavior he explains, "I'd taken a drop too much--a very unusual thing for me" (Marco, Prologue, 212). On being asked to speak to the Pope, Marco says, "He's praying," but his uncle suggests that "he'll have time enough for that, but with us time is money" (Marco, I, ii, 226). Maffeo assures the Pope that the Kaan is not a barbarian because "every plate on his table is solid gold" (Marco, I, ii, 227). When the Buddhists prostrate themselves before a statue of Buddha, Maffeo tells Marco, "they're not responsible" (Marco, I, iv, 236). When Marco asks whether the two

Gods of the Tartars are like the Holy Trinity, Maffeo answers, "These are degraded pagans" (Marco, I, v, 240). Marco decides he will ask the Kaan to make him a first-class government commission agent, but his uncle assures him that second-class status would be better because the second-class agent "gets what's rightfully coming to him" (Marco, I, vi, 245). Marco describes his gift to Kukachin as "a genuine, pedigreed pup. I procured him at ~~great~~ cost--I mean he's extra well-bred" (Marco, II, i, 256). He strikes an excess profits tax from the books in favor of a tax on necessities: "a law that hits everyman's pocket equally, be he beggar or banker!" (Marco, II, i, 256). He creates a law declaring that every citizen must be happy or go to jail because "if a man's good, he's happy--and if he isn't happy, it's a sure sign he's no good . . ." (Marco, II, i, 256). Marco's workable solution to end the evil of war is "to conquer everybody else in the world so they'll never dare fight you again!" (Marco, II, i, 258). He speaks of a military action costing the lives of ten thousand men, and he values "each life conservatively at ten yen" (Marco, II, i, 259). He likes to go to the theatre to "get your mind off serious things, until it's time to go to bed" (Marco, II, i, 263). Proud of having gotten the cargo loaded ahead of schedule, he exclaims, "We killed six slaves but, by God, we did it!" (Marco, II, ii, 269). After questioning Kukachin about the symptoms of unrequited love that have made her consider suicide, he concludes that she may be suffering from brain fever (Marco, II, iii, 277), and a little later he attributes her condition

to her spleen being "out of order" (Marco, II, iii, 285). When Kukachin reminds Marco that his Donata will be "middle-aged--fat--and stupid" when he sees her again, he tells her he prefers "a wife being a bit plump," and that he does not want "a great thinker around the house" (Marco, II, iii, 281).

Lavinia Mannon complains about Seth Beckwith's drunkenness, but he equates drinking with patriotism, calling it a proper duty to celebrate historic events (Mourning, "Homecoming," III, 728).

Lily Miller tells Sid Davis if he is not drunk she will go with him to the fireworks display. Sid's comment to her brother is that she is "evil-minded, I'm afraid, Nat. I hate to say it of your sister" (Wilderness, I, 12). When both he and Nat Miller return home drunk, he tries the same ploy by calling attention to Miller being "drunk again, I regret to note. Sister, my heart bleeds for you and your poor fatherless chicks!" (Wilderness, II, 50). Lily comments on Mildred's penmanship having improved, but when she criticizes the excessive number of flourishes Mildred tells her that "that's just what I was practicing hardest on" (Wilderness, III, ii, 78). Mrs. Miller is angry with Richard for having feigned sleep when she looked into his room; however, he assures her "If you'd asked if I was asleep I'd have said no" (Wilderness, IV, i, 100). When Miller insists on punishing Richard, his wife suggests she has punished him enough, that he has punished himself, and that he should be punished no further, though, in fact, everybody has been most

solicitous toward him (Wilderness, IV, iii, 121). A little later, she speaks of Richard's exceptional intelligence and calls attention to his reading (that she had previously criticized) by referring to it as "all those deep plays and books and poetry" (Wilderness, IV, iii, 122).

Ed Mosher has "watched many cases of almost fatal teetotalism, but they all came out of it completely cured and as drunk as ever" (Iceman, I, 88).

James Tyrone responds to the lack of response in his son over a rare gesture of generosity on his part:

TYRONE: . . . "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is--"

EDMUND: "To have a thankless child." I know.  
[Journey, II, ii, 89].

Erie Smith suggests that Hughie's wife probably "proposed and said 'yes' for him, and married him . . ." (Hughie, 278).

Josie Hogan's brother remarks that she is ridiculing him because he wants to be decent. She tells him, "You're worse than decent. You're virtuous" (Misbegotten, I, 303). Hogan agrees to her suggestion that he offer Jim Tyrone something to eat to keep in his good graces: "Why shouldn't I ask him? I know damned well he has no appetite this early in the day, but only a thirst" (Misbegotten, I, 322). Tyrone explains that he was disqualified for the job of office boy because he had no Bachelor of Arts diploma (Misbegotten, I, 324). When he complains about not being able to sleep, Josie suggests it may be because "you had no woman in bed with you, for a change. It's a terrible thing to break the habit of years" (Misbegotten, I, 325). When he refers to her as "my

Virgin Queen of Ireland" she tells him "you'll ruin my reputation if you spread that lie about me" (Misbegotten, I, 325). Hogan tells Tyrone, his landlord, of the promising harvest of the farm he rents from him: "The milkweed and the thistles is in thriving condition, and I never saw the poison ivy so bounteous and beautiful" (Misbegotten, I, 325). When Tyrone questions Josie about her allusions to the women he associates with, she tells him, "I've been considering joining their union. It's easier living than farming, I'm sure" (Misbegotten, I, 326).

### (3) A Change to Absurdity

This is a surprise turn in which a sudden appearance of the ludicrous provides the major comic effect.

Little Davie Royston offers as logical proof that his younger sister could not possibly be ill from having eaten too much candy the fact that he ate more than she did (Servitude, II, 258). Commenting on her motherly solicitousness toward her brothers and sisters, Stephen Murray asks Eileen Carmody, "Won't you adopt me, too?" (Straw, I, ii, 66). Gordon Evans kisses his mother to "make up" for the kiss that Ned Darrell had given her shortly before. "That takes it off her mouth," Gordon thinks (Interlude, VII, 637). Darrell doesn't believe in ghosts, but he suggests a scientific explanation for the meeting between him and Nina: "cosmic positive and negative electric charges" (Interlude, IX, 679). Mrs. Fife reminisces about having met her husband in May, and then reminds herself to make him change to his summer underwear (Dynamo, I, ii, 26).

"Damn the Fourth of July, anyway! I wish we still belonged to England!" says Richard Miller (Wilderness, I, 32). His Uncle Sid argues that the sun has a perfect right to set and that people should mind their own business (Wilderness, II, 48). Mrs. Miller interprets her son's despair with life as "your liver, that's what! You'll take a good dose of salts tomorrow morning, and no nonsense about it!" (Wilderness, IV, i, 101).

Con Melody justifies having a drink during the celebration of the anniversary of the Battle of Talavera by ordering Jamie Cregan to "wet your lips, Corporal. Talavera was a devilish thirsty day, if you'll remember" (Poet, III, 200).

Cathleen complains that her feet "kill her," and that walking gives her sunstroke, so she calls the family to meals by shouting from inside the house (Journey, II, i, 53). She believes that "everybody healthy snores. It's a sign of sanity . . ." (Journey, III, 99). James Tyrone is convinced that Shakespeare was an Irish Catholic, and that "the proof is in his plays" (Journey, IV, 127). He is equally convinced that the Duke of Wellington was an Irish Catholic because, as Edmund says, "You just want to believe that no one but an Irish Catholic general could beat Napoleon" (Journey, IV, 127).

Josie Hogan and her father have the last absurd word:

HOGAN: . . . my motto in life is never trust anyone too far, not even myself.

JOSIE: You've reason for the last. I've often suspected you sneak out of bed in the night to pick your own pockets.  
[Misbegotten, I, 314].

#### THE VARIETIES OF O'NEILL'S VERBAL HUMOR

O'Neill uses verbal humor in almost all of his plays. Of the twenty-six published full-length plays, only Gold contains no verbal humor; of the nineteen one-act plays, only five--Thirst, Before Breakfast, The Sniper, Where the Cross is Made, and "Ile"--lack comic language.

##### A. COLLOQUIAL LANGUAGE

O'Neill relies on a rich and varied strain of comic colloquial language to reveal vigorously the desires, opinions, attitudes, and enthusiasm of many of his characters. The aphorisms Richard Miller expresses in Wilderness, for example, help define the absurdity of his attempt to play the experienced dilletante, and the banal, presumptuous maxims of Marco Polo define his ridiculous pomposity and his overbearing self-assurance.

Abusive expressions, diminutives, outbursts of enthusiasm and approval, and erotic references comprise the wide range of comic colloquialism O'Neill uses over and over again to stamp clearly the regional characteristics and the often complex emotions experienced by his characters. Margie's admonition to Rocky--"shake the lead outa your pants, Pimp!" (Iceman, IV, 255)--is an expression of renewed affection, as is Phil Hogan's "down with all tyrants, male and female!" which he shouts at his daughter (Misbegotten, II, 345). Hugo, in Iceman, succeeds

in using the diminutive "leedle" in both a complimentary and a derogatory manner, suiting the word to his mood, his mood to the availability of something to drink. A succession of characters--Cocky in Caribbees, Hope in Iceman, Roche and O'Dowd in Poet, James Tyrone in Journey, and Hogan in Misbegotten--register their enthusiasm and admiration in strong, brisk colloquial language whose humor stems both from the colorful vernacular they use and from their energetic spirits.

A pungent vein of erotic references runs through O'Neill's work: the prurient remarks of the American correspondents in Movie Man on the dimensions of Anita Fernandez' figure, the Donkeyman's sarcastic reference to lust in Caribbees, Captain Crosby's comment on the evil of sexual abstinence during long sea voyages in Diff'rent, Cybel's reminiscence of the voyeurism of her patrons in Brown, and Joe Silva's admiration for the physical attributes of the dead Christine Mannon in Mourning.

Exaggeration for effect is a strong source of comedy in O'Neill's colloquial language. Mat Burke revels in the image of himself as "a rale man with guts to him" (Christie, II, 51). Marco praises his own swimming and swordsmanship (Marco, II, iii, 276). Seth Beckwith considers himself young at seventy-five (Mourning, "Homecoming," I, 689). Richard Miller dramatically exaggerates his drunkenness (Wilderness, IV, ii, 115). Exaggerated comic references to the physical attributes and pervasive influence of women, the ideas of marriage, absurd threats of physical

harm, exclamations of sarcasm, and the ridicule of individuals and institutions, all contribute to a large degree to the language of colloquial humor that appears in the early as well as the late plays.

Greeting and farewells afford excellent opportunities for characters to express their uniqueness, and O'Neill uses the opportunities often. Between Cockey's "Cheero!" (Voyage, 63) and Nat Miller's "let her go, Gallagher" (Wilderness, IV, iii, 131) a host of characters signals arrivals and departures in gusty, poetic, grandiloquent, and obscene terms, in every instance giving vent to their unrestrained enthusiasm.

However, it is hyperbole and metaphor that form the lion's share of comic colloquialism in O'Neill's plays. Absurd exaggeration, whose effect is the comically ridiculous, infuses the lively chit-chat of the correspondents in Movie Man, the varying colloquial strains of the characters in the sea plays, the carping controversy of the Roman senators in Lazarus, and the rich and vigorous discourse of the characters in Hope's bar in the first act of Iceman. O'Neill's use of comic metaphor covers a wide range of subjects. Revealed as a catholicity in his choice of metaphor that reflects the turns and choices of everyday speech. Metaphors used for comic effect fall into certain specific groups, most of which range throughout the plays. These groups are animals, drunkenness and drinking, geniality and approval, derogation, descriptions of people, motion, talking and listening, place, the "beyond," personification, the military, and love.

With the exceptions of Richard Miller in Wilderness and Con Melody in Poet, whose use of parody is related more to the absurdity of their behavior than to any deliberate attempts at ridicule, O'Neill's parody often reveals a biting cynicism in the characters who resort to it. However, characters like David Roylston (Servitude), Stephen Murray (Straw), Lily Jayson (First Man), Larry Slade (Iceman), and Jamie Tyrone (Journey) all share the same hard-nosed philosophy which they express in sarcastic parody of the conventional or the familiar.

Comic interjections, profane oaths, and threats appear in many of the plays; in almost all instances they disclose an effusive character whose language is marked by distinct regional characteristics. Chris Christopherson's "by yiminy crickens . . . !" (Christie, I, 24), Jack Crosby's "by gum!" (Diff'rent, I, 202), Cybel's "shoot! I'm all set!" (Brown, I, iii, 330), and Rocky's "nix! Piano!" (Iceman, I, 62), are expressions whose humor serves the additional purpose of defining their geographical backgrounds.

O'Neill's Blacks share the characteristics of the stereotypic nineteenth-century stage "darkie," whose absurdity was often expressed in colloquial exclamations that personified inanimate objects. Ceely Ann's matches are "pesky little sticks [that] done hide umse'fs" (Dreamy Kid, 16), Brutus Jones exhorts his feet to do their duty (Jones, I, 13), and Joe Mott tells how he makes dice "behave" (Iceman, I, 45).

Characters like Ephraim Cabot (Desire), the Chantyman (Mourning), Joe Silva (Mourning), and Hickey (Iceman), all burst into comic song or deliver lyric compositions of their own, to break out of a constricting environment, or to express strong feelings.

Dialect is used often, both as an important facet of characterization and for comic effect. O'Neill attempts to reproduce the fast-talking, big-city "lingo" of the American correspondents in Movie Man; the tough street talk of the urchins in Chillun, the prostitutes in Brown, Wilderness, and Iceman, and Erie Smith in Hughie; the Irish brogue of the maids in Wilderness and Journey, the hangers-on in Poet, and the Hogans in Misbegotten; the Balkan, Italian, and Boer inflections of Hugo, Rocky, and Wetjoen in Iceman; the sea dialects of Captain Crosby in Diff'rent and the characters in Ape; the stage dialect of Brutus Jones in Jones; the Swedish inflections of Chris and Anna in Christie; and the New England colloquialism of the townspeople in Mourning.

O'Neill uses soliloquy when he wants his characters to express an exuberant self-assurance. But Ada Fife's "I got to hand it to you, baby, you're there!" addressed to her mirror image (Dynamo, I, 11, 29) is an example of the same self-deception evident in Con Melody's grandiloquent remark to his mirror image that he still bears "the unmistakable stamp of an officer and a gentleman" (Poet, I, 161). Both Ada and Melody will shortly lose both the appearance and the reality of their excessive pride.

## B. STYLISTIC DEVICES

O'Neill uses verbal devices of style to a lesser degree than the more natural humor of colloquial language. Nevertheless, he manages to create some startling devices that produce moments of comic intensity. The Donkeyman categorizes women with a sharp staccato: "white, brown, yellor 'n' black" (Caribbees, 26). Simeon Cabot's gesture of taking the gate off its hinge, thereby abolishing "shet gates, an' open gates, an' all gates" is an act of defiance toward his father. When the old man appears, Simeon loses his nerve and becomes an absurd clown (Desire, I, iv, 155). Brutus Jones can "outguess, outrun, outfight, an' outplay" his enemies (Jones, I, 14). Dion Anthony's answer to Margaret's confession of love is a grammatical declension: "I love, thou lovest, he loves, she loves!" (Brown, Prologue, 316). The character of Erie Smith is vividly demonstrated in his alliterative "frails from the Follies, or the Scandals, or the Frolics, that'd knock your eye out!" (Hughie, 271). When Harry Hope tells the I.W.W. men "I'll make your Movement move!" (Iceman, I, 54) no one has the slightest doubt that Harry means business this time. There is no better comic evidence of Marco Polo's devotion to Mammon than the absurd cadences and rhymes of his love poem to Donata (Marco, I, ii, 224). The two "friendly oxen," Peter and Simeon Cabot intone a litany to a rasher of bacon as they lumber home after a day of hard work on the farm (Desire, I, i, 139). But perhaps the most vivid of O'Neill's comic devices is Uncle Sid's onomatopoeic "girls whose hair sizzchels" (Wilderness, II, 53).

### C. COMIC FORMATIONS

O'Neill uses the coining of new words and the application of new usages and meanings to words and names for some pointed comic effects in Captain Crosby's definition of a saint as a "he-virgin, sky-pilot" (Diff'rent, I, 217), and Charlie Marsden's paean to spring as the "trees . . . treeing with one another" (Interlude, III, 533). When, for instance, well-meaning Bull Herron is called "Jumbo" (Abortion, 148), ambitious Bella "Mrs. Old Black Joe" (Caribbees, 12), the cynical Larry Slade "de old Foolosopher" (Iceman, I, 10), the miserly James Tyrone "old Gaspard" (Journey, IV, 155), and the whiskey-voiced Phil Hogan "the Donegal lark" (Misbegotten, II, 364), in every instance the coined name acts as a precise label to define, through comic ridicule, the dramatic action that engages the character.

### D. WORD-PLAY AND WIT

O'Neill shows some interest in the varieties of word-play and the pleasure of wit in producing comic effect. Cybel's observation that "when you got to love to live it's hard to love living" (Brown, I, 111, 331), and Charlie Marsden's reference to the stork as "the only conceivable explanation" of Gordon Evans' parenthood (Interlude, IV, 557), offer two independent views of the act of sex. Sex is hard work to Cybel and a subject of passing interest to Marsden. Uncle Sid has his own idea of the meaning of the word "life," when applied to the population and environs of Waterbury, Connecticut (Wilderness, I, 9), for this old "drummer,"

Waterbury is a dead town. In blissful ignorance of her natural linguistic talents, the second girl, Cathleen, disparages teetotalers because "they've no high spirits" (Journey, III, 101). Phil Hogan upbraids his daughter for "moon[ing] at the sunrise" (Misbegotten, IV, 408). Cathleen equates drinking with liveliness; she considers nondrinkers to be bores. Hogan is equally uneasy with introspective people.

