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The performance of folly in plays by O’Neill, Williams, and Shepard

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The Ohio State University, 1992
THE PERFORMANCE OF FOLLY
IN PLAYS BY O'NEILL, WILLIAMS, AND SHEPARD

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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*****

The Ohio State University
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank Dr. Katherine Burkman for impetus, guidance, and scrutiny. Drs. Pat Mullen and Stratos Constantinidis have provided valuable insight and commentary. I have relied on conversations with several good friends and thank them for their patience and good humor. My parents and sisters have also been very supportive.
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INTRODUCTION

THE FOLKLOРИST, THE FOOL, AND THE PATHWAYS OF FOLLY

The theaters of Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Sam Shepard denote three separate but interfusing stages of American drama; each playwright serves as a benchmark of the historical development of American theater, from realism through postmodernism. All three playwrights experimented with new techniques and forms, each seeking to make, as William Carlos Williams might say, the experience of theater new. Borrowing expressionistic techniques from European models, O'Neill sought to escape the melodramatic conventions of nineteenth-century American drama. Williams, as a successor to O'Neill, deepened the theater patron's experience through use of expressionistic devices and "plastic" elements of staging. Just as O'Neill and Williams were major voices of their respective time periods, Shepard's is an influential contemporary voice, sounding out possibilities in the postmodern theater.

In several dramas by each playwright, the figure of the fool plays a central part. For example, Jones, of O'Neill's The Emperor Jones, contains vestiges of the minstrel fool in his characterization; Alvaro, of Williams's The Rose Tattoo, plays a significant role as
Commedia dell'arte clown; Martin, of Shepard's *Fool for Love*, is a simpleton, a country bumpkin, forming an easy target for the sophisticated wit of the play's trickster Eddie. The presence of the fool in modern tragicomedy is not unusual; comedy, as Olson points out, always requires the presence of a well- or ill-intentioned fool or wit (52). In the modern social world, "Folly has become a general, opaque, vague and free-floating phenomenon" (Zijderveld 156); likewise, one would expect a similar diffusion of folly in modern drama, with a proliferation of characters playing foolish parts, as is the case in *The Iceman Cometh*. The tragic character seems obsolete, requiring redefinitions from Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams, while the fool seems to rule the stage. Unlike the Renaissance or Restoration fool who played a significant, yet marginal, part, the fool in several American dramas tends to take center stage. By looking at three icons of the popular theater and of academic discussion, one may discover historical patterns of the way the fool is used in American drama.

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1 In his foreword to *The Rose Tattoo*, a comedy, Williams discusses the contemporary requirements for tragedy. In tragedies of a former order, a timeless quality informs the events on stage. To hold the attention of a modern audience, a tragedy must include "the diminishing influence of life's destroyer, time" (x). Williams suggests that "a certain foolery, a certain distortion toward the grotesque" may "solve the problem" (x). Miller disinherits the Aristotelian notion that tragedy belongs to the highly placed or noble individual. As long as a character is "intent upon claiming his whole due as a personality," he may be said to be tragic, even if an "average man" (6-7).
The fool spins a revolving door of truth and illusion, substituting an invented reality for one more empirically based, calling into question the foundations of our existence. One looks for a common denominator of traits: dual consciousness, a certain "self-division" (Willeford 34, 42); the espousal of irrationality, of nonsense; existence along the sidelines of dramatic action (Welsford xii; Willeford 49); social marginality, the fool as "under-dog" (Welsford 319). The fool is comically abnormal, a scapegoat of our own sense of inferiority (Welsford 318) or an entertainer of absurd possibilities, using carnival unlicense or verbal indirection to challenge the status quo. At bottom, the fool lacks sense. As Red Skeleton says, "I've got the sixth sense, but I don't have the other five" (qtd. in Willeford 28).

Although writers speak of the fool in a universal sense: the "Fool or Clown" as "Comic Man" (Welsford xii), "the Fool--capital F" (Berlin 7), several types of fool may be delineated. Several commentators distinguish between the natural and artificial fool (Welsford 59; Willeford 10; Sypher 232): the natural fool is physically deformed or mentally abnormal, cruelly retained by patrons as a source of amusement, as supernatural protection against the Evil Eye, as preventative medicine against the ill effects of hubris; the artificial fool, imitating the behavior of the natural fool, is a self-conscious jester, an entertainer, a licensed critic of courtly idiosyncrasies. The court fool finds his parallel on the Elizabethan stage in the Shakespearean wise fool, Touchstone or Lear's mascot, who disguises truth with nonsense and acts as "an ironical commentator on the other persons and the action of the play"
(Goldsmith 31). Finally, the mythical trickster is a type of fool, a figure whose pranks make fools out of others but may backfire and reveal the trickster's own absurdity. He encapsulates a trait of the fool as boundary breaker, his function "to render possible, within the fixed bounds of what is permitted, an experience of what is not permitted" (Kerenyi 185). Like the fool, he possesses a dual nature, "half animal, half divine" (Jung 195). In literature, the trickster manifests himself as "picaro, the vice, the mountebank, the rogue" (Lindberg 9). In American history, Abe Lincoln played the trickster by pretending to be a natural fool, a country bumpkin, conning political opponents into thinking he was simpler minded than he was in reality (Blair 126-33).

The natural fool, the artificial jester, the wise fool, the trickster--these four varieties of fool also appear in American literature. One may find representatives of these types in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn alone: the Duke and King as artificial jesters who play-act the semi-obscene Royal Nonesuch, and the Duke and King as con-artists who abuse the public welfare of the Wilks daughters for private gain; Huck as a natural fool, a "numskull" (1178), who cannot make-believe, along with Tom Sawyer, that a Sunday School picnic is really a caravan of "A-rabs" (1179), and Huck as a wise fool, a mouthpiece for the ironical commentary of Mark Twain.

The fool makes significant inroads on the American stage in the twentieth-century dramas of O'Neill, Williams, and Shepard. What use does the American dramatist continue to make of the fool
persona? What is the relationship between the fool as a performer and his or her on-stage audiences? What implications does this relationship hold for the theater audience at large? These are the three primary questions that this study addresses. Three plays by each playwright will be considered: O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* (first performed in 1920), *Marco Millions* (1928), and *The Iceman Cometh* (1946); Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), *The Rose Tattoo* (1950), and *Camino Real* (1953); and Shepard's *The Tooth of Crime* (1972), *True West* (1980), and *Fool for Love* (1983). These plays make predominant use of the fool as a performer, a character who collects an on-stage audience of other characters as participants in his or her fool's "show" (a term Willeford employs, 1). This study, at first, will be textually diagnostic, but will attempt to pin the tail of fool performance to the donkey of American traditions of humor, establishing a theatrical-historical framework, as well as structurally assess audience or reader response.

This is not to say that these are the only plays by these playwrights which contain fools. One could look at O'Neill's *Lazarus Laughed*, in which the resurrected Biblical Lazarus acts as a Lord of Misrule, a festival leader through his contagious, ongoing laughter of a Feast of Fools who act outside the bounds of Roman law. Or one could consider Williams's *The Night of the Iguana*, whose protagonist, Shannon, an alcoholic, defrocked priest, tragically mismanages, in his present capacity as tour guide, a bus load of schoolteachers from a Bible college. Or Shepard's *Buried Child*, one of whose fools,
Tilden, brings an armload of ears of corn on stage from a back lot which hadn't been planted for years.

Other American playwrights would also make good candidates for a study of the fool on stage. In George S. Kaufman's dramas, for instance, is the "Kaufmanic fool, a natural hick" (Mason 208), and the subversive clown, exemplified by the routines of the Marx Brothers (Mason 210-12)--alternate versions of the "American Everyman" (Mason 207). In Ed Bullins's play The Electronic Nigger, a student of Mr. Jones's English 22E, Creative Writing, course continually interrupts the first class session with impromptu academic remarks. The student, Mr. Carpentier, is the epitome of academic linguistic density, the language of the clown interfering with the ordinary course of classroom events:

Mr. Carpentier: Socio Drama will be the new breakthrough in the theatrical-literary community.
Mr. Jones: Oh, Lord . . . not again. This is madness. (241)

However, limiting this study to three playwrights who have achieved popular success as well as academic scrutiny will provide a variety of patterns of communication between fool and audience on stage, as well as historical continuity.

The fool has a central role as a participant in theater and speaks significantly to problems of theater performance in American culture. Welsford suggests the stage fool is important because, as a social and theatrical figure, he bridges the gap between actor and audience: "The Fool, in fact, is an amphibian equally at home in the world of reality and the world of imagination" (xii). Gentili, too,
underscores the importance of the fool on stage, the "disguises" of folly reflecting the nature of theater, "the realm of fiction and simulation" (11). The relationship between the fool as a performer and his or her on-stage audience in these plays may provide an insight into the theater patron's or reader's relationship to the theaters of O'Neill, Williams, and Shepard.

The fool in America is disconnected from royalty, or there exists no royalty from which it can disconnect itself. "It is, of course, un-American to think in terms of fools and knaves" (Ciardi 63). In Hawthorne's story, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," the country bumpkin, Robin, conducts a vain search for his kinsman, a colonial official appointed by the British king. An object of humor for the townspeople he encounters, a butt of their jokes, Robin pursues a fool's quest for patronage but learns a lesson in independence. Instead of the potential fool as scapegoat, it is Major Molineux himself who, in "tar-and-feathery dignity" (510), is carted past Robin. The American fool, like the nation itself, has severed his chain from the leg of the throne: "the chain must have . . . functioned as a means of keeping this human symbol for disorder fixed within the compass of the court" (Emigh 127).

The American fool, as a performer, asserts an individuality free of the limitations of patronage. The American fool's "show" is potentially unlicensed; no authority, except the limits of public taste, restrains his performance. Sut Lovingood, a "nat'ral born durn'd fool" (Harris vii), creates chaos out of the fragile order of Tennessee frontier civilization. "The conventional world of rule disintegrates as
Sut enacts his play of misrule. His success as a performer hinges on his ability to shatter conventional formulations" (Wenke 199). The tall tale, a peculiarly American genre, also produces its assault on ordinary sense, attempts to break in verbal geometrical progression any upward limit of rationality: "From almost the beginning, the incomprehensible vastness of the continent, the extraordinary fertility of the land, and the variety of natural peculiarities inspired a humor of extravagance and exaggeration" (Brown 2). In this case, the audience plays the part of fool, taken in by the lies of the tale teller, as trickster.

The backwoods boaster, as well, verbally inflated his identity to the point of absurdity. The frontispiece to Blair and Hill's study of American humor contrasts "Old World Braggarts" with the "New World Ring-tailed Roarer." The subscripts read, for the Old: "After Boasting about Their Bravery, Two Cowardly 17th-Century Commedia dell'arte Captains Run Away from One Another"; for the New: "After Boasting about His Bravery, a 19th-Century Kentucky Ring-Tailed Roarer Decimates a Backwoods Settlement." The business of the American self-conscious fool, as subversive jester, as individualist comedian, is to stretch limits, to engage in unrestrained activity or verbal performance: "subversive characters have one trait in common: their distrust of and disregard for the rules. At the least dangerous level, such indifference becomes clear in their defiance of the laws of truthfulness and honesty" (Blair and Hill 195). At a more dangerous level, "the rascal in subversive humor manages to injure, quite deliberately, various innocent bystanders, little old
ladies, sheriffs, men of the cloth, and his own parents" (Blair and Hill 198).

Unlike the Shakespearean wise fool who "takes no prominent part in the business of the play" (Goldsmith 31), the American fool plays a central role; if he emerges from a life on the periphery of action, if he enters late in the play from the wings, the fool still claims a spotlight for his performance, assumes a precedence over the "serious" dramatic actor. In O'Neill, the fool becomes a mock-actor, assuming a "serious" part; in Williams, the fool combats the performances of the realistic actor; in Shepard, all characters, to some degree, take the part of the fool. Instead of providing comic relief, the American fool intimidates, harasses, transforms. Not the traditional hub of carnival unlicense or anti-authoritarian revel, the American fool may disrupt a carnival already taking place on stage: Hickey's disturbance, in The Iceman Cometh, of Harry's birthday party; Blanche's kibitzing, in A Streetcar Named Desire, on Stanley's poker night; Eddie's intrusion in Fool for Love on May's preparations for her date.

The study of the fool in American drama brings into play three central questions of performance: the problem of an interior self, of who is speaking; the problem of limits, of the performer's recognition of a boundary to the potentialities of performance; and the problem of the audience-performer relationship, of performative power. The fool, in general, provides a special case study of these problems because of the peculiar ways his performances affect his audience. But the American fool, in particular, makes these theatrical
preoccupations a center of interest because he takes center stage, in the plays under consideration, as a performer. Willeford says that "the drama, as a presentation of meaningful action, belongs not to the fool but to the actor" (49); in selected plays of O'Neill, Williams, and Shepard, the drama belongs not to the actor but to the fool.

Nonfool performers reveal a more concrete idea of who they are, of what they're like inside; they recognize appropriate, socially prescribed limits of performance; and they do not threaten the audience with carnivalesque unlicense or the challenge to rationality. With the fool, however, the audience is both attracted and repulsed, attracted because it is able to see itself in the fool, repulsed because of the threat of nonsense and the discomfort of taboo. On the one hand is the fool's "show" as a drama: "the make-believe of a play or other formal dramatic entertainment requires the spectator partly to lose himself in the performance" (Willeford 63). On the other hand is the audience's tendency to distance itself through rationality: "we soon come to terms with the trick that the fool plays on us, either by seeing a meaningful point in it or by giving it up as nonsense" (Willeford 52). No matter how caught up an audience becomes with the performance of the fool, it may tend to hold certain reservations, to keep one foot in reality, as a brace against the instability, the irrationality of the fool's imaginative world.

The actor's approach to playing a fool may differ from an audience's reaction to a fool as a character. The comments of Shakespearean actors fail to suggest any meaningful distinction between a fool's part and nonfool's part. In each case, the actor goes
through a process of screening the text for clues of psychology, motivation, personal background, personality, relationship to other characters, etc., as a way of entering a part. For instance, with Portia, a nonfool, the actor's problem was to reconcile the "spoilt little rich girl" of the early scenes with the "woman" who can "deliver the 'quality of mercy' speech" at the end of the play (Brockbank 30). With the fool, Lavatch, the actor also faced a problem of reconciliation of opposites: "There seems to be within him a continual battle between the forces of good and evil. His general level of thought and reference is very crude and low . . . Nevertheless, through this there shine occasional moments of enlightenment" (Brockbank 84). Willeford calls attention to a basic duality in the mindset of the fool, as well: "The self-division that we sense in the fool is made, partly by means of projection, to correspond to the division between fool and nonfool" (42). However, the actor playing Timon of Athens, a tragic character, also senses a self-division, "antithetical passions" of "munificence" and "misanthropy" (Brockbank 132). In any case, the character of Lavatch springs to life quite easily: "Having created the character, discovered his attitudes to life, found the logic behind his thinking, his motivations and drives, it doesn't seem to me difficult to make the humour work" (Brockbank 89).

Willeford also suggests that the fool "may be regarded as the prototype of the dramatic actor, and his show may be regarded as the prototype of drama" (64). Like any impromptu street performer, the fool in social life has the ability to create performance situations,
to manufacture audiences out of passersby. In this case, one can understand the value of paying attention to the fool-performer (as a character) in a drama, especially if this character takes center stage. In his role as comic actor, and in his generation of audiences on stage, a miniature, microcosmic theater is established, a theater within a theater, like Hamlet's mouse-trap, whereby one may catch the conscience of the playwright, and derive an understanding of his conceptions of the possibilities of the dramatic enterprise.

The fool as performer, performing a part for an on-stage audience of nonfool characters, brings into question the nature of theater. The issue of interiority is brought into play. Part of the problem of the on-stage audience is that its members try to sound out the interiors of the fool-performers, what it is that makes them tick, the problem of motivation. There is some hidden quality, some missing link or dimension, in these characters: Blanche's interior visions and auditory hallucinations; Crow's self behind the mask; Hickey's guilt over the murder of his wife, a fact withheld until the fourth act, when Hickey admits this to himself for the first time.

In several of the plays by O'Neill, Williams, and Shepard, one witnesses the unlicensed performance of the fool. The American fools in these plays do not have a developed sense of limits, or a knowledge of their on-stage audience's capacities for indulgence of their performances. A tension exists between fool-performer and on-stage audience, a tension which serves as a self-reflexive commentary on theater interrelationships at large. Dramatized is the problem of performative power, the excesses of performance and the
ways an audience is able to harness this power or quarantine it. The fool again is a good figure to bring into play as a test of performer-audience relationships because of the unlimited exercise of his or her imagination, the way he or she involves the audience in substitute worlds. In other words, the fool-performer involves his audience in a complicity, because it sees itself in the fool, because it is busy making a scapegoat out of him based on its own fears and anxieties, because it is caught up as a third party in the victimization of an authority figure whom it dislikes, etc.

By observing the interaction of fool-performer and on-stage audience, one may gauge the individual playwright's preoccupations with the theater as a collective experience. Other studies of these playwrights discuss, in passing, individual characters as a type of fool, addressing problems of definition, categorization, or function—e.g., Nancy Reinhardt notes that Hugo and Willie in *The Iceman Cometh* are "quasi-Shakespearean fools" (122); Normand Berlin assesses Larry Slade's role in this same play as a wise fool (7); Philip Kolin recognizes that Alvaro in *The Rose Tattoo* "is the lover disguised as a fool" (221); Ann Wilson claims that in *Fool for Love* each character is a fool for love and that the spectators "are fools of desire who try to satisfy their desire for the pleasure of performance" (56). Other relevant studies are cited in each chapter; however, no study at present devotes exclusive attention to the problem of the fool as a verbal performer in these plays.

On the other hand, several studies examine the problems of performance in these plays, issues of the actor's self, role-playing,
and metatheater—e.g., James Watson examines the ways the "internal structure" of The Iceman Cometh is "the structure of a theater" (231); William Free relates the exaggerated masculine and feminine roles of Stanley and Blanche to homosexual Camp performance, attaching their styles to a historical phenomenon of theater; Bonnie Marranca examines various aspects of Shepard's theater, including Shepard's "practice" of "giving his characters the chance to be performers" (14). Other studies concerning performance issues are highlighted in individual chapters. This dissertation attempts to bridge these two kinds of critical discussions, of the fool and of performance, relating fool activity on stage to a cultural matrix of folly and assessing possible avenues of audience response.

In O'Neill, the fool has lost his connection with folly. He has surrendered a fool's image or role for a different, more assertive type of performance. His "new" performance exceeds the limits that the original fool's role would have respected. O'Neill sets up a model of the excessive performer and records the process of marginalization that the on-stage audience enforces. In Williams, the marginal voice of the fool-performer is brought into play as a counter-authoritarian element, as a corrective. The fool-performer acts as an antidote to the more rigid and inelastic performances that his or her on-stage audiences employ. The fool teaches lessons in plasticity, attempting a break-up of performative convention, a miniature model of Williams's conception of the plastic theater itself. Shepard brings varieties of trickster performance into play. The
audience or reader witnesses the activity of the trickster, but sympathizes with the victim, who also plays the trickster as a defensive counter-measure. Shepard's drama intensifies audience appreciation of the ways the performance of a threatening, unknowable, unlicensed fool brings out similar features in his on-stage audience. Each playwright, then, uses the figure of the fool to register the potentials for transformation in the on-stage audience, or to record the ways an audience goes about adapting itself to the powers of the fool-performer or evicting the fool-performer from the premises.

At least two of O'Neill's dramas, The Emperor Jones and The Iceman Cometh, are tied to the popular stages of, respectively, the minstrel show and the vaudeville circuit. Trying to break his theater of the habit of nineteenth-century melodramatic conventions (see Murphy 112-31), O'Neill reconstitutes the image of the popular American stage fool, making him a character suitable for the "new" realistic stage. By tearing the fool from his popular roots, however, O'Neill has turned him into a threatening figure, an excessive verbal monster without an interior dimension. Williams, on the other hand, attempts to work magic with the theater, using expressionistic techniques to lure his stage away from a dependency on realistic conventions (see Jackson 88-108). A Streetcar Named Desire, The Rose Tattoo, and Camino Real each demonstrate Williams's distrust of American nativist humor, which, like the conventional world of realism, may come across as rigid, unsentimental, and clinical or cruel. The fools in these plays enter the stage from the periphery of
American social power or from other comic traditions, such as the *commedia dell' arte*. The fool, as an antidote injected into the bloodstream of the play, parallels Williams's infusion of "plastic" elements to achieve a modernist "break-up" of realistic theater.

Finally, Shepard resurrects the old-fashioned figure of the con-artist, of the American trickster, as an agent of intimidation and anxiety. The activity of the trickster—an unknowable entity without a clearly defined motive—reflects the concerns of the postmodern theater with ambiguity, absence of the self, non-linearity, and duplicity of role (see Marranca 13-33).

The perceptions one has of fool-performer and on-stage audience will influence one's own complicity or involvement as audience members at large, or as readers of drama. A theater patron's experience of a play will differ from a reader's. The audience member interprets an interpretation made by the actors: "plays are addressed to spectators through performers" (Chauduri 283). Even with productions that break away from picture-box theater, the audience may still respond as passive eye witness. In Richard Schechner's production of *The Tooth of Crime*, where audience members could sit on the scenic furniture and relocate their viewing positions during the course of the play, some members actively resisted this invitational aspect (Dasgupta 181-2). The reader, however, is required to take a more active role. The stage directions in a dramatic text encourage the reader to create a virtual performance: "the reader as director" (Alter 121).
Or the reader as reader may become a performer, a silent reader who performs various parts. Rosenblatt distinguishes between "efferent" reading for retention value and "aesthetic" reading, in which "the reader selects an attitude of readiness to attend to what is being lived through during the reading-event" (16). On the other hand is Tennessee Williams's conception of the text as lifeless blueprint: "In my dissident opinion, a play in a book is only the shadow of a play and not even a clear shadow of it" (Camino xii). Whereas the theater patron sees an interpretation somewhat fixed by the production, responding to both actor and character, the reader may rehearse a text repeatedly until the virtual performance becomes routine, the equivalent of a staged reading. The audience member becomes engaged but at a distance; the reader may become engaged as the vehicle of a part, enacting the "I" of the text, interpreting it after his or her own intuition or fashion. In the following chapters, I alternate between an imagination of the theater audience's experience and the reader's. The reader, moreso than the theater audience, may experience firsthand the power of the fool's performance, as well as acquire the peculiar sense of self, the emptiness at the center, that seems to characterize the fool. The theater audience will experience the fool's "show" in the same capacity as the on-stage audience, as involuntary witness or participant.

When it comes to questions of audience response, the difficulties are several. A theater audience changes with each performance; each audience has its own chemical make-up, as each
patron in each audience adjusts him- or herself to the patron in the next seat, and the audience member assesses his or her status, dress, appearance, personality in relation to other audience members. Can an audience ever react as a whole, collective unit? Does everyone laugh at a joke in the production with equal force and for the same reason? Something as simple as a person with a nagging cough can distract performers and audience members alike, changing the temperament, the temperature, of events on stage. Putzel, for instance, claims that "Of course there is no such thing as a Shepard audience, a static body whose responses can be gauged and manipulated" (149). Chaudhuri, too, says that "spectators will be present who occupy a number of different positions on such social and intellectual continua as rich-poor, educated-illiterate, sophisticated-naive, refined-vulgar, etc., and such psychological continua as attentive-inattentive, serious-casual, sensitive-insensitive, etc." (284).

The same problems accord with an evaluation of reader response. How can we make claims for every reader reacting in the same way? Does every reader incubate the same psychology? Just as there is the daydreaming theater patron who presents an exception to any collective formula, there is the preoccupied reader who must backtrack and reread the lines that have entered consciousness and left without a trace. The tendency currently is for reader-response criticism to engage issues of culture and gender that play a role in the reading process. The speculations I make about reader response in this study, however, relegate themselves to the
roots of reader-response criticism, examining structures of a text and anticipating the routes of response a reader will likely take based on these structures. Thus we may identify "the implied reader, the reader who engages in those activities that seem to be called for by the strategies a particular text has adopted" (Rabinowitz 84). Close to the "ideal reader," who "would understand perfectly and would approve entirely the least of his [an author's] words, the most subtle of his intentions" (Prince 9), the reader I imagine is reactive rather than interactive.

In speculating about the effects of these texts on the audience or reader, I am assuming a text that goes to work on an imagined audience or reader, whose processes of thought will be shaped by features and contours of the text. I am assuming a textual stability that some would not allow (Davis and Schleifer 11) and a unidirectional movement from text to reader that is questioned by others (Eagleton 85). However, this approach allows one to examine certain features of the text in terms of performance, of the communicative interaction between the fool as a verbal performer and his or her on-stage auditors. The text imprints one with its transactions between characters, but one may contemplate the text with a stance as folklorist, keying in on folkloric performance situations. Representing one trend in anthropology, Victor Turner demonstrates the usefulness of drama in understanding social life through "ethnodramatics": "How could we turn ethnography into script, then enact that script . . . ?" (Ritual to Theater 98). Our approach, conversely, makes the aesthetic experience of theater the
basis of an ethnography, of a folkloric performance analysis that impinges on problems of culture.

If one looks through the eyes of the folklorist at a dramatic text, it becomes a transcript of verbal performances in the field. As folklorist, one takes the part of an invisible auditor of the performance of the fool. One’s center of interest concerns performance situations, when the fool dominates a field of action as a performer and creates audiences out of the collection of on-stage characters involved in the scene; when the fool as a performer creates a verbal enhancement of experience—conducts a sermon, indulges in a boast, tells a joke or story, informs an auditor about a supernatural vision—subject to evaluation by his on-stage audience (Bauman, *Verbal* 11). As folklore currently is context-oriented, the context initially is the performance situation transcribed in the text, the reactions of the on-stage audience in the italics of the stage directions. "One reason for collecting context is that only if such data is provided can any serious attempt be made to explain WHY a particular text is used in a particular situation" (Dundes, “Texture” 14). Likewise, by collecting the context of the on-stage situation, we may be able to determine the ways the text impacts on the wider context of the reader or theater audience. To take into consideration problems of audience response, the folklorist must relocate to the theater (of reality or the imagination) and supervise an actual or virtual audience, recording or imagining the effects of the on-stage performance in this wider context. This contextual assessment may provide us with a way of anticipating how a culture is involved in
theater, how the theatrical interactions on stage affect the theater as a whole, a collective state.

What the performance of folly in O'Neill, Williams, and Shepard brings out in the on-stage audiences is resistance. In O'Neill, audiences resist a performer who no longer conforms to the fool mold, does not adhere to the expectations of the on-stage audience, but by eluding the role effects a negative change in audience response. In Williams, the on-stage audience opposed to the fool comprises static performers, the authority figures of the lifeworlds of each play. This audience has an investment in its own performances, a desire for permanence of rule, and so resists the more improvisational performances of the fool, performances which threaten to undermine its own authoritative voice. In Shepard, the trickster-performer poses a serious threat to the psychological order of the victim, requiring the victim to respond by defensive role-playing of a trickster part.

Where does the theater audience or reader fit into this dramatic interchange? Which textual paths does it resist or follow? Structurally assessing the role of the audience or reader leads to intellectualization without much personality: "We should take care not to make the intellect our god; it has, of course, powerful muscles, but no personality" (Einstein, qtd. in Winokur 51). Performance analysis, however, keying in on rhetorical markers which enhance the auditor's experience, may identify emotional responses that go beyond character identification or the question of sympathy. If I suggest that the reader or audience member becomes a distanced,
critical observer of the fool-performer, I do not mean this in the sense that we become cold, clinically detached observers as though of psychological patients through a two-way mirror. This critical detachment or distancing occurs mainly in O’Neill’s and Shepard’s dramas, whereas Williams directs one toward an attachment and acceptance of the fool-performer. But the transactions that occur on stage reflect the expectations the playwright has for his particular theater, the involvement of the audience he may desire. In O’Neill, one resists the transformational potential of the performer; in Williams, one tentatively accepts it; in Shepard, one again keeps one’s distance.

The performance of folly leads to a resistance to folly. The fool-performer, instead of inducing participation, breeds an initial antagonism in his or her on-stage audience, an antagonism which infects the off-stage audience with a common cold or case of pneumonia, depending on the play. The theater audience or reader is cued by the reactions of these on-stage audiences to keep a critical distance. In O’Neill, the audience retains its detachment. This may be partly because, in American life, one is attracted by the oratorical power of the performer, but ultimately distrusts his theatrical hold. Or else one wishes to know the self behind the performing mask. Instead of playing the wise author behind the mask of the fool, O’Neill informs the point of view of the fool’s most reasonable on-stage auditors: Larry Slade, Kublai Kaan. With Williams, however, one experiences fools whose performative powers are constrained by human sympathy. Williams, as author, animates as sympathetic
agent the performances of Blanche, Alvaro, Kilroy. There is more of a
sense of self behind the comic mask. With Shepard, one keeps one's
critical distance from a stage full of fools. One becomes fascinated by
the transformative power of the trickster. In Shepard's theater, the
off-stage audience maintains hold of its own rationality, as trickster
performance becomes trickster duel negotiated by an on-stage
spectator who is a natural fool, and as the linear movement of the
drama is detoured by Shepard's own recourse to folly.
CHAPTER I
O'NEILL'S FOOLS AT THE CENTER

Two early critics of O'Neill's plays comment on the loudness of his characters. According to Hugo von Hofmannsthal, writing in 1922, "they are too prodigal with their shouting and cursing, and the result is that they leave me a little cold towards the other things they have to say" (6). In 1925, Richard Jennings comments: "One can also recognize a resultant monotony, due to the fact that whenever these people speak they roar, and that, to exhibit their impulses, they have to act as turbulently as they bellow. . . . One is at first impressed as by a blow between the eyes" (29). Their criticism suggests that although O'Neill was imitating European models (e.g., using expressionistic techniques in The Emperor Jones and The Hairy Ape), he was continuing to use American stock characters. American characters of the popular stage--the minstrel show, vaudeville--were loud, and O'Neill maintains their volume. O'Neill infuses many of his plays with excessive talkers. Jones of The Emperor Jones, Marco Polo of Marco Millions, and Hickey of The Iceman Cometh oppress the internal audience of each play with their verbal force. In these plays, however, the comic performer no longer coalesces a community through his performance but through his exile
from the stage.

As performers, each calls to mind a type of American fool. Jones possesses traces of the pretentious buffoon of minstrel comedy; Marco, as a distorted version of the American Adam (Schmitt 172), becomes a grotesque country bumpkin, the rude and obnoxious Westerner in a foreign court; Hickey, as reformed vaudevillian, attempts to eradicate the humor that provides the social interconnections, the binding twine, of Harry Hope's community. In these three plays, a radical comic individualist attaches himself to a community in a superior rather than a marginal way. Possessing an apparent freedom from hierarchical dependence, he disrupts the community to which he attaches himself.

In modern drama, the fool has taken a central role as existential clown or tragicomic scapegoat, "the comic hero merging with the comic butt or dupe" (Winston 392). O'Neill's "fools," however, move from center to margin. Each achieves a dramatic life as self-confident comic character, betraying his roots in theaters more traditional and popular. Each, however, ends his life on the margins of the community, a victim of his own performance.

In American experience, the self-confident comic hero reaches back to the backwoods "roarer," the boaster whose rhetoric hyperbolically inflates a sense of self (Reynolds 450). Jones, Marco, and Hickey may be seen as ironic versions of this self-confident "roarer." Each character dominates his on-stage audiences with a heightened verbal display. Jones claims, "Sho', I talks large when I ain't got nothin' to back it up, but I ain't talkin' wild just de same" (1:
Kublai Kaan complains that Marco's speeches have tainted the dignified military bearing of his chief general: "War without rhetoric, please! Polo has infected you with cant! The West already invades us!" (2: 452). As a testimony to Hickey's longwindedness, Rocky informs Moran who arrives to arrest Hickey for the murder of his wife, "And if yuh want a confession all yuh got to do is listen. He'll be tellin' all about it soon. Yuh can't stop de bastard talkin'" (3: 693).

Each character is caught between 19th-century comic bravado and 20th-century angst. It is as though O'Neill is testing Sanford Pinkser's claim that American humor had already changed by 1910, the year of Mark Twain's death, in favor of something more anguished and inward, the humor of the roarer "poured into new Modernist bottles" (197). Instead of a native eiron, "the man who knows more than he says" (Pinkser 189), each character becomes a tragicomic alazon, "the man who says more than he knows" (Pinsker 189), an intruder who must be put to flight. Each character ends up as a tragicomic victim, hunted down and killed (Jones), shattered by the drop of a crystal ball (Marco, although he is not aware of himself as a victim), or escorted by police to a possible death sentence (Hickey). Each "fool" has intruded on a modernist stage from a more popular theater; each is out of place, speaking with a comic voice that is silenced, relegated to the margins.

In one sense, the "fools" in these plays speak the language of the clown, a language which Bakhtin views as dialogic in the extreme, playing freely with authoritative language: "on the stages of local fairs and at buffoon spectacles, the heteroglossia of the clown
sounded forth, ridiculing all 'languages' and dialects" (Dialogic 273). O’Neill’s "fool" appropriates the language of his on-stage audience and turns this language against it. Jones uses the “natives’” language of superstition as a way of creating a mythic self as a figure of social domination; Marco’s youthful language of romance, the primary language of Kublai Kaan’s court, resurfaces in such a way as to lure Kukachin, the Kaan’s granddaughter, away from her place in the courtly hierarchy; Hickey appropriates the language of the barroom’s invisible Bessie, becoming a “nag” who prompts Harry Hope’s crowd to play-act their “pipe dreams.”

On the other hand, each "fool" learns or acquires a language from an external source as a means of control: Jones the voice of the folkloric “bad man”; Marco the language of business; Hickey the “bughouse bull” of the Progressive “Reform Wave” (as Rocky puts it, 3: 652), with overtones of the church sermon: “Aw, hire a church!” Rocky complains (3: 627). In effect, the “fool” in each case possesses no real language of his own but speaks with borrowed languages. The “fool” seems hollow or empty, a self inflated by rhetoric, sustained by a bravado voice.

As the discourse of the “fool” is finally made marginal, reduced to the sidelines of the drama, the internal audience’s language reconstitutes itself, makes itself heard. The quarantine of the “fool” allows the community to regroup; a self-reflexive moment of community ensues, as the social “breach” which the “fool’s” intrusion has constituted is repaired and the effects of his performance
redressed. The structures of order become more visible, are brought into view; the community becomes aware of itself as a system.

O'Neill dramatizes the idea of a performer who can speak too effectively or claim too much social power through oral delivery. For the reader who silently performs the parts of Jones, Marco, Hickey, there are attractions as well as dangers, pleasures of delivery, coherence, and social power, yet an understanding that the performance is not founded on the bedrock of an interior self or dimension. It exists as a verbal mask.

The reader is thus likely to adopt the point of view of observer of the “fool,” not because the “fool” is too nonsensical for comfort, threatening boundaries of common sense, but because he is framed by other characters’ points of view within the play, becoming a focal point of character observation. The reader is offered at least two viewing platforms from which to view the “fool”; the “fool” interacts with two different internal audiences in each play, forcing a bipolarization of reader response. As the play progresses, the reader is kept in suspension by these internal audiences, negotiating the performer via the verbal responses of the internal audience members within the play. In the long run, the reader will likely align herself with the internal audience member who expresses the most reasonable attitude toward the “fool” or whose interplay with the fool seems most commonsensical. This is also the character who has the least ties with community hierarchy, who, like the “fool,” is also somewhat detached from the community structure, able to break away. Booth speaks of "innumerable norms which we must
accept if we are to comprehend particular plays" (141). The ideal of a rational viewpoint equipoised between the fool-performer's excess verbiage and a community's rigid social resistance may be an authorial norm of these plays. But it is a norm which involves an isolating despair. In *The Emperor Jones*, this character is Jones himself, as Jones develops a reasonable perspective on himself during his flight through a forest. In *Marco Millions*, this audience is Kukachin, who embraces against the wisdom of the Kaan the spirit of the West as represented by Marco (although the Kaan's view remains ambivalent and wisely ironic). In *The Iceman Cometh*, this audience is Larry, who detaches himself from the carnival which Harry Hope leads after Hickey exits the stage.

In between the assertion of the comic self and the assertion of community stands an internal audience as mediator of two extremes and who suffers more than the other characters the consequences of the divorce or breach in dialogue between “fool” and community leader. Again, the reader aligns herself with this mediating audience member. In effect, O'Neill places the reader in a gray area, one that responds to the "fool's" performance with sympathy but one that is also distanced from community.

By not letting his fools act like fools in a traditional sense, O'Neill redefines the reader's or audience's relationship to these figures. We are asked to take a giant step back and look critically at the assertive control of the performer at the height of his powers. Because the comic performer is no longer in touch with the sources of folly which made him simply amusing (as comic safety valve, as
audience scapegoat), we reevaluate our response. We are no longer attached to Jones, Marco, and Hickey as participants in comedy. In each play, O'Neill cuts the fool out of a canvas of popular literature and takes steps toward making the fool more human, leading him from stereotyped comedian, to performer without an interior, to discoverer of a hidden interior dimension. In each case, however, the fool declines to accept this interior dimension: Jones, his affiliation with the oppressed; Marco, his love for Kukachin; Hickey, his hatred of his wife.

"Talkin' Big" in The Emperor Jones

In Thirst, a one-act play produced in 1916, three characters are stranded without water on a small liferaft: an aristocratic Gentleman, a Dancer, and a West Indian "mulatto" sailor. The sailor is a quiet, menacing figure whom the Gentleman accuses of secretly having drunk the last of the boat's water ration. As in The Emperor Jones, a black character holds power over a white character yet at the expense of a certain amount of stereotyping. Once the Dancer dies of heat exhaustion, the sailor suggests cannibalism as a means of survival, then stabs the Gentleman who opposes this plan and who pulls him overboard into a pool of sharks.

Two facets of Thirst set the stage for The Emperor Jones. First, O'Neill himself played the part of the West Indian sailor, and in a picture of the production, he sits in blackface on his corner of the raft (Alexander). With The Emperor Jones, "The director's decision to use a black actor in a leading dramatic role outside Harlem remains a
landmark in American theater history" (Wainscott 55). Still, the other black characters were played by white actors; Gilpin was "incongruously surrounded by white actors in blackened faces and bodies" (Wainscott 56). Secondly, the West Indian sailor's characterization is that of the "bad man" of black folklore. As Levine notes, paraphrasing Eric Hobsbawm, "coming from the depths of society, representing the most oppressed and deprived strata, these bandits are manifestations of the feeling that, within the circumstances in which they operate, to assert any power at all is a triumph" (418). The circumstances in which the sailor operates are very narrow, but Jones creates his own circumstances, acquires the upper hand over an unidentified Caribbean island's indigenous population and over a white Cockney trader through the rhetoric of the "bad man" persona.

Although the play is generally regarded as a psychological exploration of the collective unconsciousness of a guilt-ridden oppressor, and is recognized as an early American experiment in expressionism, the problem of stereotyping predominates in a number of discussions. Critics regard the stereotyping of Jones as a

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1 Cooley sees Jones as a "Sambo figure" ("Emperor" 82), a product of O'Neill's writing in the "savage mode" (Savages 61); O'Neill "exploits those stereotypes in the white imagination which associate blacks with the savage and a jungle landscape" (Savages 69). Shaughnessy, too, although acknowledging that O'Neill's "sensitivity towards Black characters obviously grows" throughout his career, sees how O'Neill "falls back on racial stereotype" (90). Oliver says
defect in O'Neill's characterization in an otherwise tragic play.

However, not enough effort has been made to link The Emperor Jones to the minstrel stage. Building on Kagan, who sees the movie version of Jones as "a watershed, a Consciousness Awareness Divide," a step out of the mold of "white films" that "show the Black as a comic, stereotyped inferior" (162), we can view Jones as taking a giant stride away from the minstrel circuit. Jones succeeds in asserting the performance of the "bad man" against prearranged parts.

In part, Jones plays a role with which a white audience in a minstrel theater would be comfortable or from which it would derive pleasure, the black character acting comically above his limitations, "the blackface clown" as "America's fool" (Engle xxv). When overstepping his limits, the character acted as a scapegoat for white audiences frustrated by the American dream of upward cultural and economic mobility (Engle xxvi). Joseph Boskin suggests that the black minstrel's mythical prototype, the subservient yet humorous plantation slave, was as close to a fool in a medieval sense as American egalitarian culture would permit, the fool attached parasitically to Southern aristocracy (13), a white construct which perpetuated white misconceptions of black identity. Escaping America, where he had been a marginal and fugitive figure, Jones takes advantage of a situation in which he can reverse the roles of a

that the play's "theme is not primarily racial" (57) but that a black hero is employed for "exotic theatrical images" and a "generalized racial unconscious" (58).
system that had required him to play, in essence, the subservient fool.²

In Scene One, however, Jones plays, in part, a variation of the minstrel fool. Boskin points to “two specific black types, the flip side of one coin that would become the currency of the minstrel theatre and the white jokes thereafter: the plantation ‘darky’ and the city ‘dandy’” (75). As overdressed emperor, Jones plays a type of minstrel dandy, a comic “pretender” to the throne (Cooley, Savages 64-5); furthermore, he is asleep on the job when the “natives” are plotting their coup, and he treats the role itself as a game: “You don’t s’pose I was holdin’ down dis Emperor job for de glory in it, did you?,” he asks Smithers. “Sho’! De fuss and glory part of it, dat’s only to turn de heads o’ de low-flung, bush niggers dat’s here. Dey wants de big circus show for deir money” (1: 1035). In addition, he is comically oppressive: “Ain’t I de Emperor? De laws don’t go for him” (1: 1035); and he expresses a comic freedom from hierarchy, a detachment from the responsibility of power: “When I sees dese niggers gittin’ up deir nerve to tu’n me out, and I’se got all de money in sight, I resigns on de spot and beats it quick” (1: 1037).

However, Jones does not play the "correct" part of the minstrel fool. In terms of his self empowerment, Jones resembles the “bad man” of black folklore instead. The “bad man” challenges white

²As Norman Kagan says, “The hero begins as a shady, clever, boastful rooster, a bright headstrong bluffer, but what else to expect from an ambitious, poorly educated fellow from an abused minority?” (162).
society at the same time that he may be an oppressor of his own race. O'Neill may be deliberately drawing on a black folklore creation to offset the traditional white stereotypical role. A conflation of signs, of mythologies, is at work. The “bad man” and fool are opposite numbers, present contradictory masks.

Why, then, is the Sambo stereotype allowed to surface in The Emperor Jones? What does a conception of Jones as fool contribute to the action? After all, O'Neill was able to employ black characterizations in other plays--Thirst, The Dreamy Kid, All God's Chillun Got Wings--without resorting to this particular stereotype. As “bad man,” the hubris Jones exhibits is tragic, because it ultimately puts a pressure on his subjects which leads to his ritual defeat, an attempt by voodoo performance to bring Jones toward a recognition of community, of his participation in a common ancestry and struggle. As fool or buffoon, the hubris Jones resonates is comic, and his defeat is that of a scapegoat who has tried to exercise a power above responsible means.

The self-confident bravado performer, Jones as “man-of-words,” unites these two extremes. As he moves from the position of wit in Scene One, in control of his performance, and then into the role of victim, in Scenes Two through Seven, manipulated by voodoo performance, the Sambo image of the black as fool is reformed for the external audience. It is no longer a laughing matter, a subject for comedy, but an image to be reconsidered in terms of tragic denouement. As though descending a cubist staircase, Jones presents at least four faces to the viewer altogether: the violent “bad man” of
black folklore with which he maintains his positions of authority or resistance; the pretentious buffoon of minstrel comedy who refuses to comply with this role; the fearful fool of that same tradition who at the same time is the hero of a tragic decline; and the unwilling participant in pantomimes of personal and communal history. Vestiges of the Sambo stereotype may be present as keys which alert an audience sensitive to the minstrel tradition to the progress beyond this stereotype that Jones’s characterization has made.

The Emperor Jones challenges the “normal” transaction between white and black characters on stage in a minstrel theater. At the same time, the stereotype of the black comic character as buffoon is also subverted or overturned. First, Jones distances himself verbally from association with the label of “fool”: “I ain’t no fool. I knows dis Emperor’s time is sho’t” (1: 1037); “Does you think I’s a natural bo’n fool? Give me credit for havin’ some sense, fo’ Lawd’s sake!” (1: 1040). It is not himself but the “natives” who could be so easily duped who are the “fools”: “And it didn’t take long [...] to get dese fool, woods’ niggers right where I wanted dem” (1: 1034); “And dere all dem fool bush niggers was kneelin’ down and bumpin’ der heads on de ground like I was a miracle out o’ de Bible” (1: 1036). He is not only not foolish, he is not an essential part of the Sambo stereotype: superstitious. He knows instead how to manipulate the superstitions of others to his own advantage.

Secondly, he uses the difference of race to keep an authoritative position over Smithers. If we regard Jones as a vestige of the fool of minstrel comedy, he extends the fool’s license to a
breaking point. Further, if we regard Smithers as one half of a comic duo in this scene, he is always the victim of the joke; Jones reverses the dynamics of race so that it is the white performer who is continuously mocked or put down: "Talk polite, white man! Talk polite, you heah me! I'm boss here now, is you forgettin'?" (1: 1034); "So long, white man! (with a grin) See you in jail sometime, maybe!" (1: 1042). This parting shot again refers to Jones's "bad man" reputation at the same time that it injures Smithers's own status.

Finally, Jones is always able to deflect any attempt on Smithers's part to make Jones the butt of the joke. Smithers: "(maliciously) Give my regards to any ghosts yer meets up with." Jones: (grinnin) If dat ghost got money, I'll tell him never ha'nt you less'n he wants to lose it" (1: 1043). The traditional interactions of minstrel comedy are reversed. On the other hand, Smithers is a "safe" target, in the sense that he is a sort of villain or rogue who has taught Jones everything he knows about exploitation, a "white-livered, shiftless, aitchless, Cockney trader," a "comic and sickly representative of Europe" (Shand 25). Smithers may function in the way that Lawrence Levine says that the immigrant Irishman functioned as a target of both white and black humor, a humor that both blacks and whites could share, thus allowing the black joke teller to feel, if only temporarily, on a par with white society (302). What is evident in the play is that Smithers is a butt of comedy, more a burlesque clown than Jones because unable to maintain the sense of dignity which would override his comic function: "The tropics have tanned his natural pasty face with its small, sharp
features to a sickly yellow, and native rum has painted his pointed nose to a startling red” (1: 1031).

In Scene One, Jones couches his exposition of past crimes in the hypothetical through repeated use of the word “maybe”: “Maybe I goes to jail dere for gettin’ in an argument wid razors ovah a crap game. Maybe I gits in ‘nother argument wid de prison guard was overseer ovah us when we’re wukin’ de road. Maybe he hits me wid a whip and I splits his head wid a shovel and runs away” (1: 1038). The use of “maybe” mythologizes Jones. “Ain’t a man’s talkin’ big what makes him big--long as he makes folks believe it?” he asks Smithers (1: 1036). This self-mythologizing is a further way of maintaining his “bad man” status and of again asserting authority over Smithers, just as his self-invented mythology concerning the “silver bullet” asserts authority over the indigenous population. A tension builds in Scene One between the fool persona which he manages to evade and the “bad man” persona which he brings verbally into play as a threat, and this tension will continue once Jones is evicted from power and forced again into a fugitive and marginal role. That Jones takes pleasure in his “bad man” past is not surprising. As Levine notes, “these bandits are manifestations of the feeling that, within the circumstances in which they operate, to assert any power at all is a triumph” (418). The “triumph” Jones asserts in Scene One at the palace, and that he continues to seek in Scenes Two through Seven in the no man’s land of the forest, is that of a performer who dominates his social/theatrical environment.
Cooley suggests Jones is punished in Scenes Two through Seven for being "an 'uppity' black man who presumed to model himself after successful white exploiters" (Savages 65). If he is punished in a social sense, he is also punished in a theatrical sense, for assuming a superior speaking role. The agent of Jones's punishment is Smithers, the frustrated sidekick. Smithers provides information about the coup which undermines Jones's self-confidence. As the tom-tom begins--one critic describes the play as "a study of fear in the tropics in eight scenes, five pistol shots, and several hundred thousand taps on a tom-tom" (P. F. R. 9)--Smithers informs Jones that "the bleedin' ceremony has started" (1: 1041). "They’re there ‘oldin’ their ‘eathen religious service--makin’ no end of devil spells and charms to ‘elp ‘em against your silver bullet." Jones becomes "a tiny bit awed and shaken in spite of himself": "Huh! Takes more’n dat to scare dis chicken!" (1: 1041). In a way, Smithers uses his private knowledge of local custom and voodoo ceremony to create a fissure in Jones’s mask.

The beating tom-toms, which accelerate throughout the subsequent forest scenes, indicate the change in theater taking place as Scene One closes and Jones exits the throne room. Jones’s former audience now directs a series of performances in which Jones is a captive, unwilling performer, suffering a chronic series of breaks in his self-confident bravado voice. His captive audience becomes a hostile audience, invisible observers of a ritual which it also directs, playing an active rather than a passive role. In Scene One, Jones owns the stage and rises above the traditional part of the minstrel
buffoon, molding the part in a radical way; in Scene Two, he succumbs to a performance more typical of the place in theater reserved for the black actor, playing parts that his former audience wants him to play or desires to see him enact.

In Scenes Two through Seven, the text shapes itself to a conception of Jones as constant performer, a character always aware of an audience, or, in this case, the lack of one. When alone in the forest, Jones remains a “man-of-words,” a type of performer that Roger Abrahams has observed in African-American communities in the United States and the Caribbean: “A man-of-words is nothing unless he can, on the one hand, stitch together a startling piece of oratorical rhetoric, and, on the other, capture the attention, the allegiance, and the admiration of the audience through his fluency, his strength of voice, and his social maneuverability and psychological resilience” (xxx). Although Abrahams reserves this term for improvisational performers in front of participatory audiences and excludes it from application to stage characters (xxx-xxxi), we can still see how Jones resembles this definition.

In Scene Two, at the edge of the forest, Jones retains a sense of being center stage as performer. He anthropomorphizes his surroundings, inventing addressees: “Feet, you is holdin’ up yo’ end fine an’ I sutinly hopes you ain’t blisterin’ none” (1: 1044); “Grub, whar is you?” (1: 1045); “Woods, is you tryin’ to put somethin’ ovah on me?” (1: 1046); “Oh, Lawd, what I gwine do now?” (1: 1055); “Lawd Jesus, heah my prayer!” (1: 1059). His performance continually seeks out an addressee, first among elements of his
natural surroundings and then, as his situation becomes more desperate, a supernatural authority.

Secondly, Jones becomes his own addressee. He develops an authorial relationship with himself, using the disparaging term "nigger" in the way he used "white man" in Scene One: "Cheer up, nigger, de worst is yet to come" (1: 1044); "Nigger, is you gone crazy mad?" (1: 1045); "Sho', you fool nigger, what you think dey is--ha'nts?" (1: 1046). The term "fool," which he used as a way of drawing a distinction between himself and the "natives" in Scene One, he now applies to himself: "If only my fool legs stands up" (1: 1049); "Ha'nts! You fool nigger, dey ain't no such things!" (1: 1049); "Hunger 'fects yo' head and yo' eyes. Any fool know dat" (1: 1050). With this reapplication of the term "fool" comes a self-recognition of his change in status, from authoritative to marginal, which his flight through the forest, acting as a medium of the ritual process, effects: "Look at you now, Emperor, you'se gittin' mighty low!" (1: 1052).

Smithers remains a "sensational" observer, attuned to the "style" Jones achieves, to Jones's pretentiousness. Boni and Liveright, publishers of the American first edition, attempted to lure the "sensational" reader to the book with their dust jacket. The blurb for The Emperor Jones reads: "A study of the psychology of fear and of race superstition." The blurb for Diff'rent, another O'Neill play in this volume, reads: "The Story of a Sex-Starved Woman" (Atkinson 76). O'Neill's text, however, attempts to transform the reader from sensational reactionist to sober sympathizer. At the end of Scene One, as Smithers detaches himself from his comic dialogue with Jones
and becomes an onlooker of Jones’s departure for the forest (1:1043), he is alternately admiring and contemptuous. The reader, too, may be unhappy with Jones as a “bad man,” an oppressor of his people, yet may admire Jones as a “man-of-words,” a versatile verbal performer who is able to deflect Smithers’s attempts to turn him into a “fool.” (My reader in this case may be culturally biased in taking his or her cue from Smithers’s reactions. Differences of response between black and white readers, as well as among them, are possible.)

Smithers has the last word in this play, essentially the same word he uttered at the end of Scene One. His attitude has not changed; it remains ambivalent. When Jones’s “limp body” is carried onto the stage, Smithers, again in the position of observer, expresses a double response, still in dialogue with Jones, as though Jones were still alive. On the one hand, he is sarcastic, again attempting to deflate Jones’s superiority: “Where’s yer ‘igh an’ mighty airs now, yer bloomin’ Majesty?” (1: 1061). He follows this with a sense of admiration: “Silver bullets! Gawd blimey, but yer died in the ‘eighth o’ style any’ow!” (1: 1061). If the reader appreciates Smithers as observer at the end of Scene One, the reader distances him- or herself from Smithers's reaction at the end of the play. The text has produced a different type of reader. Smithers acts as a benchmark, a way for the reader to measure the degree to which his or her view of Jones has been transformed. Smithers is still parasitically attached to the hierarchy which Lem takes over from Jones; Lem is reattached to this hierarchy as rigid leader: “We cotch him,” he repeats three
times to Smithers's inquiries in Scene Eight (1: 1060). The reader finds a middle ground with the transformed Jones, a point of view that distances itself from the comic buffoonery of Scene One (Jones as potential fool) and the rigid hierarchy of Scene Eight (the court as regrouped under Lem). The play shies away from the excessive performer as well as the rigidity of Lem as audience.

Jones's tendency throughout the play is to run in one of two alternative directions; he resonates either a touch of the fool or a touch of the "bad man." Scenes Two through Seven stipulate a third possibility: Jones as unwilling performer. As a ritual process directed or supervised by Lem, the pantomimes in which Jones is coerced to play a part attempt to rework Jones's identity, strip him of his masks and place him in situations that force him to reconsider his communal heritage. A dialogue begins to form between the oppressed community and the radical individual; however, it is a dialogue that Jones ultimately refuses.

A complex interplay of two voices develops in Scenes Two through Seven. The apparitions and pantomimes that Jones encounters induce two opposing reactions in Jones, again the fool and the "bad man." Jones is increasingly likely to take on aspects of minstrel monologue; his performances resonate the minstrel stage. The minstrel voice is typically activated during moments of intense fear: "Dey's gittin' near! Dey's comin' fast! And heah I is shootin' shots to let 'em know jes' what I is! Oh, Gorry, I'se got to run" (1: 1048); "Oh, Gorry, I'se skeered in dis place! I'se skeered. Oh, Lawd, perrupt dis sinner!" (1: 1057). If the play were to end happily, with
Jones emerging from the forest alive, his lesson learned, and if an audience were to sense the approach of this happy ending, it might be tempted to laugh at this sort of speech. The language of this comic subtext is the language Smithers would most like to hear; this is the breakdown in performance that Smithers’s information about the coup tries to bring into play.

The pantomimes pull Jones toward tragic reenactment of past crimes and communal history. The potential for humor is still present. In Scene Four, Jones takes his place on a chain gang of prisoners, whose “movements [...] are those of automatons.--rigid, slow, and mechanical. The prison guard points sternly at Jones with his whip, motions him to take his place among the other shovelers. Jones gets to his feet in a hypnotized stupor. He mumbles subserviently” (1: 1050). What he mumbles again recalls the subservient fool’s speech of minstrel comedy: “Yes, suh! Yes, suh! I’s comin’” (1: 1050). Jones’s response to an illusionary slave auction he stumbles upon seems also comically inappropriate: “What you all doin’, white folks? What’s all dis? What you all lookin’ at me fo’?” (1: 1053).

Aside from the comic potential of such reactions, the pantomimes threaten to place Jones in a prearranged part, to deny him any sense of performative freedom. They undermine the authority Jones displays in Scene One. Jones’s response to five of these instances of coercion is one of resistance. As his voice gives way to characteristic “mournful foreboding,” he counteracts it “with sudden forced defiance--in an angry tone” (1: 1046). In Scene Seven,
as “Jones squirms on his belly, nearer and nearer” a Crocodile God, open-mouthed, waiting to receive him as sacrifice, Jones’s voice gives way to unrestrained fear: “Mercy, Lawd! Mercy!” (1: 1058). Again he corrects this with a final resort to the authoritative voice of the opening scene: “De silver bullet! You don’t git me yit!” (1: 1059). Thus the slipping into the minstrel fool’s speech is given the prescribed antidote of the authoritative voice of Scene One.

As a remedy to the involuntary parts he plays in the pantomimes, Jones recovers his status as “bad man”; the physical threat of pantomime is challenged by the physical power of the “bad man” persona. Jones uses the violence of his revolver to free himself of these performances. To the apparition of Jeff whom he killed in a gambling argument, he says, “Nigger, I kills you dead once. Has I got to kills you ag’in?” (1: 1048). Before hitting the apparition of a prison guard over the head with an imaginary shovel, Jones says, “I kills you, you white debil, if it’s de last thing I evah does! Ghost or debil, I kill you agin!” (1: 1051). His dependency on the “bad man” persona is revealed in a monologue lamenting his depleted ammunition: “Oh, Lawd, what I gwine do now? Ain’t got no bullet left on’y de silver one. If mo’ o’ dem ha’nts come after me, how I gwine skeer dem away?” (1: 1055). In this instance, the potential fool’s voice tries to locate and hold onto the “bad man” persona. Because Jones is trapped in a part, and because he has gained reader sympathy, the resurfacing of the "bad man" is a positive feature of Jones's performance; we respond to it with less ambivalence, as something that is helping Jones maintain his autonomy.
One exception to Jones's rule of violent resistance comes with Scene Six, when Jones takes his place aboard a phantom slave ship. Here, he joins a number of slaves rocking their bodies in unison with the ship's movements: "A shudder of terror shakes his whole body as the wail rises up about him again. But the next time, his voice, as if under some uncanny compulsion, starts with the others" (1: 1055-6). That this pantomime is again created by the invisible practitioners of voodoo is made clear as the slaves' lamentation keeps synch with the tom-tom: "A low, melancholy murmur rises among them, increasing gradually by rhythmic degrees which seem to be directed and controlled by the throb of the tom-tom in the distance" (1: 1055). Jones runs away only after this performance is over and the slave crew disappears. In this single communal moment, Jones becomes unified with the plight of the oppressed: "His voice reaches the highest pitch of sorrow, of desolation" (1: 1056). A temporary dialogue is formed between oppressed and oppressor; Jones briefly speaks the language which his other internal audience, the "natives," would like him to speak, the language of the oppressed.

Jones's flight through the forest resembles the middle key of a three-part ritual process of "separation, margin (or limen, signifying 'threshold' in Latin), and aggregation" (Turner, Ritual Process 94). In this middle mode, "persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space"; they become "liminal personae" (Turner, Ritual Process 95). The threshold nature of this second stage offers the possibility of
"communitas," a "communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders" (Turner, Ritual Process 96). Jones becomes liminal with only a temporary recognition of communitas. Individual performance and ritual communitas seem mutually exclusive categories.

In terms of ritual process, Jones's flight permits no form of reintegration with his community. In general, however, the reader seems encouraged to applaud Jones's performative resistance against a coerced communitas. The ritual process of separation, transition, and reintegration ends with the sacrifice of Jones, a form of permanent quarantine or exile. As comic pretender, Jones's rule has constituted a breach in the social order, has undermined normal authority and disrupted the indigenous courtly hierarchy. The effect of Jones's exile is the reconstitution of Lem's court. In order to defeat Jones, Lem resorts to organizational skills that coalesce his former order: "My mens dey got um silver bullets. Lead bullet no kill him. He got um strong charm. I cook um money, make um silver bullet, make um strong charm, too" (1: 1061). The significance of Jones's movement from center to margin has to do with the reconfiguration of the Sambo stereotype, the black character as fool. Only partly restrained by the fool stereotype, Jones rises to a tragic stature, elevated, transformed. The speech patterns normally associated with a comic theater are now part of a tragic theater, so that the external audience is asked to respond differently, with empathy. Jones may remain part clown and may have to resort to the role of "bad man" to avoid a recognition of communal identity,
but as O’Neill forces the fool stereotype or role into a tragic context and toward a tragic resolution, an incongruity is achieved by which we change our disposition toward this figure and the potential for laughter he represents. The fool is no longer humorous, and *The Emperor Jones*, through Jones’s performance as "man-of-words" and "bad man," succeeds in dispelling the efficacy of the Sambo stereotype.

**Medieval Folly and American Humor in *Marco Millions***

When Marco Polo enters Kublai Kaan’s court in Act Two, Scene One, of *Marco Millions*, he plays the part that Jones eludes, the comic buffoon. Marco dresses as gaudily as Jones: “*Over his gorgeous uniform of Mayor, he wears his childishly fantastic regalia as chief of the Mystic Knights of Confucius,*” complete with “*gilded, laced hat with its Bird of Paradise plumes*” (2: 423). His rule of Yang-Chau as mayor has been as oppressive as Jones’s rule: “*Why, I even had a law passed that anyone caught interfering with culture would be subject to a fine!*” (2: 425). In one instance, the exchange between the Kaan and Marco approaches vaudeville, as that between Jones and Smithers does the minstrel show, the Kaan playing a straight man to Marco’s comic:

Kublai: *(with a chilling air)* I have received a petition from the inhabitants of Yang-Chau enumerating over three thousand abuses of your gross abuse of power!
Marco: *(abashed only for a moment)* Oh, so they've sent that vile slander to you, have they? That's the work of a mere handful of radicals—

Kublai: *(dryly)* Five hundred thousand names are signed to it. *(2: 425)*

Critics of *Marco Millions* have focused on the implicit dichotomy between East and West.\(^3\) The play opposes a brash, commercially myopic Marco with the wise, rational Kublai Kaan; wisdom and folly seem as separated as opponents on either side of a tennis net. Although James Robinson suggests that "O'Neill's Western side has the final word" (*Eugene* 117),\(^4\) for most readers, the play delivers an obvious "message": O'Neill's harsh verdict on Western commercialism. Although Marco Polo is the Pope's emissary from Venice, he may be identified as a symbolic American, a representative of American avarice of the 1920s.\(^5\) Marco's folly is

\(^3\)Frenz, for instance, calls the play an expression of O'Neill's "deep frustration with the American society as he saw it" (363). Frenz adheres to O'Neill's characterization of the Tibetan rulers of China as wise--"Chu-Yin, the subtle sage of China" (364)"--as opposed to the characterization of Marco as "the rash philistine emissary from Venice" (364). An Min Hsia also notes how "the Eastern philosophy of calm intuition is contrasted with Western assertive action and rational practicality," again with an "insensitive" Marco looking the worse in contrast with "the fragile Kukachin," the Kaan's granddaughter (171).

\(^4\)Robinson claims that O'Neill cannot separate himself wholly from the West since "the dualistic Western world view," with its emphasis on conflict, "constitutes the essence of his dramatic, tragic vision" (*Eugene* 117).
that of American narrow-minded commercialism. Only Patrick Schmitt looks critically at the way Marco is portrayed as a type of fool, labeled as such by the Kaan and his court. Whereas Marco’s ability to amuse is a positive feature, Schmitt says, his inability to grow is pitiable (146), suggesting the reader’s ambivalent response toward Marco.