Combinations of comic word-play appear in such usages as "inainties" for "amenities" (Ape, II, 51), "sired . . . and damned" (Ape, II, 52), "unholy . . . bedlock" (Welded, II, II, 287), "souls of soldiers" (Marco, II, I, 260), "bigamy" for sodomy (Wilderness, I, 18), and "gabblers" for "Gabler" (Wilderness, IV, I, 101).

Perversity as a comic quality is given effective expression in such statements as Sara Melody's avowed difficulty in shedding her modesty (Poet, IV, 232), Ed Mosher's belief that sobriety "cuts men off in their prime" (Iceman, I, 88), and Phil Hogan's complaint about his wife's family being "too busy preaching temperance to have time for a drink" (Misbegotten, I, 310).

In a few instances O'Neill uses mispronunciation and the ungrammatical to reveal innocent pretension in Richard Miller (Wilderness, I, 18), deliberate mispronunciation for comic effect by Uncle Sid (Wilderness, II, 52), and a superb ungrammatical absurdity by Anna Christie who states that she is a governess, whose work is to care for children and "learn them things" (Christie, II, 56).

Characters in many of the plays attempt wit or engage in witty exchange. Typical examples are the Older Man's concession that women are angels for short periods of time only (Wife, 215), Marco's smug observations that Jack's dullness is attributable to "all play and no work" (Marco, II, 1, 263) and that looking before leaping is certain to cause inaction (Marco, II, 11, 271), Con Melody's claim that Irish freedom means Ireland being freed from the Irish (Poet, I, 160), and Hugo's revolutionary zeal being dampened by the fact that the champagne has not been iced properly (Iceman, II, 143).

In a few instances O'Neill's characters engage in arguments of a semantic nature that make for some mordant comic effects. Nat Miller deflates his son's grandiloquent mood when he expresses a preference for being wounded to "the quick" over being wounded to "the heart" (Wilderness, IV, 1, 102). Rocky and his girls engage in extended discourse on the semantic differences between pimps and bartenders, and whores and tarts (Iceman, I, 12, 66, 67; II, 100; IV, 256). And Josie Hogan corrects her father's ridiculous use of mixed metaphor for the singular purpose of changing the mood to comedy (Misbegotten, II, 348).

#### E. JESTS AND COMIC STORIES

The derision of one character by another occurs in many of the plays (twenty-nine contain such derisive jests and taunts). Most of these jests have strong sarcastic elements; poking ridicule at the physical characteristics or ungainly behavior of some temporary scapegoat

is the usual form taken. Typical of this kind of jibe is the Nobleman's comment that Juan Ponce de Leon "must be flooded" from all the water he had drunk in searching for the fountain of youth (Fountain, viii, 173).

Many a character "squares off" with another in extended scenes of mutually-traded taunts. They alternate between being the initiator and the butt of the jests. Such jesting teams include Uncle Sid and Nat Miller in Wilderness, Rocky, Chuck, and the prostitutes Margie, Pearl and Cora in Iceman, Jamie and James Tyrone in Journey, and Josie and Phil Hogan in Misbegotten.

Many of the comic stories O'Neill's characters tell contain the same element of the ridicule of some innocent victim, or recount the attempts of one character to take advantage of another in some underhanded way.

#### F. LINGUISTIC REVERSALS

Throughout his work O'Neill depends to a large extent on verbal surprises for comic effect. Emma Crosby's explanation to Caleb Williams that her hair may have been grey sometime ago but that it has been coming in black lately (Diff'rent, II, 240) illustrates O'Neill's use of the surprise turn, as does Margaret Anthony's sarcastic "good morning . . . at four in the afternoon!" (Brown, I, 1, 321). Ned Darrell's caustic jibe at Charlie Marsden as someone who spends a lifetime trying not to discover which sex he belongs to (Interlude, II, 516) is O'Neill at his derisive best. O'Neill uses the technique of verbal surprise with notable success in

the comic distortions of Marco Polo as he travels around the world, unable to resist expressing his absurd opinions on the subjects of taxes, morality, war, the value of life, the theatre, the efficiency of labor, the symptoms of disease, marriage, and the virtues of womanhood. And in the series of unsuccessful antics Richard Miller engages in, O'Neill often uses the surprise turn to burst the bubble and reveal the innocent child beneath the surface. Not only Richard, but most of the members of the Miller household pepper their dialogue with sharp verbal surprises that maintain the level of comic exchange that runs through the play. The same can be said of many of the characters in Harry Hope's bar during the first act of Iceman; the surprise punch line is used by Larry Slade, Willie Oban, Margie, Cora, McGloin and Hugo. The male members of the Tyrone family in Journey and the Hogans in Misbegotten resort to the shock of the unexpected remark as an effective instrument of comic derision. James Tyrone's conviction that both Shakespeare and the Duke of Wellington were Irish Catholics lends an air of comic absurdity to the final act of Journey that emphasizes the vigorous life-force in the Tyrone family. The joy of Irish chauvinism is still with them. It is an element that contrasts sharply with their despair.

## CHAPTER V

### COMIC CHARACTERS

The influence of the stock types of Roman comedy on later generations of comedy writers has been pervasive. Although there may be a limited number of character types in Roman comedy, there are, as Duckworth observes, "numerous variations within each type."<sup>1</sup> All life-like dramatic characters act with consistency (inconsistency itself may be a consistent character pattern), which is related to the stock type that defines their dramatic function. The character is not only the stock type, but the stock type informs and structures his dramatic life. In discussing O'Neill's comic characters, I do not suggest that their life-like qualities be reduced to stock types, but rather that the skeletal structures that link them to earlier stock types help reveal the ways in which O'Neill used comic character types for comic effect.

Duckworth places the comic characters of both Plautus and Terence into three clearly defined groups: (A) the male members of the household, (B) the female members, and (C) the professional types.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Duckworth, The Nature of Roman Drama, p. 236.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 237.

O'Neill's comic characters can be placed into the same groups. Male members of the household include the fathers, the older lovers, the sons and youthful lovers, and the male servants. O'Neill's comic women include the mothers, the daughters, the female servants, and the prostitutes. The third comic group comprises the four major categories of parasites, sailors, bartenders, and "city slickers," as well as such professional types as sea captains, salesmen, and military men.

O'Neill also makes use of two additional types of comic characters not found in Roman comedy, children and comic choruses. I shall consider these children, who are all under sixteen, as linked to the household types, and closely related to the female members. Duckworth notes the presence of "an inorganic chorus which sang and perhaps danced during pauses in the action" in the extant fragments of Menander's plays. By this time, the chorus had become a mere musical interlude and was not involved in the action of the play.<sup>3</sup> Plautus and Terence, when they adapted the Greek comedies, were conscious of the divisions made by these choral interludes, but they made no attempt to preserve them. They dispensed with the chorus and filled the resultant gaps with monologues or monodies.<sup>4</sup> O'Neill's comic choruses in Mourning comment on the action of the play and are also participants in that action. The chorus in Ape is cast in an active, antagonistic role toward Yank Smith.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

What follows is a discussion of O'Neill's comic characters as types. Comparisons among type characters will indicate the extent to which O'Neill both retained intrinsic type qualities and departed from them.

#### A. THE MALE MEMBERS OF THE HOUSEHOLD

##### (1) The Older Men as Fathers

The senex of Roman comedy is an old man who may be a parent, lover, or a helpful friend. Duckworth notes that as the parent the senex may be an indulgent father or one who is unsympathetic, harsh, and severe toward his offspring. As lover, he tends to consider his role as husband and father secondary to his pursuit of the young girl he favors. As helpful friend, he assists in the intrigue, but he also serves as a foil to help delineate other characters, and he often appears awkward and ridiculous because of his willingness to help others.<sup>5</sup> O'Neill's senes are fathers who actively involve themselves in the amorous pursuits of their children. O'Neill's older lovers are mature men actively involved in their own amorous pursuits. All but one of them are unmarried; therefore, they do not fill the role of senex as aged lover and devious husband or father. Their bachelorhood conforms to acceptable American mores. The older lovers will appear in this category with their younger counterparts, the youthful lovers, or adulescentes.

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 242-249.

The Roman comedy senex, as father, often criticizes his wife, but he is unfaithful to her. However, he is faithful to his friends. Toward his children he may be indulgent or severe, or somewhere between both extremes. O'Neill's senes, as fathers, fall into the category of angry men who attempt unsuccessfully to impede the progress of their children's love affairs: Chris Christopherson (Christie), Nat Miller (Wilderness), and David McComber (Wilderness). But although other fathers in other plays display some of the comic qualities of the senex, they depart in meaningful ways from classical prototype. Some, after having initially entered the play in comic fashion even depart from that fashion. In this latter group, such fathers as Bill Carmody (Straw), Ramsay Fife (Dynamo), and Con Melody (Poet) abandon their early involvement in their daughters' welfare; Carmody and Fife actually abandon their daughters, while Melody approves of his daughter's fait accompli with her lover in line with the more general atavistic change in himself.

After offering a few salty comments on his daughter's behavior toward her betrothed, Captain John Crosby (Diff'rent), a comic father, retires from the field for the rest of the play. Like Crosby, Phil Hogan (Misbegotten) plays the comic father type: both men attempt to influence their daughters to marry and are thwarted by the ladies, who during the course of the play change their minds.

After opposing the romance between his child and her object of affection, Chris Christopherson concedes his daughter to her persistent suitor, Mat Burke, and the two generations literally unite when the old man and his son-in-law go to sea together to work for Anna's future. Heraldizing the coming celebration that will lead to the marriage, Chris makes the initial gesture of reconciliation: "Ve have drink on this, py golly!" (Christie, IV, 12).

Bill Carmody complains to his ailing daughter Eileen: "A cold kiss! Is your heart a stone? . . . And your own father going back to a lone house with a stranger in it!" (Straw, I, 11, 62). Eileen tells him to drop the blarney; she knows the "stranger" is his new woman, and that his protest is merely his way of convincing himself he is still a devoted father.

Chris Christopherson marries his daughter off, Bill Carmody abandons his, but Captain John Crosby disregards his daughter after he makes a few objective comments about her distress. He defends male sexual proclivity in answer to his daughter's concern over Caleb Williams' affair with a native woman (Diff'rent, I, 217). His wife recognizes Crosby's inability to provide any effective advice, and Crosby recognizes his wife's authority:

MRS. CROSBY: . . . You come with me . . .

CROSBY: . . . Aye-aye, skipper! You're boss aboard here.  
[Diff'rent, I, 218].

Ramsay Fife's influence on his daughter's future is far more pernicious (Dynamo). It is his decision to play a practical joke on his daughter's beau and the fact that he convinces his daughter to go along with the initial deception that result in the tragic deaths of the two young lovers. In this instance, a comic father obstructs the marriage with a comic deception that unexpectedly turns the tide in his favor. But the play shifts, from that moment, to the issue of revenge, and the early comic action leads to a disastrous conclusion.

Nat Miller (Wilderness) is the most typical of O'Neill's comic fathers. He manages to combine a genuine concern about his son's torrid love letters to his sweetheart ("I wonder if he is hanging around her to see what he can get?" (Wilderness, I, 28) with a wily recognition of the perils of paternal pressure ("Putting a curb bit on would make him worse. Then he'd have a harsh tyrant to defy. He'd love that, darn him!" (Wilderness, I, 27). He steers the middle, ultimately successful course, Richard recognizes that he is quite incapable of drowning his sorrows in drink since it makes him sick, and his father discovers it is unnecessary to lecture his son on the distinction between lust and love because Richard is protected and informed by his innocence. Miller makes an attempt to introduce his son to the benefits of contraception, but he stumbles over his words (Wilderness, IV, 111, 128) and decides to let love take its course. Given the good-hearted sentimentality of all members of the Miller clan, it seems certain that young love will prevail and the older generation will cooperate.

O'Neill is not concerned with what happens to David McComber, the father of Richard's sweetheart. But he manages to include one scene of parental intransigence that borders on the obsessive (Wilderness, I, 22-26). Bent on defending the honor of his daughter against what he presumes to be the direst of threats by Richard, McComber indignantly complains to Miller of his son's behavior. He sees Richard as a devilish seducer. In an absurd display of fierce determination, he announces he is confining Muriel to the house for a month. Miller banishes him from the scene by a threat of business reprisal, but his opposition to the young lovers is unabated. The character never appears again; we are left in doubt as to McComber's reaction to the rapprochement between the young people, but one suspects he would be unconvinced to the bitter end.

Con Melody gives up more easily. In a ridiculous display of pride he condescends to accept the Boston Harford family as suitable for his daughter to marry into (Poet, I, 165). Though it is clear to all that he is destitute he announces he is ready to discuss the settlement he will make for her (Poet, I, 166). While Sarah laughs at his absurdity, he persists in his decision until he is beaten by the Boston police. With the loss of his pride, his comic qualities disappear. He recognizes Sarah's tactical victory in having seduced Simon Harford to secure the marriage, but he does so with bitter irony, suggesting that he really applauds his daughter's peasant cunning (Poet, IV, 250, 251).

The marriage will be consummated, but by regaining his dignity in the face of his daughter's craftiness, Con Melody will lose all those comic aspects of the stock father type.

Phil Hogan (Misbegotten) shatters the stereotype by indulging in comic action designed to get his daughter to seduce the man she wants to marry. He is defeated in his designs, but he retains his farm, routs the Standard Oil millionaire enemy, and wins his daughter for himself (Misbegotten, IV, 409). Josie thus joins her father's generation.

## (2) Lovers

### a. Sons and Youthful Lovers

The Roman adulescens is a young man whose love for his sweetheart motivates the action of the play. In Roman comedy he is either unable to win her or having won her is fearful he will lose her. Indicative of the importance of this type to Roman comedy is the fact that Terence uses two young lovers in all but one of his plays, the Hecyra. While few characters in O'Neill's plays conform to the type, a number of sons and youthful lovers bear many of the characteristics of adulescentes, though often with ironic variations on the theme.

Richard Miller (Wilderness) comes closest to the type in that he is thwarted by his sweetheart's father in his inspired love pursuit. But it must be pointed out that the Roman adulescens is a youthful lover who is quite knowledgeable in the ways of love, and who has no illusions about the course of true love; he is fully aware

of the disadvantages of innocence; his love is satisfied by consummation. The Roman adulescens must also rely on his slave to achieve his goal; O'Neill's young lovers are more self-reliant and guileful. But they reflect the puritanism of early twentieth-century America. An inexperienced adolescent, Richard Miller would not dare entertain the thought of taking Muriel to bed before he married her. Because she is his romantic ideal, all he really wants, for the present, is to have her respond to his poetic flights. But in his decision to punish Muriel by becoming corrupt, Richard introduces variation on the theme that contributes strongly to the comic effect--the frantic attempt of an innocent youth to acquire instant worldly cynicism. Richard's actions result from an initial misunderstanding about Muriel's intentions until a letter from her assures him of her love. From then on, he is invincible.

The young Marco Polo (Marco) is a variation of the stock youthful lover. Like Richard Miller he knows exactly whom he wants, the girl back home. Both are enticed by prostitutes (though only Marco succumbs) but neither ever seriously doubts his loyalty and devotion to his sweetheart. Marco's inability to recognize the love offered him by the Princess Kukachin may very well be ironic, in that a liaison with her offers amorous as well as commercial advantages, but as the young bourgeois he cannot take seriously anyone but his beloved Donata. There is no opposition to Marco's love, other than his own insatiable ambition to become a millionaire, a desire with which doting Roman

senes would be expected to agree,<sup>6</sup> as indeed Marco's and Donata's fathers do.

The youthful lover as college boy is exemplified by two rather passive types: "Bull" Herron (Abortion), and Arthur Miller (Wilderness). O'Neill does not think highly of colleges or college boys (Wilderness, IV, iii, 129; Iceman, I, 37, 38), for he presents both as innocuous, well-meaning, insensitive and slow-witted. No parents will object to their marriages because they are both models of dull, conventional responsibility. Whatever comic qualities they possess lie in their plodding self-assurance that contrasts sharply with the anxieties suffered by their younger contemporaries, Jack Townsend and Richard Miller.

Benny Rogers (Diff'rent) is another variation of the youthful lover type. He considers the possibility of a liaison with his spinster aunt Emma only because it promises to provide him with a comfortable way of life. Completely cynical about women, he regards them as objects of his lust, probable means of support, or both. Though his mother and his uncle vehemently oppose his marriage to Emma, he feels

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<sup>6</sup>Duckworth, The Nature of Roman Comedy, pp. 244-245. Duckworth notes that, as a rule, both the severe and lenient Roman fathers are interested in their son's welfare. Plautus' senes fundamentally are not bad-tempered; they rage only when they discover they have been tricked. As a parent, the senex of Roman comedy is often easy-going and tolerant.