However, Marco is not only a symbol, he is a performer. The play critiques a Western performer whose dominant mode is the sales pitch. We are amused by the natural foolishness of an American innocent who is always "on" stage, but we are alerted to the dangers of a performer who threatens to undermine the boundaries of the Kaan’s court in an unlicensed way. The image of Marco as medieval courtly fool provides the reader with a starting point which is countered by the image of the American fool at a foreign court. Unlike the typical American naive fool, who is normally a mask for a wise author, Marco is an unquantified entity, a performer who does not recognize limits. The reader performing Marco’s part may experience a facade without an inner content, an empty mask.

As a type of court fool, a comic performer, Marco presents complications of performance that exceed his role of mere comic butt.

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5"America's citizens are the Marco Polos of this world, and as the embodiment of America's sterility, Marco gains the world, but . . . loses his soul" (Stroupe 382); "Marco becomes a brash Western Babbitt, intent on exploiting the resources of the East" (Falk 91); "Marco can be interpreted as a kind of American Adam . . . the dark side of Whitman's democratic vision" (Schmitt 172).
of O’Neill’s satire of Western commercialism. As we have seen in The Emperor Jones, a comic character who speaks with a self-confident, boasting voice is made the center of a modern tragicomedy; we experience a sense of incongruity, a feeling that the character, as a leftover of 19th-century Industrial Era optimism (if Marco is seen as an American) is out of place on the modern stage.

One reason Marco functions so well as an instrument of subverting courtly systems is that he is a naive character, a grotesque “innocent” or “American Adam” (Schmitt 172). He is a surrogate “wise man” of the West, fulfilling in Tedaldo’s ironic view the function of the one hundred monks the Kaan requested in order to debate religious truth: “Master Marco can be my missionary. Let him set an example of virtuous Western manhood [. . .] and I will wager a million of something or other myself that the Kaan will soon be driven to seek spiritual salvation somewhere!” (2: 399). Marco is a natural fool, an unpredictable entity who is not able to observe the proper attitude of reverence at court. When he arrives at the Kaan’s court, he mistakes an aide’s gestures to kneel as an invitation to sit down, a comic misunderstanding: "He sits down on one of the sample cases to the gasping horror of all the court" (2: 412).

What Marco learns en route to the Kaan’s palace from father and uncle is the language of the jest. He is trained by his mentors as a joke teller, a conscious comedian--the American traveling salesman-- the joke serving as the chief means of opening business discussions with Asian merchants. Marco has not yet mastered this language by Act One, Scene Five, when he tries his own hand at a
joke, “a good one an idol-polisher told me in Tibet. This is the funniest story you ever heard!” At the end of the joke, which fails to amuse his auditors, Maffeo says, “I'll have to give Marco some lessons in how to tell a short story. (warningly) And until I pronounce you graduated, mum’s the word, understand!” (2: 409). Marco’s own unselfconsciousness, his unawareness of his miscommunication with his audience, is part of the joke the play repeats on Marco.

When he arrives at the Kaan's court, Marco is a natural fool in the eyes of the Kaan, his mentors, and the reader. The Kaan employs Marco as a natural fool, adopting him as a mascot after the fashion Welsford describes as the historical beginnings of the court fool. Welsford documents rulers who acquired mentally or physically handicapped persons as sources of entertainment and of good luck (55-75). She writes that “though the dwarf-fool may have at times exercised the functions of an astute and privileged jester, there seems no doubt that his chief appeal was not intellectual but sensational, and that among the female population at any rate he corresponded to our modern lap-dogs and teddy-bears” (59). The Kaan soon wearies of Marco as unconscious source of entertainment: “A jester inspires mirth only so long as his deformity does not revolt one. Marco’s spiritual hump begins to disgust me” (2: 420). He also becomes alarmed at the “teddy-bear” function Marco serves for Kukachin.

We may expect that the play will continue from Marco's arrival at court to be a comedy, that Marco will continue to act foolishly, and
that the Kaan, mentors, and ourselves will be further amused by his antics. But Marco as a performer complicates matters. Through performance, he transcends the part of natural fool while not attaining the role of artificial jester. In a medieval court, the artificial fool would be careful not to overstep his license, since his continued employment depended on a level of judicious restraint (Zijderveld 113). Toward the end of the courtly fool's effective social life in Europe, the fool lost ties with the social margins (of natural folly) (Zijderveld 113, 123) and became a mirror of the ruler, absolutist and powerful (Zijderveld 115-22). Marco, too, is absolutist in his verbal performances, an indefatiguable comic persona who has lost a productive (conscious) association with folly. While marginally tied to the monarch as Agent Second Class, Marco effectively assumes a monarch's power.

What complicates the audience's response to the play is that Marco is put to two distinct uses. The Kaan employs Marco for the sake of amusement and for the purpose of instruction: the sage Chu-Yin advises the Kaan to "let him develop according to his own inclination and give him every opportunity for true growth if he so

6However, Geoffrey Hutchings, an actor who played the Shakespearian Servant-Clown Lavatch, suggests the contrary: "This readiness to exceed the licence afforded them was common among professional jesters" (Brockbank 81). He also provides a clue to the Kaan's original tolerance of Marco's antics: "When confronted by some physical deformity it is natural for most people who believe themselves to be normal to extend towards that person an element of generosity and licence that would not be granted to a so-called equal" (Brockbank 85).
desires. And let us observe him. At least, if he cannot learn, we shall.” Kublai: “(smilingly) Yes. And be amused” (2: 416). One imagines O’Neill using Marco for both of these ends, as well. As a thesis play, Marco Millions sets itself up for education’s subversion by entertainment. The natural fool could fulfill both of these functions, as could a wise fool, or artificial jester. Marco, however, is stranded between these performance modes. Instead of a licensed artificial jester, Marco is an unlicensed natural fool, whose verbal excesses may be amusing yet horrifying.

The play makes use of a medieval concept of folly that reaches back to a point in Christian history when the fool was subjected to ridicule, providing an object lesson of worldly greed and earthly pleasure for Christians determined to follow a more saintly regimen (Swain 10). As an ironic “apotheosis,” in the Kaan’s view, of the West (2: 413), Marco’s folly becomes visible when framed by an alien, ostensibly more enlightened culture. Thus, Marco Millions encourages its audience to become moral through observation, along with the Kaan, of the antics of the fool.

Because Marco is an unlicensed natural fool, his binary functions of amusement and instruction seem contradictory rather than complementary, splitting the reader’s focus, just as the Kaan’s reaction to Marco is almost always equivocal, on the one hand

7Willeford, among others, calls attention to this common distinction between fool types: “In the time of Elizabeth I a distinction came to be expressed between the ‘natural’ and the ‘artificial’ fool, the latter being the person who ‘professionally counterfeits folly’; either could serve as a jester or clown” (10).
scornful and ironic, on the other hand amused. As Marco's performances become unlicensed, the distance between amusement and instruction widens. As Marco undermines the Kaan's court, one would expect amusement to evaporate, just as it does in Jones as the play turns tragic. Instead, the Kaan cannot help showing affection for Marco even in Marco's most threatening moments. In one instance, the Kaan "cannot control a laugh in spite of himself" as "helplessly" he asks his advisor, Chu-Yin, "How can one deal seriously with such a child actor?" (2: 423). At a later point, "forcing an amused teasing tone," the Kaan tells his departing granddaughter Kukachin, "Marco will soon be here, wearing his self-assurance of an immortal soul and his new admiral's uniform! I must fly in retreat from what I can neither laugh away nor kill" (2: 433). Because Marco remains unaware of the effects of his own performance (i.e. remains a natural fool), we continue to laugh. If O'Neill wished to produce terror, Marco would have to be aware of the inimical effects of his performance and continue to perform.

An American tradition of humor and folly confuses the audience's response to O'Neill's medieval intention, the moral instruction of his audience through satire. Although we sense the author's moral consciousness coinciding with the point of view of the Kaan, this perspective goes against the grain of an American humor which aligns that consciousness with the fool. Marco is a type of American buffoon, a protagonist with limited cultural awareness who in American tradition is typically set in an environment foreign to his or her native roots, the disjunction between character and frame
generating laughter at the expense of the frame, an undermining of social authority or highbrow culture. In Major Jones's letters to Mr. Thompson, for instance, a symphony concert falls victim to the fool's misguided cultural appreciation: "Then the man with the fiddle-stick, after wavin it up and down three or four times, giv his fiddle a scrape or two what seemed to set the whole of 'em agwine; and sich another hurra's nest I never did hear before. . . . One old feller had a grate big fiddle of about one hundred hoss power, and the way he did rear and pitch and pull and jerk at it, was really distressin" (Thompson 97-8).

Instead of degrading an orchestra through innocent comic remarks, Marco is a ridiculous band leader himself, arranging a spectacle for the Princess Kukachin's departure for Persia: "(He turns with a sudden fierceness on the band who are standing stolidly, awaiting orders.) Hey you! Didn't I tell you to strike up when I set foot on the deck? What do you think I paid you in advance for—to wave me good-bye? (The band plunges madly into it. A frenzied cataract of sound results. Chu-Yin covers his ears and moves away, shaking his head)" (2: 438). Because the audience is asked to become an observer of Marco, rather than a co-conspirator, it will fail to participate in Marco's performance as fool the way it would that of Major Jones. However, because Marco's comic pretensions counter the spiritual observances of the Kaan's court, disturb its tranquility, the effect of his performance, if not its authorial cause, mirrors the kind of humor of which Major Jones is representative.
Marco can be considered a later version of Hank Morgan of Mark Twain’s *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, the protagonist as “daimonic entrepreneur” (Fienberg 166). When Hank Morgan asserts his power, he sounds a lot like Marco: "Look at the opportunities here for a man of knowledge, brains, pluck and enterprise to sail in and grow up up with the country. The grandest field that ever was; and all my own; not a competitor nor the shadow of a competitor; not a man who wasn't a baby to me in acquirements and capacities . . . What a jump I had made! I couldn't keep from thinking about it, and contemplating it, just as one does who has struck oil" (Twain 63).

Like Hank Morgan, Marco invents over again what the West takes for granted, with the intent of enlightening the court at which he is a guest. The 19th-century idea of the machine as an extension of the human being, “independent because essentially inflexible” (Michaels 73), affords Twain a positive view of Hank Morgan (Michaels 79). Marco, however, takes likeness one step further into the 20th-century and creates an equivalence of human to machine. Preparing for departure, Marco supervises an inhuman assembly line, “a line of half-naked slaves, their necks, waists, and right ankles linked up by chains, form an endless human chain which revolves mechanically” as they load the cargo hold of Marco’s ship (2: 432). Marco boasts, “Well, cargo’s aboard, before schedule, too. We killed six slaves but, by God, we did it!” (2: 437).

The success of O’Neill’s medieval project depends in part on the degree to which an external audience accepts the Kaan’s perspective
as a suitable frame for viewing the performance of the fool. In Marco Millions, we smile at a character who, within the frame of Eastern spirituality of the Kaan’s court, is continuously in the wrong. Marco Millions places Marco on a laboratory table where his capitalistic faults may be dissected and subjected to ridicule. However, the stereotype that holds Marco in place, like the classroom jar that kept the Polyphemus moth Annie Dillard observed from opening its wings (Dillard 61), may strain the audience’s credulity. As a natural fool, a type of country bumpkin in an alien context, Marco functions in terms of entertainment, which may undermine his educational function. To borrow Barbara Swain’s title of her Chapter Three, “The Fool Triumphs Over the Wise Man” in such a way as to undercut moral instruction and encourage an audience’s suspicions about the frame wherein Marco appears as a fool.

One of the suspicions about the frame of the East that the audience may begin to form is that the Kaan and Marco are mirrors of each other, that ruler and fool are alike in several ways. In his study of jesters, William Willeford calls attention to the power struggle between king and fool: “the pair may suggest to us a weary conqueror and a rebel prince with whom he has come to an uneasy settlement” (155). This is the dynamic that Marco’s performance as natural fool generates at the Kaan’s court. However much the Kaan and Marco resemble what Willeford sees in general terms as “two comedians squabbling sullenly in the wings of a stage” (156), ruler and fool are mirrors, and this has something to do with the way Marco is able to subvert order at court.
Both, to some degree, define themselves as optimists. The Kaan complains to Kukachin, "Your poem has made me melancholy. And I am too old, if not too wise, to afford anything but optimism!" (2: 419). Marco tells Chu-Yin, "Take a fool's advice and don't think so much or you'll get old before your time! [. . .] Keep on going ahead and you can't help but be right!" (2: 438). (The Kaan is a perfect audience of the Eastern performance of poetry; Marco is a perfect performer of the Western sales pitch. The chief performance mode of the East produces harmony in the audience; the chief performance mode of the West produces discord.) Each has arranged a marriage in order to solidify political or business arrangements, the Kaan of Kukachin to Arghun Kahn of Persia, Marco of himself to Donata, the daughter of a rival Venetian business firm. Most importantly, the Kaan and Marco speak the languages of commerce and romance in inverse proportions, the Kaan privileging romance at the expense of commerce, Marco hiding his romantic tendencies in favor of an overt business monologue. In Marco's mouth, both languages become subversive, the language of romance, which he has repressed, and the language of business, which he has learned from his mentors.

Marco's business language is dialogically sensitive; it acknowledges the presence of an auditor, as a successful sales discourse should. At the same time, Marco's discourse is insensitive, monologically rigid. In general, a dialogic utterance recognizes or incorporates the languages of others in some way. A monologic utterance asserts its own authority, presents a unified, solitary voice (see Bakhtin, Dialogic 259-349; Problems 5-46, 181-269). Marco's
sales pitch in Act Two, Scene One, speaks and answers for his chief audience, the Kaan: "May I demonstrate? (without waiting for permission, takes a piece of printed paper like a dollar bill from his pocket) What is it? Paper. Correct. What is it worth? Nothing. That's where you're mistaken" (2: 426). To Chu-Yin who tells Marco that the Kaan has instructed him to look into Kukachin's eyes once each day on their voyage to Persia, Marco replies, "What for? (then brightly) Oh, he's afraid she'll get fever in the tropics. Well, you tell him I'll see to it she keeps in good condition. [. . .] (then practically) Then, of course, if her husband thinks at the end of the voyage that my work deserves a bonus--why, that's up to him" (2: 436). The humor in Marco Millions is stimulated by a Western voice that permits no entry of the voice of the East into its sphere and that misunderstands this other voice, adjusting it so that it suits the language Marco has learned from father and uncle.

Through monologic performance, Marco is able to overturn the authority of the Kaan, to place the Kaan in a marginal position as audience. When it comes to the sales pitch exclusively, Marco demonstrates competence as a Western performer. He creates, in Richard Bauman's terms, an "enhancement of experience," which is "subject to evaluation" by an audience (11). However, the audience that Marco addresses is a part of his imagination; not the audience that is objectively present. In reality, Marco's audience is unreceptive; he performs in a discourse community responsive to poetry. Kukachin's recital of poetry to the Kaan initiates the scene in which Marco achieves his height as a salesperson. Because Marco's
sales speech is professional, however, a Western audience may be aesthetically impressed, at the same time that it is amused by Marco’s obliviousness. Marco’s sales pitch is not humorous on its own; rather the mismatch of Marco’s intention with the Kaan’s ironic response produces laughter. For instance, after Marco fires a toy cannon at a wall of children's building blocks, as a sales demonstration, "Kukachin gives a scream of fright, then a gasp of delight, and claps her hands. Marco bows to her the more gratefully as Kublai and Chu-Yin are staring at him with a queer appalled wonder that puzzles him although he cannot imagine it is not admiration” (2: 428).

The distorted language of romance as spoken by Marco threatens the Kaan’s order in a more immediate way, as well. Marco’s romantic imagination, suppressed or repressed by his mentors, finds an outlet in mechanical inventiveness, the visual imagination of Industrial Era optimism. Once Marco adopts the language and mindset of business, he substitutes the creation of poetry for the invention of paper money, cannons, and tax schemes, which in the frame of the East seem the products of a deranged mind.

The language that the Kaan would respond to, that which would indicate the presence of a soul to the Kaan and his advisor Chu-Yin, is for Marco a marginal language, a form of play or flirtation, not a means of serious discourse. It undermines the Kaan’s court by unintentionally enticing Kukachin away from her commitment to the East. More than Marco’s performance as natural fool, what threatens
the Kaan's order is Kukachin's movement from East to West as she comes to the defense of Marco's "soul": "Because I have seen it—once, when he bound up my dog's leg, once when he played with a slave's baby, once when he listened to music over water and I heard him sigh" (2: 430). Her incipient love for Marco deflates Marco's entertainment value for the Kaan: "So, because I have permitted this fool a jester's latitude, because I have permitted him to amuse you when you were a little girl, and since then, on his returns, to speak with you--a Princess!" (2: 421).

On the one hand, Marco is distant from the external audience, a monster, an alien. On the other hand, Marco is likable, an adolescent performer with limited perspective. Incompetence, buffoonery, childishness may present attractions. Marco's natural foolishness tends to undermine a satire that depends on Marco as a figure of reprehension. Marco doesn't triumph through artificial disguise of his own intelligence, as Barbara Swain's example of the fool Marcolph does over Solomon (30-36), yet the effect of his performance as fool is to disrupt Eastern hierarchy, at the top of which is the Kaan. Most critically, the order that the Kaan has been trying to solidify by an arranged marriage of Kukachin to the King of Persia collapses as Kukachin dies of the effects of love sickness for Marco.

In *Marco Millions*, the reader is again kept at a distance from the fool-performer, is invited to audit the fool-performer from the perspectives of the internal audiences of the play: the Kaan, Kukachin, Chu-Yin. On the other hand, Marco's unintentional humor acts as a safety valve, providing a release from seeing Marco in
purely negative terms. Through humor, O'Neill provides a tentative connection to the performer; the reader, along with the Kaan and Kukachin, cannot wholly dismiss him. Marco's naivety eludes O'Neill's satiric aim. In a way, Marco's natural foolishness counterbalances the dangers of his excessive and unlicensed performance. Because O'Neill privileges the point of view of the Kaan, aligning his sympathies with the East, a vacuum is created in Marco's characterization. The reader senses an empty self. Along with the Kaan and Kukachin, the reader tries to discover the self behind the mask, the reality behind the performance: Marco's "soul." A mystery exists at the center of Marco's stage presence, the puzzle of the selfhood of the natural fool.

In effect, Marco functions in the way that a proper American fool should, by undermining systems of hierarchy and courtly order; Marco is natively American in a comic sense, and one wonders whether O'Neill was using an American fool, in part, to offset his own overdependence on the East for its transfusion of aesthetic sensibility. The fool in this case is allowed to speak with a boasting self-confidence, but this constitution of self is out of place, is made to look ridiculous or foolish, as framed by the fool's internal audiences. Ordinarily, an external audience would gain pleasure in seeing the ways a highbrow, superior audience is deflated, brought down to earth; however, in this case, this process plays itself out as a tragedy.

As in The Emperor Jones, there is a point in Marco Millions when the "fool" suffers a break in his self-confident voice, a fissure in his verbal mask. The monologic voice he has developed cracks, so
that a different language is spoken, one that is hidden or below the surface. In *Marco Millions*, it is again the voice of romance, the chief language of the Kaan's court. Marco speaks in a language his audience wishes to hear, admitting the possibility of a productive dialogue between "fool" and court. In Act Two, Scene Three, as Marco escorts Kukachin to Persia, he initially speaks in a monologic way, transforming Kukachin's language into the language of his own mental system. When Kukachin accuses Marco of being cruel in saving her from death, Marco replies, "You're joking. You certainly didn't want to die, did you?"

Kukachin: *(slowly and intensely)* Yes!

Marco: *(puzzled and severe)* Hum! You shouldn't talk that way. *(2: 443)*

When Kukachin admits, "My heart feels as if it were bursting!" Marco asks, "It burns?"

Kukachin: Like a red ember flaring up for the last time before it chills into gray ash forever!

Marco: Then something must have disagreed with you. Will you let me see your tongue? *(2: 444)*

Once again, Marco recognizes only one language, that attuned to his serious responsibility as escort, a matter of business, which is facilitated by an optimistic good nature. When Kukachin instructs Marco to look into her eyes one last time to fulfill to the letter the instructions of Chu-Yin, Marco "looks for a moment critically, then he grows tense, his face moves hypnotically toward hers, their lips seem about to meet in a kiss."
Kukachin: Marco!

Marco: (his voice thrilling for this second with oblivious passion) Kukachin! (2: 446)

In The Emperor Jones, Jones attempts to cure the break in his voice, the pressure to play involuntary roles, by resorting to the persona of the "bad man." Likewise, Marco is rescued from his slip into an alien language by the voice of business or commerce, as father and uncle finish counting their take from their business with the Kaan:

"(suddenly slapping a stack of coins into the chest with a resounding clank) One million!" (2: 446).

Marco explains his verbal slip by saying, "I felt like one of those figures in a puppet show with someone jerking the wires. It wasn't me, you understand. My lips spoke without me saying a word" (2: 446). The irony is that this is one of the moments when Marco is less a puppet of O'Neill's medieval intention but is speaking more flexibly, admitting a different worldview into his system of thought. Marco’s reassertion of his monologic voice turns Kukachin from a sympathetic audience into a hostile one. She is now less a

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8I keep speaking of O'Neill' medieval intention as if this were his only intention in Marco Millions. But other intentions prevail, as well. O'Neill, for instance, needs to keep his audience entertained and amused, but this desire conflicts with his simultaneous satirical drive. O'Neill's equivocal conception of Marco in the early composition of the play is expressed in a letter to Kenneth MacGowan: "The child will either be a surpassing satiric Beauty—or a most Godawful monster. Beauty, I fondly opine. Satiric or not remains to be seen—but Beauty must be the word!" (Bogard and Bryer 179).
mediator between the worlds of East and West and more aligned with the point of view of the Kaan. Her patience finally gives way, and she echoes the outraged sentiments of the Kaan's point of view: "He has amused me. Let him be fed. Stuff him with food and gold and send him home" (2: 450).

As with The Emperor Jones, Marco Millions offers the external audience more than one viewing platform from which to observe Marco. The conception of Marco as fool is subverted by the use of audiences within the play. The external audience is offered a loophole in viewing Marco as incurable natural fool because Marco achieves his voice of extreme self-confidence after a period of initiation, a rite of passage. Marco is considered a natural fool by his Western audiences (Tedaldo, Maffeo, Nicolo) during his education, but the external audience sympathizes with Marco, sees him as a victim of training. The external audience watches Marco grow in reverse, from a flexible and sensitive youth into a single-minded businessman who privileges only one language. Marco moves from a pole of dialogic possibility to a pole of monologic rigidity. Meanwhile, Marco's original audience, his mentors, are relegated to almost voiceless sidekicks in the course of the play, natural buffoons who grasp at any gold coin tossed toward them, and in comparison with whom Marco looks less foolish, more reasonable and human, less stock as a character.

As Marco graduates away from being a clown in the Western view, the external audience views this negatively, along with the Kaan, as a real graduation into foolishness. However, the Kaan, as
observer, is qualified by his fairly rigid attachment to the hierarchy of his Eastern court. Kukachin, as audience, is more a mediator between East and West, as she complies with the Kaan's wish for an arranged marriage in order to suit the needs of the court but also nurtures her affection toward Marco.

Yet Kukachin offers, as Jones has offered of himself, the most reasonable view of the "fool," one that is sympathetic yet recognizes the "fool's" limitations. Kukachin's insight into Marco's romantic interior alerts an external audience which is intently taking in Marco as a moral lesson, or as a humorous buffoon, to other possibilities, to a loophole in O'Neill's medieval intention. In contrast to the self-recognition of Jones, Marco's own view of himself is the most unreasonable. He boasts himself to Donata upon his return to Venice as a man of action: "I'm a hero, that's what!" (2: 459). His self-description to his homecoming audience is likewise ironic: "I am a simple man, an ordinary man, I might almost say,—a man of affairs used to dealing in the hard facts of life, a silent man given to deeds not words" (2: 460). Kukachin, as mediator of audience response, is not attached in a rigid way to the hierarchy of the East or to that of the West, not swayed by Marco's position at the top of his own commercial hierarchy. If the external audience aligns itself with Kukachin, the more reasonable internal audience, it possesses a more forgiving or understanding view of Marco as "fool."

An instance of metatheater—a self-conscious moment of miniature theater within the dramatic whole—as in *The Emperor Jones*, contributes to a quarantine of the "fool," a negation of the
"fool's" power, a containment of his performance. The most obvious or explicit instance of metatheater in *Marco Millions* occurs in Act Three, Scene One, after the Kaan has learned about Kukachin's declining spirit. As becomes the case with Jones, Marco is framed by his audience, the Kaan, in such a way as to satisfy the Kaan's desires: "My loathing grows so intense I feel he must jump into the crystal at my bidding. And—in the cause of wisdom, say—we must see what he is doing now" (2: 456). He looks into a crystal ball which brings into view Marco's return to Venice. Once again, Marco is at his height as a performer. In terms of Barnum and Bailey showmanship, he does everything right. He creates suspense for his audience, he treats them with musicians and rich food, he displays gems and expensive robes. His competence as a Western performer is evident, yet he misreads his audience and indulges in a long-winded speech about the silk worm trade, which is drowned out by his guests' more avid interest in food, so that only the keyword of Marco's language system, "Millions," can be overheard, repeated into infinity. In the frame of the East, Marco is again seen at his height as a natural fool; however, this time the Kaan is in control of the performance situation, and he is able to dispose of it by smashing the crystal and thus eradicating Marco from the play. Yet once again, amusement becomes a part of audience response, as the Kaan "turns away with a shudder of loathing—and, in spite of himself, a shadow of a smile—and lets the crystal fall from his hand and shatter into bits" (2: 461).

The instance of metatheater which follows, the funeral procession of Kukachin, functions similarly to the last scene of *The
Emperor Jones. The focus, now that the “fool” has been permanently exiled, is on the internal audience member who has suffered most as a consequence of having been caught in the middle of two discourse systems. As the Kaan recognizes, "She died for love of a fool!" (2: 466). The court engages in a moment of self-reflexivity, its structures and hierarchy exposed to view: “Kublai sits at the top of his throne, cross-legged in the posture of an idol [...] Chu-Yin stands on the level below, on Kublai’s left. On the main floor are the nobles and people of the court [...] Their eyes are kept on him with the ardent humility and respect of worship” (2: 462). As the funeral procession arrives, with its string of musicians, singers, boy and girl censer bearers, priests and nobles, the court appears to be reviewing itself, seeing a mirror of itself, the presence of the Kaan acknowledging the absence of Kukachin. The effect of the fool's performance ironically strengthens the structures of the court, brings these structures more firmly into view. The court has been altered by the loss of Kukachin, but there is a sense of reaffirmation, a reassertion of order and hierarchy.

In the epilogue, Marco is revealed rising from a theater seat, stretching and yawning, "a bit sleepy, a trifle puzzled, and not a little irritated as his thoughts, in spite of himself, cling for a passing moment to the play" (2: 467). This recalls his declaration to Kukachin about the promise of shipboard playlets: "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 of serious things until it's time to go to bed" (2: 431). Marco displays a resilience against the concept of theater as a transformative experience. The epilogue suggests there is no real place for the West as a fool within the Eastern frame and no help-wanted posting by the Western frame for the East as wise counselor. If we see ourselves in Marco, O'Neill reduces our shock through laughter. So as not to alienate the Western reader, who would no doubt recoil from a completely negative image or assessment, O'Neill, by making Marco a "clownish dolt" and "bumptious ass,"9 a natural fool, leaves room for redemption, through Marco's naivety and humor.

What is suggested by Marco's movement from center to margin is the resilience of this comic persona. In The Emperor Jones, the image of the minstrel fool is reformed for the reader or external audience. The language of minstrel comedy is made marginal. In Marco Millions, O'Neill wishes to appropriate the voice of the 19th-century natural fool for the ends of audience transformation and moral correction. But the persistence of this image, given its ability to amuse, subverts this intention. The figure of the 19th-century American natural fool can be amusing if kept within a firm boundary, if proscribed by certain limits. However, there can be something dangerous and unamusing about this figure if he is able to acquire social power or undermine the frame which contains him.

9In a review of the book, Watts asks why Marco is dramatized as this (qtd. in Miller, “Eugene” 385).
“Bughouse Bull” in The Iceman Cometh

The community of alcoholic outcasts in The Iceman Cometh is a Ship of Fools (Berlin 4) washed ashore and permanently anchored: “Madness will no longer proceed from a point within the world to a point beyond, on its strange voyage. . . . Behold it moored now, made fast among things and men. Retained and maintained. No longer a ship but a hospital” (Foucault 35). Hickey treats the passengers of Hope’s cargo hold to a possibility of rebirth. But the effect of Hickey’s performance substantiates the view expressed by characters in the play that the back room has a closer affinity with clinical institutions than with a free-floating ship. In Act One, Rocky calls it “de morgue” (3: 572); Margie, too, refers to it as “de Morgue wid all de stiffs on deck” (3: 600). Rocky labels Hugo a “bughouse bum” (3: 570) and asks Hickey to “forget dat bughouse line of bull” (3: 646).

“Bughouse” may also recall the term “nuthouse,” a pseudonym for the vaudeville palaces of the early twentieth century, which fostered "a combination of outrageous distortion, noisy satire, and mad humor, adding up to an insanely imaginative entertainment--'nut' acts" (Gilbert 251). One of the “nut acts” was the team of Bill Hickey and Sadie Nelson: "Natural endowment gave Hickey a start; he was a funny-looking guy to begin with. Even in repose, his face resembled an enormous potato, and when he assumed a winsome or appealing expression it was something to see. He wore a misfit coat, knee-length vest, pants that would shield three persons, and oyster-shaped shoes eighteen inches long" (Gilbert 264).
The Hickey of *The Iceman Cometh*, too, "(immediately puts on an entrance act, places a hand affectedly on his chest, throws back his head, and 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!'" (3: 607). Hickey and Sadie, of real-life vaudeville, "opened with a romantic song and dance, 'The Wedding of Lily and Rose' . . . Bill came in with a whisky tenor for attempts at harmony and tremelo that were so funny no one ever heard the complete song" (Gilbert 264).

Hickey resembles, in part, the vaudevillian comic or "nut"; the barroom dynamics can be understood in relationship to vaudeville. By providing a link with American popular theater and American mythology, this view builds on critical discussions of Hickey as a performer.10 We may tie Hickey's performances to the image of the

10 Critics of *The Iceman Cometh* who have discussed issues of performance and metatheater include Robinson, who sees how Hickey cannot escape the role of entertainer because of "audience resistance" ("Convergences" 334); he relates Hickey's performance to O'Neill's theater which was caught between the dual goals of entertaining and preaching ("Convergences" 335). Jean Chothia demonstrates how Hickey's failure to tell the gag about the iceman disturbs his audience's expectations and affects the external audience's view of Hickey, making it less disposed to Hickey's messages (79). James Watson describes *The Iceman Cometh* as "a play composed of a play, acted by actors who take the roles of actors acting" (231). The bar itself, he says, is a theater in miniature (232-3), and the bar members, as supportive audience, verify each other's roles (233). Hickey, Watson says, is "anti-art" because he forces the barroom members to speak the truth and thus quit playing their parts (235).
vaudevillian fool, a linchpin for the cast of characters as a 
vaudevillian community.\(^{11}\)

In Jones's case, his departure from the minstrel role permits 
him an expressive individuality; in *Marco Millions*, the tradition of an 
American (or Western) fool in a foreign court creates an ambiguity of 
reader response. In *The Iceman Cometh*, Hickey's departure from 
the vaudeville norm, the role of stage fool, is subjected to continuous 
(on-stage and off-stage) audience critique; the fool is a missing 
feature rather than an active presence in the play. Hickey is the fool 
who refuses to play his old part, an essential part in terms of 
solidifying group identity. Hickey's new role as salvationist preacher 
is the fool's role turned inside out. Whereas the fool abetted the 
community's withdrawal from society, the preacher demands 
participation. The play tends to evoke a nostalgia, a collective 
yearning, for the vaudevillian fool; the accent falls continually on 
what is missing and rebels against what is present.

Unlike *The Emperor Jones* and *Marco Millions* in which a 
Western protagonist visits a foreign court, the court in *The Iceman 
Cometh* is indigenous, comprising a collection of outcast individuals, 
some natively American, others legally alien. Harry Hope's saloon is 

\(^{11}\)This view redefines Watson's thesis in terms of vaudeville 
comic routine and joke-telling. It also sharpens Chothia's insight; 
Hickey disturbs audience expectations not only by failing to tell 
comic stories but by failing to play the essential part of vaudevillian 
fool, the content of his stories validating a leisure-class lifestyle of a 
 marginal group of has-beens who feel excessive guilt about their 
nonparticipation in the American urban dream of success.
set up like an American royal court, with a systematic hierarchy, an
ingrained pecking order, based partly upon the level of self-
consciousness with which a character participates in the discourse of
the pipe dream. The characters are unequally weighted in the sense
that some possess a greater awareness of the pipe dream as a
function of community than others. Thus, in Act One, Jimmy
Tomorrow seems least self-conscious about his pipe dream as a type
of game and is framed by Harry Hope, who sits on the highest rung
of the hierarchy: “Poor Jimmy’s off on his pipe dream again. Bejees,
he takes the cake!” (3: 594). Likewise, Rocky, as leader of the
employed patrons of the barroom, is able to frame the pipe dream of
Cora and Chuck: “Yeah, of all de pipe dreams in dis dump, dey got de
nuttiest!” (3: 603). Larry, who occupies a marginal position in Act
One in the “grandstand,” takes a verbal snapshot of the entire
community: “they keep up the appearances of life with a few
harmless pipe dreams about their yesterdays and tomorrows” (3:
578).

At the top of the pecking order, then, is the Boss and his
Cronies (or the King and his Courtiers): Harry and his parasitical
sidekicks, Ed Mosher and Pat McGloin. Harry exercises his power
liberally, threatening courtiers and court with the removal of
privilege: “And you two big barflies are a hell of a help to me, ain’t
you? [. . .] Well, you can take that ‘I’ll-have-the-same’ look off your
maps! There ain’t going to be no more drinks on the house till hell
freezes over!” (3: 588).
Three other subgroups within the community possess a similar structure of dominant male to whom are attached two sidekicks who operate as a comedy team: Jimmy with his attending comic contenders, Cecil Lewis and Piet Wetjoen, who continue an argument begun when on opposite sides in the Boer War; Rocky as ringleader of a group of bar employees whose subordinate males are Joe and Chuck, attended by three prostitutes, Cora, Margie, and Pearl; and Larry who keeps company with two other marginal men, "quasi-Shakespearean fools" (Reinhardt 122), Hugo and Willie. These two characters are on the bottom rungs of a courtly hierarchy, the upper rungs of which threaten at times to remove them from the premises for violations of social propriety, raucous singing or mocking verbal assaults. Larry, Jimmy, and Harry thus play the three ringmasters of their individual circular tables from left to right respectively, and it is Larry, Jimmy, and Harry whom Hickey says he wishes to help the most (3: 631).

Hickey and Parritt are the two components of a "team," the divided halves of a dynamic duo, lacking connection in a triangular way with a unifying team leader, the way the other male relationships are structured: Hickey as a would-be father figure in search of obedient sons and Parritt as a prodigal son in search of a salvationist father.

When Hickey is asleep at the end of Act One, having disturbed the community with the preliminary speeches of his salvationist rhetoric, Ed Mosher enlivens the group with an extended story about a quack doctor he knew who made a living with the sales pitch that
“rattlesnake oil, rubbed on the prat, would cure heart failure in three
days” (3: 615). Barlow discusses the way Mosher’s doctor is “a
picture in miniature of Hickey” (30): “The doctor is a charlatan who
is fully conscious of his cure’s lethal nature; it is only in early
versions of Iceman that Hickey seems aware he is bringing ‘death’ to
his friends” (31). Thus, Hickey’s roots lie in the “mountebank-Fool”
tradition, in which “the title ‘doctor’ combines pseudo-medicine with
the medieval tradition of the sermon joyeux” (Billington 65). As
Sandra Billington notes about one mountebank dialogue, “It’s hard to
ignore the mock sermon aspect of these speeches” (65).

Mosher’s story validates the community’s own attitude toward
the Puritan work ethic at the same time that it diagnoses Hickey as a
victim of overwork: “My opinion is the poor sap is temporarily
bughouse from overwork. (musingly) You can’t be too careful about
work. It’s the deadliest habit known to science” (3: 614). Hickey’s
delivery of his message to the barroom crowd entails hard work; it is
a matter of “working” an audience in the way the American
incarnation of the mountebank, the modern medicine salesman,
would work his audience into an enthusiastic fervor that produced
sales. In a recent reconstruction of an old-time medicine show, “the
uninhibited sales techniques of the old performers produced near
riots in the audience. People leaped off their benches with dollar
bills clutched in their hands” (McNamara 86). One organizer of the
event, Brooks McNamara, says that “for the first time I had a clear
sense of how traditional sales actually worked. They were
structured in exactly the same way as the presentations of tent
evangelists, assembled out of a powerful combination of oratory and music and repetitious sounds in such a way that the pitchman gained control over the spectator" (86-7).

Similarly, Hickey’s mission is a function of work at the same time that his audience wishes to see it as only a “gag,” a part of a comic routine, fitting in with the group’s preoccupation with the “game.” As in the case of Jones and Marco, an old-fashioned boaster, a self-confident comic persona, violates the traditional attributes of his characterization, a superseding of the “old” Hickey by the “new.”

Hickey is both entertainer and reformer, caught between the part of festival fool and sermonistic wise man: “Hickey continues to entertain, in a strange way--his joking persists (between sermons)” (Robinson, “Convergences” 335). Thus, Hickey’s reformist speech is always cast in the voice of the entertainer, the comedian. In one instance, “(Hickey changes to his jovial, bustling, master-of-ceremonies manner): But what are we waiting for, boys and girls? Let’s start the party rolling!” (3: 644). In an earlier entrance, he “(booms in imitation of a familiar Polo Grounds bleacherite cry--with rising volume) Well! Well!! Well!!!” (3: 626). As comic motivator, an entertaining emcee, Hickey’s role corresponds with that of a vaudevillian performer who has surrendered his old comic act, his vaudeville routine about his wife in bed with the iceman, for a new role as stage manager.

The “new” Hickey is no longer a performer with the others, but a manager of other acts, the pipe dream as routine that each member of Hope’s community verbally plays out. As manager, Hickey prods
his cast toward actual, kinetic, rather than oral, potential, performances. As James Watson points out, Hickey is "anti-art" because his emphasis on truth and self-honesty "threatens the destruction of the theater world of the lying dream" (235); however, Hickey also creates theater, a sort of living theater, out of verbal potentialities.

If Hickey is a non-comic descendent of the quack doctor, he is likewise a reformed fool of the vaudeville circuit, no longer performer but manager. As fellow performer, who visited the back room during his periodical bouts with alcohol, Hickey played the fool who evokes laughter from an audience frustrated by the Myth of Success, the American Dream of upward economic mobility. By entering the barroom from the outside, as a successfully employed and married member of society, someone who claims success in his line of work as a drummer of hardware goods, Hickey played an essential role as fool. By appearing drunk and by making a regular gag about his wife's relationship with a fictional iceman, Hickey validated his audience's pipe dreams, the way each dream embraced yet retaliated against this Myth of Success, making it seem an enviable yet questionable ideal. The back room is a vaudeville theater in obverse. Like vaudeville itself, a multifaceted, diverse, polyglot urban life is represented, different segments of urban experience are "portrayed" by the characters: "Vaudeville... provided that esthetic encounter that immigrant and rural segments of the population longed to make with the urban civilization that was absorbing them" (McLean 11).
Each character manages an act, a routine of his or her own, the pipe dream as vaudevillian verbal performance. The Myth of Success sustains the pipe-dreaming life of the inhabitants, since each pipe dream has some vital connection with a return to work and a full life based on a work ethic, at the same time that this work ethic is openly and explicitly criticized. In traditional vaudeville of the early twentieth century, the stage embraced the Myth of Success and demonstrated it as a viable norm: "The Myth of Success was both an escape from the moment and a tangible promise for the future. Its glittering promises of pleasure and fulfillment, its easy answers for immediate problems, its roots in middle class values, and its cheerful materialism—all served to make it the primary myth celebrated by the New Folk" (McLean 15). The back room of Hope's saloon presents the Horatio Alger story in reverse; the performers are discarded has-beens, would-be practitioners of the American Dream, fragments of a possible energetic whole, vaudeville on the downward slide of entropy.

The "new" Hickey, as reformed fool, reverts to an "old" humor, which runs counter to the "new humor" Hope's barroom crowd depends on for its sense of community: the barbed witticism, the kidding prod, the joking insult, humor that seeks a human target. "What the practitioners of the new humor on the vaudeville stage might lose in geniality and security, they were to gain in pertinence and explosiveness. They were not really concerned with whether humor might serve as a means of betterment and uplift, but they knew that it was an effective gesture of retaliation against an
environment which promised much and yet never yielded quite enough" (McLean 109).

If the "old humor" was "morally oriented," genial, clean-spirited, and decent, the "new humor" was direct and insulting, able to "single out its scapegoats" yet also encouraging a "sense of community" (McLean 108, 121). The "new" Hickey seeks to deprive Hope's community of its primary discourse; as a cleaned-up act himself, Hickey reverts to the old humor, that of geniality, old-fashioned amiability, a humor that doesn't seek out victims. "Boys and girls," as a continual opening remark in Hickey's rhetoric, produces a soft, gentle effect. It is a performative key, a "special formula" (Bauman, Verbal 21), which creates a vaudevillian relationship with the barroom crowd in-between sermons.

A main problem of Hickey's solution for peace of mind is that he is not dealing with one person in a therapeutic session but with a discourse community which defines itself through the ability to joke about its members' pipe dreams. Each participant is able to joke about another's pipe dream but deflect criticism directed at his or her own. The joke, as a modern, urban phenomenon (McLean 113), conceals hostility, as Freud points out, providing a safe outlet for tension as it unites listener and teller in a project of creating a scapegoat out of a third, usually absent, party (Freud 90-116). In the case of The Iceman Cometh, however, the scapegoat is usually present, a member of the bar. Hope, as the back room's "greatest kidder" in Hickey's view (3: 642), conducts a number of jokes in Act One: "Bejees," he tells Larry and Hugo, "you'll pay up tomorrow, or
I’ll start a Harry Hope Revolution! I’ll tie a dispossess bomb to your tails that’ll blow you out in the street! Bejeses, I’ll make your Movement move!” (3: 595). Likewise, Harry assails Mosher’s pipe dream of returning to the circus: “Bejeses, you’ve even borrowed fish from the trained seals and peanuts from every elephant that remembered you!” (3: 598-9).

Hickey’s salvation is short-sighted; it looks mainly at the dichotomy between truth and illusion, self-honesty and self-deception. It ignores, however, the way this dichotomy is packaged, in the form of the joke. When the joke is removed as a mechanism of community interaction, the hostility that the joke conceals is still present, but now is animated on the surface of discourse, out in the open.12 Hope’s community is unwilling or unable to revert to an old-fashioned humor, one more sympathetic than sharp-witted. What Hope’s company cannot do, which old-fashioned humor can, is laugh at itself, recognize its own folly.

Hope and company do not joke in a classic sense of liberating repressed material; rather the barroom inhabitants display a constant tension sharpened by wit which gives way to direct insult. A high density of attacks, parries, thrusts, and deflections produces an animated verbal fencing match broken by oases of sentimentality.

12 Chothia says that the theater audience will respond negatively to this change in barroom temperament: “Even if they do not realize that the tales have stopped [in Act Two], they know that the roomers are no longer as entertaining as they were. Because of this, they probably share some of the resentment against Hickey which they see displayed on stage” (79).
and pipe-dreaming. Repressed or censored material emerges in the form of the direct insult, which can be immediately reconsidered, and thus taken back, as an unintentional slip. As Debra Long and Arthur Graesser say about wit in general, "One advantage to using wit as a plan to satisfy social goals is that it can be used to embarrass, cajole, influence, request, or persuade, and yet carries with it a message that the remark is not serious" (52). As a mechanism of social control, the wit in Hope’s barroom tests the limits of group cohesiveness, traces the edges of group social reflex and response. Thus, wit directed against present individuals rather than jokes told about absent others holds the community together. By constantly singling out individuals for attack, an inherent pecking order or hierarchical classification system is kept in place, the checks and balances of an Americanized court.

As Hickey works his rhetoric on the company, the wit dries up, but hostility is still omnipresent in the form of the direct insult. Whereas in Act One the insult is disguised as wit, the mask is removed in the subsequent two acts, so that the tone is less tempered by humor. One can see the way this humor evaporates at the end of Act Two, when Larry surmises that Hickey’s sobriety is a result of catching his wife in bed with the Iceman. The community subsequently unloads a barrage of verbal grenades, sharp witticisms, mocking insults, which are meant to sabotage Hickey’s mission: “I’ve noticed he hasn’t shown her picture around this time!”; “He hasn’t got it! The iceman took it away from him!”; “Jees, look at him! Who could blame her?”; “Come to look at you, Hickey, old chap, you’ve
sprouted horns like a bloody antelope!” (3: 648-9). In the next act, a joking tone has almost completely disappeared. Wetjoen, at one point, is representative of the new discourse: “Listen to me, you Cecil! Often when I am tronk and kidding you I say I am sorry I missed you, but now, py Gott, I am sober, and I don’t joke, and I say it!” (3: 664). The only time Hickey actually does joke is when Jimmy throws a glass of whiskey at him before leaving the bar in Act Three: “All set for an alcohol rub! But no hard feelings. I know how he feels” (3: 672). Hickey’s joke is self-deprecating, aimed at himself, a type of humor of which Hope’s community is incapable.

“Fools were in the Middle Ages marginal men, but not all medieval marginal men were fools” (Zijderveld 115). One could apply this same argument to the inhabitants of Harry Hope’s bar; the community of alcoholics is marginal as a whole, has marginalized itself, contained itself within the privacy of the back room, and it does display the folly of men and women who prefer rationalization to rationality, self-delusion to truth.

However, not all of these characters are equally fools or equally foolish, and the “fool” label itself is used as a socially negative category, a boundary marker staking the limits of a world view that privileges camaraderie generated by intoxication. The community has a set system of beliefs or attitudes, and the label of “fool” is used as a way of keeping members in bounds. Thus, Larry instructs Parritt, “Don’t be a damned fool!” when he stalks the truth of Larry’s departure from the Anarchist Movement (3: 580). Wetjoen kiddingly labels Cecil “a ploddy fool” when Cecil drunkenly applies a racial slur
to Joe Mott (3: 588). Harry informs the barroom crowd, “I’m going to catch a couple more winks here and I don’t want no damn-fool laughing and screeching” (3: 599). Ultimately, Hickey asks to be seen as a member of the barroom community rather than as an intruding outsider with reference to the “fool” label: “Hell, Larry, I’m no fool. Do you suppose I’d deliberately set out to get under everyone’s skin and put myself in dutch with all my old pals, if I wasn’t certain, from my own experience, that it means contentment in the end for all of you?” (3: 629-30).

After Hickey’s “cure” runs its course, the inhabitants reassert their resistance to folly. For instance, Joe says, “(with drunken self-assurance) No, suh, I wasn’t fool enough to git in no crap game” as a way of pursuing his pipe dream of reestablishing a gambling house, and Willie states, “I spent the day in the park. I wasn’t such a damned fool as to—” pursue his pipe dream, as well (3: 707).

Hope’s saloon fosters a community that consciously and aggressively resists what it defines as folly. The community has reversed what the external audience may normally take for common-sense or everyday reality. The community does not so much relish nonsense or ridiculousness as continually scrutinize member behavior for signs of what it takes to be foolish.

The predominant use of the term “fool” in a repetitive, performative sense is Hugo’s “Don’t be a fool!” Hugo’s relation to the group centers on mockery of its bourgeois pretensions: “Capitalist swine! Bourgeois stool pigeons! Have the slaves no right to sleep even!” (3: 570). As former anarchist, he plays the feudal fool, the
barroom’s only “licensed preacher” of the Anarchist “gospel” (3: 586), and one of two licensed railers of the courtly community, the other being Willie, a mock “Prince” (3: 586). Hugo seems least tied to the group, most able to mock it. He sees through an ideology implicit in Hope’s establishment, and from a privileged or licensed position on the edge of the barroom at Larry’s marginal table can castigate it with caustically ritual remarks, the opposite of Larry’s essentially pitying and sympathetic stance: “Laugh, leedle bourgeois monkey-faces! Laugh like fools, leedle stupid peoples! (His tone suddenly changes to one of guttural soapbox denunciation and he pounds on the table with a small fist.) I vill laugh, too! But I vill laugh last! I vill laugh at you!” (3: 615).

The use of “fool” here comes closer to a medieval application to members of a Joyeux Society, a Feast of Fools, and Hugo’s prophecy of laughing last comes true, although his ritual mockery is used by the group as a means of catalyzing a communal laughter once Hickey and his alien discourse have been exiled from the stage. Whereas other characters, especially the marginal ones, Rocky and Larry primarily, are able to efface the community as a whole with joking or ironic remarks, Hugo’s mockery digs into the community’s deep-rooted attitudes toward the work ethic and comes closer to being the subversive commentary of a courtly fool. As a type of I-Won’t-Worker, the epithet Harry applies to Larry and, by implication, Hugo (3: 595), Hugo attacks the foundations of the pipe dream, which in each individual case concerns the prospect of productive employment: Willie wants to practice law; Piet and Cecil will work at
blue- and white-collar jobs, respectively, in order to finance their voyages home; Mosher desires his old job as circus barker and McGloin his former position on the police force; Rocky insists on a role as big brother to the prostitutes and shuns the label "pimp." The one exception is Larry, whose primary pipe dream revolves around the philosophical issue of commitment to life.

On the other hand, Hope's saloon embraces an idea of perpetual folly, the carnivalization of American life, its members taking pleasure in a chronic communitas as an artificial leisure class which prefers any variety of "game" to the tedium of actual "work." The idea of the "game" crops up quite frequently; in Act One alone, there is reference to the "bucket-shop game" (3: 572), "de old reliever game" of selling one's clothes in exchange for a cheaper outfit (3: 572); "a great game, the pursuit of happiness" (3: 572), "de sucker game [Larry] and Hugo call de Movement" (3: 575); the "game" Hope would rediscover if he were to take a twenty-year postponed walk around the neighborhood (3: 593), the "old circus con games" Ed and Pat attempt to play on Harry, and the "game" of alcoholism which a now-dry Hickey claims to know "from soup to nuts" (3: 609). Hope's community shows the traits of being what Thomas Greenfield suggests about American society at large: "personalty-oriented," shaped by the "purposelessness of twentieth-century work," "a society that now measures personality (the ability to get along with others) as earnestly as the Puritan once measured character (the ability to sustain deeply internalized values)" (11).
A measure of the subversive nature of Hickey's message, as pseudo-"fool," is the way Hugo's performance as courtly fool breaks down in the middle of the play. "Don't be a fool!" is a steady, repetitive remark that echoes the admonitions against foolishness of other characters, and the collapse of Hugo's performance parallels the inability of the other community members to resist what they perceive as Hickey's foolishness. In Act One, Hugo possesses two voices which interplay with each other in each of his monologues: the "wheedling," "giggling," and the bullying, threatening. The voice that enters the therapeutic enterprise in Act Three is self-paranoid, non-performative: "Gottamed liar, Hickey! Does that prove I vant to be aristocrat? I love only the proletariat! I vill lead them! I vill be like a Gott to them! They vill be my slaves! (He stops in bewildered self-amazement—to Larry appealingly) I am very trunk, no, Larry? I talk foolishness?" (3: 659). Hugo can no longer sustain his capacity as courtly fool; he is in the same mental situation as the others.

As John Ditsky suggests, Larry is quarantined by the barroom community as a "foolosopher" because of his intimidating intellectuality: "his insight is necessarily insanity to them" (101). If he plays the "Fool--capital F" (Berlin 7), it is, as Berlin says, through his ability to articulate the dynamics of Hope's community through his position as detached commentator. In the view of the external audience, however, he is not so much fool as realist. His comical intensity heightens imaginative descriptions of social reality, but he says little that would disrupt the continuity of collective pipe-dreaming. In Erasmus' terminology, "foolosopher" is a disparaging
term, designating not the Wise Fool but the opposite, the foolish wise man: "Now I ask you, since these wretches are most foolish in fact but try to pass themselves off as wisemen and deep philosophers, what more fitting title could we find for them" (Erasmus 13).

Larry's pretension to a wisdom that hibernates in tranquility beyond the need for a pipe dream is not impervious to Hickey's attack, after all, as Hickey demonstrates to the amusement of the others (3: 611). At the end of the play, Larry comes to a recognition of himself as a "weak fool" (3: 710), again in a sense deeper and more philosophical than its modern connotation of "stupid person." Larry's self-recognition at the end of the play goes against the grain of the community's repulsion from the term, like an invalid submitting to a disease against which the others are inoculated. In turn, Larry accuses Hickey of being a "mad fool" (3: 677), and Jimmy Tomorrow suggests that "there was some sense in his [Hickey's] nonsense" (3: 614), defining Hickey as a wise fool in the tradition of Lear's clown, playing a mad role in order to elucidate hidden truths--the opposite of what the external audience must think about Hickey in Act One.

The primary "fool" in The Iceman Cometh is Hickey, who like his predecessors, Jones and Marco, is a tragicomic protagonist who wears the trappings of comic prototypes but who plays an unlicensed part which subverts the courtly community to the point of dissolution. One effect of Hickey's performance is to force the individuals of Hope's barroom into a self-recognition of folly. Thus, Jimmy, already in Act One, says, "I admit I've foolishly delayed" his
assault on the job market, to which Hickey replies, “Fine! That’s the spirit! And I’m going to help you!” (3: 611). Similarly, Willie, in Act Two, admits to a certain degree of folly: “I owe a lot to Hickey. He’s made me wake up to myself--see what a fool-- It wasn’t nice to face but--” (3: 632).

As in *The Emperor Jones* and *Marco Millions*, the “fool” at the center subverts a courtly system through use of a borrowed language which he has made his own. This language is picked up during a liminal phase of a loosely structured ritual passage. Jones discovers the language of the “bad man” while in a marginal position in the United States. Marco acquires the language of business while in a threshold state as apprentice to his father and uncle, crossing the continent of Asia. And Hickey, after murdering his wife, incubates a language borrowed from his salvationist preacher father while walking for six hours during the night from his home to Hope’s saloon. The inhabitants of the barroom immediately recognize this language as an alien discourse and attempt to disparage it; in Act Two alone, it is referred to as “dat line of bull” (3: 619), “his crazy bull” and “de bughouse preachin’” (3: 625), and “dat bughouse line of bull” (3: 646).

In Act One, Hickey seems somewhat self-conscious and apologetic about his use of this rhetoric: “Hell, this begins to sound like a damned sermon on the way to lead the good life” (3: 610). However, at the end of Hope’s birthday party in Act Two, Hickey’s “sermon” is framed meta-communicatively as a traditional sermon: “Brothers and Sisters. This peace is real! It’s a fact! I know!”
Because I've got it!” (3: 648). It is the language of the “Progressives” which antagonizes Hope’s group.\textsuperscript{13} The “guilt” that the self-honesty of Progressivism makes one feel (Wiles 190) parallels the guilt induced by the “role of the female” in \textit{The Iceman Cometh}: “She enters a man’s life calling upon him to become more than he is” (Andreach 90).

Hickey becomes through use of this language a “nag,” and thus also speaks with the discourse of one of the invisible women in the bar, Hope’s deceased wife Bessie. What sustains the pipe dream is the business of nagging at oneself, and it is Bessie whom Hope identifies as a prime mover of this interior nagging discourse: Hickey, Hope claims, is “a worse gabber than that nagging bitch, Bessie” (3: 678). Nagging discourse animates the pipe dream of pursuing a fantasy ambition. As Hickey points out to Harry, Bessie “was always on your neck, making you have ambition and go out and do things, when all you wanted was to get drunk in peace” (3: 674). On the other hand, Evelyn, Hickey’s wife, did not nag, was not a proponent of this discourse, although she too prodded Hickey gently and lovingly—a case of old humor over new—toward the possibility of reforming his bad habits with women and alcohol.

Hickey becomes a nag in Evelyn’s sense, persistently nagging the inhabitants yet doing so with old-fashioned humor and good nature, part of the cult of personality. Paradoxically, the intention of

\textsuperscript{13}Timothy Wiles links Hickey with the “reform movement” of the early twentieth century, and demonstrates that Hickey’s “reform” assaults the “Tammany Hall cronyism” of the barroom (181).
Hickey's discourse is to create a form of male liberation, the effect of a homeopathic cure, escape from a nagging interior discourse through the monologic oppressiveness of an external nagging discourse. He apologizes to the crowd near the end of Hope's birthday party in Act Two: "I know how it must look to you. As if I was a damned busybody who was not only interfering in your private business, but even sicking some of you on to nag at each other. Well, I have to admit that's true, and I'm damned sorry about it. But it simply had to be done!" (3: 647).

A hidden dimension of language, an internal discourse, breaks through--as it does in Jones's case, when his voice resounds communally with the phantoms on the slave ship, and with Marco when he sings out rapturously "Kukachin." With Hickey, the internal language surfaces when he inadvertently tells the barroom crowd that he called Evelyn, his wife, a "bitch." What is the significance or even the appeal of these language elements that are hiding behind or beneath the surface? In each case there is this profundity of language generated by role-playing: Jones as man-of-words "bad man," Marco as salesman, Hickey as Reformist preacher. One senses that it takes the weight of these foreign discourses to suppress a few, simple devastating words which contradict all of the words generated by the verbal mask. O'Neill allows the audience to sense something "real" underneath the role, reminding us that the bulk of what we are hearing is a performance--a performance unfounded on an interior sense of self. These hidden words, as missing elements of
discourse, have a potential to provide a more productive connection between performer and audience.

A break occurs in Hickey's discourse, as it does in Jones's and Marco's, because a language that is Hickey's "own" is hiding beneath the languages that Hickey uses monologically to motivate the barroom crowd. Again, dialogism will be defined, following Bakhtin, as a state in which a speaker is interacting with another's utterances so that the words he or she is using are shaped by this other's discourse in a direct way; dialogic discourse "has a two-fold direction--it is directed both toward the referential object of speech, as in ordinary discourse, and toward another's discourse, toward someone else's speech" (Problems 185). Inasmuch as Hickey speaks with the borrowed language of salvationist discourse, he speaks dialogically with respect to this other language; yet his interactions with the barroom inhabitants exhibit dialogism in reverse, since he gives the inhabitants the lines they are to speak, essentially by having each member repeat his pipe dream with renewed conviction, like a stage prompter handing each performer his or her script. A break occurs when Hickey reveals an internal, hidden discourse expressing his hatred for Evelyn and then speaks with the barroom inhabitants dialogically as a corrective, a way of desperately taking back what he has said. Like Jones and Marco, Hickey, prior to his exile from the community, speaks in a way which inadvertently satisfies or pleases his audience, in this case by providing a loophole to his salvationist rhetoric, a way this rhetoric can be rewritten.
Hickey's confession is a performance in a metatheatrical context, a police drama witnessed by the additional audience members Lieb and Moran who are there to arrest him. Watson considers the entire play as metatheatrical, "acted by actors who take the roles of actors acting" (231), and in this scene the metatheatrical nature of the play is taken to a second power, metatheater squared. Hickey has framed his audience throughout the play, violating the boundaries between audience and performer by continuing his performance behind the scenes, upstairs in the men's rooms, all night, non-stop, as though in a living theater marathon. Now the situation is reversed, and Hickey, like Jones and Marco before him, is finally surrounded by his audience, confined, quarantined.

As in The Emperor Jones and Marco Millions, the external audience may align itself with the point of view of the most reasonable character; in The Iceman Cometh, this character is Larry Slade. To a high degree, his speech anchors itself to utterances outside the community, to external sources, not to insider dialogue. Unlike the others, he quotes outside, external sources, like a research writer plugging in a couple of footnotes as he speaks. In one instance, he tells Parritt, "I have no answer to give anyone, not even myself. Unless you can call what Heine wrote in his poem to morphine an answer" (3: 581-2). Verbally, he is in a marginal position, a "dangerous" or eccentric entity in terms of the community because linguistically halfway out of the barroom, communing with alien, philosophical spirits.
Like Hickey, Larry speaks monologically, not by using an alien language as a tool of oppression but by speaking in a wholly original, inventive, colorful way, with a language that is his own, creative and humorous. More than the rest of the community, Larry is peculiarly resistant to Hickey’s advances. When he does engage dialogically with Hickey, it is the reverse of the way the others do, not by repeating what Hickey has encouraged them to say but by saying to Hickey in advance what he thinks Hickey would like to hear him say: “I’m afraid to live, am I?—and even more afraid to die! [. . .] You think you’ll make me admit that to myself?” (3: 675). Even though Larry echoes cues Hickey has provided him in Act One (3: 611), there is more of a defiance, a resistance, within this brand of dialogic interplay.

Although the other members of the barroom also voice a bitterness toward Hickey, they temporarily obey Hickey’s orders like windup dolls. Compare Harry Hope’s interplay with Hickey: In his birthday address to the community, Hope says, “I know damned well you’re giving me the laugh behind my back, thinking to yourselves, The old, lying, pipe-dreaming faker, we’ve heard his bull about taking a walk around the ward for years, he’ll never make it! [. . .] But I’ll show you, bejesus! (He glares at Hickey.) I’ll show you, too, you son of a bitch frying-pan-peddling bastard!” (3: 646). If we compare Harry’s dialogic interplay with Hickey with Larry’s, we see that Hickey’s defiance masks a submission in a way that Larry’s does not. Hope’s dialogism returns in a much different form once Hickey’s experiment has completed its course. Hope now cues the rest of the
community as a chorus leader with lines of despair and apathy:
“Who the hell cares?” as verbal motif, a dialogism which solidifies the group, again by giving it alternative (to Hickey’s) lines to speak. Hope takes charge, doing what Hickey had been doing, by picking up on Hickey’s word “insane” and repeating this as a way of forcing Hickey to speak in a way that will release his former patients, now turned into an impatient audience: “Insane? You mean—you really went insane?” (3: 701).

Larry offers the external audience the most reasonable viewing platform because he maintains a critical perspective on the position of the “fool” and is not attached to the community in a strict, hierarchical sense, but especially at the end remains apart, distanced, detached. It is a position that has the potential to mediate between “fool” and “court,” having the ability to provide a dialogue between the two halves of an extreme dialogical equation.

The effect of Hickey’s performance overall is to elucidate the structure of Hope’s court, to solidify the courtly community, and, as in The Emperor Jones and Marco Millions, the new order is brought deliberately and self-reflexively into view in the final tableau of the play. The community fractures into two separate halves, Larry in his isolation balancing the communal celebration at the other side of the back room. As other critics have noted, the play thus fractures along the fault line of the pipe dream, of illusion. The play may thus finish polyphonically, in a way that Bakhtin says drama cannot—“drama is by its very nature alien to genuine polyphony; drama may be multi-leveled, but it cannot contain multiple worlds; it permits only one,
and not several, systems of measurement” (Problems 34)—with two separate but equal voices or ideologies left dangling before the external audience like the scales of justice.

The extremity of Larry’s community of one is Parritt, who has discarded all illusions about his relationship with his mother in favor of hard-core reality; the extremity of Hope’s Feast of Fools is Hickey, who has rejoined the community in spirit by adopting the pipe dream that he was insane when he expressed his hatred for Evelyn but who also claims to have no pipe dreams left to him. As Reinhardt notes, Hickey’s ambiguity is symbolized by his exit through a hallway door “between the two groups” (125). Thus the play pulls into two extreme directions, does not resolve itself under a single umbrella vision or ideology. Hugo’s final movement away from Larry to Harry’s banquet table tips the scale, attempts to lure the external audience’s eye away from Larry, whose point of view the external audience has relied upon all along, toward Harry. However, this movement represents the reattachment of the courtly fool to the source of social power in the play, since the community uses Hugo’s comic utterance as a way of uniting itself more strongly. Larry, if he is a fool who sits apart, is the “weak fool” who has come to terms with his pipe dream, who has found a capacity to celebrate in a more realistic and philosophical way. Larry’s last lines, somewhat far from being those of a tragic Jaques (Berlin 7), are instead comically and once again sardonically affirmative: “Be God, I’m the only real convert to death Hickey made here. From the bottom of my coward’s heart I mean that now!” (3: 710). His
"sardonic grin" (3: 710) provides a subtextual clue to the comedy beneath the tragedy.