O'Neill's parents in Marco are tolerant of their children's desires, deeply interested in their welfare, and greatly pleased with the financial arrangements reached through Marco's industriousness.

secure in Emma's affections. He boasts to his mother: "You'll get fat runnin' me down to her" (Diff'rent, II, 233). Teasing Emma with suggestive references to the love-making abilities of French women, he arouses her, and she ridiculously offers herself to him. Only the promise of immediate money dissuades him, and he shatters Emma's hopes with the announcement that he was never really interested in marriage because "there's too many others" (Diff'rent, II, 250). He decides that taking the money instead of Emma would "be the real stunt aw right, aw right. Oui, oui!" (Diff'rent, II, 249).

b. Mature Lovers

O'Neill introduces a succession of lovers older than the teen-age adulescens who either pursue or are pursued by women. The Older Man (Wife) gives his wife to his friend after he notes that women are "all angels--at first. The only trouble is their angelic attributes lack staying qualities" (Wife, 215). David Royston (Servitude) takes his wife back and returns his prospective mistress to her husband. Vowing never again to take fan letters seriously, he pays tribute to his loyal spouse: "whatever I am she has made me" (Servitude, III, 291). Stephen Murray (Straw) sacrifices himself on the altar of marriage when he heroically gives himself to the woman he does not love so that he may care for her, after he had jauntily struck out on his own and had failed to achieve success. Murray is another example of an O'Neill character who exhibits many comic traits in early scenes,

but who ultimately acquires a solemnity after having undergone a scene of suffering, whether on or off stage.<sup>7</sup>

Sam Evans (Interlude) starts as a fool and remains a fool-- though a well-meaning one--until he succumbs to a stroke while watching a boat race. He is mercilessly cuckolded by his wife, he goes to his grave ignorant of the fact that he is not the father of his son, and of all the men his wife had been intimate with (she had been generous with her favors during years of work with hospitalized invalids) he has the distinction of being regarded by her as the one male least likely to arouse her passions. Yet he muddles through life, cheerfully engaged in the American sport of acquiring money, bounces the family doctor's boy on his knee, and declares, like the proverbial proud father, that "this kid of mine is a whopper for his age" (Interlude, VII, 633). The man he believes to be his friend, but who secretly nurses a lifelong passion for his wife, Charlie Marsden, fares considerably better than the rest of the field for Nina's affections, such as they are. Marsden, whom Nina's lover, Ned Darrell, refers to as "one of those poor devils who spend their lives trying not to discover which sex they belong to!" (Interlude, II, 516), gets the lady in the end, after her husband has died

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<sup>7</sup>Other characters who develop early as comic types, but who lose their comic qualities as a result of a scene of suffering are Emma Crosby (Diff'rent), who joins her lover in suicide; Hickey (Iceman), who suffers from the tragic unravelling of the murder of his wife; Con Melody (Poet), whose heroic illusions are destroyed on a street in Boston; and James Tyrone and Josie and Phil Hogan (Misbegotten), whose comic pursuit of love is defeated by the recognition of Tyrone's irreversible despair.

and her lover has lost his standing. He seems genuinely pleased with the turn of events, although he had referred earlier, in a more philosophic mood, to the effectiveness of flowers to soothe the grief of funerals and weddings (Interlude, IX, 670).

The last mature lover is another of the variety who reverses the field of his character. James Tyrone (Misbegotten) greets the Hogans with blustering good humor. He calls Hogan "the Duke of Donegal" and Josie "my Virgin Queen of Ireland" (Misbegotten, I, 324, 325), and he carries on a continuing comic patter of witty small talk, laced with double meanings, on the subjects of drinking, pigs, money, and sex. But it becomes clear by the end of Act III that Tyrone's jokes are the way he sustains his life, and that he is incapable of feeling love for anyone because he hates himself. Josie comments on "the silly mug of the moon grinning down, enjoying the joke" of her sitting there holding a dead man's head to her breast (Misbegotten, III, 395).

### (3) Male Servants

In Roman comedy the seruus is a clever trickster and faithful servant who is almost always talkative, boastful, self-glorifying, impudent, and insolent, inquisitive, indiscreet, gossipy, fond of moralizing. He is lazy and indifferent, appreciates good food and drink, will lie, cheat, and steal when necessary, and shows little respect toward his elders and betters.<sup>8</sup> Two of O'Neill's three comic

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<sup>8</sup>Duckworth, The Nature of Roman Comedy, p. 249.

male servants--Benton, the manservant (Servitude), and Seth Beckwith, the gregarious gardener (Mourning)--share the qualities found in the Roman servus: talkativeness, inquisitiveness, love of gossip, a tendency toward moralizing, and a free-and-easy attitude toward superiors. However, they are not insolent, they do not lie, cheat, or steal, and they are indifferent about food (although Beckwith is quite fond of his whiskey). Besides these similarities to and differences from the Roman type, both are faithful servants who attempt clever deceptions to advance their master's and mistress's interests. The third comic servant, Weson, the gardener (Servitude), is similar to the type only in his avid inquisitiveness, his love of gossip, and his tendency to moralize.

Benton's master, David Roylston, admits, "I have never been able to outgrow him. He won't let me" (Servitude, III, 278). And Benton proves to be a formidable force in the action of the play. He moralizes with Weson the gardener and about his master's amorous adventures (Servitude, II, 255), and he gossips with Mrs. Frazer, whom he believes to be the latest entry in those adventures (Servitude, II, 257). He reproaches his master for not having closed the window the night before (Servitude, I, 228). And with characteristic cheek, he motivates the play by getting Mrs. Frazer to hide from Roylston's wife, thereby admitting a guilt that belies her previous actions. By the end of the play, Benton has managed to admit himself into the climactic scene in which Mrs. Frazer's husband attempts to kill Roylston. He has to be told "severely": "You may go, Benton" (Servitude, III, 296),

but Benton looks at Roylston "irresolutely," and exits with great reluctance. Finally, his master pays fitting tribute to Benton's conspicuous involvement in the affairs of the Roylston family by suggesting that he [Roylston] has shown so little interest in his children, they might as well have been Benton's (Servitude, III, 294).

Weson, the gardener (Servitude), is old, withered, near-sighted and simple. The only characteristic he retains of the faithful servant type is an incurable inquisitiveness that equals that of his fellow mental, Benton. Weson plays "straight man" and provides the questions to Benton's eager answers about the amorous activities of the master. He has a great deal of admiration for Roylston's apparently underhanded behavior (Servitude, II, 255), and he genuinely enjoys the idea of his master making "hay while the sun shines," while Mrs. Roylston is in "Noo York" (Servitude, II, 254).

However, O'Neill's most thoroughly delineated comic servant has the distinction of not appearing in a comedy. Seth Beckwith (Mourning) provides comic contrasts and parallels to the tragic action of the play. He audaciously explains his excessive drinking to his mistress as "patriotic duty" indulged in to celebrate important events (Mourning, "Homecoming," III, 728). He considers himself hale and indestructible at the age of seventy-five (Mourning, "Homecoming," I, 689). He resents the other servants and advises they be treated harshly (Mourning, "Homecoming," I, 692). He himself is treated very gingerly

by Lavinia Mannon as a kind of confidant whose support is necessary for her nefarious activities. But his most important action centers upon the comic parallel plot in which he lures Abner Small into the haunted Mannon house (Mourning, "Haunted," I,1,815); the chorus of townspeople enact a comic play-within-a-play that anticipates the time soon to come when the cook will be told to "throw out all the flowers," and Lavinia and Seth will enter the coffin of the house, shutting the door and nailing the shutters, to live with the Mannon dead.

#### B. THE FEMALE ROLES

Duckworth says that of the approximately seventy-five women who have speaking parts in the plays of Plautus and Terence, almost all belong to four distinct groups in the following order of descending numerical frequency: (1) maid, attendant, or nurse (ancilla, anus, nutrix), (2) courtesan (meretrix), (3) wife (matrona), and (4) young girl (uirgo, puella). Of these groups, the least important in the dramatic action are the first and the fourth. Maids have inorganic roles, and the young girls seldom appear on the stage.<sup>9</sup> Duckworth comments further that Plautus portrayed many characters of his Greek originals as more grotesque and laughable, while Terence moved in the opposite direction and made them more refined than in the originals.<sup>10</sup> O'Neill's comic females belong to the same four groups of

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 260.

maids, prostitutes, wives, and young girls. Only the maids and prostitutes are "grotesque and laughable," while the wives and young girls tend to be more refined, which reflects O'Neill's provincial distinctions between family women and women who have left the genteel influence of the home. Many of his female characters are humorous early in their roles, then rapidly become ironic and more serious, and eventually lose all of their former comic qualities. Therefore, I will list and discuss them as comic characters only insofar as they exhibit their comic type characteristics during the early scenes; I will note those instances in which the character departs from previously established stereotype and ceases to be comic.

#### (1) Wives

In Roman comedy, married life among older people is consistently portrayed as unpleasant and disagreeable--a state to be endured rather than enjoyed. Wives complain about the unjust criticism, indifference, infidelity, even the theft of their clothing, at the hands of their husbands. They themselves are often stubborn, quarrelsome, vain, extravagant, and ungrateful. But with all their faults, they are innocent of one vice, infidelity. Nevertheless, the married state in Roman comedy is unpleasant, but primarily because marriage itself is a conventional theme for jesting. The joys and sorrows of youthful love reflect adolescent emotion; older husbands and wives, who suggest "the wear and tear" of time on each other's patience,

become fit subjects to arouse laughter.<sup>11</sup> The wives of Roman comedy may be shrewish, suspicious, and extravagant, but they do have faithless husbands. However, there are human and pathetic wives as well. Alcumena (Amphitryon) is chaste, noble, and patriotic. Some women are eager to locate long-lost daughters; others (Terence's) are concerned about the happiness of their children.<sup>12</sup> O'Neill's two comic mothers belong to this third group. Although they do not always approve of their offspring's choices, they are singularly devoted to their children's welfare and happiness. Of the two, only Essie Miller (Wilderness) remains comic throughout the play. May Fife (Dynamo) starts as a comic character, but then goes mad.

Early in the play, Mrs. Fife displays a comic absentmindedness unrelated to a characteristic of any Roman prototype but suited to the conventional busybody whom O'Neill pictures as the rural wife. She seems to be concerned about nothing more serious than her husband's underwear (Dynamo, I, ii, 26); she reminisces about his intentions when he courted her (Dynamo, I, ii, 28), thinks about skunk coats (Dynamo, I, ii, 48), and worries about the holes in the window screens (Dynamo, II, i, 88). Later in the play, she is profoundly influenced by Reuben Light, who evokes in her a mysterious strength. Her husband, who is the jellyfish, calls her a jellyfish (Dynamo, III, i, 138), and when "he turns from her in a tantrum," a moment later, she "looks after him

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 283-284.    <sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 255-258.

with a placid smile," and goes on with her mission of supporting Reuben's vision; she becomes transfixed before the "Dynamo-Mother," "her big body relaxed as if she had given herself up completely to the spell of its hypnotic, metallic purr" (Dynamo, III, iii, 154).

Essie Miller (Wilderness) is the comic mother from first to last. Her errant son is her sole concern. She worries about "that awful Oscar Wilde" whose poetry has influenced him (Wilderness, I, 18). In response to his dramatic quotation from Candida--"Out, then, into the night with me!--and his departure from the house, she says "it isn't even dark yet!" (Wilderness, II, 40). She calls him "intoxicated!" and "wicked!" (Wilderness, III, ii, 90). She "knows" the "Hedda" he has been talking about is "one of those bad women" (Wilderness, III, ii, 90). She orders her husband to punish Richard for his transgressions, but she cautions him to "be careful how you go about it" (Wilderness, IV, i, 95). She admits she knows nothing about the General Gabler the boy keeps talking about, but she calls him a "silly gabbler" for doing so (Wilderness, IV, i, 101). After Richard seems to have solved his problems, and has been re-admitted into the family fold, Mrs. Miller declares he has an exceptional mind because of all the "deep plays and books and poetry" he reads (Wilderness, IV, iii, 122). And finally, fully recovered from the shock of Richard's barroom escapade, she vows that whatever Richard does, he will be great (Wilderness, IV, iii, 122).

(2) Young Girls

When the heroines of Roman comedy are girls of respectable parentage, they remain offstage; both the social conventions of the time and the rigidity of the stage setting, with its lack of interior scenes, make it difficult for young girls of good family to take part in the action. The role of the uirgo in Plautus is seldom an active one; in Terence it is almost nonexistent.<sup>13</sup> The few young girls who do appear are usually lost children who are the property of slave dealers. One of the least important among the female roles in Roman comedy, the uirgo is nevertheless eager to marry her young lover and shares his enthusiasm for the liaison. Many of O'Neill's young girls are also primarily concerned with marrying or holding their men. They are pivotal characters who strongly influence and are influenced by the action, and they are never "grotesque and laughable," as are the prostitutes and maids. What is even more significant to the field of this study is that they seldom retain throughout the play those comic qualities they display initially. The only young girl who closely fits the category and remains comic in all her scenes is Muriel McComber (Wilderness).

Five of the nine daughters who appear in O'Neill's plays are lovers in pursuit, whose progress is influenced (either aided or impeded) by their fathers. Emma Crosby (Diff'rent), Ada Fife (Dynamo),

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 253-254.

Muriel McComber (Wilderness), Sara Melody (Poet), and Josie Hogan (Misbegotten) are all eagerly engaged in the love chase, but only Sara Melody and Muriel McComber succeed in strengthening their holds on their lovers by the play's end. Emma Crosby and Ada Fife lose their lovers and their lives. Emma's ridiculous pursuit of Benny Rogers and Ada's teasing pursuit of Reuben Light lead to reversals that end in catastrophe. Josie Hogan gives up the chase when she learns her lover is wracked with despair. She sorrowfully sees him off, and decides to settle down with her father.

Of the other daughters, Lily Jayson (First Man) acts as a cynical commentator on the marriages of others. She ridicules marriage and proudly boasts she can do without it (First Man, 157). Lucy Townsend (Abortion) and Sara Melody (Mansions) are sarcastic about their own marriages, and hurl comic ridicule at their men. Only Mildred Miller (Wilderness) is entirely oblivious to problems of love; she prefers to concentrate on such matters as the development of a handwriting with proper Spenserian flourishes, and thereby departs most significantly from the matrimonial concerns of the uirgo.

"I'm going to be just the most stunning bridesmaid" (Abortion, 147) is Lucy Townsend's considered appraisal of her impending marriage with "Bull" Herron, whom she manages to deride without mercy in the opening scene of the play. When he complains that "she is breaking me on the wheel," Lucy counters with a derisive "Ha ha ha!

Poor, delicate, fragile butterfly!" (Abortion, 143). Emma Crosby reminds her nephew that "them French girls ain't the only ones knows how to fix up," as she parades before him "coquettishly," unable to see the contempt in his eyes (Diff'rent, II, 232). "I got to hand it to you, baby, you're there!" says Ada Fife to her own mirror image (Dynamo, I, ii, 29), as she proceeds to prepare herself to snare her lover. Unfortunately, her father intercedes with a practical joke whose purpose is to prove the boy a fool. The joke backfires, the boy runs out, and Ada never again regains that early self-assurance. On the other hand, Mildred Miller is always self-assured. When Aunt Lily suggests there may be too many flourishes in her handwriting, she assures her aunt that that is "what I was practising hardest on" (Wilderness, III, ii, 78). She does offer one jejune comment on matters of the heart when she tells her brother "it must be nice to be in love like you are--all with one person" (Wilderness, IV, i, 103). However, it is Muriel McComber who comes closest to type in her consistent attempts to overcome her father's resistance and meet with her young lover. Even so, she bites his hand by way of complaining about the attentions he paid to a prostitute. Richard is quick to beg forgiveness and to explain that even having his hand bitten by the girl he loves was a wonderful experience (Wilderness, IV, ii, 118). "Anything to give him his way, as long as it's our way!" is Sara Melody's confidential remark to her mother-in-law regarding the proper method to control her husband (Mansions, II, iii, 128); and she

succeeds in doing so, just as Sara Melody (Poet) had successfully engineered the earlier seduction of her lover, and had sarcastically commented to her mother that "he's terribly ashamed of his sinful inclinations and the insult they are to my purity" (Poet, I, 154). But Josie Hogan regards her lover with kindly affection, reserving her sarcasm for her father, when she tells Hogan she will "skip down the path to meet him [Tyrone], and make him a courtesy, and hold on to his hand, and bat my eyes at him, and lead him in the house, and offer him a drink of the good whiskey you didn't keep for company" (Misbegotten, I, 315).

### (3) Children

A comic type without precedent in Roman comedy, children appear in O'Neill's plays often to provide incidental humor in the household. They are always treated condescendingly by adults. O'Neill's comic children are contentious, precocious, petulant, tough, and charming. Charlie Knapp tells his sister Lizzie that the Dutch kid whose father runs the saloon is cross-eyed and "can't see straight or he'd never look at you" (Warnings, 63). Engaging in general mayhem, Nora, Tom, and Mary Carmody tug, kick and shout at each other until their father sends them out so he can have a moment's peace (Straw, I, 1, 39-41). Ruth and Davie Royston, children of wealthy suburbanites, are more precocious and considerably less violent in their sibling sallies. Davie refuses to believe his sister has an upset stomach because

he announces that he ate more than she did. Ruth would like to be the princess in a play, but Davie prefers being the dragon rather than the prince because the dragon is the wicked one (Servitude, II, 258). The eight white and black children on the street corner in lower New York City are tough, insensitive, and fiercely competitive as they berate and taunt each other (Chillum, I, 1, 91-93). Petulant and peevish when he discovers his mother kissing Ned Darrell, Gordon Evans kisses her himself, thinking with triumph that he has effectively obliterated all traces of Darrell's kiss (Interlude, VII, 637). But it is Tommy and Mildred Miller who display the characteristics of active, fun-loving, good children whose humor evolves from the charm of their innocence. Tommy opens the play by "bursting with bottled-up energy" into the sitting room (Wilderness, I, 6). And Mildred spends most of her time perfecting her handwriting and demanding that the family pass judgment on her efforts (Wilderness, III, ii, 77, 78). At bedtime they reluctantly confront each other:

TOMMY (pecking at Mildred): Good night, you.

MILDRED: Good night, you.

[Wilderness, III, ii, 80].

#### (4) Female Servants

The maid of Roman comedy (ancilla) is usually as loosely attached to the action as the uirgo. However, Duckworth notes that she may aid in the development of the plot by revealing information or

assisting in the discovery of someone's identity. She is sometimes used to help delineate other characters through contrasts and parallels. In Plautus' plays, she may be used to provide incidental humor in the form of an interlude that pads the plot with badinage, witticism, and comic revelry.<sup>14</sup> In scenes that appear as interludes interrupting the action, O'Neill introduces two comic maids: the bumbling, inefficient, raucous, "shanty" Irish servants, Norah (Wilderness) and Cathleen (Journey). Norah parallels the lively enthusiasm of the Miller family, for whom she works. Cathleen sharply contrasts her healthy, ebullient nature with the despair of her mistress. However, neither of O'Neill's maids is interested in any matters of love that may occupy the young people in the family. In this sense, they depart from the Roman comedy type.