The tendency of The Emperor Jones, Marco Millions, and The Iceman Cometh is to force their larger-than-life "fools" to recognize some sense of an interior. Jones, who is all surface in his first scene, is submerged in a long and difficult rite of passage as a means of acquiring an interior recognition of community, although he continually fights or resists this attack on his radical individualism. Marco is also encouraged to discover an interior "soul" but never does. Hickey believes throughout that he knows the territory of his own interior self but realizes at the end of the play that there has been more pomp than circumstance to his performance, that he has yet to engage wholeheartedly the therapeutic enterprise. The Iceman Cometh is The Emperor Jones or Marco Millions turned inside out; as Zijderveld suggests about the modern world at large (156-62), folly has dissolved and spread throughout a community.

In each play, the central performer is estranged from a prototypical fool's role, is not playing the part one expects him to perform. Each performer uses a language which is not expressive of any interior dimension, as though the character were two-dimensional, a cardboard prop. Yet, a crisis point is reached wherein an interiority is revealed. Willeford calls attention to the fool as stage persona: "He is as though the same as himself and as though the same as an actor. The same imagination, his and ours, that can make him nothing, or that partly keeps him from being something,
can sometimes make him into anything that he wants to be, even if in becoming it he mixes and dissolves levels of reality and illusion" (64). The fool, by his presence, entails more possibilities than are denoted by a theatrical script. Jones, Marco, and Hickey, however, have exchanged the fool's flexibility for the actor's rigidity; have surrendered the fool's marginality for the actor's centrality; and have given up the fool's pretense to know nothing for the actor's claim to know all. Cut off from their foolish prototypes, they lose a fool's consciousness, for better (in the case of Jones) or worse (in the case of Hickey). Removed like paper cutouts from the backdrop of the American popular stage, Jones, Marco, and Hickey are now two dimensional, without consciousness, interiority, or depth. However, O'Neill leads these characters from the popular stage to the serious stage as a way of forcing them out of their former fool's roles and into serious parts as "real" characters. The processes of play seem determined to transform, like the story of Pinocchio, wooden puppets into three-dimensional human agents.

Bauman suggests that performers are both "admired and feared" because of their ability "to transform social structures": "Here too may lie a reason for the equally persistent association between performers and marginality or deviance, for in the special emergent quality of performance the capacity for change may be highlighted and made manifest to the community . . . If change is conceived of in opposition to the conventionality of the community at large, then it is only appropriate that the agents of that change be placed away from the center of that conventionality, on the margins
of society" (Verbal 45). In these three plays, we see that process occurring; the performer is driven into a life on the boundary, but this has different connotations in each case.

What is a common denominator, however, is that each performer has lost ties with the original sources of folly that inform the prototypical performance of each fool type; the performer's new role is distanced from his image as fool. Again, the implications vary with each case. Jones has escaped a role as fool-scapegoat, but is an oppressor of community as trickster; the Kaan conjures Marco with his crystal ball demonstrating a need of the spiritual East to keep in touch with the folly of the commercial West; Hickey comes closest to a demonstration of the performer's power to change a society.

Ordinarily, the fool's performance is licensed by the community he amuses; although a boundary figure, a breaker of taboo, the fool recognizes implicit limits to performance. The nature of comedy is conservative, and it is in the fool's best interests of the prospects of continued employment to keep his own powers in check. These plays demonstrate social processes which transpire when folly and performance become disconnected.
CHAPTER II
WILLIAMS'S FOOLS WHO COME IN FROM THE COLD

Tennessee Williams is often identified as the successor to Eugene O'Neill, the next significant innovator of American drama. Critics compare the two playwrights in terms of theme and language. What Simon says of his project concerning O'Neill and Williams is apropos of this study concerning the "fool": "turning the

1Francis Donahue, for instance, calls Williams the "Shadow of O'Neill": both playwrights were "interested in the tragedy of lost souls" (218-19). Williams, she says, "was shaped as a playwright in a dramatic world presided over by Eugene O'Neill" (218). According to Esther Jackson, Williams's plays were propelled by "more comprehensive motives" than those of contemporaries Thornton Wilder, Clifford Odets, and William Saroyan. She, too, relates him to O'Neill as an equal: "Like O'Neill, he conceived for popular theatre an ancient purpose: the exposure of human suffering" (x). Joseph Wood Krutch, however, puts the comparison to a more arduous test by asking whether Williams's plays constitute "true" tragedy in the tradition of O'Neill (327). He answers with a qualified "yes," suggesting that A Streetcar Named Desire, in particular, rises above a study of psychopathology through Blanche's "choice" of the "dead past," "a choice made in the tradition of tragedy where man may be defeated but does not yield" (331). Ruby Cohn pulls Williams away from O'Neill through her focus on the issue of language: "Williams reacts against O'Neill in his profuse images and relatively complicated syntax. Pithy or lyrical as suits the character, Williams' dialogue endowed the American stage with a new vocabulary and
two dramatists not into opposites, each serving to point up the lacks of the other, but into forces complementing, corroborating, reinvigorating each other" (563-4). Each playwright is interested in characters who are in some measure fools. Like O'Neill, Williams brings the fool-performer into the lifeworld of the drama as an intruder, a speaker of a discourse foreign to the communities to which he or she becomes attached.

Blanche of A Streetcar Named Desire, Alvaro of The Rose Tattoo, and Kilroy of Camino Real are fool-performers who again bring into question the nature of the performer-audience relationship. Both O'Neill and Williams measure the impact a "fool's" performance has on his or her on-stage audience. Whereas O'Neill evaluates the threat the "fool" poses of excess performance, Williams tests the capacities of the "fool's" auditors to incorporate the "fool's" "show." Instead of a threatening force to be expelled, Williams's "fool" has the potential to transform a community in a positive way.

In O'Neill, the image of the fool lies in the background, a prototype from which the performances of Jones, Marco, and Hickey deviate. Each of their performances is in some way oppressive to their audiences--unlicensed, uncontrollable, not in true dialogue with other characters. In Williams, a sense of foolishness or clownishness
adheres to the intrusive performer in each play: Blanche, Alvaro, and Kilroy. Their roles or personas are more explicitly those of the fool or clown. As with O'Neill, Williams brings two separate types of wit into contact, and drama is created by the friction between them: Blanche’s highbrow wit versus Stanley’s mother wit; Serafina’s personal experience stories versus Alvaro’s improvisational comedy; Kilroy’s American nativist humor versus the Camino Real’s inhumane nonsense.

In O'Neill, an unstoppable force meets an immovable object, as a community braces itself against the excessive verbal performances of fools who have overstepped their license. Williams posits a more integrative vision of clown and community, allowing for productive communication. In O'Neill, the fool is necessarily exiled, whereas Williams sees ultimate value in the verbal performances of the clown, exile occurring primarily at the community's expense.

Bakhtin says “the author needs the fool: by his very uncomprehending presence he makes strange the world of social conventionality” (Dialogic 404). O'Neill finds the fool-performer himself strange, not so much the world which is the target of the “fool’s” commentary. In The Emperor Jones, Marco Millions and The Iceman Cometh, the conventional world reasserts itself, and we are left to contemplate, along with Smithers, the Kaan, and Larry, the performer who has been exiled to the margins. Because O’Neill’s performers keep their distance from their prototypical life as fools, the folly that would make the authoritarian world seem strange remains absent; instead, the authority of O’Neill’s figures as
performers is subject to audience evaluation. The danger of excessive, unlicensed performance is critiqued. Williams, conversely, uses his fool-performers in a more traditional sense, to make the conventional world of the play seem strange. The fool-performer brings a less rigid, more flexible language to bear on the community leader, disrupting his or her verbal performances.

O'Neill presents an unbridgeable gulf between on-stage audience and performer; the "fool's" performance is too strong, and the audience's tolerance is too weak. Williams allows a possibility for productive exchange between audience and fool. Not so much an unlicensed figure, the fool attempts to climb under the umbrella of community, to negotiate with the community in order to find a home or niche. Williams's "fools" deviate from the norm in a different way than O'Neill's; the "fool's" subversiveness, his or her anti-authoritarianism, is limited by his or her need to maintain a productive connection with the authoritarian figure of each play.

In O'Neill, the reader may align herself with the point of view of the most reasonable character; viewing platforms of tolerant rationality are privileged over the intensive rationality of the unlicensed discourse of the fool-performer. In Williams, however, the reader may be drawn to the "fool" by the appeal of a wit that is more improvisational than the more grounded or static nature of the auditors who constitute the community to which the "fool" becomes attached. The community upon which the fool intrudes has a basic way of operating its discourse, a set routine of verbalizing, of going about its language business. In Streetcar, Stanley's is a mother-wit
community; in *The Rose Tattoo*, Serafina is a composer of memorates, personal experience stories, which affix her identity to past events; in *Camino Real*, the nonsensical, improvisational world of the play provides a surreal dream flow of events, as parties of characters who are victims (Jacques, Marguerite, Kilroy) negotiate the authority of the Camino's practical jokers (the stage-manager Gutman, the Gypsy, Abdullah).

In Williams, the reader or theater audience witnesses an interaction between types or genres of performance, a more rigid, inflexible, iconic\(^2\) rhetoric opposed to a more clownish, playful, nonsensical language (except in *Camino*, where Kilroy plays with the nonsense of the Camino but grounds his own performances in common sense). One of the values Williams stresses about the "fool" is his or her improvisational skills, flexibility, and nervous energy. We ultimately participate in the performances of Williams's "fools," the opposite of the way, with O'Neill, we ultimately keep a critical

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\(^2\)I will be referring to the roles of Stanley, Serafina, and Gutman as iconic. Goldman says, "All acting roles have a quality we may call iconic—they give the impression of a fixed or masklike definition. We feel we are watching a figure that, although animated, is yet a type or effigy. It's through the interplay between the iconic and the animate, between mask and face, that drama is able to deploy some of the uncanniness associated with acting itself" (93). One usually thinks of the fool as masklike, a fixed figure or type, a mask without a face. In these plays, the counter-authoritarian "fool"—Blanche, Alvaro, Kilroy—wears a mask which presents several faces. Their presentation of self involves an animated free play, whereas the face of their opponents—Stanley, Serafina, Gutman—appear more fixed, like Greek masks, expressing a stable or rigid self-definition.
distance from the performances of the "fool." In Williams, we keep our critical distance from the "fool's" on-stage audiences. Not so much the performer, it is the on-stage audience, which we begin to critique and question. Although the clowns in Williams are individualists, unlicensed in their own way, they maintain a dialogue with community leaders to the point where continual negotiations are made, a give and take on the fulcrum of folly. Audience sympathy moves in favor of the improvisational. In Williams, the "fool’s" performance has the potential to transform the internal audience. Stanley, Serafina, Gutman--each seems to undergo a character change or transformation, however slight or impermanent.

Finally, the audience becomes involved in the performance of the "fool" in these plays because the fool-performer acts as a type of ritual-clown, a boundary figure who integrates his or her verbal performance with rituals that constitute a backbone to each drama. Williams informs his plays with rituals acted out by the characters themselves: Stanley's celebration of the birth of his child, Serafina's life-crisis ritual of mourning her husband, the Fiesta of the Camino Real.3 The rituals within the drama create a "ritual expectancy"

3This is not to identify each play as a ritual; I am making a distinction between drama and ritual, following the argument of Menagh: "The symbolic recital of an event, whether by words or action, is not theatrical. The portrayal and recreation of an event is. Mimicry is theatrical when it is creative acting, . . . it is non-theatrical when it is commemorative symbolism" (122). The characters of the drama, when they become involved in dramatized ritual, become character-participants, who may take on additional symbolic value, a self-reflexive aspect within the text.
(Fergusson 28), and our sympathies adhere more firmly to the ritual-clown who facilitates or impedes the progress of the ritual.

In each ritual, the fool-performer plays a taboo role, functioning as a borderline character, encouraging the "normal" participants to transgress certain limits, or to break certain moral codes. Blanche functions this way as she gives in to madness, in the role-playing the part of the Southern belle of her youth, leading Stanley to transgress his own moral code as he further marginalizes her through rape; Alvaro, by playing the part of the commedia dell’arte Harlequin, leading Serafina out of her mourning ritual by violating certain sexual mores; Kilroy, as Chosen Hero of a Festival, despoiling the Gypsy's daughter Esmeralda and suffering a crisis in his otherwise optimistic nature, a crisis which leads in turn to his death and resurrection.

The dramatized rituals tend to create a collective point of focus, to pull theater audience and characters into a self-reflexive moment of dramatic time. As the ritual unfolds, the fool-performer provokes a crisis, leading the audience to readjust its attitudes toward the participants. We see Stanley go over the edge of his own propriety and readjust our attachment to him; we see Serafina become verbally confused and break out of her mourning ritual; we see the Camino

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4Fergusson draws on Sophocles' Oedipus Rex for his model of a "tragic rhythm of action," a progression from Purpose (the reason behind the hero's quest) through Passion (the hero's suffering) to Perception (a new understanding of the purpose) (18). He understands the entire play as a ritual (27), a tendency I try to avoid with Williams's plays.
Real become a less harsh environment with Kilroy's death and resurrection.

This parallels the metatheatrical exile of the "fool" figure in O'Neill's dramas. However, in O'Neill, we draw back from the fool-performer in these metatheatrical instances; in Williams, we become more involved with the interactions between ritual-clown and ritual-participant as an integrative unit. A suspense is generated because we are watching a wrestling match between "fool" and community. As we begin to appreciate the positive potential of the "fool" for altering the static nature of the participants, we contemplate with terror or humor the way the community ultimately repels or accepts the "fool's" marginal and improvisational voice.

Williams's predisposition to the transformational powers of the fool-performer on stage accords with his conception of a "plastic" theater, which as a genre has the capacity to transform the audience's experience of theater itself: "His 'plastic theatre' is concerned not only with the exposition of rational planes of experience but also with the connotation of the ambiguous world of meaning above and below accepted levels of reason. Williams attempts to project into the cube called a 'stage' a vision of the entire complex of human experience, including those planes of reality which Wagner described as 'unutterable'" (Jackson 89). The fool figure, too, admits more reality into his or her performance than is rationally realizable.
"Mother Wit" and the Tall Tale
in A Streetcar Named Desire

A university student asked Faulkner whether Emily in "A Rose for Emily" represents the South, and Faulkner replied, "I think that the writer is too busy trying to create flesh-and-blood people that will stand up and cast a shadow to have time to be conscious of all the symbolism that he may put into what he does or what people may read into it" (Gwynn and Blotner 47). Williams, perhaps, was not too busy to consider Blanche as a representative of a dying South: "the South once had a way of life that I am just old enough to remember--a culture that had grace, elegance . . . an inbred culture . . . not a society based on money, as in the North. I write out of regret for that" (Devlin 43). Blanche, as symbol of a passing order, challenges audience expectations about the performance of folly in an American cultural context.

5 Quirino complains that "too many critics have made oversimplified, sociologically oriented interpretations of the conflict in Streetcar as a representation of Williams's nostalgia for vanished, decadent southern aristocracy"; rather, he says, both Belle Reve and Elysian Fields are shown to be uninhabitable (81-2).

6 Porter writes that "the confinement of Blanche DuBois is a legend about the passing of the Old South" (153). He notes the ambiguity produced by Blanche's role as outsider: "Blanche is cast in the role of invader. As far as Stanley's world is concerned, she is the outsider, the disruptive influence. By realigning the pattern in this way [i.e., the Southern belle, rather than the North, as invader], the impact of the romance analogue is transmuted into an emotional and conceptual ambiguity" (169). My discussion turns Porter's argument
In one American tradition of humor, the aristocratic greenhorn from the city travels to the country and is made to feel his or her outsiderliness by the tall-tale tellings of native inhabitants. Carolyn S. Brown, for instance, describes a tall-tale situation in which a camp director replies to a camper's mother's inquiry about "trouble with snakes" that "the mountain lions eat 'em" (1). Brown comments: "he placed her in an uncomfortable position. Very likely the camper's mother was . . . bothered by the moral atmosphere in which it [the tale] was told--an atmosphere in which the line between fact and fiction is hazy and the manipulation of that boundary is a source of humor" (9). *Streetcar* reverses this folklore situation, since the aristocrat from the country invades the city. Further reversing the norm, Blanche, as nominal outsider, is the one who tells tales (constructs narratives using tall-tale devices), making the nativist Stanley feel like the outsider in his own home.

Although Blanche may symbolize an outmoded Southern sensibility, as a performer, she is dynamic, constantly pushing against imaginary walls with a verbal barrage. About the "neurasthenic personality" (Williams's definition of Blanche, *Streetcar* 100), Williams says: "these seemingly fragile people are the strong people really. They have a certain appearance of fragility, these neurotic people that I write about, but they really are strong. Blanche was much stronger than Kowalski" (Devlin 110). The reversal of the folklore norm upsets the reader's expectation of a

about Blanche as Southern belle toward the issue of American humor.
typical performance situation: the naive outsider being taken advantage of by the native dweller.

Part of the baggage Blanche carries onto the stage is an inheritance of Mildred's role in O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*; her journey in *A Streetcar Named Desire* picks up where Mildred's leaves off. Mildred, an anemic millionaire's daughter, "fretful, nervous and discontented, bored by her own anemia" (2: 130), visits the stokehole of an ocean liner dominated by Yank, chief bellerower among a gang of men who "resemble those pictures in which the appearance of *Neanderthal Man* is guessed at" (2: 131). Before fainting into the arms of her escort, Mildred calls Yank a "filthy beast" (2: 137), anticipating Blanche's declaration to Stella that there is "something-ape-like about" Stanley" (83). Like Mildred, Blanche is an "adventure feminist" (a term Reynolds applies to the nineteenth-century "g'hal" stage personality, p. 450), but she withstands the heat of the stokehole longer through her performance abilities. Both women are modern versions of the "g'hal," a counterpart of the "b'hoy," the rough-and-ready fireman of the mid-1800s of the New York bowery: "Along with the b'hoy went the g'hal . . . who was tough, active, athletic, good-hearted" (Reynolds 464). Although neither Mildred nor Blanche are a part of "brash, swaggering lower-

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7 The phrase that follows this, "like one of those pictures I've seen in--anthropological studies," echoes O'Neill's description of the stokehole crew.

8 Blanche, Porter says, is "the vivacious adventuress who flirts and dares and teases" (159).
class urban youth" (Reynolds 463), each is independent, anti-authoritarian, and a connection is implicit between the apparently genteel aristocratic female and the roughhouse, grass-roots male, which Yank attests to when he keeps referring to Mildred as a "ghost" (a "ghost" of the "g'hal")?): "I was scared, get me? Sure! I tought she was a ghost, see? She was all in white like dey wrap around stiffs" (2: 142).9

Both The Hairy Ape and A Streetcar Named Desire dramatize the ways a modernist "g'hal" affects an old-fashioned "b'hoy," a product of the backwoods "roarer" school of performance. Several critics have noted how Blanche adopts various roles in order to win a place for herself in Stanley's household. Blanche's wit, too, is discussed as a tactic of self-preservation. In addition, readers have noted the exaggeration of Blanche's femininity and of Stanley's masculine pose.10 Interfused with Blanche's role-playing, comedic

9Blanche, too, makes her first appearance "daintily dressed in a white suit... There is something about her uncertain manner, as well as her white clothes, that suggests a moth" (5). At this point, one may question the importance of connecting Blanche with Mildred. Mainly, I am trying to place Blanche in a tradition of American humor. Although each woman's appearance is frail, her performance through language is animated, vigorous, "loud," the tradition of the frontier "screamer woman" transmuted, as we will see, into a neurotic, modern form.

10Porter says that "Blanche dresses up to the role of the plantation belle... She plays the refined delicate lady and the flirtatious adventurress, both in a state of electrically nervous tension" (163). Adler discusses her succession of roles as "demure lady," "carefree flirt," "determined seductress," and "rejected maiden" (36). Roderick suggests "the comic elements play their role in
qualities, and exaggerated speech is the way Blanche performs her identity, in part, through use of tall-tale devices; Williams pits Blanche's tall-tale performances against those of a community anchored to common sense. Opposed to Blanche's craftsmanship as a story-teller is her audience's insensitivity or incomprehension; her speeches, personal experience stories, and highbrow wit tend to miscommunicate with her audiences. For all her effort to perform verbally, Blanche is very much isolated as a performer. By opposing Blanche's improvisational tale telling to Stanley's mother wit, Williams opposes two genres or types of theater, one more static and empirically based, the other more illusionistic. Ultimately, Williams privileges the improvisational wit of the "g'hal" above the empirical common sense of the "b'hoy."11

aggressive self-preservation just as the tragic possibilities invite the antithetical notion of self-destruction" (122). Free credits Blanche and Stanley with exaggerated femininity and masculinity respectively, theatrically posed for audience effect. He suggests an affinity of Blanche's femininity with homosexual Camp performance: "Her scatterbrained feminine weakness is a pose. Beneath she is an embittered person who is emotionally harder than either the brute Stanley or the mama's boy Mitch" (19). My analysis agrees with these discussions of Blanche's role-playing but attempts to affix her role-playing to an American comic tradition of tall-tale telling.

I am postponing labelling Blanche a fool because the play makes no reference to her as such. We may see her as a fool, however, in terms of her improvisational abilities and anti-authoritarian stance. Also, her madness, her "neurasthenic personality," places her on the borderlines of Stanley's social world; she is marginal, a liminal entity: "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (Turner, Ritual 95). Welsford makes tentative connections between the "awe-inspiring figure" of the "madman" (76) and the court fool:
Although Robert Brustein sees Stanley and Yank as "inarticulate hero" (8), Yank articulates his identity through tall-tale rhetoric. One of Yank's speeches resembles what Reynolds cites as the most popular instance of "ring-tailed roarer" monologue, the Child of Calamity's boast in *Huckleberry Finn* (Reynolds 449): "Hold me down to the earth, for I feel my powers a working! whoo-oop!" (Twain 1225). Yank's speech, energized by tall-tale rhetoric, also effects a hyperbolic identity: "I'm new, get me? Hell in the stokehole? Sure! It takes a man to work in hell. Hell, sure, dat's my fav'rite climate. I eat it up! I git fat on it! It's me makes it hot! It's me makes it roar!" (2: 128).

"This kind of madness, it may be said, is more akin to neurosis and hysteria than to the grotesque idiocy which seems to have been the mark of the Roman dwarf-fool. Nevertheless, it would seem that no real clear distinction was made between these two types of mental infirmity" (77). Stanley, in this case, functions as a Huey Longian "king" (*Streetcar* 131), displaced by the performance of Blanche as mock-"queen" (131). Willeford also discusses the modern disposition to label as madness attributes that would have seemed to the medieval world elements of folly: "The scientifically differentiated symptoms, syndromes, and illnesses that now provide the means of describing various kinds of psychopathology have in many times and places been conceived as expressions of something diffuse but unitary. Folly is one name for it" (23). But liminality, marginality, and madness do not necessarily make one a fool. It is in her play-acting relationship to authority that Blanche may resemble a subversive fool, one who counters authority by inviting it into liminal arenas of play: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law, he lures us into a region of the spirit where . . . the writ does not run" (Welsford 321).

12Yank is the "inarticulate" antecedent to Stanley, Brustein notes; "O'Neill's . . . proletarian heroes are often characterized by their lack of verbal coherence" (8).
Instead of a self-inflated identity, Stanley performs the aphorisms of mother wit, a less garrulous genre than the tall tale. According to Walter Blair, an important tradition of American humor is founded on "horse sense": "common sense, homespun philosophy, pawkiness, cracker-box philosophy, gumption, or mother-wit" (vi). In the 1800s, the "wise" author stood behind the mask of the "fool" who lacked this "horse sense"; "When Mark Twain sentimentalized over the tomb of Adam, the joke was that Mark the fool was set off against the canny horse-sense character (Clemens) who knew all the time that Mark was making a dunce of himself" (Blair 291). In Streetcar, Stanley possesses mother wit without the blessing of a "wise" playwright.13

When Stanley first meets Blanche, Stanley's mother witticisms disorient her: "Where's the little woman?"; "Liquor goes fast in hot weather"; and then about liquor, "Some people rarely touch it, but it touches them often"; "Be comfortable is my motto"; "You know you can catch cold sitting around in damp things"; "You going to shack up here?"; and then, finally, to Stella in the bathroom, "Haven't fallen in, have you?" (25-8). A series of cracker-box philosophies assails Blanche with the speech typical of Stanley's community, introducing her to the verbal level that she must engage. What further disturbs

13 Burt Cardullo, however, reassesses the play from Stanley's point of view. He counters the academic bias against Stanley by suggesting his cruelty is misinterpreted: "Stanley does not come out the victor in any contest with Blanche, he survives" (150). His reaction does not imply, however, that Williams's point of view informs Stanley's.
Blanche's equilibrium is Stanley's awareness of his status in a mother-wit community: "[He grins at Blanche. She tries unsuccessfully to smile back. There is a silence.] I'm afraid I'll strike you as being the unrefined type" (28). Stanley's use of mother wit in this scene establishes a degree zero, a least common denominator of language; because Stanley acknowledges he is unrefined, he shows an awareness of a status inhabiting the basement warehouse of the American vernacular. This may unsettle Blanche because her verbal structures are more like a house of cards, precariously poised, her identity the product of the stories she tells about herself. Stanley, conversely, comments with quick one-liners on conditions of the "real" or empirically verifiable world. His mother witticisms emanate from a defined but non-verbalized sense of self.

Instead of using tall-tale rhetoric to bolster his own ego, Stanley manufactures a tall-tale identity for the intruder. His comic evaluation of Blanche's furs and jewelry could, as Stella points out, be taken as the ravings of an uneducated "idiot" (34), the hallmark of a natural fool. But although Stanley wrongly identifies Blanche's possessions, he exaggerates these mistakes comically and deliberately: "Genuine fox fur-pieces, a half a mile long!"; "The treasure chest of a pirate!"; "Pearls! Ropes of them! What is this sister of yours, a deep-sea diver?"; "And diamonds! A crown for an empress!" (34-5). Although his performance is motivated by outrage, its cleverness and style highlight it as the delivery of a humorist who is creating a target. The repeated appeal to various acquaintances who will substantiate his claims--e.g., "I have an
acquaintance that works in a jewelry store. I'll have him in here to make an appraisal of this" (35)—although "showing brutishness and insensitivity" (Brooks 722), underscores the mother-wit need for empirical evidence, to get the story straight, a folkway that quarantines Blanche as the community gathers more information about her.

Mildred's insult drives Yank to a quest for revenge that takes him outside the security of the stokehole. With his departure from this male arena comes a gradual loss of a self that had been maintained by verbal performance: "Dat's me now—I don't tick, see?—I'm a busted Ingersoll, dat's what. Steel was me, and I owned the woild. Now I ain't steel, and de woild owns me" (2: 159). In contrast, Blanche's insults force Stanley to entrench himself further in the masculine role of protector of the mother-wit clan. Whereas Mildred's insult undermines the identity Yank had created for himself through word power, Blanche's insult cannot produce this effect in Stanley, who is rooted in his commonness. In fact, the reverse occurs. Blanche's final insult to Stanley in Scene Ten—"Swine! And I'm thinking not only of you but of your friend, Mr. Mitchell" (156)—motivates Stanley's final assault on Blanche's identity, which, like Yank's, is a product in part of tall-tale performance.

Although Brustein claims Stanley as a direct descendent of Yank, we may better view Yank as a watershed character, his identity crisis giving way to two modern versions of the "roarer," one represented by Stanley and the other by Blanche. Whereas one path
leads to the inarticulateness of Stanley Kowalski—the icon without
the voice—the other leads to the neurotic boasts of Blanche—the
sound without the image. "For the modern humorist," Sanford
Pinkser writes, "braggadocio remained a given, but its terms were
transposed... Not only had the locale shifted from the keelboat or
Western campfire to the city street, but what a comic persona
crowed about was more often ineptitude rather than prowess,
weakness rather than strength, crippling inferiority rather than
swaggering confidence" (190). This defines the "braggadocio"
performances of Blanche.

Like Yank, Blanche uses hyperbole to create a sometimes
superior and sometimes dependent relationship to her on-stage
auditors. Several of her verbal performances incorporate elements
of the tall tale, with its reliance on "ludicrous imagery" to achieve a
humorous effect (Boatright 98). With reference to the lost plantation
Belle Reve, she insists to Stanley that "There are thousands and
thousands of papers, stretching back over hundreds of years" (44).
To Mitch, who guesses math as the subject she teaches, she says,
"Never arithmetic, sir; never arithmetic! [with a laugh] I don't even
know my multiplication tables!" (61). In these two cases, she creates
tall "statements," not quite the tall tale's "anecdotal comedy of
dizzying exaggeration" (Hoffman 23). Still, these statements are
designed as a self-conscious "hoax" (Hoffman 23) on her auditors.
There is a joke, a fallacy of argument, that Stanley and Mitch are
supposed to catch, the statements serving to initiate each male into
Blanche's arena of thought, her penchant for the imaginative and
illusionistic, in a method similar to the way the traditional tall tale may serve as an initiation rite for outsiders (Boatright 97).

Unlike traditional tall tales, however, Blanche's tall-tale tinged narratives and speeches are not primarily designed for entertainment. Blanche also deviates from a woman's traditional role in tall-tale telling: "women have more often participated in tall tale sessions as appreciative listeners or deliberate ignorers and scoffers" (Brown 14). (This defines the roles of Eunice and Stella.) Blanche's humorous exaggerations distance her, as well, from an audience accustomed to literal descriptions of social reality or to the witty insult. As Bauman points out, "The obvious exaggeration of the tall tale creates an aura of lying that colors the 'true' stories as well" (Story 20). Blanche's recourse to her imagination may work against her between Scenes Ten and Eleven, when she tells Stella the truth about Stanley's sexual aggression.

As the reader silently performs Blanche's part, she may experience the exhilaration of verbal free-play in conjunction with the braking action of story-telling. In many places, Blanche exhibits a free interplay of wit, as a part of ordinary conversation, with Stella, Stanley, and Mitch. This wit is fragmentary, improvisational, an immediate response to the social environment. It may be viewed as a fool's discourse, insofar as it tends to disrupt verbal surfaces, patterns of speech in others, and is anti-authoritarian, rebelling against Stanley's position of social power, established social relationships (Stella's to Stanley), and personal realities (Blanche's age, etc.)--through indirect comment or humorous insult. In several
scenes (One, Two, Four, Six, and Nine), Blanche's improvisational wit leads to a more formally delivered or stylistically constructed long speech, a performance at length. In these extended performances, Blanche collects her emotional energy, pulling herself into an integrated whole. Her extended performances are intended to draw in an audience, to produce a more calculated effect.

The reader's response to these two performance modes may be one of repulsion and attraction. Like the internal audience, the reader may have to make an effort to keep up with Blanche's conversational shifts, her changes of pace, feeling always left behind in the rush toward interminable borders. When Blanche begins an extended performance, the reader will likely be pulled into Blanche's speech, because it presents a resting stop, an integration of self instead of a fragmentation. In its building of suspense, the performance enables the reader to match Blanche's performative pace rather than feel left behind. This is the nexus where the reader's reaction may differ from the on-stage audience's response. The reader may end up mediating the distance between performer and auditor, responding more sympathetically than the internal audience, which fails to connect in the way Blanche intends.

One of Blanche's early tall-tale tinged narratives describes her loss of Belle Reve to Stella. As an apparently conscious artistic strategy, Blanche exaggerates the history of family deaths, "The long parade to the graveyard!" (21): "Why, the Grim Reaper had put up his tent on our doorstep! . . . Stella. Belle Reve was his headquarters!" (22). By placing the deaths in immediate succession,
Blanche intensifies her ordeal for the auditor. Blanche's exaggerated use of first-person establishes her personal connection to the story events and contrasts her with Stella, who is both auditor and character in the story, so that two of Stella's shortcomings are criticized, her past absence and her present accusations (imagined on Blanche's part) of Blanche's failure to preserve the estate: "I, I, I took the blows in my face and my body! [. . .] You just came home in time for the funerals, Stella" (21); "And now you sit there telling me with your eyes that I let the place go!" (22).

When Blanche concludes the story and returns to social reality, she is surprised at the real Stella's reaction: "Oh, Stella, Stella, you're crying!" (22). Blanche's verbal performance distances herself from her sister. Whereas Stella may sympathize with Blanche's situation, Blanche's performance keeps her at a distance. Blanche anchors the speech to a manufactured Stella who fits in with her strategy of comparison and contrast with herself. Blanche's neurotic, modernist "braggadocio" keeps her above her audience; instead of the tall-tale hoax whose "catch" (Boatright 100) would allow Stella to participate, Blanche's "ludicrous imagery" maintains Stella in the position of outsider.

Blanche's tall-tale tinged statement, already noted, to Stanley, involves a "tall-tale narrator persona" (Mullen 147) which is far from the traditional "innocent" (Mullen 147). In this instance, Blanche plays more the cynical wit. As a follow-up to Stanley's interrogation about the loss of Belle Reve, Blanche claims "There are thousands of papers, stretching back over hundreds of years, affecting Belle Reve
as, piece by piece, our improvident grandfathers and fathers and uncles and brothers exchanged the land for their epic fornications—
to put it plainly" (44). Speaking plainly is a hallmark of the mother-wit community; however, Blanche's speech does not put the cause of the estate's decline in plain terms that Stanley would understand. Her next phrase comes closer to meeting Stanley on a mother-wit level: "The four-letter word deprived us of our plantation" (44). The statement comically inflates the number of papers as a way of undermining the seriousness of Stanley's interrogation. As in the previous narrative, Blanche first describes the past, then steps back from her role as narrator.

In this case, she uses the "papers" of her statement to confront her auditor: "Here all of them are, all papers! I hereby endow you with them! Take them, peruse them--commit them to memory, even! I think it's wonderfully fitting that Belle Reve should finally be this bunch of old papers in your big, capable hands!" (44). Instead of the "warmly humorous" traditional tale (Brown 27), Blanche uses "the coolness or bitterness of irony" (Brown 27) to create a distance between herself and her audience. Because he is busy scrutinizing the papers, Stanley does not register Blanche's speech. His follow-up line does not address Blanche's speech but the papers themselves: "I have a lawyer acquaintance who will study these out" (44). Blanche's report to Stella of her interaction with Stanley again creates a distance between herself and her sister: "I called him a little boy and laughed and flirted. Yes, I was flirting with your husband!" (45).
In her first speech, Blanche plays the part of the modernist boaster, full of braggadocio about her own suffering; she intends her speech to be serious. With her second effort, however, Blanche plays the humorous (albeit ironic) role of the traditional tale teller, the proponent of the hoax. She addresses a subsequent speech to Stella, who is an unreceptive audience before Blanche begins: "[coldly] Go on and say it all, Blanche" (83). Although not a tall tale, Blanche's lengthy description of Stanley as "animal" uses the tall-tale device of humorous exaggeration to assign him this identity: "Thousands and thousands of years have passed him right by, and there he is--Stanley Kowalski--survivor of the stone age! Bearing the raw meat home from the kill in the jungle!" (83). Likewise, she creates a role for her sister as sufferer: "And you--you here--waiting for him! Maybe he'll strike you or maybe grunt and kiss you!" (83). The speech thus brings two personas of the tall tale into contact, the traditional boaster figure of the brute and the modern figure of the victim. Stella accords with the modernist Little Man who must exaggeratedly suffer.

Instead of pulling the images apart in Stella's imagination, Blanche's speech welds them together, the reverse of what Blanche intended: "Stella has embraced him [Stanley] with both arms, fiercely, and full in the view of Blanche. He laughs and clasps her head to him. Over her head he grins through the curtains at Blanche" (84). The traditional, anachronistic image and the modernist image conflict in the story but fuse in reality. Blanche again misjudges her audience. Her verbal performances misfire; performer and audience
are mismatched. The reader, continually assessing the distance between performer and on-stage audience, may gradually begin to sympathize with Blanche because of the ironic way her verbal performances fail, producing isolation. The theatrical spotlight Blanche aims at herself becomes the police interrogator's lamp which Stanley uses against her.

Unlike the "fool" in O'Neill's plays—an oppressor through language of a community's system of communication—the "fool" in Williams is more dialogic. Blanche tends to play games with authority, to loosen hinges of community interaction, but also looks for a communal niche. Although Blanche uses wit to control her situations with Stanley and to influence Stella, she also uses wit to ingratiate herself to Stanley's community. When her plan to win over Stella fails and her plan to marry Mitch is on the brink of succeeding, Blanche begins to use wit as a means of adjusting herself to her new situation.

During her birthday party (Scene Eight), she encourages Stanley to "tell us a joke, tell us a funny story to make us all laugh" (129). She tries to bridge the communication gap with Stanley by telling a humorous story herself: "This old maid, she had a parrot that cursed a blue streak and knew more vulgar expressions than Mr. Kowalski!" (130). Rather than dominating through wit,

14In Scene Five, when she is discussing with Stella the prospect of marrying Mitch, she says, "But on the other hand men lose interest quickly. Especially when the girl is over—thirty. They think a girl over thirty ought to--the vulgar term is--'put out.' . . .
Blanche provides Stanley with verbal room. In this scene, however, Stanley regains verbal control of the house. He reasserts himself as bellower, outvoicing Blanche's "poetry" (134): "But what I am is one hundred percent American, born and raised in the greatest country on earth and proud as hell of it, so don't ever call me a Polack" (134); "QUIET IN THERE! -- We've got a noisy woman on the place" (135). Since Stanley takes advantage of Blanche’s verbal relaxation, the reader’s response may turn against Stanley’s theater of the mother-wit, empirical variety and sympathize more strongly with Blanche's marginalized theater of the poetic, illusionistic.

If we were to establish Blanche against a gridwork of "fool" tropes, one model would be the ritual-clown. One example of the ritual-clown is described in Beeman's study of rural improvisatory theatre in Iran. This comic theater takes place in a festival situation, "primarily weddings and occasionally circumcision ceremonies" (510). Mocking an on-stage authority figure, the clown plays a central role: "He gives inappropriate answers, repeats directions and names incorrectly, usually changing innocent phrases into mocking, satirical, or ribald commentary" (513). The clown, through verbal violation of sexual taboos, provides comic relief at weddings, where "the setting . . . is sexually supercharged" (522). Since Iranian

And I-I'm not 'putting out'' (94-5). Again, she experiments with the language of the male community. On the other hand, Ruby Cohn claims Blanche's pretended innocence of this phrase reveals her hypocrisy, since this is an expression she has no doubt overheard in her sexual encounters with soldiers in Laurel (103). Still, Blanche is making an effort to understand the community in terms of its language as a prelude to the possibility of settling in with Mitch.
families arrange weddings as power moves, the clown is able to "mock the structure of social relations" as a "tonic" (525).

This is not to say, then, that Blanche is a ritual-clown. Handelman is concerned with how "the ritual-clown contributes to the working of those rites" in which he appears (323); the ritual-clown parallel may help us understand how Blanche contributes to the working of the drama, in which dramatized ritual plays a significant part. In Streetcar, Rose Tattoo, and Camino Real, Blanche, Alvaro, and Kilroy, although "clownish," do not cooperate with the rituals that involve them. They resist a prescribed part in rituals set up and played out by the more iconic, inflexible characters of the play: Stanley, Serafina, Gutman.

First, the ritual-clown exists in/as an oscillating state, a condition of being always "in-process": "the interior of the sacred-clown type is composed of sets of contradictory attributes: sacred-profane, wisdom/folly, solemnity/humor, serious/comic, gravity/lightness" (Handel 33). Blanche is youthful but ancient, virginal but sexual, a young woman but past her prime, loud and self-confident but soft and insecure, moral and proper yet immoral and improper, preoccupied with the past yet negotiating the present.

Secondly, the ritual-clown exists as a boundary figure, defining the line between propriety and taboo: "As the ritual-clown appears, the interior flux and oscillation of the boundary strike the consciousness of onlookers" (Handel 342). The ritual-clown fulfills its boundary function by breaking taboo, as an "earthly counterpart of
the [mythical] trickster" (Makarius 46), characterized by "eccentricity in dress and demeanor, systematic trampling over rules and norms . . . individualism . . . insolence, buffoonery, phallicism, vulgarity, a sort of madness" (Makarius 66). In Native American societies, the ritual-clown may function as "an expiatory figure": "The aberration he incarnates is incompatible with the right to live in the group" (Makarius 67-8).

Through the collection of empirical evidence, Stanley becomes Blanche's "executioner" (Streetcar 111) in a ritual sense. The mother-wit accumulation of evidence forces Blanche into the ritual-clown's role; the Greyhound ticket back to Laurel informs her that she is now marked by Stanley's society as a boundary figure, an immoral woman. The ritual-clown's role becomes an involuntary part, and Blanche, as she play-acts in her theater of illusion the Shep Huntleigh rescue, fully crosses the boundary of Stanley's verbal world by losing touch with empirical reality. Ritual within Streetcar facilitates Stanley's marginalization of Blanche and intensifies the theater audience's concentration on the conflict between two styles of performance.

According to Victor Turner, public rituals are "governed by public subjunctivity. For a while almost anything goes: taboos are lifted, fantasies are enacted, indicative mood behavior is reversed; the low are exalted and the mighty are debased. Yet there are some

15 Adler calls attention to male rituals in Streetcar: "Through these rituals, Williams paints a picture of what might be termed 'the New Man,' whom he decries" (58).
controls: crime is still illicit" (Anthropology 102). The life crisis which is enacted by Stanley is the life-crisis ritual of birth, the birth of Stella's child. As ritual leader, Stanley invites Blanche to participate, making it an event more public than private: "Hah-ha! Rain from heaven! [He extends the bottle toward her] Shall we bury the hatchet and make it a loving-cup? Huh?" (155). When he describes the nature of his ritual, he again invites Blanche to celebrate with him: "Here's something I always break out on special occasions like this. The silk pyjamas I wore on my wedding night!" (155); "When the telephone rings and they say, 'You've got a son!' I'll tear this off and wave it like a flag! [He shakes out a brilliant pyjama coat] I guess we are both entitled to put on the dog" (155-6). Stanley turns the private life-crisis transition into a public celebration; the liminal arena of the bedroom becomes a place where "fantasies are enacted," but also where extremes of theater are played out by their respective practitioners: the iconic and the illusionistic.

Blanche's presence throughout Streetcar has forced Stanley to compress his performances; he has lost his optimism, his humorous dimension. When Blanche is defeated, and after Stella has given birth, Stanley regains the confident voice of the boaster: "You know what luck is? Luck is believing you're lucky. Take at Salerno. I believed I was lucky. I figured that 4 out of 5 would not come through but I would . . . and I did" (163). This speech marks the full return of the "roarer" persona, a return which Mitch recognizes
despondently when he comments, "You . . . you . . . you . . . Brag . . . brag . . . bull . . . bull" (164).

The primary context of Scene Ten is the life-crisis ritual of birth, a rite "performed to mark and, in the view of performers, to effect transitions from social invisibility to social visibility" (Turner, Anthropology 101). Scene Eleven, the aftermath, effects the opposite with regard to Blanche, her transition from social visibility to invisibility. The preoccupation of the community members in Scenes One through Nine is with taking care of Blanche, working their lives around her presence. What disconcerts the reader is that Blanche's performances lose touch with reality, that instead of being tall-tale tinged speeches, she enacts pure fantasy. What brackets the true story that Blanche tells to Stella between scenes about the rape is Blanche's enactment of the Shep Huntleigh fantasy and her fantasy about death at sea from "eating an unwashed grape" (170).

One reason Streetcar produces an unsettling ambiguity is that we are not sure whether we are experiencing a "plot of folly" in which the "agent acts in error" or a "plot of cleverness" in which the "strategems of the agent produce the comic action" (Olson 52). In other words, if Blanche is the agent, she may be viewed as a "well-intentioned wit" regarding her primary need to secure a foothold, a niche in the Kowalski world, but she may contrarily be viewed as an "ill-intentioned wit" regarding the way she goes about infringing on Stanley's hospitality, the way she disturbs Stanley's household's equilibrium. If Stanley is perceived as the agent, he may seem an "ill-intentioned fool" regarding his response to Blanche's need for
psychic aid and emotional security, or he may be seen as a "well-intentioned fool" regarding his own need to stabilize his household.

Williams aids the reader in negatively assessing American "roarer" (or mother-wit) humor; he dramatizes its cruelty, its conservative and close-minded qualities, its need for a scapegoat, and its problem of over-confidence in its own resources for satire or insult. Although Stanley is culturally "low," he does not participate in a folk humor, does not play a carnival fool with Blanche, but is rather iconic, inflexible, a practitioner of the "new" urban humor of Harry Hope's saloon. Stanley's is a post-Renaissance, non-folk laughter, which Bakhtin describes as "a form of salutary social punishment of corrupt and low persons" (Rabelais 67). Stanley's "Ha--ha--ha!" (158) is cold, clinical--laughter as a social corrective. The irony is that the reader is apt to see the "corrupt" and "low" in Stanley. On the other hand, we develop a view of Blanche as a performer who founds her existence on realities manufactured almost exclusively through words; her performances produce a distance from the audience, reveal a superiority to the community. Through her inability to locate her audience or to find a middle ground by adopting the community's own language, Blanche, as a performer, defeats herself. But her defeat removes from the stage an essential mode of performance which has the potential to complement the voice of the "roarer."
Commedia Dell'arte and the Memorate
in The Rose Tattoo

Williams takes the marginal figure of Blanche DuBois and places her at the center of The Rose Tattoo as Serafina delle Rose. Each character is a master of extended verbal performance. Although Williams intends each character to be taken seriously, each is comedic. Both Blanche and Serafina are preoccupied with a dead husband, caught up with the past. Each exists on the fringes of her community, engaged in taboo or boundary behavior, Blanche with her sexual history, her involvement with a seventeen-year-old student, Serafina more comically with the intensity of her mourning ritual. The chief difference between the two heroines is the difference between tragedy and farce: in farce, "the victim does not suffer any lasting harm--a victim who did suffer lasting harm would evoke sympathy rather than laughter" (MacDowell 12).

In terms of each play's structure, however, Serafina stands in Stanley's position, at the center of the community to which she belongs. However, she has marginalized herself through her behavior and appearance; in Act One, Scene Four, "She is wearing a soiled pink slip and her hair is wild" (23), her own peculiar sign of

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16 Kolin suggests the Blanche-Serafina connection without pursuing it: "Serafina is much more adaptable than, say, Blanche DuBois," since Serafina is able to discard her self-deceptions by the end of the play (227-8).

17 Starnes sees Serafina as partly farcical: "we criticize her with the laughter of superioroty" (366).
mourning. In this same scene, she has locked her daughter Rosa in her bedroom to prevent her from seeing a boy she met at a dance, provoking a criticism from an even more marginal figure, the Strega or witch: "They ain't civilized, these Sicilians" (24). Alvaro, the fool who intrudes in the middle of the play, structurally enacts the part of Blanche; he is the breaker of bounds, the ironic commentator, the in-process clown who assails Serafina's iconic pose.

Williams says the "Meaning of The Rose Tattoo" is "the Dionysian element in human life, its mystery, its beauty, its significance" (55). His focus, however, stays on the deceased and invisible husband of Serafina, Rosario, who is the subject of Serafina's own intense mourning: "in the blind and frenzied efforts of the widow, Serafina, to comprehend the mysteries of her dead husband, we sense and learn more about him than would have been possible through direct observation of the living man, the Dionysus himself" (56). The character missing from Williams's list of catalysts of Serafina's sea-change is Alvaro, the fool-lover, whom Thompson recognizes as a character essential to the "demythification" of Rosario (683).

As in Streetcar, the "fool" introduces a performance more improvisational than the iconic and static performance of the community leader. In Memoirs, Williams says, "The Rose Tattoo was my love-play to the world" (162); in Alvaro's "love-play" with Serafina, the positive nature of improvisational acting, a fool's discourse of nonsensical free-play, is again privileged.
Critics of The Rose Tattoo have focused on Serafina's theatricality and on her comicality, the ways she cuts a ridiculous figure.\textsuperscript{18} Serafina garners more critical attention than Alvaro, the clownish disrupter of Serafina's pose. However, Alvaro's foolish nature as well as his therapeutic function are highlighted by critics.\textsuperscript{19} Judith Thompson provides an effective model of the play's progress, showing how a process of "demythification" moves the play from "Serafina's idealized account of her transcendent relationship with her husband Rosario" (myth) to a comic and realistic (ritual) reenactment of this relationship with Alvaro as surrogate husband (683).

\textsuperscript{18}Weldon sees in Serafina the "animal in the human" and says the "humor . . . arises from the incompatibility of Serafina's two natures" (73); Starnes discusses the operatic style of acting required of the actress playing the part of Serafina (360); Kolin sees Serafina as ridiculous at times (for instance, the slapstick of her attempts to fit into a too-tight girdle), and identifies her humorous qualities as "signs of her ethnic background" (218). At the end of the play, Kolin says, Serafina "graduates" from "buffoonery" as she "accepts the love and promise of the future" (226).

\textsuperscript{19}As Weldon says, Serafina is "saved from the tragic consequences by the chance appearance of Alvaro" (75). In addition to Alvaro's foolishness, Brooks mentions the "caricatures of American types" in Bessie and Flora, two "middle-aged clowns" who harass Serafina at one point (724). Finally, with regard to comedy, Kolin points out the elements of "vaudeville, Chaplinesque humor, and vestiges of the commedia dell'arte" (216). The commedia dell'arte functions as an antidote to the satiric nature of American nativist humor; Alvaro and the American clowns seem deliberately juxtaposed by Williams.
This essay discusses Serafina and Alvaro as performers of contradictory verbal genres. As in the dynamic between Blanche and Stanley, the language dexterity of the clown disrupts the verbal identity of the icon. Two different types of wit conflict, with the more improvisational form attempting a disruption, a break-up, of the more stable form. In The Rose Tattoo, however, the ritual-clown, as outsider, succeeds in his mission, because it is in the best interest of his adversary (and object of desire, Serafina) to enter a dialogue on his terms.

Sandra Stahl differentiates between the personal experience story and the memorate. The memorate "has long been accepted to identify personal accounts of experiences with the supernatural or first-person stories that illustrate beliefs" (269). Serafina's story about the rose tattoo that appeared on her breast on the night she conceived a child with Rosario qualifies as a memorate because of the supernatural element: "That night I woke up with a burning pain on me, here, on my left breast! A pain like a needle, quick, quick, hot little stitches. I turned on the light, I uncovered my breast!—On it I saw the rose tattoo of my husband!" (5). Although each of her audiences throughout the play questions the validity of this story, Serafina continues to tell it, suggesting that the iconic performer in Williams, like the monologic "fool" in O'Neill, wishes to assert a power over his or her audience.

As in Streetcar, the female performer uses verbal performance to construct an identity. As an "in-process" marginal character, Blanche creates identities based on immediate need, attuned to the
special nature of each audience. As a central character marginalized by her community, Serafina performs an identity that is fixed, constant, irrespective of audience. In the first half of The Rose Tattoo, Williams allows the reader to experience the dangers of Serafina's self-absorption and readies us for the intrusion of the fool, Alvaro, who will counter Serafina's solidity with the fluidity of self-conscious comedy.

Serafina's memorate is the obverse of the community's rumor of Estelle Hohengarten's affair with Rosario, a rumor which can be verified by Estelle's real tattoo on her breast of a rose. One goal of the play is to prompt Serafina to move from the memorate, which no one except her takes seriously, to the rumor, which everyone except her believes— from isolation through story-telling to community through gossip-listening. The tension between reality and superstition, realism and hyperbole, informs the dialogues of the first scene.

As a performer, Serafina develops narratives that resist audience interrogation, and which assert a sense of her own superiority over her auditors. The reader who silently performs Serafina's part will probably step back from the intensity of Serafina's belief in the superstition of her memorate. In general, however, reader response in Scene One is fostered by the resistance of auditor to performer as a given feature of the community's verbal interactions. The reader is schooled to become a skeptic. We take a critical step away from each performer, evaluating delivery and response.
When Serafina tells the memorate of the rose tattoo to Assunta, she immediately deflates Serafina's account: "Ecco! You sell the powders!" (the love potion she peddles) (5). In an earlier exchange between the two women, Assunta says she can "hear the star-noises," and Serafina replies, "Naw, them ain't the star-noises. They're termites, eating the house up" (3). Serafina's claim that when it comes to love-making with Rosario, "Each time is the first time with him. Time doesn't pass . . ." is immediately countered by Assunta: "Tick, tick, tick, tick.--You say the clock is a liar" (8). Estelle Hohengarten, Rosario's illicit lover, requests Serafina, the community's seamstress, to sew a shirt for a man who "is wild like a Gypsy" (11), a statement to which Serafina replies, "A woman should not encourage a man to be wild" (11). Finally, Rosa, Serafina's daughter, disagrees with her mother's superstitious labelling of the Strega: where Serafina sees a "white eye," Rosa sees "a cataract" (13). "The further the message is from its source of perception, the less is its truthfulness, according to the unwritten folk-law of procedure" (Degh and Vazsonyi 231). In a community in which first-person testimonials, in opposition to this unwritten law, are immediately discredited by the auditor, Serafina's rigid, indefatiguable attachment to her own stories stands out as a prominent feature.

A second feature of Serafina's verbal performance is its improvisational quality, the way she forges a story that becomes a repeatable unit of her oral repertoire. Stahl points out how repetition of a story by a performer leads to a stable story form: "Any single personal experience story tends to become increasingly
polished in terms of form and style as the teller repeats it in varying contexts. Without pushing the metaphor too far, we might say that the first telling of a personal experience story serves as an *ur-form* for the teller" (269).

In Scene Four, Williams shows Serafina's story-making process in action, as Serafina develops her thoughts about a high school dance her daughter has attended. The first time she describes this dance to the daughter's teacher, Miss Yorke, she verbalizes a gut reaction: "Sick at my stomach you make me! Your school, you make all this trouble! You give-a this dance where she gets mixed up with a sailor" (27). In a second instance, she builds her attack to a higher pitch: "You give this dance where she gets mixed up with a sailor. What do you think you want to do at this high school? [. . .] How high is this high school? Listen, how high is this high school?" (28). In a third instance, her attack acquires the features of a story: "You give this a dance! What kind of a spring dance is it? Answer this question, please, for me! What kind of a spring dance is it? She meet this boy there who don't even go to no high school. What kind of a boy? Guardate! *A sailor that wears a gold earring!*" (30).

Serafina's story-telling process begins as improvisation; information is gradually accrued and worked into her speeches. She experiments with several versions, trying to find the one that will have the most impact on her audience, the Anglo Miss Yorke. When she locates this version, her story becomes repeatable, a somewhat fixed performance. In Act Two, Scene One, for example, she repeats a central element of the third version of her story to the community
priest, Father de Leo: "They give the spring dance because the girls are man-crazy. And there at that dance my daughter goes with a sailor that has in his ear a gold ring! And pants so tight that a woman ought not to look at him!" (71).

The improvisational quality of Serafina's discourse may be compared to the improvisations of Blanche or Alvaro, the speakers on the margins. Serafina's improvisations lead to somewhat fixed formulations, set speeches, and create a certain amount of self-rigidity (as well as self-expressivity). Blanche's improvisations, while also creating certain identities for herself, are designed to break down the resistances or fixed natures of her auditors, to produce a flexibility in Stella or Mitch, to crumble Stanley's authoritarian facade. Finally, Alvaro's improvisations, like Blanche's, also play with the fixed features of his auditor's verbal makeup, are designed to unhinge Serafina's identity manufactured through storytelling. The "theater," which the "fool's" performance creates, in each case, works against traditional notions of a fixed self, undermines the conception of a permanent identity.

In Streetcar and Rose Tattoo, a dialogue transpires between "fool" and icon, between an improvisational character who is "in-process" and a character who is more stable in terms of performance. O'Neill, in comparison, seems more concerned with comic characters not in touch with an interior self, performers who overstep their license, working harm on the community. Williams seems to value the in-process nature of the "fool's" performance, viewing as positive the disruptions in the social fabric his or her nervous energy creates,
and assessing the capacities for transformation the more iconic characters possess.

In Scene Five, two middle-aged American women enter as targets of Williams's satire: "Flora and Bessie are two female clowns of middle years and juvenile temperament. Flora is tall and angular; Bessie is rather stubby" (32). Their entrance delays Serafina's participation in her daughter's graduation, which would help restore Serafina in some part to the community and withdraw her from her liminal seclusion. In turn, Serafina's protests about sewing a blouse for the one clown, Flora, postpones Bessie and Flora's participation in their own public ceremony, a festive parade of American Legionnaires. Serafina counteracts what she calls the "dirty" talk of the clowns, their stories about men, by retelling the personal experience narrative about her husband and their love-making capabilities: "When I think of men I think about my husband. My husband was a Sicilian. We had love together every night of the week, we never skipped one, from the night we was married till the night he was killed in his fruit truck on that road there!" (38).

Instead of Assunta, whose rebuttals are a licensed form of criticism in the community's verbal exchanges, the audience in this case is more hostile, indulging in unlicensed raillery. Unlike Assunta's joking response, Serafina's present audience responds by undercutting Serafina's sacred claims. Flora counterattacks with the realistic story of Rosario's affair with Estelle Hohengarten: "Everybody's known it but Serafina. I'm just telling the facts that
come out at the inquest while she was in bed with her eyes shut tight and the sheet pulled over her head like a female ostrich!" (41).

Williams introduces the clowns for the sake of comparison and contrast with Alvaro; the hostile and disruptive effects of American nativist humor are juxtaposed with the therapeutic effects of Alvaro's presence as Old World clown. Alvaro and the American clowns, Bessie and Flora, share several attributes. Both are vulgar rather than refined; in Serafina's view, both are sexually promiscuous. Neither are concerned with the sacred past, in Serafina's sense, but are preoccupied with more immediate and practical concerns. In terms of their verbal performances, both sets of clowns are improvisational, speaking more in an immediate, reactionary sense. Both undermine Serafina's grievance ritual by professing knowledge of the real story of Estelle Hohengarten's relationship to Rosario. Whereas Flora and Bessie represent Anglo-American culture, Alvaro is tied to Sicilian culture. The similarities between Alvaro and the clownish duo of Bessie and Flora suggest that Williams is playing off New World American clowns against an Old World European clown. The American concept of the clown is unfavorably contrasted with Alvaro.

When Alvaro arrives on stage, a new ritual takes the place of Serafina's mourning hibernation, a comic wooing ritual which could pass for a series of lazzi of the commedia dell'arte. Part of Alvaro's impact on Serafina is that he impersonates Rosario by acquiring a rose tattoo; however, Serafina makes this association before Alvaro's attempt to become a surrogate: "A clown of a face like that with my
husband's body!" (85). In addition, Alvaro is a more receptive audience of Serafina's stories. Although he plays the part of receptive audience, he does this at the same time that he violates the proprieties of Serafina's moral life. On the one hand, Alvaro makes himself a sympathetic listener, verifying Serafina's sense of self that she puts forth through personal experience narratives that have been downplayed by other audiences, yet, on the other, he undoes this sense of self in Serafina by verifying the affair between her husband and Estelle and, before this, by breaking down the barriers between himself and Serafina through a series of sexual innuendoes and improprieties.

Whereas the Anglo-American traditions of folly produce discomfort or alienation, the Old World clown, by performing a comic tradition that fits in with Serafina's Italian community, heals through laughter. The difference between types of folly is culturally drawn and parallels the displacement of the zanni by American clowns in the nineteenth century: "These pantomimic spectacles [of the American one-ring circus] tended to center around American themes, and this inevitably led to the expulsion of Harlequin, Pierrot, Columbine, and other stock characters of the commedia dell'arte" (Towsen 109). Williams tries to reverse this process so that the European forms replace the entrenched American forms. In Streetcar, Stanley is a part of folk culture that lacks a folk humor, whereas in Rose Tattoo Alvaro is a part of folk culture that produces a folk laughter, again recalling the opposition between Renaissance and Romantic laughter: in the Romantic period, "laughter was cut
down to cold humor, irony, sarcasm. It ceased to be a joyful and triumphant hilarity. Its positive regenerating power was reduced to a minimum" (Bakhtin, Rabelais 38). Stanley's abusive "Ha--ha--ha!" to Blanche in Scene Ten (158) contrasts with Alvaro's sense of bawdy.

In Act Two, Williams wheels three mystery carts past Serafina. First is the priest, the authority figure of the community, who lectures Serafina on her appearance and on the issue of her marginality. The priest's presence produces more uncertainty in Serafina as he refuses to violate the laws of the confessional by repeating Rosario's confessions but hints about the "known facts" (73). Next comes the salesman, another satirized American clown—a fat man in a seersucker suit and a straw hat with a yellow, red and purple band (75)—whose verbal performance involves selling a prospective customer an unidentified household appliance which "explodes in Serafina's face" (77), again a discomfoting stage presence, with Serafina as dissatisfied audience.

The salesman acts as a comic buffer between the priest, as ineffectual representative of power in the community, and Alvaro, as effectual clown or fool: Alvaro's "face and manner are clownish; he has a charming awkwardness. There is a startling, improvised air about him" (76). A conflict between New World and Old World comedy takes place, as the salesman makes Alvaro comically suffer by calling him stereotypical names—"Maccaroni"; "Spaghetti"; "greaseball" (77-8)—by kicking him in the groin as a way of warding off a fight Alvaro instigates, and by having him fired by calling his
boss behind his back. Again Williams emphasizes the cruelty of the American sense of the clown, a persecuting figure. The new ethnic Americans in this play are more sensitively portrayed and their performances more sympathetically comic than the harder, sharper outlines of the more established American types, including Estelle, "the blackjack dealer from Texas" (41), and Miss Yorke, who cannot comprehend Serafina's point of view about her daughter.

If Blanche resembles the ritual-clown, Alvaro also accords with this model: he exists on the moral and physical boundaries of Serafina's world; he breaks taboos freely and without conscience; he exists in an improvisational state, a state of being "in-process." More particularly, his performances parallel those of the clowns or zanni of the commedia dell'arte. "Much of the action in these plays was instigated by the servants, or zanni; in fact, the commedia dell'arte was also known as the commedia di zanni. Most of the zanni were males, but there was likely to be at least one maid (fantessa)" (Towsen 66). Alvaro seems to be the traditional zanni duo rolled into one persona: one clown clever and the other foolish. For example, of the two clown partners Pedrolino and Arlecchino, Pedrolino's "function is obviously to keep the play moving, to keep overturning the libidinous drives . . . of the other characters. And what he does through capricious design, Arlecchino does through witless inadvertence" (Storey 13).

According to K. M. Lea, "the word 'lazzo' is invaluable as a technicality to cover all the miscellaneous matter that every play acquires from the actors themselves in the course of a production. . . .
Lytton adjusting his toe, Charlie Chaplin eating bootlaces for spaghetti, and Stanislavsky's comedian who pretended to have a hair in his mouth keep up the tradition" (67). The lazz involved uncontainable performative energy, stage actions which spill over textual boundaries; the slapstick play in The Rose Tattoo between Alvaro and Serafina would allow for this excess, this unpredictability, physical performances which counteract the set or rigid nature of Serafina's texts, improvisation combating the formulas of Serafina's memorate and personal experience stories.