Norah calls Richard Miller "a thief" for eating the olives before dinner, flirts a bit with Uncle Sid, hits Nat Miller on the head with a serving dish, and manages to slam the door to the pantry every time she exits (Wilderness, II, 41-51). Laughing heartily at her own ungainliness, she generally acts as one of the more extroverted members of the family, accompanied by expressions of alarm and chagrin by her mistress, Mrs. Miller.

Slamming the screen door whenever she walks out on the front porch, Cathleen flirts with Edmund Tyrone, drinks as heartily as any of the men, calls the family to lunch with a voice like that of "a

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 254.

train announcer" (Journey, II, 1, 54), recounts a racy tale to her mistress of the advances the chauffeur has made toward her, defends drinking, criticizes Mrs. Tyrone for her absence from church, and generally acts as an aggressive, gregarious equal among the "haunted" Tyrones (Journey, III, 97-106).

(5) Prostitutes

The role of courtesan (meretrix) in Plautus' comedies is either a clever, experienced, but mercenary young woman who prefers money to love, or a younger girl who, devoted to her lover, has already become his mistress or is hoping to be purchased and freed. The meretrix in Terence is almost always decent and reputable, and sometimes unusually noble.<sup>15</sup> O'Neill's prostitutes are clever, experienced, industrious, and mercenary: Freda and Kate (Voyage), Bella (Caribbees), Belle (Wilderness), and Margie, Pearl, and Cora (Iceman).

Freda and Kate are two spirited women whose job it is to keep business moving. Kate drinks and dances with the patrons and generally puts them at their ease for the opportunity of "fleecing" them when they pass out. Freda, who only takes "a nip o' brandy now an' agen fur my 'ealth" (Voyage, 69), keeps up a running patter of chit-chat with Olson, before proceeding to the more serious business of stealing his money. Bella prefers not to dance, and tells Driscoll she is "wore

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 258-259.

out with you steppin' on my toes, you clumsy Mick" (Caribbees, 28), because she is far more concerned about the sale of her rum and girls aboard the Glencairn. "You can do a lot with me for five dollars--but you can't reform me," says Belle to Richard Miller (Wilderness, III, i, 70), after she tells him she gets ten dollars from everyone else. Later, she announces, "even the little flies do it!" (Wilderness, III, i, 70), and suggests that his sweetheart "does it" too. Richard becomes furious. But Belle will not be dissuaded from her business; she has him thrown out of the barroom and invites a salesman to join her. Rocky's two "pigs," Margie and Pearl, argue the differences in the meanings of the words "tarts" and "whores" with him, while Chuck has a running disagreement with Cora on the virtues of marriage and a house in New Jersey. But all three prostitutes manage to convey the impression that away from Harry Hope's bar they conduct their professional activities without any of the fears and anxieties exhibited by the men in the play. Under Hickey's destructive influence they fight among themselves, but they return to the fold with enthusiasm after Hickey is taken away. "Gangway for two good whores!" says Margie, displaying a unique sense of reality in that environment (Iceman, IV, 255). Pearl calls Rocky "a cute little Ginny" (Iceman, IV, 256), and Cora and Chuck strike up their business relationship once again to signal a return of all the women to the sound economic basis of their trade.

### C. PROFESSIONAL TYPES

The so-called "professional" roles in Roman comedy are the comic males who are usually unassociated with any household. The more significant roles in this category are the banker or money lender (trapezita, danista), who is chiefly concerned with debts, credits, payments and interest; the cook (cocus), who boasts of his culinary skill and is often noted for his thieving tendencies; the slave dealer (leno), who is greedy, faithless, and inhuman, but also stupid and often the victim of ridicule; the braggart warrior (miles), who usually boasts of his military exploits, but sometimes too of his ability to charm women (he always appears as a lover, and in most instances as a ridiculous rival of the hero); and the clever parasite, the supreme funny man of Roman comedy, the hungry joker who amuses his prospective host, runs errands, accepts insults and abuse, and resorts to flattery to gain his ends. The professional roles that appear less frequently are the merchant, the sycophant, the pilot, the fisherman, the doctor, and the lawyer.<sup>16</sup> In O'Neill's plays, the professionals represent the largest category of comic character types. Four of the most prominent are the parasites, the sailors, the "city slickers," and the bartenders. A fifth group includes a miscellaneous assortment of professionals.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 261-268.

(1) Parasites

The parasite of Roman comedy lives by his wits and is always in need of a free meal. He jokes a good deal and is always eager to please his host. O'Neill's parasites prefer whiskey to food, but in other respects they are true to type. They fare just as well as their Roman prototypes. Only one, Sid Davis (Wilderness), is actively engaged in providing aid to the youthful lover in his intrigues. Uncle Sid succeeds in restoring Richard Miller's sobriety for the showdown scenes with his sweetheart and parents. Sid's ministrations to his nephew succeed in strengthening his position with the Miller family; his drunkenness and joblessness strain that position at all times, so that he is eager to be of any assistance in family crises. By advising Nat Miller on the proper manner to treat Richard's interest in prostitution and drinking, both subjects with which he, Davis, is thoroughly familiar, he helps get Richard back into shape. "How beset my path was with gin--in the past, you understand!" (Wilderness, I, 20), is the way he ridicules his own alcoholism to blunt any edge of resentment the Miller family may feel toward him. His technique is to keep them laughing so that they may forget how much of a parasite he really is. Being able to drink with such reputable company as his brother-in-law on special occasions like July Fourth makes his own alcoholic condition somehow less grim (Wilderness, II, 50).

Harry Hope (Iceman) maintains a company of parasites as roomers in his "Raines-Law hotel" on the west side of New York. Of all the characters who congregate in the back room of Hope's bar only Joe Mott, Hugo Kalmar, the prostitute Cora, and Hickey do not room upstairs. But Mott and Kalmar manage to include themselves in the action as though they were roomers. Their goal is to drink as many shots of Harry's five-cent whiskey as circumstances and the generosity of others will permit. The working members of the back room group are the two bartenders, Rocky and Chuck, and the three prostitutes, Margie, Pearl and Cora. Of the others, Hickey and Don Parritt are both willing and able to pay for their drinks and any other services of the establishment. The parasites are Ed Mosher, Pat McGloin, Willie Oban, Piet Wetjoen, Cecil Lewis, James Cameron, and Larry Slade. Joe Mott and Hugo Kalmar "sponge" only for drinks. "Loan me a dollar! . . . Buy me a trink!" (Iceman, I, 11) is Hugo's repeated request to whoever is within earshot.

Willie Oban reminds Don Parritt that "the customary salutation is 'What'll you have?'" (Iceman, I, 38). Later Harry tells them all to "take that 'I'll-have-the same' look off your maps!" (Iceman, I, 42), but they know that Harry is not as good as his word, and that he will "come through" for them. Harry feigns deafness when Lewis asks for a drink (Iceman, I, 47), and when he counters with a request for Lewis' room rent, Lewis feigns ignorance of money matters (Iceman, I, 48).

Harry even threatens to dispossess some of the roomers for nonpayment of rent: "Bejees, I'll make your Movement move!" (Iceman, I, 54). But Harry shakes off the mood of despair and fear brought on by Hickey, and the parasites win. "Have a drink! Have ten drinks, bejees!" (Iceman, IV, 257), is Harry's final statement which indicates victory for the status quo.

The hangers-on in the offstage barroom of Melody's Tavern on July 27th, 1828 fare equally well with Con Melody (Poet), a proprietor every bit as generous as Harry Hope. Jamie Cregan has some legitimate claim to the favors of the bar because he provides Melody with the opportunity to reminisce about their mutual experiences as participants in the Battle of Talavera. But Paddy O'Dowd, Dan Roche, and Patch Riley, who "get jammed for a moment in the doorway" when they make their raucous entrance (Poet, I, 167), have only their good cheer, their obsequiousness, and their thirst to offer. These seem to be enough. Melody, who calls himself "but a ghost haunting a ruin" (Poet, II, 174), nevertheless encourages Cregan to "wet your lips, Corporal. Talavera was a devilish thirsty day, if you'll remember" (Poet, III, 200). O'Dowd joins in a toast to "drink long life to him [Melody], and may he always be as big a fool as he is this night!" [Poet, III, 202). Though he comments about them "fooling yourselves that I am fooled in you," Melody keeps the whiskey pouring for them all (Poet, III, 202). But any suggestion that Melody's reversion to the Irish peasant in the last act will pose a threat to the

welfare of his parasites is dispelled when he remarks before his final exit: "And now with your permission, ladies both, I'll join me good friends in the bar" (Poet, IV, 256).

(2) Sailors

O'Neill creates a host of comic sailors in the one-act sea plays and in Christie, Diff'rent, Ape, and Mourning.

Driscoll (Cardiff; Voyage; Caribbees), Cocky (Voyage; Caribbees), Ivan (Zone; Voyage) and Yank (Caribbees) provide a running comic dialogue on bad food and indigestion (Cardiff, 40; Zone, 89; Caribbees, 5), women (Voyage, 64; Caribbees, 12, 23, 26), the ridicule of Cocky (Cardiff, 37; Voyage, 65), and the lyrical praise of whiskey (Voyage, 68; Caribbees, 11). Luke Bentley strains for humor and barely manages to express it in his sarcastic comments to his sister about how well she looks, how happy she must be to see him home, and how well they got along in the past (Rope, 196). Close in spirit to the vindictiveness of Luke Bentley, Jack Crosby uses his humor to taunt his sister Emma about her resemblance to an angry cat (Diff'rent, I, 202, 211) and with the story of her fiance's affair with the "brown gal" in the South Sea Islands (Diff'rent, I, 207). Similarly sarcastic, Paddy refers to the presence of Mildred Douglas below decks as having "put the touch of home, swate home in the stokehole" (Ape, iv, 62), and he imagines her at home in bed "wid ten doctors and nurses feedin' her salts to clean the fear out of her" (Ape, iv, 64) as a result of having seen Yank. The

Chantyman appears on the dock alongside Adam Brant's ship. He chides himself for being too "pertic'lar," he sings in praise of whiskey, and he criticizes women who "skin your hide off an' use it fur a carpet" (Mourning, "Hunted," 790-793).

O'Neill creates two comic sea captains in Captain Dick Scott (Horizon) and Captain John Crosby (Diff'rent). Scott enjoys telling how a "fool woman" once asked him "where the sea-gulls sleeps at nights," and how he got rid of her by telling her the next time he hears one snoring he will write to her. When his sister then asks him, "where do sea-gulls sleep?" he slaps the table and roars, "'Nother one!" (Horizon, I, 11, 32, 33). His idea of a fool is a woman who is unfamiliar with the sea. Captain Crosby is a good-natured old salt who "shakes with laughter and kisses his wife a resounding smack" and pats his daughter on the back "with a playful touch that almost jars her off her feet." He still enjoys a jest at their expense, but when he is challenged by his wife he playfully submits. "Aye-aye, skipper! You're boss around here," he says, after having defended the rights of white sea captains to copulate with "brown females" for health's sake (Diff'rent, I, 217, 218).

### (3) "City Slickers"

O'Neill's big city types are usually characters who look, act, dress, and talk like natives of New York City. Fleas in Mexico are said to have "class" (Movie Man, 170), a coffin is called "a white-pine kimono" (Movie Man, 173), women are "skirts," eyes are "lamps," a cold look is "the icy onceover," and women are to be trusted as far as pitcher "Walter Johnson's fast one" can be hit (Movie

Man, 174). The tubercular patient Flynn refers to women as "a gang of skirts," talking as "chewin' the fat" (Straw, II, 1, 86), and his success in holding his weight steady for the week as having "hit 'er for a two-bagger" (Straw, II, 1, 87). McGloin mentions the "sugar galore" out in the Ward, and he contemplates "ridin' around in a big red automobile" (Iceman, II, 134). His partner, Ed Mosher, boasts about the time he "short-changed" his sister, and declares, the next moment, that he "always gave a sucker some chance" (Iceman, I, 59). He considers work to be "the deadliest habit known to science" (Iceman, I, 88). He refers to a dead friend in Hell, "making suckers of the damned, telling them there's nothing like snake oil for a bad burn" (Iceman, I, 90). When McGloin states his intention to get back to the "take," Mosher remarks, "It's his gowed-up night!" (Iceman, II, 134).

O'Neill's finest example of the big city type, Erie Smith, advises the night clerk to "take my tip, Pal" (Hughie, 266); calls a face a "puss" (Hughie, 267); and refers to women as "queens," "frails" (Hughie, 271), "dolls" (Hughie, 277), and "dames" (Hughie, 278). He hates Brooklyn, refers to children as "gorillas" (Hughie, 280), calls the hotel "a dead dump" (Hughie, 282), tells about Hughie having "lapped up" his stories like he would "a beakful of heroin" (Hughie, 284), and says a horse is "full of hop" (Hughie, 291). Erie talks fast, uses a multitude of metaphors in city slang, and considers most people unlike himself to be "suckers" until proven otherwise.

James Tyrone (Journey and Misbegotten) is the last of O'Neill's Broadway types. He refers to the maid Cathleen as "our wild Irish lark" (Journey, II, 1, 54), declares he is "drunk as a fiddler's bitch"

(Journey, IV, 155), suggests his father play Old Gaspard in The Bells without make-up (Journey, IV, 158), and refers to "John Barleycorn" as a companion in love-making (Journey, IV, 160). The older James has not lost his touch. He tells of the time he took a prostitute away from her room near "the damned Sixth Avenue El" to live with him at college (Misbegotten, I, 234), he refers to a glass of water as "something people wash with" (Misbegotten, I, 327), he believes with Ed Mosher that going "on the wagon" would be fatal for him with his weak heart (Misbegotten, I, 327), he calls a millionaire's money "inherited swag" (Misbegotten, I, 328), he refers to whiskey as "chicken medicine" (Misbegotten, I, 332) and Hogan as "the Donegal lark" (Misbegotten, II, 364), and he greets the sunrise with a terse "I like Belasco better" (Misbegotten, IV, 405).

#### (4) Bartenders

Larry is an O'Neill bartender who does not drink with the customers, who in fact does not like to see them drunk (Christie, I, 25), and who is very capable of handling any situation that may arise among them. When Anna orders a whiskey and ginger ale, and adds, "don't be stingy, baby," Larry asks, "Shall I serve it in a pail?" (Christie, I, 25). The Bartender (Wilderness) has a "foxily cunning, stupid face and a cynically wise grin." He refers to the prostitute Belle as a "Candy Kiddo" (Wilderness, III, 1, 63), he alludes sarcastically to Richard as "hot sport" and a "spender," and when Richard offers him a drink he takes his "one for the house" in cigars (Wilderness, III, 1, 64). Seeing Richard's arm around Belle's waist, he comments: Ho-ho, we're

coming on, I see" (Wilderness, III, 1, 69). But he ends the scene insolently as he throws both Richard and Belle out of the bar. "Them lousy tramps is always getting this dump in Dutch!" is his parting comment about Belle (Wilderness, III, 1, 76). Rocky Ploggi (Iceman) is O'Neill's most fully developed comic bartender. An integral character in the action in Harry Hope's back room, he is the focus of most of the persons. O'Neill uses Rocky to provide the initial exposition for many of the characters in the play. However, his primary concern is the maintenance of a smooth-working relationship with his "pigs," Margie and Pearl--a relationship firmly based on the illusion that he is not to be considered a pimp (Iceman, I, 12). Despite his harsh manner, Rocky has a good heart and is as generous as his boss in doling out free drinks (Iceman, I, 17). "Piano! What d'yuh tink dis dump is, a dump?" (Iceman, I, 41), is his method of keeping order. He resents "a good barkeep" like Chuck and a fine whore like Cora getting married and moving to New Jersey: "Dey'd get D.T.s if dey ever hold a cricket choip!" (Iceman, I, 68). After Hickey leaves, Rocky regains his good humor. He calls his girls "tarts" and promises to "knock the block off anyone" who calls them "whores" (Iceman, IV, 256). At the end of the play he joyously sings "You Great Big Beautiful Doll," to them and they answer with another song, "Everybody's Doing It!" (Iceman, IV, 259). Less effusive and less comic than Rocky, Chuck Morello, the day bartender, has a "fat, amiable, swarthy face" (Iceman, I, 69) and is devoted to his whore

(Iceman, I, 70). When she tells the brutal story of how she frisked a drunken sailor, Chuck comments that the government should not "trust guys like dat wid dough!" (Iceman, I, 73). When he sings his song of reunion with Cora (who chants a gay rendition of "The Oceana Roll"), it is appropriately a sentimental tune, "The Curse of An Aching Heart," which describes his devotion to her (Iceman, IV, 259). Mickey Maloy is another bartender who displays the same generous spirit as his proprietor (Poet, I, 138, 139). O'Neill uses him, as he uses Rocky, to convey exposition (Poet, I, 140-143). Brash and impudent toward Sara (Poet, I, 144), he is kind and loving toward Nora (Poet, I, 146; IV, 225-227). "The divil take young girls. You're worth a hundred av thim," is his last line in the play, as he "grins with satisfaction at having cheered her up" (Poet, IV, 227).