In The Audience, Blau discusses Gertrude Stein's view of the theater: "What she disliked about the accepted form of drama was that the actors knew what was going to happen and the audience was always behind" (115). With Alvaro, as a type of clown, however, the audience may close the gap with a character who "frequently seems surprised at his own speeches and actions, as though he had not at all anticipated them" (Rose 76). Although the actor would still know in advance the speeches he is about to say, he is pretending to be a man who does not know what he is about to say. What would a reader's silent performance of Alvaro's part be like: surprise at the character's own surprise? a feeling of being carried away by the impromptu nature of the speech? a feeling of release, liberation, temporariness, especially in contrast with Serafina's predictable speeches? If Serafina's set speeches tend to keep an audience at bay, posted outside the no-trespassing signs of her text, Alvaro's impromptu speech seems more invitational.
The lazzi of the commedia dell'arte were "any discrete, or independent, comic and repeatable activity that guaranteed laughs for its participants" (Gordon 4-5). Alvaro embraces a commedia mixture of innocence and ingenuity, naivety and craft. The audience is never sure how intelligent he is, whether he is more artificial jester or natural fool. Like the O'Neillian "fool," Alvaro seems to lack an interior self. Instead of clamping down on his audience with a "foreign" language, he is in "true" dialogue with Serafina's own language, working with it, tugging at it, readjusting it, until Serafina's language begins to break down under his comic insolence and suggestiveness. His anti-authoritarian clown's language, his "language of the marketplace" (Bakhtin, Rabelais Chapt. 2 title), leads her away from the authority of her own former idealistic image into a self-conception more vulgar and down to earth.

As a zanni, Alvaro introduces a comedy that Serafina has so far produced on her own (or with the assistance of American satirized clowns). The lazzi which he instigates accord with those of traditional commedia dell'arte: "imitation of animals or objects" (Gordon 9), "trick properties" such as "the exploding book, disappearing fruit" (Gordon 29) (the exploding household object of the salesman anticipates Alvaro's entrance), "sexual/scatological lazzi" such as "the telling of dirty jokes" (Gordon 32), "stupidity/inappropriate behavior," in which "sometimes the humor of the lazzo involves a kind of double stupidity, where both characters engage in two sets of inappropriate actions" (Gordon 43), "transformation lazzi," in which "sudden and complete change of
personality and emotion fuels the humor" (Gordon 47), the "stock
ruses and tricks" of "the eternal schemers like Pulcinella" (Gordon
51), and "word play lazzi" of "dialects, misunderstood words, puns,
malapropisms, story-telling, and foreign accents" (Gordon 55).

The comic violations that Alvaro engineers, as a part of an
improvisational slapstick performance, infringe on Serafina’s self-
containment; they draw her out of sacred isolation and into a secular
interaction more sexual. Alvaro enters Serafina’s house without
permission and then asks Serafina to leave him alone ("illogical
lazzi"); he blows his nose between two fingers so that Serafina must
hand him a scrap of cloth ("inappropriate behavior"); he calls the
children who are helping themselves to bananas from his truck “little
buggers,” which he recognizes as an improper remark by way of
apology ("scatalogical lazzi"); he gets bitten by Serafina’s parrot while
inspecting its tail feathers ("inappropriate behavior"); he pinches
Serafina’s arm and talks about how she must sleep without a
nightgown at night because of the hot weather ("sexual"); he
pretends she is a fireplace and mimes warming his hands near her
("imitation of animals or objects"); he comically chases her
throughout the house as she resists his advances ("acrobatics"); he
tells her that he looks at pictures of nearly nude women in
magazines ("sexual/scatalogical"). Alvaro’s impromptu interruptions,
again functioning along the lines of the lazzi which incorporated
vulgarity and crudity as a way of interrupting the progress of the
romantic scenes of the commedia dell’arte, draw Serafina into a sense
of play and transform her from a sacredly isolated person farcically
trapped by her own emotional withdrawal into a clownish participant in a mock-romantic entanglement.

Unsettled by Alvaro's performances, Serafina ends up speaking and acting nonsensically ("double stupidity"). Ironically, Alvaro helps her out of ridiculous sentence formulations or assists her in creating sense out of nonsense ("word play"). When Serafina is stranded on top of a chair, she says, "I can't get up." Alvaro replies, "You mean you can't get down?" (83). As she is getting ready to pour glasses of wine, she says, "The bottle should be in ice but the next best thing is to pour the wine over the bottle." Alvaro replies, "You mean over the ice?" (86). Alvaro disorients Serafina to the point where she no longer operates out of a set idea of self, the identity manufactured by her personal experience narratives; she is verbally put off balance, entering out-of-bounds zones of verbal performance. Alvaro plays the role of helpful clown, a helpmate rescuing her from semantic difficulties, a verbal coach assisting her as she begins to reformulate a new sense of herself through words.

In conjunction with this role, however, Alvaro plays the part of sympathetic listener, and unlike other audiences in the play who resist, contradict, or downplay Serafina's construction of an identity based on romantic exaggeration and superstitious hyperbole, Alvaro plays along with Serafina's reassertions of her narratives. When Serafina rehearses the story about the spring dance, Alvaro pulls the cork off a bottle of Spumanti and complements her on her laughter: "I like a woman that laughs with all her heart" (86). About her keeping her husband's ashes, a practice for which the priest has
reprimanded her, Alvaro says, "The body would've decayed, but ashes always stay clean" (89). After Serafina tells him the memorate about the rose tattoo appearing on her breast, Alvaro asks innocently/craftily: "Would you be willing to show me the rose tattoo?" (90). Although one may read the subtext of these exchanges in terms of Alvaro's sexual desire, Alvaro is inadvertently leading Serafina toward a new definition of self by supporting her old conceptions of self (strengthening her former position as a means of submitting her to departures from this position).

A significant verbal slip of Serafina's is when she borrows by accident (dialogically) Estelle's conception of her husband as "wild like a gypsy": "He was--wild like a--Gypsy.--'Wild--like a--Gypsy?' Who said that?--I hate to start to remember, and then not remember . . ." (88). Again, Alvaro's presence has knocked her verbally off balance; in this case, she fails to use her own speech in order to describe her husband.

Although Alvaro recites personal experience narratives to Serafina, they concern the immediate problems of the present, as opposed to Serafina's preoccupation with the past. When he does refer to historical circumstances, he does so in a comic way, again opposed to Serafina's seriousness. His discussion of his dependents is in the form of a formalized speech: "They got the parchesi habit. They play the game of parchesi, morning, night, noon. Passing a bucket of beer around the table . . ." (92). He sums up this speech with, "I've told you my life," his secular superficiality contrasting with Serafina's sacred commitment to her husband.
A further indication of Serafina's change is established by the self-reflexivity attached to Alvaro's definition as clown. The phrase "grandson of the village idiot of Ribera" becomes a repeatable epithet, a phrase that is used in various ways in different contexts. When Alvaro first announces this identity, it is as a boastful proclamation. With it, he asks Serafina to accept him for who he is: "Mangiacavallo has nothing. In fact, he is the grandson of the village idiot of Ribera!" (94). Alvaro refers a second time to this identity in a self-effacing way as Serafina offers him the rose-colored shirt that Estelle had originally requested Serafina to make for Rosario. Alvaro self-consciously claims a low social status, and Serafina's reaction is sympathetic: "No matter whose grandson you are, put it on; you are welcome to wear it" (97). In a third instance, Serafina uses this epithet to rebuke Alvaro for chasing her through the parlor, trying to force a romantic issue: "Git up, git up, git up!—you village idiot's grandson!" (115). This phrase unites Serafina and Alvaro in the enterprise of giving Alvaro his identity and of indicating the kind of comic relationship between them. It is a phrase Serafina adopts in a dialogic way; what begins as a joking epithet becomes a self-reflexive way of assigning Alvaro the role of clown or buffoon. Its use is a watermark of Serafina's acceptance of Alvaro in this role, which entails a low social status, the opposite end of the spectrum from the status of her husband as baron, and which promises anything but respectability and seriousness.

In Memoirs, Williams records his fascination with Anna Magnani, the actress who played Serafina in the movie version of
The Rose Tattoo: "I often wonder how Anna Magnani managed to live within society and yet to remain so free of its conventions. She was as unconventional a woman as I have known..." (162). The reader is likewise fascinated with Serafina along similar lines: how she lives by the conventions of her world, its religiosity, its sanctity, yet how she is unconventional with regard to her mourning ritual, her marginality of dress and behavior. If I have overemphasized Serafina's iconic features of performance, this is at the price of her emotional expressivity. Yet this emotional energy is held in place, transfixed, looking back to the past instead of living the present, like a recording of a Tchaikovsky symphony stuck in a groove.

In this way, Serafina resembles Blanche. Each character is an excessive performer, Blanche with her illusions, Serafina with her remembrances, posing, unlike O'Neill's performers, more of a danger to herself than her community. Like Blanche, Serafina is an aggressive role-player; she plays the two roles of passionate devotee and protective mother. Her performances, likewise, distance her from her audiences. Both Blanche and Serafina transgress limits of performance, Blanche becoming a victim of her own illusions, Serafina transcending the norm of the mourning ritual.

If Serafina is too iconic, her attachment to the past too inflexible, her pose too rigid, Blanche is too illusionistic, too improvisational, too much a proponent of Williams's "plastic" theater. Whereas Blanche goes over the boundary of performance through madness, Serafina is rescued from her performance, her rigid role-playing. Unlike Streetcar, where the ultra-realism of Stanley and the
ultra-illusionism of Blanche violently separate, Serafina, by play's end, unites within her person illusionism and realism as a performative ideal. Although Alvaro turns Serafina toward present realities, Serafina's imagination still plays with the possibility of illusion. The Rose Tattoo moves full circle as Serafina produces a second memorate concerning the mystical rose tattoo as a sign of conception, this time applying it to Alvaro as father: "Just now I felt on my breast the burning again of the rose" (143). Assunta once again is her audience, this time a noncritical one.

Camino Real as Nonsense Play

Violets are a central image in Williams's Camino Real, signifying sensitivity in a harsh environment. Williams says about this image: "at moments, certainly the violets do break the rocks. There are moments when they do. I'm not sure one should cling to that image too much because after all it's rather a pretty image; it's an effective image but it isn't a very comprehensive one perhaps" (Devlin 92). The environment in Camino Real is as difficult for sensitive spirits as that in Streetcar: Williams presents an absurdist rendering of a military dictatorship in a country far enough south of the United States where the Southern Cross can be seen at night. One issue in Camino Real is whether or not, as the character Jacques proposes, the violets can break the rocks in the mountains: "The violets in the mountains can break the rocks if you believe in them and allow them to grow!" (97). Williams's answer is affirmative, as Don Quixote declares, at the end of the play: "The violets in the mountains have
broken the rocks!" (161). This is announced by the stage-manager Gutman as "The Curtain Line" (161).

One parallel between Camino Real and Streetcar rests with this image. Dickson points out that Blanche's "essential innocence was suggested visually in the first draft by her wearing a white suit with slightly tired violets pinned to her fluffy blouse" (167). Williams again is bringing two different types of performance into contact, one more entrenched and impervious to self-transformation (like Stanley's), one more free-floating and ludic (like Blanche's). The difference in Camino Real is that the boundary between these performance modes is not clear-cut. One could oppose Kilroy to Gutman, but each character, as a representation of a performance mode, is unstable, fluctuating: Gutman, the oppressive stage manager of the Camino, is at various times ruthless, impersonable, persecuting, but also humorous, sentimental, philosophical--a strain of the practical joker running through his interaction with the desperate and forlorn characters under his supervision. Kilroy, as the comic intruder, the American nativist clown, is likewise a figure alternating between the extreme self-confidence of the braggart and the nonsensical free-play of the fool.

Several critics have identified Camino Real as an expressionist play. According to Corrigan, "Its technique and subject matter recall the Expressionistic extravaganzas popular in the American theater during the 1920s. . . . Since all such drama has an inbred freedom from strictures of verisimilitude in plot, characters, and setting, fair evaluation of Camino Real must consider the unique rules for such
compositions" (396). Seeing the play as "a direct descendent of the Symbolists" (413), Larsen says that "Camino Real is the quintessential example of Williams' concept of plastic theater. It presents a synthesis of poetry, music, mime, dance, lighting and spectacle. The action is not confined to the stage. The entire theater auditorium was utilized by Williams and the director Elia Kazan" (423).

The play is also a nonsense play, similar to complete nonsense works such as Lewis Carroll's, Edward Lear's, and John Lennon's, with regard to its word play and slapstick. Camino Real may encourage its readers toward a state of liberation which nonsense generates. (Wolf discusses the image of Casanova's portmanteau containing fragile mementoes as symbolic of the way Camino Real contains fragments of characterizations and symbols of Williams's previous plays; however, the title of the play itself is a portmanteau, as Williams stipulates through a replaced accent the formation of the word "real" out of "royal.") Williams says as much in his Foreword: "... in New Haven we opened directly across the street from a movie theatre that was showing Peter Pan in Technicolor, and it did not seem altogether inappropriate to me. ... To me the appeal of this work is its unusual degree of freedom. When it began to get under way I felt a new sensation of release" (viii). This release is conveyed by the breakdown of the barrier between audience and theater, between stage and spectator (or page and reader).

However, this is not a case of a modernist breakdown in which the playwright is out to play George and Martha's game of "Get the Guests" (Albee, Who's Afraid? 86) but more of a case in which the
audience is encouraged to participate as willing subjects in a theatrical experiment. The stage is not used to intimidate or harass but to liberate and unbind. Williams says that "when a theatrical work kicks over the traces with such apparent insouciance, security seems challenged and, instead of participating in its sense of freedom, one of a certain number of playgoers will rush back out to the more accustomed implausibility of the street he lives on" (Camino xi).

In addition to a competition between character-performers, the competition in Camino Real is between the nature of the play as a medium, a non-linear text, and a pool of characters of miscellaneous stature and station, all of whom must negotiate the random, unpredictable nature of the playworld Williams has created. Some, like Gutman, respond by assuming authoritarian roles, whereas others, like Kilroy, respond by playing more flexible, adaptable parts. But the play, as an impersonable succession of sixteen "blocks" (or scenes), announced by Gutman, seems a testing ground for performance modes as a response to non-linearity. The nature of theater itself is called into question, and performance is either in the form of self-assertion, a rigid clinging to identity, or in the form of self-flexibility, a fool's play with the contours of an impersonable playworld. The play seems to have a will of its own, in terms of action, irrespective of character development; character and action seem disjointed, separate considerations. In Stanislavsky's terms, the characters seem in a perpetual struggle to determine the
underlying action of the play, seeking the infinitive which would complete the question concerning the play's goal: "To ---?"

Most critics tend to downplay Kilroy's centrality and undervalue his tragicomic contributions to the play.20 Two studies, however, see Kilroy as a more efficacious character. Diane Turner analyzes how Kilroy progresses through a three-stage rite of passage, and how he "takes on the role of scapegoat . . . ritual lover . . . and finally the dying and reborn god hero" (240). Defining Kilroy as a character who "always bounces back, even after dying" (43), Cless sees in Kilroy "both champ/clown": "he maintains innocence and even idealism in the face of severe plight and lets his bumbling naivete be both his downfall and his saving grace" (44).21 In addition to his ritual function and his role as clown, we may

20 Jordan Miller sees that "Kilroy emerges more pitiful than tragic" and that there is no "tragic protagonist" in the play ("Three" 87). Campbell agrees that "between Byron and Jacques stands Kilroy, weak and confused but rebelliously idealistic" (37). He calls him one of "the defenseless and sensitive outcasts" (35-6). Labelling him a "baby-hero," Wolf says, "For all his buffoonery and clownishness, this former boxer is a stage-person who radiates the appeal of spectacular failure"; "Kilroy, usually muddled, is pathetically ineffectual, but his very naivete and his lack of affectation arouse sympathy" (264).

21 Esther Jackson also sees Kilroy as a central figure: "Williams, the American, finds in the anti-heroic Kilroy a possible savior of humanity" (123). She sees how Williams adopts a new "vision of the protagonist" in Kilroy as "clown" (124): "That the anti-heroic Kilroy is a clown, a 'little man,' is significant. For Williams presses the existentialist idea of man as actor to one of its logical conclusions: man the clown, 'the absurd'" (125). I will be assessing Kilroy as a protagonist with a dual nature, part clown, part icon.
understand Kilroy as a character who performs both common sense and nonsense, resisting the absurdities of the Camino Real yet participating by speaking a nonsensical punning language. Kilroy seems to unify the narrative line of the play. On the one hand, Kilroy resembles Stanley, a commonsensical character; on the other, he is a naive, sensitive idealist. The twin aspects of his character, as American folk hero, like Stanley, and as sympathetic victim, like Blanche, aid our understanding of Kilroy as a performer who assists the theater audience in negotiating the absurd contours of the Camino Real.

Kilroy is one of several legendary characters who arrive on the Camino Real, other arrivals including Lord Byron, Don Quixote and Sancho, Jacques Casanova and Marguerite Gautier. What makes Kilroy unique is that he is the only American character in the play, a "Yankee," in the terminology of the Gypsy, even though he is from the South. He is also a folk hero, a comic character who in American legend is a type of trickster, a new culture hero for an America that was expanding its horizons in World War Two and leaving its mark on all parts of the world. Kilroy was the legendary first American to introduce young men and women to "Terra Incognita," which in Camino Real is reduced to the desert visible through the central upstage arch between the two sides, rich and poor, of the stage: "a wasteland between the walled town and the distant perimeter of snow-topped mountains" (2).

It is unusual to see Kilroy in a foreign country. Although his presence on the Camino Real fits in with the globetrotting character
of his myth, Kilroy's visible presence is an aberration, since the nature of his myth is also to be omnipresent and invisible, not pinned down to a real identity:

- He is the spirit of the serious-gay lads who have air-lifted America's fighting men and fighting equipment on magic carpets to global war. . . . Their enthusiasm for alien lands is more than a little dulled. But they have girdled the world and that is something that will stick. . . . They are among the millions of Americans who know the world a little better . . . who can never again believe that everything beyond New York and San Francisco is Terra Incognita. Each is something of a Kilroy . . . Kilroy, the Man Who Has Been Everywhere.

(Scheyer 20)

Unlike several of the other legendary figures in the play (e.g., Byron, Quixote), Kilroy is not out of time or out of place. In 1953, the year the play opened on Broadway, he would have been discharged from the service he provided the country as comic relief in World War Two.

According to Scheyer, Kilroy is "a brother of Paul Bunyan, and America's other heroes" (20); he is a more recent incarnation of this type of bravura personality. There is no reason Williams could not have cast in Kilroy's place Paul Bunyan or Davy Crockett; however, Williams may date him as post-World War Two vintage for the purpose of conducting an experiment: how a folklore figure resembling Stanley will function in an absurdist environment.

Like Stanley, Kilroy is a soldier, a veteran. Kilroy shares as many characteristics with Stanley as he does with Blanche: his roots in mother wit; his basic, blunt way of expressing his wishes and complaints; his physical capabilities; his swaggering personality--
although this is all tinged with a Blanche-like sensitivity that enjoys a good joke and which is partly the product of illness, since he is not allowed to box again because of his symbolically overlarge heart.

When he first enters the Camino, he makes a speech that resembles the braggart speech of the backwoods roarer: "I just got off a boat. Lousiest frigging tub I ever shipped on, one continual hell it was, all the way up from Rio. And me sick, too. I picked up one of those tropical fevers. No sick-bay on that tub, no doctor, no medicine or nothing, not even one quinine pill, and I was burning up with Christ knows how much fever" (25). This speech resonates a combination of Blanche and Stanley, the image of Stanley but the voice of Blanche, the tall-tale teller, who exaggerates to create a worst-case scenario, using hyperbole to construct an identity as victim: "I've got a heart in my chest as big as the head of a baby. Ha ha!" (25).

On the other hand, Kilroy speaks with Stanley-like aphorisms, though tighter-lipped: "In the States that pile of lettuce would make you a plutocrat!" (26); "What've I got to cash in on? My golden gloves? Never! I'll say that once more, never! The silver-framed photo of my One True Woman? Never! Repeat that! Never!" (32).

When Gutman wants Kilroy to don a Patsy outfit, Kilroy responds with, "Don't give me orders. Kilroy is a free agent--" (49). Kilroy's resistance to folly matches Stanley's own outrage at what he perceives as the folly of Blanche. Kilroy caps his threat to call the American Embassy when his wallet is stolen with: "I hope I have made myself plain. If not, I will make myself plainer!" (30). This affinity for "plain" speech sets him in Stanley's camp. Williams
places a folk hero with Stanley's folk characteristics in a dreamlike, absurdist, alien setting, and sets out to record any transformations he will undergo or contributions to the action he will make.

Kilroy intrudes in this absurdist environment with a commonsensical American outlook; he provides the audience (or reader) with a way of negotiating the nonsensical world of the play through verbal performance, which plays along with the nonsense while at the same time anchoring itself to a mother-wit position of common sense. We will continue to focus on Kilroy insofar as he introduces, again in the same vein as the previous two plays of our study, a type of verbal performance which adjusts the audience's (or reader's) relationship to other performances in the text.

Kilroy is a character who enables the reader to enjoy the nonsense of *Camino Real* and to hold onto rationality at the same time. As readers, we may comprehend nonsense in a positive way; nonsense keeps the text open-ended, the reader continually guessing. On the other hand, nonsense forces the reader to concentrate, to monitor the text for shifts, to keep tuned-in with upraised antennae, alert for infractions, reversals. In this sense, the play encourages an intensity, a forced concentration on the reader's part. In the first case, the reader enjoys nonsense for the sake of nonsense; in the second case, the reader is busy trying to make sense out of nonsense or hanging onto the world of common sense that the play seems to discard.

When Kilroy first enters the setting, he scratches out "Kilroy is Coming" and writes "Kilroy is Here," a deviation from his typical
invisibility. He identifies himself as Kilroy; the reader and a contemporary audience would no doubt be amused by this boastfulness and the status of this character as presently "here."

Kilroy breaks the frame of conventional theater by addressing the audience in a comically desperate way as he leads a chase of officers who wish to place him in the Patsy outfit: "[Kilroy wheels about at the top of the center aisle, and runs back down it, panting, gasping out questions and entreaties to various persons occupying aisle seats, such as:] How do I git out? Which way do I go, which way do I get out? Where's the Greyhound depot? Hey, do you know where the Greyhound bus depot is?" (50-1). In one view, this dialogue generates the nonsense that the play is an illusion, an event happening on a stage in front of an audience. It enlarges the cast of characters by the number of theater seats in the auditorium.

At one point, Kilroy engages in a childish nonsense rhyme with the Loan Shark, bargaining for his golden gloves:

Loan Shark: Nine, nine fifty!
Kilroy: Nah, nah, nah!
Loan Shark: Yah, yah, yah.
Kilroy: I say nah.
Loan Shark: I say yah.
Kilroy: The nahs have it. (36)

This sequence threatens the nonsense of infinity: "repetition, whose nature is seen as ongoing, can only achieve this quality of ongoingness by 'swallowing' the ongoing quality of context, by holding context still. Here again is the threat of the self-generating, self-perpetuating machine" (Stewart 120-1).
Through repetition and word play, Kilroy is able to hold the context still and so suspend forward movement, delaying the progress of the discourse. Kilroy may be naive, but he is also street smart, able to converse in the language of nonsense; like any character who plays temporarily the part of the fool, he is able to turn tables, to invert verbal structures, to make play out of seriousness. At the same time, he is still in the tradition of the swaggering American backwoods strong man capable of performing a reality with words in order to confute or confuse an auditor, whether this performance be in the form of the boast or the jest or the tall tale. When he introduces himself to Jacques, he boasts, "My name's Kilroy. I'm here" (42), voicing the self-confidence of the braggart and playing a word game with the Kilroy myth.

Kilroy is also capable of bad puns, which break communicative structures, turning words in upon themselves, creating intense moments of reflexivity: "puns are 'terrible' and 'awful' because they split the flow of events in time. Like any intrusion of nonsense into conversation, they are a 'trip-up,' an impediment to seriousness" (Stewart 161). Kilroy's pun on "legal tender" is unexpected: "Hah ha! I been in countries where money was not legal tender. I mean it was legal but it wasn't tender" (46). There is an immediate groan heard in the Ritz Men Only, which suggests that the pun has actually killed one of the tenants, who is carried out by the Streetcleaners, providing a vacancy.

Several characters in Camino Real are more nonsensical than sensible, as though personas of a children's theater. Prudence seems
completely out of touch with the play’s world, rambling through a long, pointless monologue which connects the prologue with Block One. In Block Two, the Gypsy parodies the dialogue of advertisements: "Do you feel yourself to be spiritually unprepared for the age of exploding atoms? Do you distrust the newspapers? Are you suspicious of governments? Have you arrived at a point on the Camino Real where the walls converge not in the distance but right in front of your nose?" (28). The questions again threaten infinity, to keep going on and on, ad nauseum. The Bum comes out on the terrace of the Ritz Men Only periodically to offer an inebriated comment which provides an oblique commentary on the action: "O Jack o' Diamonds, you robbed my pockets, you robbed my pockets of silver and gold!" (33). The Baron de Charlus (of Proust) describes the bird circuit of "hot-spots" to Kilroy, playing with his imagination: "There's the Pink Flamingo, the Yellow Pelican, the Blue Heron, and the Prothonotary Warbler" (39).

As though playing a game of Twister, Kilroy stands with one hand on a locus of sense and one foot on a spot of nonsense. He functions as a translator, as he tries to make sense out of nonsense, even though his tall-tale entrance with its modernist braggadocio--"I've got a heart in my chest as big as the head of a baby" (25)--seems nonsensical. "In folklore, forms of hyperbole such as tall tales and Jonathanisms provide a way to test the limits of everyday categories, especially the categorization of the body" (Stewart 101).

On the other hand, a number of serious characters in Camino Real do not perform nonsense but brace themselves against it. In
Block Five, Kilroy's verbal repartee with Jacques Casanova, one of the more serious characters, seems like a dialogue of Gogo and Didi:

Kilroy: Nobody thinks romance is more important than me!
Jacques: Except possibly me!
Kilroy: Maybe that's why fate has brung us together! We're buddies under the skin!
Jacques: Travelers born?
Kilroy: Always looking for something!
Jacques: Satisfied by nothing!
Kilroy: Hopeful?
Jacques: Always. (43-4)

The mirroring is more obvious in Block Eleven, when Jacques, as King of Cuckholds, meets Kilroy, as Patsy: "Kilroy crosses to Jacques and beckons him out behind the crowd. There he snatches off his antlers and returns him his fedora. Jacques reciprocates by removing Kilroy's fright wig and electric nose" (101). Kilroy is more comic, more flexible, keeping with a fool's response to the events of the play, whereas Jacques is more dignified, serious, and unbending. When silenced with the Patsy outfit, Kilroy's bravura persona is marginalized; he moves to the sidelines so that the serious, romantic core of the play may proceed, his presence indicated only when he tries blinking a Morse Code message to Jacques with his nose (56) and when he tries "to make a fast buck or two as a Redcap" (85) when the airplane Fugitivo lands and rescues passengers from the Camino Real.

In Blocks Three through Six, we acquire a sense of how Kilroy, an American comic hero capable of playing the clown or fool but also resistant to the complete playing of this role, reacts to his surroundings. In Blocks Seven through Ten, the attention moves
from Kilroy to Jacques. We experience a different texture of hero's response, one that is more serious, less comic, more in control yet likewise resistant to folly. When Jacques is made King of Cuckholds, he does not lead a comic chase through the aisles but resists with a verbal challenge (100-1). An American comic response is juxtaposed with a European chivalric response.

Corrigan develops a negative assessment of Kilroy as clown: "It is a brilliant stroke to make Kilroy wear the uniform of a patsy, but again Williams fails to realize the potential of this device" (400). Kilroy, she complains, "never acts in his capacity as clown" (401). It is easy to agree with Corrigan, since Kilroy is relegated to the sidelines to allow room for the expanded Jacques and Marguerite exchange; however, one could accept Kilroy's inability to play along with the clown's role as the point of the action, not a fault of Williams's dramaturgy. Kilroy is comic mainly in his naive, bravado capacity as folkloric pupil of the backwoods boaster school, a good-humored innocent in a strange world. He resists the Patsy outfit because he is not a clown—at least not in Gutman's sense of 'patsy,' the opposite of a "free agent" (49).

Instead of Kilroy, as individual, it is the Camino community as a collective which is foolish, weird, clownish. The community itself is

22Williams says he quieted Kilroy in order to highlight the Casanova-Gautier relationship, and to not overdo Kilroy's central part: "Kilroy, an ex-boxer, is the play's most important character, but in the expansion from the shorter original ["Ten Blocks on the Camino Real"], Mr. Williams has had to stop Kilroy's story and make him a minor character for almost the entire second act" (Devlin 32).
"in-process," incomplete, non-linear, marginal, taboo-breaking—all characteristics of the ritual-clown. If we think of Kilroy as a "ritual-clown," however, we see that he is similar in some respects to Blanche and Alvaro. Like them, he is an outsider, an alien, who contributes elements of comedy to the ritual events of the play. Unlike Blanche and Alvaro, however, Kilroy does not have associations with what is considered taboo by the majority of characters in the play. Instead, Kilroy seems the quintessential clean-cut American youth who is down on his luck, but who, as he tells the audience (as he turns down a prostitute's offer), has "ideals" (28).

Unlike Blanche, he is not a persona "in-process," alternating between various constructed identities, and unlike Alvaro, he does not play the *commedia dell'arte* buffoon, but brings to the play a degree of self-confidence and plays a stable self which can take part in the comedy but also maintain a critical distance. As Kilroy is asked by Esmeralda (the Gypsy's daughter) to be the Chosen Hero, he brings into the picture a spirited American native humor which tries to resist involvement but which comically gives in: "My resistance is crumbling!"; "It's crumbled!" (106). In the play's ritual, Kilroy again plays the commonsensical straight man but can, as usual, function as a nonsensical wit. Once chosen as the hero, "Kilroy surrounded by cheering Street People goes into a triumphant eccentric dance which reviews his history as fighter, traveler and lover" (106). When the Gypsy, during her interview with Kilroy, asks "Who brought you up?" Kilroy answers, "I was brought up and down by an eccentric old aunt
in Dallas" (112). Alongside the comic, he acts as serious respondent in a conversational exchange with Esmeralda. Esmeralda discusses the “class struggle,” in which she doesn’t take sides “because of the dialectics.” Kilroy asks, “Who! Which?” Esmeralda responds, “Languages with accents, I suppose” (123). Kilroy both plays with the ritual-clown’s role and resists it. At one point with the Gypsy’s daughter, he claims, “You’re making a fool out of me” (126). He helps facilitate the nonsense of the ritual but also opposes it, bringing into play a certain tragic element.

The ritual in _Camino Real_ is overt, an explicit event for the characters and theater audience. "Rites cannot exist in an aesthetic or formalist vacuum; they require the context of community" (Hardin 847). The community of the _Camino Real_ invests itself as an entirety in this ritual. There is a crowd of "weird-looking celebrants or carnival mummers" (99) which cheers as Jacques is crowned King of Cuckholds: "Cornudo! Cornudo! Cornudo! Cornudo! Cornudo!" (100); it sighs the refrain "Ahh!" (three times) as the Gypsy recites how the moon has restored her daughter's virginity (102); finally, the crowd celebrates a "Fiesta," "a sort of serio-comic, grotesque-lyric 'Rites of Fertility' with roots in various pagan cultures" (103). Ritual and carnival bring the stage together, unify through choral responses a verbal course customarily split and fragmented through nonsense and word play. Although a mock-ritual, it is underlaid with a seriousness; there is not simply a carnival release, but a coming together, a devotional aspect to the event.
In these rituals, Corrigan appreciates Williams's satirical aim: "Williams also satirizes some less institutionalized rituals. Kilroy and Esmeralda engage in a ridiculous parody of lovemaking in which climax is reached by raising Esmeralda's spangled veil" (406). But the play's ritual also seems an oblique way of preparing Kilroy as the next victim of the Streetcleaners, who remove the bodies of non-survivors of the Camino. In Blocks Eleven and Twelve, nonsense is in the context of ritual; it is directed or contained nonsense, bounded by a function. The reader or audience may experience less randomness and more direction; ritual, however nonsensical, carries with it a ritual expectation. "Rituals are believed to be efficacious; they never exist for their own sake" (Hardin 848). The reader or audience has a feeling that the play is now heading toward a conclusion. It's main function is to prepare Kilroy as sacrificial victim. At the end of Block Twelve, as Kilroy departs the Gypsy's establishment, "The piping of the Streetcleaners is heard outside" (136).