#### (5) Other Professionals

O'Neill creates a number of comic salesmen in the brothers Nicolo and Maffeo Polo (Marco), Sid Davis and the Salesman (Wilderness), and Hickey (Iceman). Maffeo believes that "time is money," and that it should not be wasted in prayer (Marco, I, ii, 226). He tells the Pope that a man whose table bears gold service could not possibly be a barbarian (Marco, I, ii, 227). Nicolo's recorded item of interest in the exotic Musul kingdom is that the women wear cotton drawers, "to look large in the hips" (Marco, I, iii, 229). However, Maffeo notes with interest, "the women do all the buying and selling" in Mongolia

(Marco, I, v, 238). "Unless your jokes improve you'll never sell anything" (Marco, I, v, 238), Nicolo tells Marco. True to his comic type, Maffeo concludes that "any climate is healthy where trade is brisk" (Marco, I, iv, 234). Sid Davis, another salesman, though what he sells is never specified, recalls one of the stories he told in Waterbury, Connecticut, "that tickled the folks there pink" (Wilderness, I, 9). When he is sober he cavorts in the swift, breezy style of the big city salesman who has been everywhere and has seen everything. When he is drunk he is equally comic and often endearing. He jests with everyone in the family, including the maid (Wilderness, II, 50). The one time he is serious he is called upon to provide the kind of information a travelling salesman would be expected to know: the identification of a prostitute and a house of prostitution (Wilderness, IV, 1, 96, 97). The other salesman in the play also bears the "professional breeziness and jocular, kid-'em-along manner of his kind." He enters the back room of the bar and makes an immediate proposal to Belle to "do a little business" (Wilderness, III, 1, 71). He taunts Richard with a melodramatic paraphrase, "Curse you, Jack Dalton, if I won't unhand her, what then?" (Wilderness, III, 1, 73). And he succeeds in getting Richard thrown out, although he hurries out after the boy to see that he gets on the trolley safely (Wilderness, III, 1, 75).

But Theodore Hickman (Hickey) is O'Neill's most fully developed salesman character. Not only is he the pivotal character in the play,

but he is the salesman par excellence: he tells jokes and stories, alternately "kids" and is convincingly sincere with the others, uses a vigorous and colorful vernacular, is forceful and persistent, yet charming, loved, and even feared by his friends. His singing entrance, late in the long first act, is a comic lazzo of an operatic falsetto tenor who suddenly changes to a comic bass and a different tune (Iceman, I, 76). He frightens the assemblage with his second entrance when he mimics "a familiar Polo Grounds bleacherite cry" (Iceman, II, 111). Although his visit this time, as contrasted with his past visits, is inspired with reformist zeal, he is generous, lavish and friendly. Prior to the pathetic confession of the murder of his wife, he tells how he was given his start by a prostitute with a heart of gold, and how he kidded her (Iceman, III, 233).

Harry Hope (Iceman) and Con Melody (Poet) are two barroom proprietors who share a number of comic qualities. They both alternate between derision and generosity in their behavior toward the parasites who have attached themselves to their establishments, with generosity winning out in the end. They both harbor illusions of themselves that are inconsistent with reality: Hope believes his grief over his wife's death twenty years ago has kept him from going out into the neighborhood and participating in the life outside his hotel; Melody believes his gentlemanly heritage does not permit him to cavort with his cronies on an equal basis. Hope returns to his illusion at the end

of the play; Melody seems to discard his, but the extent to which he will descend to the level of his parasites is uncertain. Hope directs comic ridicule at his bartenders (Iceman, I, 16, 42; IV, 250), his parasites (Iceman, I, 42, 46, 47, 54, 55, 59, 60, 71), the ladies (Iceman, I, 70; III, 257), Hickey (Iceman, I, 78), and the police (Iceman, IV, 244, 245). Melody ridicules his parasites (Poet, I, 158), the Yankees (Poet, II, 181), and the Irish (Poet, I, 160).

Simeon and Peter Cabot are two young rustics who appear as ridiculous, insensitive "oxen." Their comic buffoonery takes the curious form of a kind of sing-song recitation delivered to each other on the delectability of bacon (Desire, I, i, 139), the evils of work (Desire, I, iv, 150), and the extraneousness of gates (Desire, I, iv, 155). Cynical toward women, their only interest is in Minnie, the village prostitute: "Sim knew her--an' then me arter" Peter proudly announces (Desire, I, ii, 144).

Two soldiers appear in the personae of General Bayan (Marco) and Major Cornelius Melody (Poet). A minor character in the play, Bayan, who appears in one short scene, offers death to those who deny Buddha, "the gentle one" (Marco, III, i, 287). But Melody is comparable to the miles gloriosus of Roman comedy who displays the soldier's conceit, considers himself irresistible to women, always plays the role of lover, and is often the hero's rival. Melody and Plautus' famous Pyrgopolynices (The Braggart Warrior) share many characteristics. Both are proud of their military exploits (although Pyrgopolynices' ludicrous

exaggerations far exceed Melody's); both believe they are irresistible to women; Pyrgopolynices plans to deceive his pretended wife, while Melody openly deceives Nora without the slightest concern for her feelings; the Roman's overweening pride and vanity lead to his downfall just as Melody's excessive pride and vanity lead to his humiliation by Mrs. Harford and his beating by the police. However, Melody is courageous, both on the battlefield at Talavera and when fighting the Boston police; the Roman miles talks rather than fights his battles. Melody's amorousness is limited to his short, embarrassing scene with the mother of his daughter's lover (Poet, II, 178-182). However, he makes grandiloquent references to military exploits of the past (Poet, I, 158, 159, 161; II, 180, 197; III, 198-203, 214), and he is vain and pretentious (Poet, II, 174, 179-182). But, by the end of the third act Melody ceases to be comic: he hurls himself into the real battle with the Boston police, and is brutally subdued. He attains an air of true dignity when he ironically reverts to the Irish peasant type; a dignity he did not have when he dissembled as the braggart miles.

Other comic professionals in O'Neill's plays include the Fiddler, who declares that "life is short an' so's love, as the feller says" (Desire, III, i, 186); the Buddhist, Christian, and Magian priests, who argue about commercial matters and the religious derivation of a holy tree (Marco, Prologue, 211-213); the Third Senator, who suggests that a death wish is attributable to an upset stomach (Lazarus, II, ii,

424); the lawyer Nicholas Gadsby, whose ridiculous pomposity goads Melody's cohorts to kick "his butt down the street" (Poet, III, 219); the Night Clerk (Hughie), who acts as a kind of absent-minded, lifeless automaton in contrast to the human, witty, and spirited behavior of Erie Smith; and T. Stedman Harder, the Standard Oil millionaire who is ignominiously routed from the presence of the Hogans for having dared complain about their pigs swimming in his ice pond (Misbegotten, I, 334-339).

#### D. COMIC CHORUSES

O'Neill uses comic choruses to advance the action in Ape and Mourning.

"Talking in toneless, simpering voices" about sermons and income taxes, the "roughed, calcimined, dyed, overdressed" women and their men in "Prince Alberts, high hats, spats" walk down Fifth Avenue, but at a cry from one of the women, they scurry to a furrier's window to gaze ecstatically at a display of monkey fur (Ape, v, 71). The chorus of men and women shout "Monkey fur!" in a tone of affected delight, which infuriates Yank, whose own actions they completely ignore. This chorus, engaged in ridiculous action, offers a dramatic contrast to Yank's feverish efforts to express his anger. The absurd interaction of Yank and the chorus illustrate the extent to which both levels of society, the high and the low, are uncivilized, primitive, and unthinking.

There are three choruses in Mourning: (1) the "Homecoming" chorus of Amos Ames, his wife Louisa, and her cousin Minnie, guided by Seth Beckwith, the family gardener, as chorus leader; (2) the "Hunted" chorus of Josiah Borden and his wife, Everett Hills, D.D., and his wife, and Doctor Joseph Blake, the Mannon's family physician; and (3) the "Haunted" chorus of Amos Ames, Ira Mackel, Joe Silva, and Abner Small, led as in the "Homecoming," by Seth Beckwith.

The "Homecoming" chorus, "led by Seth . . . in a mood of aged playfulness," delivers the exposition on the Mannon family: the chorus identifies the members of the family, the source of family income, the townspeople's attitudes toward Ezra and Christine, and the secrets of the Mannon past. Before the chorus leaves the stage it simulates the Aeschylean chorus' introduction of Clytaemestra in the Agamemnon by introducing both Christine and Lavinia to the audience. Each comes out to the top of the stairs of the portico to strike a pose in silence as she is presented. But O'Neill's chorus is comic. Seth announces it is his patriotic duty to celebrate the surrender of the South by getting drunk. He tells the chorus that though Christine may "run you off fur trespassin'," Lavinia has already given them permission to be there. This anticipates the alliance between Seth and Lavinia that will see them become the lone survivors of the Mannon house. The chorus considers Christine "too furrin' lookin'," and Lavinia "like her mother in face--queer lookin'," and thus sets the stage for the tragic struggle between the two women (Mourning, "Homecoming," I, 688-693).

Like its predecessor, the "Hunted" chorus stands outside the Mannon house. Its members have just paid their respects to Ezra Mannon's widow, who remains in the house. The women discuss Christine's grief, and how Lavinia appears "cold and calm as an icicle." The men discuss the ironic tragedy of Mannon's death the first night home after having survived the war, but conclude that there are "worse ways of dying" than suffering a heart attack while having sexual intercourse with "a looker" like Christine Mannon (Mourning, "Hunted," 1,753-757).

The "Haunted" chorus of five drunk men also stands outside the Mannon house. "There is a grotesque atmosphere of boys out on a forbidden lark about these old men," They pass a whisky bottle among them, and prepare to bet with one of their number that he will not be able to enter the house and stay there during the night because of the ghosts haunting the place. Abner Small enters the house accompanied by the taunts and jibes of the others. The discussion turns to ghosts and haunting, a recounting of the Mannon past, and an announcement that Lavinia and Orin will soon return, before Small runs out of the house, "his face chalky white and his eyes popping." Seth explains that he engineered the duping of Abner Small to stop the gossip that the house was haunted. But the choral scene serves as a comic parallel to the fate of the two living Mannons haunted by the ghosts of their past, and driven--as Abner Small is driven to hysteria--to the desperation of suicide and banishment from society (Mourning, "Haunted," I,1,815-821).

### O'NEILL'S COMIC CHARACTER TYPES

Among O'Neill's comic senes only Chris Christopherson (Christie) displays the classic characteristics of the irate father who opposes the impending marriage of his offspring but who eventually joins the younger generation in the final celebration of the event. Because the offspring is a prostitute, however, and hardly merits the concern and ministrations of her doting father, the parental opposition appears in this play as comic irony. Two other comic fathers, Nat Miller (Wilderness) and Phil Hogan (Misbegotten), act consistently as loving parents who identify the love pursuits of their offspring with their own interests, and therefore emerge as strong supporters of their children's desires. Nat Miller helps his son Richard regain the affections of his sweetheart Muriel. But despite Phil Hogan's sincere efforts to help his daughter snare her man, he fails (through no fault of his) to bring about the union, and he reluctantly retires as lover-surrogate with his daughter. Ramsay Fife (Dynamo) begins as a classic father opposed to his daughter's marriage plans; by playing a practical joke on her lover he acts to prevent her. It is this joke--the inciting incident of the play--that turns the action from comic to tragic, and that results in the deaths of both young people. While the senex as father in Roman comedy may be either indulgent or harsh toward his offspring, O'Neill's fathers with the exception of David McComber (Wilderness) are indulgent. Their primary action is to influence the course of events

to insure a happy and secure future for their children. When they oppose their choices they do so with a great deal of attention to their children's sensibilities, and they do not forcefully invoke parental prerogatives to settle issues. One reason for this conciliatory attitude is the recognition of their own limited power in directing their strong-willed children. In Roman comedy the father may be a frustrated lover who considers his family role secondary to his pursuit of the young girl he desires; O'Neill's fathers never pursue young girls, and even when they do actively engage in a love chase--Carmody (Straw) and Melody (Poet)--the action does not jeopardize their families.

Among the sons, youthful and mature lovers, Marco Polo (Marco), and Richard Miller (Wilderness), remain close to the type character who doggedly pursues the object of his love, defies formidable opposition, and ultimately wins out. Richard Miller directly opposes the strongly expressed desires of his sweetheart's father and eventually overcomes them. Marco struggles against the temptations of the world--including the proffered love of a beautiful princess--before he is to be reunited with his childhood sweetheart. The lover in Roman comedy either is unable to win his sweetheart or he is afraid he will lose her; O'Neill's lovers, however, believe in themselves. They are not discouraged or thwarted by the blocking attempts made against them. They possess a kind of brash, swaggering, self-confident manner that seems to guarantee ultimate success.

Benton (Servitude) and Seth Beckwith (Mourning) are O'Neill's talkative, inquisitive, and highly independent comic male servants who are primarily concerned with the fates of their employers, David Roylston and Lavinia Mannon. Benton is a ubiquitous busybody who must be forcibly expelled from his master's presence after he succeeds in creating an intolerable situation between Mrs. Roylston and the other woman. Beckwith leads two of the three comic choruses in Mourning, and with his somber mistress he carries on a continuing comic dialogue on the subject of patriotic drinking (Mourning, "Homecoming," III, 728). O'Neill's comic male servants bear many of the characteristics of the seruus of Roman comedy (see above) but there is one significant departure from type. O'Neill pictures the American male servant as a character devoted to protecting the interests of the family, rather than, as he appears in Roman comedy, a character exclusively concerned with the love chase of the adulescens.

O'Neill's two comic wives depart from Roman comedy type in that they are singularly active in promoting the welfare of their children. They do not complain of ill-treatment by their spouses; their role in the family hierarchy is not inferior to that of their husbands. Essie Miller (Wilderness) gives full support to her son Richard in his impetuous, oblique pursuit of his sweetheart. "Richard could do worse," she tells her husband (Wilderness, IV, 111, 122). And when he suggests the boy is not seriously in love she cautions him not to be

cynical, a condition which she considers close to sin. O'Neill's wives lead their husbands by the force of their convictions. In sharp contrast to its portrayal in Roman comedy, marriage is depicted as a mildly contentious but essentially happy state.

Lucy Townsend (Abortion), Lily Jayson (First Man), Muriel McComber and Mildred Miller (Wilderness), and Josie Hogan (Misbegotten) are O'Neill's comic daughters. Lucy and Lily confine their comic activity to ridiculing others. Mildred Miller is more concerned with her handwriting than with the boy who has shown some interest in her. However, Muriel McComber and Josie Hogan are O'Neill's most prominent comic daughters whose actions center conspicuously around the theme of how to acquire, retain, and eventually marry a lover. Josie Hogan tries her best to win her lover, even to the point of deceiving him, but she learns he is incapable of loving anyone, and so she turns to her father for solace. Muriel steadfastly struggles against the unrelenting resistance of her father and manages to meet her lover, whose loyalty she regains after an almost disastrous break. Muriel is the prototype young girl of comedy whose primary interest is the retention of her lover. In Roman comedy she rarely appears on stage; it was necessary to assume that her desires were the same as those of the adulescens. O'Neill develops many variations on the uirgo character, whom he treats as an important figure in the action.

The two female servants, Norah (Wilderness) and Cathleen (Journey) are boisterous, fiercely independent, and gauche. Norah's bumbling service at table provides the Miller family with a strong comic action to respond to; Norah acts as a kind of comic catalyst to the other characters in the play. In contrast to the brooding Tyrones, Cathleen is the picture of health, an easy-going, energetic, simple-minded peasant who lives for the present, in the midst of a family torn by the events of their past. O'Neill's female servants provide the same kind of comic revelry and incidental humor as those of Plautus. They are loosely attached to the action, but serve to accentuate it by their ridiculous antics.

O'Neill's most sharply drawn comic prostitutes are clever, experienced professionals. Belle (Wilderness) takes Richard Miller's money, then has him thrown out. Margie, Pearl, and Cora (Iceman) are accomplished professionals who ply their trade in a most business-like, unemotional manner. Whether for services rendered or through other devious means, O'Neill's prostitutes consider men fair game for any maneuvers that might produce additional income. Although the courtesan (meretrix) of Roman comedy is either mercenary or else devoted to her lover, O'Neill's prostitutes are all mercenary--tough, big-city "hustlers" always on the prowl for "suckers." The decent young girl who dreams of leaving the profession and loving one man never appears. Cora (Iceman) entertains the notion but gives it up as impractical.

The parasites who depend on Harry Hope (Iceman) and Con Melody (Poet) for the necessary whiskey to sustain their existence are classic examples of the joking, performing, unemployed and unemployable hangers-on whose primary function is to please their hosts. They may live precariously by their wits, but whatever energies they possess are expended in the continuing effort to keep the whiskey pouring. Hope's barflies are considerably more restrained and depressed than Melody's, but their activities are, nevertheless, directed toward the same end: whiskey and the retention of amicable relations with their benefactor-host.

The parasites O'Neill creates are men in need of a place where they may enjoy the conviviality they require to survive (Sid Davis (Wildemess) is the only parasite who is still home-based). But the parasites comprise only one type among many, all roles rich in comic values, roles that include adventurers and professionals unattached to any household or family. Cocky and Driscoll in the early sea plays represent O'Neill's sailors. They engage in a continuing comic debate on the discomforts of life at sea, and level sharp comic ridicule at each other and at their shipmates as accompaniment to their daily routine. Sailors like Jack Crosby (Diff'rent), Paddy (Ape), and the Chantyman (Mourning) direct their sarcastic criticism toward women and the land. Only Mat Burke (Christie) is eager to get married, although he is just as eager to return to the sea after the celebration.

O'Neill's city "slickers" are similarly uncomfortable when confined to the home. Erie Smith (Hughie) reminisces about the surprisingly pleasant aspects of his visit to Hughie's home in Brooklyn, but at no point does he suggest home life and a family as a possibility for himself. Jamie Tyrone (Journey) and James Tyrone (Misbegotten), two of O'Neill's comic-pathetic types, whose language is infused with self-destructive irony, find life extremely uncomfortable and abrasive when they are forced into the home; it evokes bitter reflections of the past. O'Neill's bartenders are generally efficient, generous, and gregarious. They know their business well, keep a tight control of events in their bars, and are considered indispensable by their proprietors. Another professional type is the salesman who--whether he appears in the historical setting of Marco, the family dinner table of Wilderness, or the west side bar of Iceman--displays the familiar American salesman's characteristics of volubility, homespun wit, and pertinacity. Other comic professionals include sea captains, evangelists, soldiers, bar proprietors, a senator, a New England country fiddler, a night clerk, a lawyer, and an American millionaire. In each instance, O'Neill closely links the character's dialogue, manner and actions to his professional status: sea captains are blustering and jolly; evangelists are narrow-minded and parochial; soldiers are boastful, pompous, and aggressive; bar proprietors are tough but generous; the Roman senator is cynical; the

New England fiddler is jovial and extemporaneous; the night clerk is slow-witted and lethargic; the lawyer is precise and suspicious; and the Standard Oil millionaire is pretentious and demanding.

Although informed by Roman comedy types, most of O'Neill's comic characters depart from type characteristics and take on qualities that are closer to the early twentieth-century American scene. These contemporary variations bear strong affinities with American melodramatic character types. When they appear, heroes (Marco Polo, Richard Miller) and villains (David McComber, Harder) are sharply delineated; they are all good and all bad, respectively. O'Neill's heroines (Anna Christie, Donata, Muriel McComber, Josie Hogan) are all at the mercy of the prevailing winds of their lovers' inclinations: they are eager to be won if their men will have them. In Christie, Wilderness, and Misbegotten the characters are engaged in the typical love pursuit, which forms the major action of the plot. In Marco, the love story is of secondary importance, but nevertheless acts as a strong influence on Marco's comic behavior.

## CHAPTER VI

### COMEDY OF IDEAS

According to Thompson, whose sixth classification of the varieties of comic effect is comedy of ideas, "satire, except when it is mere ridicule of an individual, is comedy of idea [sic] because it involves the comparison between what the dramatist thinks ought to be and what he actually finds in his fellow men."<sup>1</sup> However, Thompson is not more precise than this; his definition can also be applied to the writer of any kind of comedy. James Sutherland points out that the satirist cannot accept the follies and vices of mankind and refuses to tolerate them.<sup>2</sup> We are still without any clearly defined aim for or method of satire. Meredith deals in extremes: he refers to the laughter of satire as "a blow in the back or the face."<sup>3</sup> Shaw's satiric comedies are blows neither in the back nor the face, but perhaps in the conscience, where they may hurt more. Jeremy Collier, who was, after all, a

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<sup>1</sup>Thompson, The Anatomy of Drama, p. 203.

<sup>2</sup>James Sutherland, English Satire (Cambridge: University Press, 1958), pp. 3-7.

<sup>3</sup>George Meredith, "An Essay on Comedy," in Comedy, ed. by Wylie Sypher (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1956), p. 47.

classical scholar as well as a Puritan, observes in the first line of his Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage, written in 1698, that "the business of plays is to recommend virtue and discountenance vice. . . , Tis to expose the singularities of pride and fancy, to make folly and falsehood contemptible, and to bring everything that is ill under infamy and neglect."<sup>4</sup> It seems that the only kind of comedy Collier could countenance was satiric. He comes closer to the aim of satire when he speaks of the goal of making folly and falsehood contemptible. For the satirist, to make something contemptible is a step toward doing something about it, not just to compare the real with the ideal (Thompson), not to refuse to accept or tolerate (Sutherland), not even, as David Worcester suggests, to make his audience adopt his criticism as their own.<sup>5</sup>

It is Kierkegaard who, in dealing with satire as a kind of comedy, defines the nature of satire. In discussing the tragic and the comic, he says that they are the same, in so far as "both are based on contradiction; but the tragic is the suffering contradiction, the comical the painless contradiction"<sup>6</sup> [italics his]. Then Kierkegaard notes

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<sup>4</sup>Jeremy Collier, "A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of The English Stage," in British Dramatists from Dryden to Sheridan, ed. by G. H. Nettleton and A. E. Case (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1939).

<sup>5</sup>David Worcester, The Art of Satire (New York: Russell D. Russell, Inc., 1960), p. 13.

<sup>6</sup>Søren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. by David F. Swenson, completed after his death by Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), pp.459, 462.

that "satire also entails pain, but this pain has a dialectic which gives it a teleology in the direction of a cure." The design, the purpose of satire is to attempt to effect a cure; that cure may be explicit or implicit. However, it is the dictionary that provides me with a thorough and workable definition. According to The Webster Unabridged Dictionary (Third Edition), satire is "a usually topical literary composition holding up human or individual vices, folly, abuses, or shortcomings to censure by means of ridicule, derision, burlesque, irony, or other method sometimes with an intent to bring about improvement."

In order best to identify and discuss the nature of O'Neill's satire, I will define these techniques of ridicule, derision, burlesque, irony, and other methods by placing them within four distinct categories.<sup>7</sup> These categories are (1) satiric wit, (2) irony, (3) ridicule, which includes burlesque, parody and derision, and (4) abuse, which includes sarcasm, the sardonic, and invective. While there are many so-called "moods" or "tones" of satire, they all may be placed within these four technical classifications, each of which is distinguished from the others by the method it uses to censure and the manner in which I may suggest a cure.

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<sup>7</sup>These definitions are derived both from the Oxford Dictionary (1971) and the Webster Dictionary (Third Edition).

(1) Satiric Wit

Satiric wit is that quality of writing that censures with clever remarks that indicate a perception of the incongruous, which is expressed in a surprising or epigrammatic manner. The wit appearing as a category in Chapter IV is verbal; satiric wit is related to ideas. Satiric wit appeals to good sense and wisdom. It attempts to cure by an ultimate appeal to reason.

(2) Irony

When used in satire, irony is the adoption of a mode of speech or writing in which the intended meaning is different from the literal sense of the words. Ironic satire thereby censures by implication and it tries to cure by comparison. Usually, what is explicitly expressed as good is meant to be recognized as bad.

(3) Ridicule

Using language intended to raise laughter against a person or thing, ridicule censures by mocking and belittling. One form of ridicule is burlesque, which is the use of grotesque imitation to ridicule. Burlesque imitates what is, or is intended to be dignified or pathetic. It either casts ridicule on that which it imitates, or is itself ridiculous as an unsuccessful attempt to be serious or impressive. Parody, which also ridicules by imitating, treats a serious subject in a jesting manner. Related to burlesque, parody is less grotesque and less bombastic.

Derision, another form of ridicule, belittles by showing scorn, or contempt. Ridicule, generally, attempts to cure by unmasking absurdity or causing shame.

(4) Abuse

Satiric abuse is characterized by scornful, railing language. Other forms of abuse are (a) sarcasm, a biting or cutting expression, a bitter jibe or taunt, which may use irony, but only does so to express contempt, (b) the sardonic, an expression of subdued anger that transmits chagrin, and (c) invective, which is a direct, unremitting attack characterized by expressed anger and vituperation. Abuse, which censures with bitterness, attempts to cure by denunciation.

In this chapter I will identify the techniques O'Neill uses in his satire, and the ideas and subjects he censures. In considering the targets of O'Neill's censure I will try to discover normative ideas or figures that represent the intended cures.

(1) Satiric Wit

There are no examples of satiric wit in O'Neill's plays, although there are verbal witticisms which were discussed in Chapter IV.

(2) Irony

Satire, in which the intended meaning differs from the literal sense of the words, appears in Marco, when Marco himself is depicted as a pretentious genius, a superb salesman who parlays a

conspicuous talent for commerce into unprecedented power and success. Throughout the play Marco expresses the most aggressive, tyrannical views toward individuals and society, but he considers his words benevolent and enlightened. As the self-confident, world-shaking American materialist, Marco regards acquisition as the means and meaning of existence. But O'Neill uses comic irony in developing the character of Marco. Marco is a rigid, humorless materialist, but O'Neill invests him with a kind of insouciant charm, and creates what Worcester refers to as "ingénu satire," in which the hero is a plain, matter-of-fact sort of man, a simple soul, essentially good-natured and naive, who disarms his audience. Love touches him, but half-heartedly. The violent, chaotic forces of civilization reverberate against him, but his eyes remain wide with wonder. The ingénu hero is a revelation, a symbol of the vanity and purposelessness of humanity, and as a kind of ironic figure his acts are a confession of the soul's bankruptcy.<sup>8</sup>

O'Neill has Marco journey through life, from puberty to adolescence, to marriage and manhood, accumulating success along the way. Using consummate skill and charm, Marco exploits every opportunity to acquire money, but he never loses the ingratiating naïvete that endears him to the Pope in Rome, the princess in Cathay, and the reader of the play; his vivacious manner ~~makes his words seem to mean other~~ than what they signify. He is thoroughly insensitive to beauty, love,

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<sup>8</sup>David Worcester, The Art of Satire, pp. 102-107.

and virtue, He is responsive to methods, practicability, loyalty, responsibility, and the values of the striving middle-class. Even though Marco is a symbol of materialist distortion he cavorts through life with a vigorous comic rhythm that is nothing short of ingratiating. O'Neill ironically uses innocence to reveal corruption; the insouciant character exposes the evil system.

After his uncle had convinced him that whereas a first-class commission agent has all the glory, the second-class agent "is allowed his expenses, gets friendly with the dealers, scares them into letting him in on everything--and gets what's rightfully coming to him!" Marco with unfeigned sincerity tells the Kaan he prefers to be appointed a second-class agent because he wants "to start at the bottom" (Marco, I,vi,245). O'Neill has Marco express ideas to the Kaan that are appalling, but, ironically, he expresses them with such exuberance and charm that they take on different meanings, and the Kaan condones what he would otherwise condemn.

The mood is ironic when O'Neill links religious conviction with military truculence by introducing the peaceful Kaan's Commander-in-Chief, General Bayan, who proposes a war against the West in the name of "Buddha . . . The Gentle One, The Good, The Kind, The Pitiful, The Merciful, The Wise, The Eternal Contemplative One!" and he adds "Death to those who deny Him!" (Marco, III,1,287). Bayan means to express a religious zeal, but his words reveal his aggressive intentions.

The use of religious justification for the abuses of military power is exposed; an attack is launched against the hypocrisy of warmongering and the self-serving complicity and nationalism of religion. O'Neill's irony is even more pronounced when he has General Bayan wage war against the Japanese, whose silk industry has become too competitive. Bayan patriotically denounces the Japanese who "are breeding and maintaining silkworms for purposes of aggression" (Marco, III, 1, 288).

Provincial middle-class attitudes about intellectual activity and about theatre are satirized ironically in a scene in which Marco and the princess Kukachin prepare for the long voyage to Persia. Once again, Marco means to express an enlightened view, but his words belie the intent. When he complains that he hates "idleness where there's nothing to occupy your mind but thinking," Kukachin, eager to please him, and joyous at the prospect of spending the next few months in his presence, tells Marco that there will be dancers and actors aboard ship. Marco is pleased. He explains that he looks forward to seeing the plays, for

there's nothing better than to sit down in a good seat at a good play after a good day's work in which you know you've accomplished something, and after you've had a good dinner, and just take it easy and enjoy a good wholesome thrill or a good laugh and get your mind off serious things until it's time to go to bed.

[Marco, II, 1, 263].

In this short, ironic exchange, O'Neill censures the attitudes of his fellow Americans about what constitutes good theatre. "Serious things" in a materialistic society are not things of the spirit. He also censures the tendency to equate thinking with idleness.

Irony is at the heart of the attempts made by Rocky Pioggi to define his relationship to Margie and Pearl (Iceman). Reminding the other characters that he is a bartender rather than a pimp, Rocky tries to explain his relationship with the girls in terms that would justify his assertion, but--ironically--he reveals the reverse. "I fix the cops fer dem so's dey can hustle widout gettin' pinched." he declares, adding that he takes their money because "dey'd on'y trow it away. Tarts can't hang on to dough" (Iceman, I, 12).

Irony is used between Josie Hogan and her brother Mike in Misbegotten. Described as "slyly cunning . . . primly self-righteous . . . one of the elite of Almighty God . . . and extremely irritating," Mike is a puritannical pillar of virtue and piety. He attempts to assuage his sister by announcing he will pray for her when he is away. When she offers him a few dollars he considers refusing it because it is not rightfully his. On the point of leaving, he reminds her of her "shameless ways with men" (Misbegotten, I, 303-306). Mike is an insensitive clod who is pious and proper, a staunch defender of his faith, his country, and conventional morality. But O'Neill uses Mike's virtuous language to indicate a nature that is mean, vindictive, petty, and unfeeling. Josie, who acts mean, insensitive, and coarse at times, and who speaks that way, is really kind, considerate, warm-hearted, and virtuous. O'Neill makes it quite clear that of the two it is Mike who will become an accepted member of society and Josie who will be the outcast.

O'Neill would replace the hypocritical judgments of respectability and the self-serving morality of society with an essential decency, which motivates the attitudes and behavior of his norm, Josie, whose virtue shines by contrast.

In attempting to censure by implication, irony usually expresses something as good that is meant to be recognized as bad. But O'Neill sometimes reverses his method by expressing something as bad that is generally recognized as good, as when he has the virgin Josie Hogan pretend to be a whore. She tells Tyrone that prostitution is easier than farming and that she has considered "joining their union" because she seems to do well at it (Misbegotten, I, 326). When Tyrone calls her his "Virgin Queen of Ireland" she tells him not to spread that lie around because it might ruin her reputation (Misbegotten, I, 325). She consistently uses language describing herself as a cynical prostitute, but O'Neill's intention is to reveal that she is a virtuous, romantic girl. Jim Tyrone and Josie taunt each other with reminders of their promiscuity, but, ironically, Tyrone is promiscuous while Josie is pure. In this, his last play, O'Neill censures the hypocrisy of the puritannical American society that demands virtue but is essentially scornful of it. Josie maintains a false reputation of promiscuity because it results, paradoxically, in her being feared and respected by the community. Josie herself, as the symbol of true virtue, is the norm against which the corrupt values of society are measured.

(3) Ridicule

Using language intended to raise laughter by mocking and belittling a person or thing, O'Neill ridicules the hypocrisy of Irish-Catholic values in the scene between the maid Cathleen and Mary Tyrone in Journey.

The stupid, good-humored face of the maid reveals an insensitive clod who, in sharp contrast to her brooding mistress, is a robust, successful creature. O'Neill dramatizes the paradox of ignorance, gaucherie, and meaningless volubility accompanying emotional stability and psychological health, while the intelligent, the sensitive, the wise are melancholy, introspective, and sickly. The censure is levelled against the human condition, in which the most human among us are the most ravaged; the simple-minded animals survive. Cathleen refers to herself as a decent girl; she wishes the chauffeur would "keep his dirty hands to himself," but she adds that if he were more handsome she would be more amenable to his advances. In a self-righteous mood she chides her mistress: "Sure, you never darken the door of a church, God forgive you." She is a mine of homilies: fog is good for the complexion; snoring is a sign of sanity; and drinking is "a good man's falling" (Journey, III, 97-106). Sharing the company of her mistress, but unable really to understand her desperation and anguish, Cathleen rambles on good-naturedly and eventually reels back into the kitchen, drunk, while Mary Tyrone reminisces about the less painful past and broods upon the

painful present. The absurdity, the ridiculousness of Cathleen and her hypocritical values are contrasted with the tortured contemplation of her mistress, and the scene between the two becomes largely incommunicative.

Chauvinism and its traditional religious alliance is ridiculed in the scene between the elder Tyrone and his son Edmund over the meaning of truth in Journey. Vowing that Tyrone considers truth to be only what pleases him, Edmund accuses his father of believing that Shakespeare and the Duke of Wellington were Irish Catholics. Tyrone insists Shakespeare was an Irish Catholic because "the proof is in his plays," and he considers Wellington to have been one because only an Irish Catholic general could have beaten Napoleon (Journey, IV, 127). O'Neill censures the parochialism of nationalistic and religious advocacy by creating an incident marked by absurdity. This scene is important to the structure of the play because it is one in which O'Neill shows Tyrone to be ridiculous. His attitude is contrasted with that of his son who, we are led to believe, is less prone to this kind of absurd bias.

a. Burlesque

Ridiculing by grotesque imitation of what is intended to be dignified, O'Neill turns to the technique of burlesque. He has Marco return after his tour of duty in the "regalia of Cock of Paradise in his secret fraternal order of the Mystic Knights of Confucius." Marco parades before the Kaan and his court, chucks babies under their chins, shakes hands with wounded veterans, and prepares to speak by opening his mouth in "position one of the five phonetic exercises" (Marco, II, 1, 253).

In another scene of ridiculous burlesque, O'Neill unmaskes the ugliness of capitalistic acquisition. Triumphant and rich, Marco, his uncle, and his father return to Venice and are welcomed with a garish banquet prepared by themselves for themselves. The orchestra plays sentimental Italian melodies, servants file in stately procession, the laden table "resembles the front of a pretentious delicatessen store," the "substantial bourgeois" audience gapes and comments enviously, and the richly robed Polos dazzle their neighbors by strewing gold and precious stones over everything. Slapping his "old girl" Donata on the back, Marco tells her he is still a bachelor and a hero, and "worth over two millions." The betrothal is announced, the guests sit down "with one motion," and as they devour the food Marco addresses them on the breeding of silkworms; he speaks carefully so as "not to miss a word his voice utters" (Marco, III, 1, 292-297).

Grotesque and exaggerated as they may be, the antics of Marco, his family, and his fellow Venetians represent attitudes consistent with reality in a materialist society bent on expansion, acquisition and achievement. In fact, Marco is the superman hero of the achieving society and is so regarded by his contemporaries. The focus of O'Neill's attack is not Marco, who throughout the play never loses the charm and good-natured vivacity he possessed when he started his journey as a mere lad; it is, instead, the society itself, of which Marco is its most successful citizen. Marco's Venice is O'Neill's America seven years

after World War I. Materialist and barbaric, Western capitalist society is seen as a distortion of Christian values and is contrasted to the highly spiritual and civilized Buddhist society of the Kaan's world. Only the Pope in Rome does not suffer by the comparison; all others, both onstage and in the audience (Marco appears seated in the audience during the epilogue) are the objects of O'Neill's ridicule.

In attempting without success to be serious, Richard Miller becomes ridiculous. In burlesque fashion, he imitates the impassioned, committed radical, but succeeds only in appearing absurd. Passionately engaged in the political issues of his time, and vigorously opposed to the capitalistic ethos under which he lives, he disparages all the "lying talk about liberty" during the July Fourth celebration. He vows America should be called the home of the slave rather than the brave, "the wage slave ground under the heel of the capitalist class, starving, crying for bread for his children, and all he gets is a stone!" (Wilderness, I, 15). Set in Connecticut in 1906, the scene of good-natured jesting in which the members of the family receive Richard's diatribe is vigorously comic, but O'Neill wrote this play in 1932 and presented it in 1933, during the American depression; Richard's cynical arguments, clothed as they may be in his innocence, nevertheless enable O'Neill to reveal the apathy, smugness, and indifference of an earlier generation. The satire is particularly barbed because it is evident only to the audience for whom Richard's words carry the sting of truth. "Why shouldn't the workers of

the world unite and rise?" he asks. "They have nothing to lose but their chains!" (Wilderness, I, 17). Richard's antics are a burlesque of the serious, committed radical. In his unsuccessful attempts to be impressive, Richard is made ridiculous, but his words have two meanings: they are a reflection of the absurdity of innocence, as well as being a reminder and a censure of middle-class indifference.

b. Parody

Ridiculing by imitation, parody treats a serious subject in a jesting manner. Though related to burlesque, parody is less grotesque and less bombastic. In the early one-act play Movie Man, the practices of capitalist enterprise wedded to American colonial expansionist policies, the arrogant chauvinist and racist attitudes of white Americans toward their neighbors to the south, and even the self-serving nature of revolutionaries are used to parody a serious political revolution. The Earth Motion Picture Company supports a Mexican revolution for the purpose of photographing the action, and uses real war, death, and destruction to provide the American public with the fantasy of war, death, and destruction they demand in the movies. Rogers, the company representative, tells the Commander-in-Chief of the Constitutionalist Army that there will be no night attacks because "the light is so poor as to make the taking of motion pictures impracticable." He reminds him that the company provides the ammunition, payroll, and German specialists for the campaign, and has promised to make him president when he

reaches Mexico City. Rogers concludes with a warning to "keep on the right side of the U.S.A. or your revolution isn't worth the powder to blow it to--Mexico" (Movie Man, 181-183). Imploring Rogers to permit him to conduct the night attack just this time, General Gomez promises that he will shoot all the prisoners the next day exactly as required for the cameras, but Rogers is adamant.

Both Rogers and his assistant, Al Devlin, express the rampant chauvinism that motivates their actions and that provides them with the influence and power to maintain their unchallenged superiority among the Mexicans. Rogers comments that Spanish, or "spigoty," sounds "almost like real talk" (Movie Man, 171), and Devlin is appalled when a Mexican girl ignores him: "Some nerve to that greaser chicken giving a real white man the foot!" (Movie Man, 185). Earlier, Devlin had referred to a Mexican as a good fellow because he "went to school in the States-- Cornell or some place" (Movie Man, 173), and Rogers had described Mexico as a "flea-bitten cluster of shanties," compared to "God's Country," the United States (Movie Man, 170).

A nation's political structure is endangered by a real and powerful rebellion, but in place of the lofty ideals and self-sacrificing heroes usually associated with revolution, commercial transactions and self-seeking clowns are the motivating influences. Controlled by American money, and victimized by the arrogant, gauche, and overconfident Americans, the Mexicans are pictured as helpless pawns in the affairs

of their own country. As a reflection of the oppressive American colonial ambitions in Central America and the Caribbean area at the turn of the century, this short play shows how the insufferable Yankee, the gringo, the bad neighbor of the continent, whose devil-may-care, ingratiating behavior, with all fervent appeals to patriotism, pride, and puritan morality, marks an oppressive evil. O'Neill censures in this early play, but he only implies the cure--a "hands-off" policy in Latin America. However, he does present a "norm" in the offstage character of the "good fellow--Fernandez," who is the enemy of the villain, General Virella, and who is depicted as the true, self-sacrificing hero and patriot, opposed to the false revolutionaries, the corrupt, ambitious, opportunists who are in control.

The absurd, competitive parochialism of religion is ridiculed in a scene among a Christian, a Magian, and a Buddhist priest in Marco. The seriousness of religious belief is parodied by three absurd clowns (Marco, Prologue, 213-214). O'Neill censures the exclusivity of religious doctrine. His cure is presented in the person of the soldier who decides the issue and whose threat implies the only religious truth possible: the one backed by force.

Reporting to the Kaan on the progress he has made as the second-class commission agent to Yang-Chau, Marco enthusiastically tells of having repealed the excess profits and luxury taxes because a profit could not possibly be excess, most people do not have luxuries,

and, a luxury tax would not be "democratic enough to make it pay." Therefore, he taxes necessities. Observing that only unhappy people make trouble, he rules that a citizen must be happy or go to jail, and he explains with an enthymeme the reasoning that led to his conclusion; "if a man's good, he's happy--and if he isn't happy, it's a sure sign he's no good." Proud he has made sin "practically unseen" (rather than unknown) in Yang-Chau with his laws, Marco then tells how he discovered paper money because "it can be made at very slight expense and yields enormous profits," and how he developed gunpowder from children's fireworks, gleefully adding that "the destruction of property and loss of life would be tremendous" were it to be used to wage a war to end all wars. But he says he is opposed to war because it "eats into the profits of life," and it is wrong because it wastes money (Marco, II, i, 256-260). The satire in the scene stems strongly from the parody of the public servant. O'Neill ridicules self-seeking authority. The Kaan, as the symbol of benevolent authority, is powerless to intercede because Marco is so overwhelmingly successful.

In another scene of parody, O'Neill has the young Marco Polo confront the beautiful princess who is dying of unrequited love for him. Affecting a grave manner, Marco imitates a doctor. He naively and stupidly examines her tongue and her feet, asks if she has stomach cramps, suggests she try to get some sleep, and even considers the possibility of brain fever. When the frustrated princess passionately

offers herself to him, and he seems on the verge of responding, he is suddenly shocked back to his true nature by the sound of his uncle counting money (Marco, II, iii, 277-280). Marco is crass, boorish, blind, and nonsensical in his behavior with Kukachin. Incapable of feeling love, he replaces it with loyalty. Unable even to recognize love in others, he not only rejects all loving gestures made to him, but he manages to respond in the most brutal and humiliating ways with an innocence that is exasperating. He repulses Kukachin's advances, then blithely mentions that when he almost kissed her he was really thinking of his plump, matronly Donata in Venice (Marco, II, iii, 281). Acquisitive, pompous, dishonest, insensitive, and energetic, Marco symbolizes the capitalist hero whose life will be marked by personal success, achievement, and fame, while Kukachin, who is poetic, sensuous, responsive to beauty, and virtuous, is unprepared to survive in the new society. By unmasking Marco's absurdity, and contrasting it to the sincerity and honesty of Kukachin, O'Neill censures the society whose values elevate the crass materialist and denigrate the individual with aesthetic sensibility.

c. Derision

Ridiculing by belittling, and showing scorn or contempt, is the technique O'Neill uses when he has Emma Crosby make a fool of herself by falling in love with her loutish nephew in Diff'rent. After having discarded her lover thirty years earlier because he was not a virgin, Emma becomes a frustrated "withered, scrawny woman [with] rouge

on her tight cheeks and thin lips . . . penciled [sic] make-up about her eyes . . . the black of her hair brazenly untruthful . . . [resembling] some passe stock actress of fifty made up for a heroine of twenty" (Diff'rent, II, 224). She falls in love with her nephew Benny Rogers, a coarse libertine, who offers to marry her so that she may support him in a style more adequate to his needs than that provided by his mother and uncle. But Benny is repulsed by her lasciviousness; he tells her she looks as though she were getting sick. Initially motivated by an obsessive puritanism into a rejection of her childhood sweetheart because he had lost his virginity, Emma ultimately is willing and eager to give up all her earlier ideals for the chance to lose hers. But she is now old, grotesque, and absurd. Victimized by her lust, she has become a comic fool whose antics--sincere as they may be--render her a mockery of the young lover. Emma, who is a puritan, attempts to act like a whore; it is too late; the pattern of her life is set. But O'Neill reveals himself to be strongly influenced by similar restrictive mores. He directs the satire against those who behave in a manner inconsistent with their role and status in society. Emma is described as showing "in her simpering, self-consciously coquettish manner that laughable--and at the same time irritating and disgusting--mockery of undignified age snatching greedily at the empty simulacra of youth" (Diff'rent, II, 224). The young O'Neill finds the spectacle of a woman of fifty dissembling as a coquette "irritating and disgusting." He censures Emma's actions by scornfully mocking her. O'Neill's implied cure is for people to "act their age."

(4) Abuse

Characterized by scornful, railing language, the satire becomes abusive at times in the Miller household in *Wilderness*. Reacting to Richard's enthusiasm over Carlyle's French Revolution, Mrs. Miller concludes that Richard may be under the influence of some other boy who is "advanced and wicked." She mentions "that awful Oscar Wilde," refers to The Picture of Dorian Gray as "cheap trash," rails about "that Bernard Shaw" and his play that was so "vile they wouldn't even let it play in New York!" Ibsen is called "that Ibsen, there," Swinburne "should have been . . . flung in jail," and The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam is labelled "blasphemous."

In a mood of despair, Richard says if he had one of "General Gabler's pistols around" he would use it, and in her attempt to dissuade him, Mrs. Miller speaks of General Gabler as one "of those darned books" (Wilderness, IV1, 101).

a. Sarcasm

Taunting his nephew to express contempt for his literary preferences, Sid Davis, with appropriate winking at the others, sarcastically comments that he feels "the need of a little poetical education" when Mrs. Miller mentions the "indecentcy" of Swinburne's poems. Davis also quotes "rhetorically" from The Rubaiyat with comic gestures (Wilderness, I, 17-20). Continuing in the sarcastic vein,

Miller says that he never read Swinburne's poetry but he "heard something like that was the matter with him," in reference to the ardent language of Anactoria, and Sid announces "the worst is yet to come," prior to reciting additional lines from the same poem (Wilderness, I, 27).

However, Mrs. Miller argues in the last scene that Richard has "an exceptional brain," and that "he's proved it by the way he likes to read all those deep books and poetry" (Wilderness, IV, iii, 122). and the play ends with a quotation from The Rubaiyat that Miller endearingly recites to his wife (Wilderness, IV, iii, 132). O'Neill displays a kindness toward his characters in this play that renders even their abuse good-natured.

However, the sarcastic abuse in Hughie is less sedate and more savage. Dedicated to disparaging the conventions of middle-class respectability, Erie Smith considers ideals worthy of "suckers" and sees life in terms of a survival of the fittest. "Don't never know nothin'," is Erie's advice to his fellow man. "Be a sap and stay healthy" (Hughie, 266). O'Neill uses Erie's abusive sarcasm to attack the restrictive conventions of marriage and the family just as he uses Richard Miller's fierce radical advocacy to ridicule the smug political indifference of the middle-class. Erie describes marriage as a state of resignation, a "racket . . . out of my line" (Hughie, 279-280). Defending bachelorhood, he proudly describes his friends as the "rats and chiselers" of Broadway, and he makes it clear he would have it no other

way. Respectability and family life are presented by Erie as conditions of drudgery and despair. But Erie's sarcasm is ironic: his words denounce the values of middle-class society, and yet there is an unexpressed longing for those very values in him--the warmth, generosity and lasting relationships of blood and marital ties.

b. The Sardonic

As a form of abusive satire, the sardonic, the mood of subdued anger that transmits chagrin, does not appear in O'Neill's plays.

c. Invective

A direct, unremitting attack characterized by expressed anger and vituperation, appears in two instances.

Hugo Kalmar in Iceman pours forth a steady stream of bitter abuse in the form of invective against the proletariat whose cause he claims to champion. Amazing himself by the sentiments he expresses in his frequent outbursts, he says he loves the proletariat, that he wants to lead them, to be their God, and then, he adds, "They will be my slaves!" (Iceman, III, 169). Vowing that he and "the jackass mob" will hang Hickey to a lamppost when the revolution comes, he interrupts the others with confused outbursts that mingle expressions of concern and disdain for the proletariat. Hugo is O'Neill's mock-revolutionary--the man with radical ideals but aristocratic tastes and

desires. Through the bitter threats and confused loyalties of Hugo Kalmar, O'Neill censures radical idealism itself.

Decidedly more sharp and biting in Journey, the invective is delivered with furious resentment by James Tyrone:

Voltaire, Rousseau, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Ibsen! Atheists, fools, and madmen! And your poets! This Dowson, and this Baudelaire, and Swinburne and Oscar Wilde, and Whitman and Poe! Whoremongers and degenerates! Pah! When I've got three good sets of Shakespeare there . . . you could read . . . Your dirty Zola! And your Dante Gabriel Rossetti who was a dope fiend!

[Journey, IV, 135].

He calls Baudelaire's poetry "morbid nonsense" and "morbid filth," and he proudly declares that he never heard of the author (Journey, IV, 133-134). The mild, disingenuous, literary criticism of Nat Miller in Wilderness has hardened into the bitter, angry reprovals of James Tyrone. But O'Neill's satire, in both instances, is directed against the stubborn, reactionary attitudes of older generation Americans whose aesthetic judgments are based on an appreciation of the acceptable classics and literature that neither violates Victorian rules of decorum and respectability nor challenges religious belief.

#### O'NEILL'S COMEDY OF IDEAS

The nimble delight, subtlety, and virtuosity of wit are not the stuff of which O'Neill's satire is made. More suitable to his temperament are irony, ridicule, and abuse.

He satirizes the mores of American society--the grotesque and oppressive practices of capitalism--in Movie Man, in which a great political event is controlled and exploited by fools imbued with the profit motive. In this early play, the tone is colloquial, free-swinging, and full of the teasing raillery and comic patois of stereotypic brash Americans, and obsequious, untrustworthy Mexicans. The scenes of Marco's early wheelings, dealings, discoveries, and decisions are laced with irony that stems from the startling contrast between Marco's joyful, ebullient spirit and the abusive, insensitive, destructive nature of his philosophy. This is very different from the irony evident in Mike Hogan's cloak of feigned interest in his ~~sister's~~ welfare in Misbegotten. His obsequiousness is an attempt to appear generous, but his rigid moralisms and his self-righteous indignation reveal the Puritan beneath the skin.

O'Neill's satire is levelled against the vulgarity of age masquerading as youth (Emma Crosby in Diff'rent), the fervent and absurd competitiveness of religion revealed in the mock-pietistic scene of the three priests at the sacred tree in Marco, the insensitivity and gaucherie of the materialist (Marco), the abuse of authority (Marco), the absurdity of undisciplined radicalism (Wilderness), the survival capacity of the ignorant and unfeeling (Journey), and the stupidity of chauvinism (Journey).

The satiric technique is abusive when directed against provincial American attitudes toward literature (Wilderness; Journey), the hypocrisy of radicalism (Iceman), and the restrictive conventions of middle-class values (Hughie).

When Marco sees "democratic" taxation as a tax on necessities rather than luxuries, O'Neill's target is the American income tax as a device that makes the rich richer and the poor poorer. Marco, the businessman, regards war as evil when it eats into his profits; a profitable war--like the Mexican revolution supported by The Earth Motion Picture Company in Movie Man--is a desirable tactic both of foreign and domestic policy. Government bureaucracy is the unchallenged exercise of authority supported by pomp and spectacle to impress and suppress the mob; it functions best when underhandedness, greed, double-dealing, graft, favoritism, and mistrust are used in the conduct of its affairs. Imbued with the spirit of acquisition, the American public, in Marco's homecoming banquet scene, is drawn as a society deeply committed to the materialist credo that quantity is quality, the rich are by definition virtuous, and poverty is a punishable crime.

Marco the capitalist conquers the world and acquires wealth, fame, and his childhood sweetheart; Richard Miller the radical fails in his efforts to be worldly, is regarded by his family as an adolescent fool whose social criticism is not to be taken seriously, and

only succeeds in winning the affections of his very conventional young woman. Richard is presented as a ridiculous adolescent whose reforming zeal is nothing more than a symptom of growing up in middle-class America, protected by the family and coddled by society because of the respected status of his father.

In presenting religionism and chauvinism as absurdly parochial, O'Neill links the sacred and the secular in immoral alliance. Church and state conspire to influence and rule men's lives by linking ideologies. General Bayan's zeal for conquest is fed both by nationalistic and religious fervor (Marco). Irish Catholicism, not just Catholicism, is considered by James Tyrone to be a hierarchical distinction inspired by God (Journey).

The inequities and excesses of capitalism; the fierce, competitive marketing spirit of religion; and the self-righteous aggression of chauvinism, as they appear in American society, are the primary objects of O'Neill's satire, but he also takes a side-swipe at unenlightened American attitudes toward art. Marco's description of the theatre as a place to "get your mind off serious things," and Nat Miller's, Sid Davis's, and James Tyrone's derogation of all literature that does not meet acceptable, puritannical standards, illustrate O'Neill's sharp condemnation of the provincial attitudes of American society during the early part of the century. The satire is pointed because Miller, Davis, and Tyrone are college-educated and presumably would not be expected to speak for the ignorant multitudes.

In considering the more universal shortcomings of human nature, O'Neill directs his satire against the disproportions of pretense, self-delusion, the ease with which false virtue passes for true, and the uses and abuses of sexuality that characterize love relationships. Marco (Marco), Cathleen (Journey), and Mike Hogan (Misbegotten) are among those who will "make it" in this world; Kukachin (Marco), Mary Tyrone (Journey), and Josie Hogan (Misbegotten) are among those who will not, because O'Neill sees the insensitive, the self-righteous, and the pragmatists succeed, while the sensitive ones, the virtuous ones, the idealists are pathetically ill-equipped for survival.

In his comedy of ideas, O'Neill reveals the deeply involved passion of the disillusioned idealist. Whether the subject be the institutions of men or their individual behavior, whether the satiric tone be the mocking of ridicule or the implication of irony (moods which contain most of the satire in his plays), O'Neill displays a reforming zeal that is often genial and reasonable. The extremes of the satiric spectrum--the light-heartedness of wit never appears, and the vituperation of invective appears infrequently. O'Neill is not contemptuous or indignant in his satire; he is concerned with human distortion, intractability, and ignorance, but his humanism is too strong a force in his work to be overcome. The tone of his protest is essentially moderate and often considerate. Only General Bayan (Marco), Benny

Rogers (Different), and Mike Hogan (Misbegotten), minor characters all, emerge as strongly unsympathetic and humorless. Expressed in the language, attitudes, and behavior of all the other characters in his plays, O'Neill's satire is rich in generosity and understanding.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

All six categories of comic elements<sup>1</sup> are used by O'Neill in the plays he wrote throughout his career, from 1913 to 1943. What follows are a summary of the significant conclusions for each category, a chart identifying the nature and extent of the comic elements that appear in each of the plays, and a consideration of the use and importance of comedy in O'Neill's work.

#### (1) Comic Taboo

The sex act provides the basis of more than half of the comic taboo elements in O'Neill's plays. Taboo references to sex appear in Caribbees, Diff'rent, Ape, Desire, Marco, Wilderness, Iceman, Hughie, and Misbegotten. With the exception of Jim Tyrone in Misbegotten, whose oft-repeated interest is in women with "beautiful big breasts," the use of body parts as elements of comic taboo is limited to the male and female fundaments. These references appear in Ape, Iceman, Journey, and Misbegotten. Blasphemous language intended to provide comic shock

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<sup>1</sup>Comic Taboo, Physical Comedy, Comic Plot Devices, Verbal Humor, Comic Characters, and Comedy of Ideas.

occurs in Voyage, Jones, Desire, Poet, and Misbegotten. O'Neill's use of verbal obscenity is limited to the later plays, Iceman, Hughie, and Misbegotten. The comic taboo of gesture and movement appears in Marco and Wilderness. The evidence shows that in both his serious and his comic plays, throughout his career, O'Neill used taboo elements for comic shock as bases for jests, stories, comic allusions, and, in two instances--Marco's story (with gestures) of the Irishman who mistook a statue for a woman, and Nat Miller's slap on his wife's buttocks--as the subjects for erotic pantomime.

## (2) Physical Comedy

The buffoonery and slapstick antics of a host of comic characters in ten plays<sup>2</sup> illustrate O'Neill's use of robust physical comedy--often of a spectacular nature--for dramatic effect and contrast. In the early Caribbees, a scene of choreographed bedlam "pours out on deck" from the forecastle of the Glancairn; crewmen and prostitutes dance drunkenly, intentionally bump into each other, and finally break out into a "wholesale fight." The parasites Roche, O'Dowd, and Riley in Poet cavort grotesquely, hilariously jamming themselves in the doorway, and thereby give Con Melody the opportunity to upbraid them for mistaking his inn for the "dirty shebeen you were used to in the old country where the pigs ran in and out the door" (Poet, I, 168). "Like a monkey on a string," Ephraim Cabot prances and "cuts incredibly

<sup>2</sup>Caribbees, Voyage, Ape, Desire, Marco, Wilderness, Poet, Iceman, Journey, and Misbegotten.

grotesque capers" in a large, spectacular country dance scene in which he attempts to outdance his neighbors (Desire, III, 1, 187). Cabot sees himself as a symbol of sexual virility; his neighbors see him as a ridiculous cuckold. Both the scapegoat and the satyr merge into one. As comic scenes of vigorous physical activity, the homecoming banquet of the Polo clan in Marco and the Fourth of July dinner of the Miller clan in Wilderness illustrate the voracious spirit of acquisition of the American system, and the good-natured, ribald horseplay of American family life, respectively.

Ensemble events like the Polo and Miller feasts, and solo and comic team "acts" are the kinds of physical comedy scenes O'Neill uses. Outstanding among O'Neill's comic teams are Cocky and Driscoll of the sea plays, Sid Davis and the maid Norah in Wilderness, and Josie and Phil Hogan in Misbegotten. A vaudeville team--Cocky, the little "wizened runt" of a Cockney sailor, and Driscoll, his big, powerful Irish comrade--exchange abuse, obscenities, "roughhouse," and mutual affection. In a hilarious scene of ungainliness and pure slapstick, Sid Davis' drunk act collides with Norah's bumbling table service, provoking gales of laughter from the others around the table. But for a sustained level of physical comedy--shovings, beatings on the head, threatening gestures, and the like--Josie Hogan and her father stand out, in the last of O'Neill's plays, as his most accomplished comic team. When they are not abusing each other, they join

forces in a ribald scene of furious intensity to rout Harder, the Standard Oil millionaire.

Two solo comedy acts rely on drunkenness for their humor, Drinking renders Hugo Kalmar impervious to his environment; he alternately dozes and awakens to repeat his confused expressions of support and disdain for the proletariat (Iceman). Drinking renders the maid Cathleen exuberant and voluble; she lectures her mistress and becomes like a member of the family (Journey). Hugo is a comic clown whose antics illustrate the theme of the lies that pass for truth--his drunkenness reveals the hypocrisy of the disillusioned idealist whose love for the proletariat has become nothing more than intellectual pretension; Cathleen acts as a comic contrast to her despairing mistress, thereby increasing the sense of futility in the scene. In both instances, O'Neill uses physical comedy in clownish characters to enlighten aspects of serious dramatic themes.

### (3) Comic Plot Devices

In his use of comic plot devices in Dynamo, Mourning, Wilderness, Poet, Journey, and Misbegotten, O'Neill relies heavily on gulling and, to a lesser degree, on the element of misunderstanding. Two instances of comic misunderstanding appear in Poet: the scenes between Melody and Deborah Harford, and Melody and Nicholas Gadsby. As a comic plot device, gulling occurs both as an attempt to hoodwink

some innocent person and as an instance of someone taking advantage of a victim of an overpowering obsession. Hoodwinked innocents include Reuben Light, the victim of Ramsay Fife's practical joke in Dynamo; Richard Miller, the ridiculous innocent of the bar scene in Wilderness; Abner Small, the unsuspecting butt of Seth Beckwith's "haunted house" ruse in Mourning; Charles Hughes, the absent-minded night clerk in Hughie; and Josie Hogan, tricked by her father into planning the seduction of a prospective husband in Misbegotten. Dupes include Nat Miller, who passionately detests bluefish even though he has been eating it for years without being aware of it (Wilderness), James Tyrone, whose miserliness is defeated by all the members of his household conspiring to maintain the level in his whiskey bottle by adding water to the contents (Journey), and T. Stedman Harder, whose violent objection to his neighbor's pigs in his ice pond is subdued when his neighbor threatens to sue him for having caused his pigs to contract pneumonia (Misbegotten).

#### (4) Verbal Humor

However, O'Neill's comedy is largely verbal. Twenty-five of the twenty-six published full-length plays (Gold is the exception) contain elements of verbal humor; even among the nineteen one-act plays, many of whose plots are grim and seemingly humorless, only Thirst, Before Breakfast, "Ile," The Sniper, and Where The Cross Is Made contain no comic dialogue. Ruby Cohn identifies O'Neill as

a master of dialect and as the playwright who fathered realistic dialogue in the American theatre.<sup>3</sup> The distinctiveness is supported by O'Neill's extensive use of colloquial dialogue in his verbal comedy, in which dialect and regional and professional colloquialism play strong roles. There is comic Irish brogue in Wilderness, Journey, Iceman, Poet, and Misbegotten. Big-city dialect appears in Brown, Wilderness, Iceman, Hughie, Journey, and Misbegotten. O'Neill records the language of sailors, northern and southern Blacks, first and second generation Swedes, New England farmers, sophisticated New Yorkers, small-town New Englanders, Fundamentalist preachers, Cockney traders, Spanish grandees, native West Indians, prostitutes, Englishmen, New York society matrons, religious mystics, Oriental potentates and sages, German and Slavic immigrants, Harvard and Yale graduates, doctors, priests, millionaires, Hollywood movie men, and others. Starting in 1913 and continuing for thirty years, O'Neill creates a rich store of realistic dialogue that reflects the robust, vigorous rhythms of the American language. His comically colloquial language registers abusive and enthusiastic outbursts, diminutives, erotic references, exaggeration, hyperbole, and parody. Even the comic formations he uses--the coined words, names, titles, and new usages--are mainly colloquialisms. O'Neill is far less interested in creating comic effect

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<sup>3</sup>Ruby Cohn, Dialogue in American Drama (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), p. 5.

through the use of word-play, wit, and stylistic devices (words sounds, and letter, syllable, and word repetition) because he uses language more for an element of character than for its inherent comic possibilities. However, jests and comic stories abound, reflecting the broad usage of comic banter, small talk, and story-telling in the American tradition. Significant in the examples of O'Neill's verbal humor are the many instances of linguistic reversals in the plays. A common device in which the comic shock results from a surprise turn from the expected, comic reversals are used often by O'Neill to identify a character with a strong sense of comic intention. On two occasions, O'Neill even uses colloquial language and word meanings as the subjects of comic dialogue: when Sara Melody repeatedly lapses into Irish brogue in order to taunt her father, who reminds her of the effort he made to have her learn to speak English well (Poet), and when Rocky and his girls argue the semantic differences between "whore" and "tart" (Iceman).

#### (5) Comic Characters

A rich variety of household and professional types appears throughout the plays as comic characters: young lovers like Mat Burke, Marco Polo, and Richard Miller, who struggle against overwhelming odds to win their women; comic fathers Ramsay Fife, Chris Christopherson, Nat Miller, and Phil Hogan who thwart the marital ambitions of their offspring; parasites Sid Davis and the denizens of Harry Hope's and

Con Melody's bars; as well as comic sailors, "city slickers," salesmen, rustics, lawyers, and even a Standard Oil millionaire.

Among the women, there are the comic mothers--Harriet Crosby, Ada Fife, Amelia Light, and Essie Miller--all vigorously involved in the love pursuits of their offspring; young girls like Lucy Townsend, Donata Loredano, Muriel McComber, and Josie Hogan, who are engaged in snaring prospective husbands; other young girls, Lily Jayson, and Mildred Miller, who are comic precisely because they make it clear to everyone that the love chase, which is supposed to be of primary interest to them, is not; and prostitutes in Marco, Wilderness, and Iceman, and comic maids in Wilderness and Journey, who conduct themselves in aggressive comic manner, oblivious to the conventional requirements of good taste and polite society.

#### (6) Comedy of Ideas

Satiric comedy, or the comedy of ideas, appears in Diff'rent, Movie Man, Marco, Wilderness, Iceman, Journey, Misbegotten, Poet, and Hughie. But the tones of O'Neill's satire are neither the light-hearted flippancy of wit nor the released fury of invective; comic irony and the ridiculous provide the moods most often present in the satiric scenes. O'Neill's satire conveys a sense of protest informed more by a spirit of genial criticism than by anger. The abuses of American capitalism, the disproportionate values of materialism, the hypocrisy of religion, the narrow-mindedness of

American provincialism, the pretense, vanity, and self-delusion of mankind, the ease with which false virtue passes for true, and the uses people make of their sexuality, are the subjects that occupy his interest. Generally, the topics of O'Neill's satire are the same topics that appear most often in satiric literature.

O'Neill makes ample use of the full range of dramatic techniques available to provide comic effect in his plays. In all his work, only the one-act plays Thirst, The Sniper, Before Breakfast, "Ile," and Where The Cross Is Made, and the full-length play Gold, contain no comic elements. All of these plays were written before 1921.

However, for a more precise picture of O'Neill's use of comic elements throughout his career, I have prepared a chart on the following pages that lists all of his published plays according to their dates of composition. For each play, an indication of the use of each of the six comic elements is made. A space between play titles means that a period of more than one year lapsed between dates of composition.

O'NEILL'S USE OF THE SIX COMIC ELEMENTS IN HIS PLAYS

\*indicates a full-length play

		Comic Taboo	Physical Comedy	Comic Plot Devices	Verbal Humor	Comic Characters	Comedy of Ideas
1913	<u>The Web</u>				X		
1913	<u>A Wife for A Life</u>				X	X	
1914	<u>The Movie Man</u>				X	X	X
1914	<u>Warnings</u>				X	X	
1914	<u>Thirst</u>						
1914	<u>Recklessness</u>				X		
1914	<u>Fog</u>				X		
1914	<u>Bound East for Cardiff</u>				X	X	
1914	<u>Abortion</u>				X	X	
1914	<u>Servitude*</u>				X	X	
1915	<u>The Sniper</u>						
1916	<u>Before Breakfast</u>						
1917	<u>"Ile"</u>						
1917	<u>In The Zone</u>				X	X	
1917	<u>The Long Voyage Home</u>	X	X		X	X	
1917	<u>The Moon of The Caribbees</u>	X	X		X	X	
1918	<u>Rope</u>				X	X	
1918	<u>Where The Cross Is Made</u>						
1918	<u>The Dreamy Kid</u>				X		
1918	<u>Beyond The Horizon*</u>				X	X	
1919	<u>Anna Christie*</u>				X	X	
1919	<u>The Straw*</u>				X	X	
1920	<u>Diff'rent*</u>	X			X	X	X

O'NEILL'S USE OF THE SIX COMIC ELEMENTS IN HIS PLAYS--Continued

		Comic Taboo	Physical Comedy	Comic Plot Devices	Verbal Humor	Comic Characters	Comedy of Ideas
1920	<u>The Emperor Jones*</u>	X			X		
1920	<u>Gold*</u>						
1921	<u>The Hairy Ape*</u>	X	X		X	X	
1921	<u>The First Man*</u>				X	X	
1922	<u>The Fountain*</u>				X		
1923	<u>All God's Chillun Got Wings*</u>				X	X	
1923	<u>Welded*</u>				X		
1924	<u>Desire Under The Elms*</u>	X	X		X	X	
1925	<u>The Great God Brown*</u>				X		
1925	<u>Marco Millions*</u>	X	X		X	X	X
1926	<u>Lazarus Laughed*</u>				X	X	
1927	<u>Strange Interlude *</u>				X	X	
1928	<u>Dynamo*</u>			X	X	X	
1931	<u>Days Without End*</u>				X		
1931	<u>Mourning Becomes Electra*</u>	X		X	X	X	
1932	<u>Ah, Wilderness!*</u>	X	X	X	X	X	X
1938	<u>More Stately Mansions*</u>				X	X	
1939	<u>The Iceman Cometh*</u>	X	X		X	X	X
1940	<u>A Touch of the Poet*</u>	X	X	X	X	X	
1941	<u>Long Day's Journey into Night*</u>	X	X	X	X	X	X
1941	<u>Hughie</u>	X			X	X	X
1943	<u>A Moon for The Misbegotten*</u>	X	X	X	X	X	X

The few plays without any type of comedy were written before 1921. However, plays like Movie Man, Voyage, and Caribbees, which have a good deal of comedy, also were written before 1921. Whatever the year, and regardless of the mood of the play, O'Neill relies heavily on the development of comic characters and the attendant verbal humor that goes along with them. In the early plays, the comic characters are often incidental to the plot; in the later plays, they are often more important.

The chart indicates a hiatus after 1928 during which no plays were written for three years. After this period a sharp acceleration in the uses of comic elements occurs, giving rise to the two plays containing the most comic elements, Wilderness and Misbegotten (the exception is Marco, written in 1925, which also is rich in comedy).

In the two works of the middle period whose plots are influenced strongly by classical Greek tragedies--Desire and Mourning as manifestations of Hippolytus and The Oresteia, respectively--O'Neill mixes comic with tragic elements to provide the kind of thematic enrichment and emphasis more amenable to the analogic spirit of the Elizabethans than to the analytic spirit of the Greeks. Most of the comic elements in his plays exist as parallels and contrasts to events and actions that illuminate the themes from additional points of view in ways that stem from medieval English rather than classical Greek sources.

Regarded by many as O'Neill's best works, the "late plays," from 1939 on, contain the highest concentration of the variety of comic elements. As he matured, O'Neill used comedy with far less restraint than he had shown earlier. Most of the comic taboo, physical comedy, and satire appear in the late plays; his use of comic plot devices (appearing even in plays like Mourning and Journey) occurs only among the plays written after 1928.

Throughout his career, O'Neill infuses his work with comic elements; in the late period, however, he uses a great deal of comedy as a more pervasive dramatic technique that enriches his plots and informs his themes. In fact, the recognized excellence of his late plays is strongly related to his technique of using comedy to express and dramatize his tragic themes (Iceman, Journey).

There is a good deal of comedy in O'Neill's dialogue and in his stage directions--comedy that is robust, colloquial, often farcical, sometimes physical, sometimes erotic and shocking, but always structurally and thematically related to the play in which it appears. O'Neill's comedy is never used arbitrarily or for "comic relief." Aided by colloquial dialogue tuned to the concatenated rhythms of regional America and its rich cultural diversity, O'Neill always strives for an intense realism; he displays a strong fidelity in the language, attitudes, and behavior of his characters to the sounds and patterns of American life. The comic plays an important role in his dramaturgy because it is close

to the vigorous, free-swinging spirit of the American people before 1943 (the date of O'Neill's last play), and is, therefore, a vital aspect of his realism.

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