Williams takes a comic backwoods-antecedent character who has affinities with Stanley and places him in a nonsensical world as a way of catalyzing a new experience. In Streetcar, the idea of being or identifying oneself as American, the way Stanley declares himself to be one-hundred percent American, has a certain negative component. It is not a positive declaration, because it tends to excuse or justify his brutality. Alvaro also wishes to be assimilated into American culture, but his humor has ties with the Old World; the American clowns instead come off looking harsh or unkind. Traditions of American humor do not have a good reputation in these
two plays; in *Camino Real*, however, American humor is redeemed. The American folk hero is tempered with human sympathy. By functioning in the ritual as a negative version of the ritual-clown, Kilroy prods the play toward a comic, absurd closure. "As Kilroy departs, the fountain in the square bursts forth and the flowers crack the rocks in the mountains. Hope returns to the Camino Real. . . . Now, through his sacrifice, new values come to the Way of Life, impossible to have been gained otherwise" (Miller, "Myth" 198). Gutman, too, as authoritarian stage manager, softens his demeanor and takes a benevolent part in the play’s finale: “It would be in bad form if I didn’t take some final part in the pageant” (160). Gutman introduces Kilroy as “The Eternal Punchinella” (24), a term, when matched against Kilroy’s American nativist origins, seems a false clue. However, Kilroy’s ultimate function may be to bring about comic transformations peculiar to Old World sensibilities.23

The conclusion of *Camino Real* again privileges the improvisational over the iconic. Kilroy, as iconic American mythic hero, possesses the resilience needed to survive the regimentation of the Camino’s authoritarian figures, namely Gutman, but also to work with the grain of nonsense that the loose, dreamlike narrative path of the play engenders. Kilroy becomes a victim of the rigid, iconic elements of the play; in Block Thirteen, Gutman ignores Kilroy’s plea

23Jackson suggests that *Camino Real*’s predecessor, *Ten Blocks* [instead of Sixteen] on the *Camino Real*, has ties with Old World theater, "that popular form, the commedia dell’arte--itself a kind of symbolic theatre" (114-15).
to reinstate him in his Patsy role as a way of evading the Streetcleaners (137), and in Block Fourteen the Streetcleaners "circle about him out of reach, turning him by each of their movements" (147). In Block Fifteen, however, Kilroy's corpse responds to La Madrecita's eulogistic prompting: "Rise, ghost! Go! Go bird!" (150). From this point on, Kilroy, formerly folkloric hero, becomes "an image of the absurd" (Jackson 124), a participant within the dream world of the play as a dream image himself, leading another comic chase through the aisles as he steals his golden heart from the dissecting table of medical examiners (152). Subsequently, he is "Mistook for a cat" by the Gypsy's daughter (157), and finally departs the Camino with the absurdist hero whose dream, as he falls asleep in the Prologue, both frames and produces the play: Don Quixote.

In Streetcar, the end of the play brings about a violent separation of two performance styles: the improvisational, illusionistic of Blanche's, and the realistic, authoritarian of Stanley's. In the Rose Tattoo, Serafina blends the improvisationally comic style of Alvaro with a return to her iconic role as teller of memorates. Kilroy, likewise, mixes and matches the best elements of two performance modes: folkloric and absurdist, American nativist and Italian comedic, the commonsensical, which braces itself against nonsense, and the improvisational, which possesses the flexibility to spring back into comic action and evade authoritarian strictures. La Madrecita's lament eulogizes both sides of the dramatic equation: Kilroy as central icon: "He stood as a planet among the moons of their longing, haughty with youth, a champion of the prize-ring!"
(149); and Kilroy as marginal outcast: "Keen for him, all maimed creatures, deformed and mutilated--his homeless ghost is your own!"
(150). The Camino Real is a "spectacle," an experiment of Williams's "plastic" theater: "Williams makes a definite break with the realist tradition" (Jackson 110). Yet Kilroy is a realist performer, an anchor weight in the stream of nonsense, who proves adaptable to the demands of this new experimental form, able to resist any threat to self through his role as American boaster, and able to negotiate nonsensical events with the flexibility of the improvisational clown.

Richard Schechner discusses the difference between the transformational and transportational aspects of theater and ritual. Performers who are transformed by performance acquire new selves or statuses; they change in some psychological or social way (91). Performers who are merely transported arrive at their point of origin unchanged, perhaps only "cooled down" (91). The same goes for spectators. Performance in Western theater may transport spectators as individuals, taking each briefly through the imagination out of his or her theater seat; however, in more experimental theaters, individual spectators may be transformed into a community, experiencing a communal involvement, a communitas (109-12). Transportation without transformation is the norm in Western theater (95), whereas transformation of the initiate is the goal of ritual (92).

In O'Neill's theater, the danger of the transformative power of the fool-performer is dramatized. However, the outcomes of The
Emperor Jones, Marco Millions, and The Iceman Cometh leave mainly evidence of transportation. Both performer and on-stage audience resist transformation. In The Iceman Cometh, for instance, Harry Hope's company returns to its communitas of the pipe dream, while Hickey, transformed as a performer (i.e., he is no longer practicing his salvationist rhetoric), maintains his pipe dream that he loved his wife. Only Larry displays a character shift, embracing death genuinely instead of as a role.

In Williams's dramas, rituals bring together characters and theater audience. Dramatized rituals seem designed to transform the stage and house into a single unit. In Camino Real, the theater audience as a whole is involved in the drama, is meant to participate. In Streetcar, Stanley's ritual celebration of Stella's giving birth is a transportative affair for him; he will act crazily, waving his pajama coat (155), then return to his former self. As in the ritual process in The Emperor Jones, the former audience of the star performer becomes a ritual leader who enacts a transformation in the status of the performer, reducing her to a marginal position, transforming her relationship to her sister. Williams uses ritual to bind performer, on-stage participants, and house audience in an intense moment of theater where transformation is anticipated.

In Williams, transformation is a typical result of performance situations between characters on stage. Unsurprisingly, these transformations take place during dramatized rituals. Serafina is led out of her mourning ritual by Alvaro's counter-strategic wooing ritual, transformed from an iconic devotee into an improvisational
"clown" partner. Although he effects Blanche's transformation, Stanley himself seems slightly transformed by his experience as ritual leader, regaining his old boaster self but breaking down and crying with Stella as Blanche departs. In 

Camino Real, the Fiesta and its aftermath prepare Kilroy for transformation from a real-life folk hero into an absurdist hero, a character who exists outside of real time.

These tendencies toward transportation in O'Neill's and transformation in Williams's on-stage interactions reflect each playwright's use of the fool, a use which in turn parallels the type of theater each playwright has created. In O'Neill, the fool-performer threatens the transformation of his audience because he no longer is playing a licensed fool's part. He ultimately resists transformation himself because he is incapable of removing his verbal mask. Whatever "genuine" self lurks beneath the mask is irrecoverable by his audiences. As in realist theater, there is less give and take between performer and audience. The performer plays his part without revealing the dimension of the actor beneath the character; the audience watches the performer from a safe distance. The fool in the popular theater of O'Neill's day was meant to entertain, to transport. When he becomes a serious character in O'Neill's plays and threatens to transform, his audiences relegate him to the margins.

In Williams, the fool-performer either threatens to transform his or her audience or is threatened with transformation in turn (e.g., Kilroy being forced into the Patsy outfit). There is more of a give and
take between fool-performer and audience (or co-performers). Williams brings "fools" into play from traditions more flexible than the rigid American nativist tradition of humor; he uses their improvisational abilities, at least in the cases of Blanche and Alvaro, to create break-up, havoc, unrest. There is more fluidity between audience and performer, the passing back and forth as though along electric coils of a performative energy. The potential for transformation is high. Again, this parallels the nature of Williams's theater, exemplified by the audience involvement in the spectacle of Camino Real. With Camino, we move into a theater where distinctions between audience and performer are blurred. Williams's "fools," existing in a world of private illusion and the world of social reality, facilitate this blurring.
CHAPTER III

SHEPARD'S FOOLS CONTRA FOOLS

In *The Audience*, Blau asks, "And if it [a text] does make sense in these years of the postmodern, do we not continue to wonder . . . with loss of faith in cement, whether it's really worth saying at all?" (123-4). Shepard's dramas make sense, but, like *Camino Real*, a sort of dream sense. Shepard seems to play the fool with his own drama by violating realistic conventions and introducing absurd elements which torpedo his own seriousness. Play of the imagination wins out over the work of a coherent script: "The reason I began writing plays was the hope of extending the sensation of play (as in 'kid') on into adult life. If 'play' becomes 'labor,' why play?" (Shepard, "Language" 214). If Shepard plays the fool, it is in the sense that his mind remains open to possibilities which seem to resist a finished thesis: "If I find myself pushing the character in a certain direction, it's almost always a sure sign that I've fallen back on technique and lost the real thread of the thing" ("Language" 215). Shepard also

1Compare Shepard's ideas about playwriting with Pinter's: "Where a writer sets out a blueprint for his characters, and keeps them rigidly to it, where they do not at any time upset his applecart,
plays the fool with his dramas by always looking for situations which are comedic; no matter how serious a situation, how violent or life-threatening, Shepard's eye and ear are ready to allow for the jarring sensation of laughter.

Critical discussion of Shepard's work centers on issues of performance: the problem of the performing self, characters who are self-reflexively actors or performers, the issue of power and domination through performance. On the other hand, Spalding Gray, where he has mastered them, he has also killed them, or rather terminated their birth, and he has a dead play on his hands" (Pinter xii). In contrast to Pinter, however, Shepard seems to allow more dream elements to infringe on the organic growth of his plays. One has a sense of Shepard undermining logical development with nonsensical intrusions from "outside."

2 Frutkin formulates this concern with performance early in Shepard's career, in 1969: "Among the writers involved in the modes and values of performance, Sam Shepard is the most successful at using performance value not as a style, but as a subject" (23). Later critics, Coe and Rabillard, among others, suggest two possibilities of performance in Shepard's drama, one anchored on an authentic self and the other a dramatized surface without interiority. Coe says that "the need in Shepard's theatre for what might be called an 'authentic mask' is overwhelming. When the risks are avoided . . . then the problem of identity . . . is reduced to a matter of pretense and fantasy" (59). Rabillard calls further attention to this other face of the coin, performance unfounded on a stable identity: "The flesh-and-blood actor on stage assumes the role of a Shepard character, but the character performs like an actor before an audience, speaking lines not so much because he intends what they mean, as in order to have his performance regarded, his presence and power felt" (69). Finally, Ann Wilson takes us one step further than problems of characterization, to the interaction between stage and theater audience; the preoccupation with the character-performer, she says, "overlooks the complexity of performance which is not simply the performer but the performer before an audience" (46).
who played Hoss in Richard Schechner's production of *The Tooth of Crime*, a play which seems very much about the problem of the performing self, was unable to see how Shepard's characters differed from those of other playwrights. The interviewer asks: "It does seem, however, that Shepard writes roles that demand they be enacted by performers. Characters in his plays become virtually synonymous with performers." Gray answers: "I'm not sure about that and I'm not even sure Sam is aware of that, if that is what he is doing. But also, what would you say about a character from a Tennessee Williams play or a Lanford Wilson play--are you saying Sam Shepard's characters seem more developed?" (Dasgupta 179).

The following discussion of three plays--*The Tooth of Crime, True West*, and *Fool for Love*--is informed by and parallels the critical focus on the problem of the performing self, but keeps in mind Gray's hesitation to see Shepard's characters as drastically different from Williams's or O'Neill's. We can connect Shepard's characters in these three plays with an American context of performance by identifying Shepard's use of a particular type of fool: the trickster.

The trickster may be the primitive being of myth, a being with "no inner dimension," one who "operates outside the fixed bounds of custom and law" (Kérenyi 184-5). Often represented as an animal, a coyote or spider, the "decisive factor" is the trickster's "trickery" (Kérenyi 187). However, one does not have to be an animal to be a trickster. Bauman analyzes narratives told by Texas practitioners or

This chapter attempts to address the problem of audience response to trickster activity on stage, as well.
victims of practical jokes; important to Bauman is the way the storyteller manages point of view when he is "trickster" and when he is "dupe" (Story 35-7). In Shepard's case, a consideration of characters as tricksters in a specific, cultural sense, enables us to pin Shepard's drama to traditions of American humor and to see the ways his theater has deviated from the uses previous playwrights, O'Neill and Williams, have made of this figure. Additionally, Shepard's tricksters use narrative to accomplish their tricks, forcing us to consider the trickster as a verbal performer, as con-artist.

By introducing the figure of the trickster into the critical dialogue, we accomplish two things: we root Shepard's drama in an American literary tradition that includes Melville's "The Confidence Man," the Duke and the King in Huckleberry Finn, and Heller's Yossarian of Catch-22. This tradition provides a model of typical reader response to trickster activity, a model from which Shepard's theater deviates in several ways. Secondly, the trickster may sharpen our critical focus, as we look at the problems of performance and the self in terms of a specialized type of discourse. With ordinary trickster interaction, we, as an audience, are highly interested in the trickster, or con-artist. We can understand the victim, the dupe, as a given, a representative of ordinary humanity. It is the trickster who conceals his "true" self from view that becomes the object of fascination.

In Shepard's work, we are also interested in this duplicity of the trickster, this performance aspect of the hidden "self," in the characters of Crow (The Tooth of Crime), Lee (True West), and Eddie
(Fool for Love). However, the more ordinary or knowable characters—the dupes, the victims—become equally fascinating, as they undergo certain transformations of self as a result of their interaction with the trickster. There is a double fascination at work. The audience may identify with the more ordinary character, the victim or dupe, as in other trickster narratives, but at the same time distance itself from this character because of the transformations he or she undergoes. On the other hand, we will continue to be attracted by the machinations of the con-artist, but we will assess the effects that the victim, as counter-trickster, produces in his or her "show."

Thus develops an interplay between two trickster types. Lindberg suggests a difference between the trickster of myth and the con-artist of the everyday world: "The essential analogue of the confidence man is the primitive and universal trickster of folklore and mythology" (8). The confidence man, Lindberg continues, "is a culturally representative figure, not a marginal one"; because he "inhabits a modern, highly differentiated society," he "is a much more particularized being than the trickster. He tells us less about the universal human condition than he does about the peculiar qualities of American society that gave rise to him" (8). Shepard's tricksters inform us about role-playing in popular American contexts of rock-and-roll and Hollywood. But the difference between trickster and counter-trickster is clear. In each play, the genuine trickster wears his mask to perfection. It is difficult to scrutinize his motives, to see a self behind the mask. On the other hand, the victim who adopts
trickster strategies is just that, a victim who adopts trickster strategies. We have a sense of the character as a real human, a person like us, who has adopted a pose, but whose inner dimension seems more accessible. A contest ensues between a trickster who gravitates toward the mythical and a trickster who resembles the human, a person like ourselves. The distinction is not always clear-cut.

In O'Neill, the audience of the play is kept at a distance from the fool-performer; in Williams, the reader or audience becomes attached to the fool-performer. In Shepard, the reader becomes implicated in the fools' performances as negotiator, trying to separate truth from illusion, game from seriousness. But the audience on stage, the characters who function as spectators themselves, turn out to be natural fools, suggesting a contrast of audience response. The impact that trickster performance has on the audience in the theater will not match the impact it produces in the audience on stage. If the natural fool on stage seems uncomprehending, the audience in the theater will be too comprehending. If we "see through" Shepard's choice of the natural fool as spectator, we also scrutinize our traditional support of the underdog or victim. If the victim is our representative on stage, we may become self-reflective about our own potential for character transformation induced by the performances of our adversaries.
In The Tooth of Crime, Hoss, the protagonist, is close to the top of a futuristic pyramid of power, near the apex of a "game," of which the primary pieces are cold-blooded murder, fast cars, rock and roll, and drugs. Hoss, however, is "havin' a doubt dose" (210), a crisis in the confidence he needs to maintain his hold on conquered territory. Although sustained by a quartet of helpmates, Hoss slides in the first act from a feeling of absolute power—"I got the fastest action in East L.A./I got the fastest action in San Berdoo/And if you don't believe it lemme shoot it to you" (211)—to a feeling of being "Just a man" (227), his impotence presaging his downfall in the anticipated duel (reserved for Act Two) with an intruding Gypsy, Crow, who "works outside the code" (219).

In his notes about the playwriting process, Shepard says that Crow "came from a yearning toward violence. A totally lethal human with no way or reason for tracing how he got that way. . . . He's simply following his most savage instincts. He speaks in an unheard-of tongue. He needed a victim, so I gave him one. He devoured him just like he was supposed to" ("Language" 217). But if Hoss is Crow's victim in Act Two, he is his own victim in Act One; he devours himself.

At the beginning of Act One, the stage seems set for Hoss to propel himself to a number one status in the "game"; he is shooting for a "gold record" (221). In this act, Hoss, not Crow, matches Shepard's description of a human "totally lethal," "savage," speaking in "an unheard-of tongue": "I'm winning in three fucking States! I'm
controlling more borders than any a’ them punk Markers” (207). He is ready, primed, for a “kill” which will put him over the top, mark him as a clear winner as a solo artist operating by the “code” of the “game.”

Hoss is a successor to the "roarer" native to American experience. We have traced this tall-tale, rhetorical figure from O'Neill's Yank through Stanley of Streetcar, and we may ask, What is the fate of this figure in Shepard's drama?

With Yank, a threshold moment is breached, where the roarer figure begins to break down, is not able to sustain his role when outside the male arena of the stokehole. Williams further toys with this figure, suggesting a degree of effeminacy; Stanley's macho role breaks down into a dependency on Stella when Blanche is removed from the household and the macho role is no longer called for as a defense. Yank and Stanley exhibit an initial lack of self-consciousness, which is disturbed by the intruder; they do not recognize their parts as parts, their roles as roles, until the outsider shows up and threatens their security within the male arena. Yank suffers a complete self-recognition of the limitations of his role, whereas Stanley never proceeds this far with an examination of his own mask.

Shepard's Hoss is linked more definitively with Yank than Stanley, picking up where Yank leaves off. Both Yank and Hoss end their stage careers with a form of suicide, Yank crushed and left for dead by his mirror image, the ape in the zoo, and Hoss shooting himself with a revolver after losing a verbal contest with the Gypsy
intruder, Crow, a challenger to Hoss's position. The suggestion again is that the self-confident, roaring boaster is out of place on a modernist stage or in a serious theater, that his place is reserved for the actual waterfront of O'Neill's day or the rock-and-roll circuit or the studio wrestling mat of Shepard's. In both O'Neill and Shepard, the image cannot hold, the roarer personality, sustained by rhetoric, suffers an existential breakdown.

In *The Hairy Ape*, Yank's breakdown has a primary cause in Mildred's insult. In *The Tooth of Crime*, Hoss suffers an angst without an objective correlative. Unlike Yank, Hoss possesses a high degree of intelligence; he is self-aware of his limitations and senses that his power to sustain his image is in jeopardy. He is able to separate a sense of self from mask, his outward role from an interior state of being. Because the audience remains slightly puzzled about the source of Hoss's crisis, he is a somewhat more complex figure than Yank, who slowly and painstakingly separates a "real" from a "performed" self.

Hoss's helpmates, like an Indy 500 pit-stop team, attempt to diagnose the mechanism of Hoss's crisis. His girlfriend, Becky, asks, "Whassa matter, you can't take fame no more? You can't hold down the pressure circuits?" (210). The DJ Galactic Jack claims, "You just got the buggered blues, man. You been talkin' to the wrong visions"

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3 This is not to say that Hoss kills himself because of his defeat; he claims a victory with his suicide, a form of originality: "A true gesture that won't never cheat on itself 'cause it's the last of its kind" (251).
Hoss, he suggests, has "the pre-victory shakes" (214). The second-guessing of the on-stage "audience" keeps the theater audience in a state of suspended critical examination of Hoss's breakdown. External contributions to Hoss's lapse in confidence include Hoss's advisor, Star Man, advising against any sudden move because "You'll blow it" (207); a rival Marker, Mojo Root Force, "taking" Las Vegas, territory which was promised to Hoss (208); and advance notice of "Gypsy Killers comin' into the picture" (213). In short, Hoss is aware of the "game" breaking down.

What becomes clear is that Hoss is threatened by the idea of a Gypsy operating outside the rules of the "game," recalling to Hoss his previous outsider's status before Becky and her crew rescued Hoss from an identity as a "complete beast of nature": "we molded and shaped you and sharpened you down to perfection" (209). Hoss's identity crisis is catalyzed by his recognition that he is a product of the "game," an image existing in a safe environment: "We ain't Markers no more. We ain't even Rockers. We're punk chumps cowering under the Keepers and the Refs and the critics and the public eye" (217).

In Act One, Hoss's verbal performances alternate between confidence-building and reality-sounding. He works himself into a boaster's hyperbolic confidence in a number of instances (210-11, 214, 215, 223-4), but these roarer performances do not hold, do not effect a reestablishment of the Marker image, which fades like a sun-bleached photograph. In the course of this breakdown, the reader becomes bonded with Hoss; we sympathize with his vulnerability, his
probing for a self behind the mask, his descent into ordinariness. Like Hamlet, Hoss records as though for a court stenographer the stages of his tragic fall as they occur.

The tension in Act One is within Hoss himself; this is where the dramatic conflict, the soul of the action resides. Hoss has created a self through language, the boasting persona which expresses extreme self-confidence, a "hip version of hubris before the fall" (Bachman 410). On the other hand, a self resides beneath Hoss's image, an inner dimension begins to emerge as Act One progresses and Hoss experiences a crisis in confidence.

Act One inexplicably propels Hoss from a safe and secure nesting in his own image to a concrete landing on a conception of self more tangible than a display of words. Instead of the old-fashioned boast, Hoss indulges in an anti-boast. Hoss's predilection for a reality-based self follows Becky's boast about Hoss: "Aw fuck off. I don't believe that shit no more. That stuff is for schoolies. Sure I'm good. I might even be great but I ain't no genius. Genius is something outside the game. The game can't contain a true genius" (209). While disclaiming his own powers with an anti-boast, Hoss reserves the backwoods roarer's boast for his anticipated rival: "He's got a presence. Maybe even star quality. His movements have an aura. Even his short. I mean nobody rides a '58 Impala to do battle with a star maker" (224-5). Late in Act One, before Hoss's final bout of self doubt, Hoss says to Becky: "Ya' know, you'd be O.K., Becky, if you had a self. So would I. Something to fall back on in a moment of doubt or terror or even surprise" (227). As Hoss is left alone on
stage, he becomes two voices, "himself" and an "old" voice of his father, who finally instructs him mentor-like that "You're just a man, Hoss. Just a man," a piece of advice to which Hoss as "himself" responds by saying, "Yeah, maybe you're right. I'm just a man" (227). Act One gives Hoss this interior self to "fall back on."

Why take Hoss from intimations of immortality to a more mortal and ordinary condition? What does Hoss's removal of his mask provide? Hoss comes to a recognition that Yank does in O'Neill's play that "confidence is just a hype to keep away the open-ended shakes" (227). This is the point of arrival for Yank, but it provides Hoss only with an intermission. His self-recognition is prologue to his verbal duel with the Gypsy Crow, a character who is all style and who resides like the old-style boaster in his image: "But I believe in my mask--The man I made up is me" (234). In part, this "prologue" effects an audience understanding that the battle is unequally weighted. We understand Hoss as a different type of role-player in Act Two, because we know he is able to see through his own image in Act One. Also, we become more sympathetically engaged with Hoss as potential victim of Crow's trickster strategies, at the same time that we take an avid interest in tracing the steps Crow takes to defeat Hoss. We become alarmed for Hoss as a performer who is drawn into Crow's sphere, playing the part of a trickster after he exposes his real self to Crow's scrutiny.

Hoss and Crow are unequal contenders or combatants; Hoss we understand as an ordinary self which is still capable, out of necessity for survival, of putting on an image, playing a part, being an actor.
But he is now an actor in a more traditional sense, who begins with a sense of self that steps into various parts, putting on a "Cowboy-Western image" and employing "1920s gangster style" in order to unnerve and unsettle the arrogant Crow (232-3), but capable of returning to "his own style" once this show is over (233). The mask and actor are separable in Hoss's case, whereas in Crow's case, mask and self are inseparable: "The image is my survival kit," Crow says (250). In contrast to Hoss, when Crow imitates Hoss's walk or adopts the role of Muhammad Ali, he returns to his mask, the "unheard-of tongue" he brings into the play.

At the beginning of Act Two, Hoss is still in his mode as ordinary human, a self which is not performing, which settles for itself as it is. He asks Crow, "Can't you back the language up, man. I'm too old to follow the flash" (231). Where Crow sees subterfuge in Hoss's delay of the duel, Hoss admits reality: "It wasn't strategy man. I was really tired" (229). One thing that may explain Hoss's straightforwardness, his reality mode, is his expectation that a Gypsy would be "raw, unschooled" (231); instead, he finds his opponent to be a postmodern student of the backwoods roarer school of verbal dueling.5

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4 Wilcox calls Crow a "postmodern performer of sheer surfaces" (569).

5 In Wilcox's view, "the battle of selves is co-extensive with the battle of language" (569); the play "suggests that self and language are integrally connected"; it "expresses the postmodern sense that the subject is constituted in language and discourse, and as signifiers
Like the old-style boaster, Hoss plans a duel using "skivs," or physical violence to defeat the intruder; unlike the boaster, Hoss begins his confrontation with Crow with a non-performing self, an inquisitive self curious to know about the state of affairs outside the game. When Hoss finds out from Crow that he is not the center of attention he assumed himself to be, that "We're playing in a vacuum? All these years. All the kills and no one's watching?" (232), he initiates a "style match" (232), a warm-up exercise, as a means of testing his ability in this "mode" (232).

When Hoss begins to play-act, to adopt various voices and styles, in an effort to unbalance or unnerve Crow, the reader is likely to become alarmed that Hoss is putting the image through language back into practice, that this role-playing is not founded on confidence but more on a sense of outrage, of competition, of having to prove himself to the intruder: "Just to prove I ain't outside" (235). Hoss may thus be the modernist performer who is "committed to an ideology of essences, committed to the centrality and ultimate availability of truths and values that lie behind the image" (Wilcox 568), but he play-acts less out of a confidence of the presence of this self behind the image and more out of a fear of letting go of the 'float' the self becomes unanchored" (565). This becomes true for the verbal duel, but in a sense, this is true of the verbal duel in the Raftsmen's Passage of Huckleberry Finn, or Yank's boasts to the stokehole crew, or Stanley's claim that he is 100 percent American: selves which are built or constructed out of hyperbole, a collection of exaggerated metaphors and threats about the destructive or superhuman powers of the protagonist, a self anchored to its language.
image, the fantasy that he is at the top of the game. In other words, when Hoss begins to play-act, and put on various roles and voices, he may be doomed because he has already revealed a core self, a real self behind the image to Crow. Hoss is playing the part of a trickster, turning his "imitative talents into weapons of virtuosity" (Frutkin 23). Instead of playing the part he originally intended to play, the physical duelist without the necessity for language, he plays Crow's style game.

Examining the "emergent structure in trickster stories" told by the "Carib-speaking Kalapalo of central Brazil" (294), Basso asks the following questions about narrativized trickster consciousness, centering on "how a trickster's curiously decentered self can constitute a kind of personality": "What are the implications of a trickster's undertaking contradictory and incompatible courses of action, of shifting between radically different feelings and attitudes? Does a trickster in fact act in such ways without experiencing distress or a sense of dilemma or absurdity?" (293). In this play, Shepard engages two different personas in a verbal contest. Each is a trickster, out to deceive the other with image or style, but whereas Hoss displays trickster characteristics outwardly in terms of verbal performance, Crow is the unknowable, marginal entity with more ability to survive.

In Crow's case, his feelings are hidden from view; they lie behind a calm exterior, whose temporarily ruffled surfaces Crow easily dismisses. After the warm-up match initiated by Hoss, in which "Crow is getting nervous" (233), Crow deceives Hoss into
thinking he wasn't unnerved: "Sometimes the skin deceives. Shows a power ripple. Misconstrued Leathers" (233). Hoss demonstrates more explosive, frustrated feelings, but in each case it seems trickster performance comes naturally to the combatants, that there is no inner turmoil, no signs of acknowledged absurdity about the necessities of this performance mode. This may keep the theater audience at a distance, involved because of the seriousness of the stakes, but critically removed the way it would be at a studio-wrestling match, where it recognizes the combatants' roles as play-acting.

The mythical trickster is "the spirit of disorder, the enemy of boundaries" (Kérenyi 185). Although Crow comes in from the outside, he is more a law-abiding participant in the refereed "game." When Hoss shoots the referee who declares a technical knockout against him, he breaks the boundaries of the game as overseen by the Keepers. The "spirit of disorder" proves to be Hoss; Crow knows how to work within the established order to achieve his ends. Jung postulates that "The trickster is a primitive 'cosmic' being of divine-animal nature, on the one hand, superior to man because of his superhuman qualities, and on the other hand inferior to him because of his unreason and unconsciousness" (204). Hoss expects to confront a mirror image of his youthful self, which was more animal than human, mythically larger-than-life, but Crow is the opposite of this: schooled, trained, already a master performer of his cultivated image.
Hoss is more the sophisticated and repressed animal of the trickster myth Radin describes, the trickster as "Caliban protesting against the civilization which had been forced upon him" (145). Crow, then, is not quite the mythological-based trickster of Ted Hughes's poems, "Lineage," for instance, which describes the emergence of a primal figure: "In the beginning was Scream/Who begat Blood/Who begat Eye/Who begat Fear/Who begat Wing/Who begat Bone/Who begat Granite/Who begat Violet/Who begat Guitar/Who begat Sweat/Who begat Adam/Who begat Mary/Who begat God/Who begat Nothing/Who begat Never/Never Never Never/Who begat Crow/Screaming for Blood/Grubs, crusts,/Anything/Trembling featherless elbows in the nest's filth" (10). This is more the old Hoss, the pre-civilized persona.

Crow, in contrast, is a trickster along the lines of the Texas practical jokers described by Bauman, the practical joke involving "enactments of playful deceit in which one party or team (to be called trickster) intentionally manipulates features of a situation in such a way as to induce another person or persons (to be called victim or dupe) to have a false or misleading sense of what is going on and so to behave in a way that brings about discomfiture (confusion, embarrassment, etc.) in the victim" (36). Take out the word "playful," and we have the characteristic situation of Act Two, in which each contestant plays a trickster in an effort to confuse or embarrass the other. More like the neurotic modernist roarers that Pinsker describes, each contestant tries to unsettle the other by producing emotions; in Round One, Crow tries to make Hoss feel
"shame" about masturbational activities, and in Round Two, Hoss rebounds by trying to make Crow feel "guilt" about the soulessness of his music unconnected to the blues. In these rounds, then, as Hoss declares, are "Points scored and lost on deviation from the neutral field state" (235).

According to Wilcox, Shepard shows a degree of modernist conservatism in this play, an uneasiness with regard to the "terrible inevitability in the defeat of the modernist Hoss by the postmodern Crow" (571), the undermining of modernist authenticity by postmodern performance. However, there may be more ambiguity in the balancing act Shepard achieves between Hoss and Crow in terms of trickster performance. In a sense, Hoss has tried more tricks than Crow through use of voices; if Hoss has a self beneath the various masks he puts on, Crow has a consistency, a stable persona. If Hoss tries to hang onto his mythical status, his animal origins, and thus remain more a trickster of myth, Crow seems more human, accomplishing his defeat of Hoss through capacities as a more ordinary trickster.

The on-stage audience in Tooth of Crime, however, reinforces the theater audience's predisposition toward the underdog, the victim. Shepard brings into the play a type of clown, or natural fool--a Referee--who comically judges (and in Hoss's view, misjudges) the contest: "He's dressed just like an N.B.A. ref with black pants, striped shirt, sneakers, a whistle, baseball cap . . . Through all this the REF puts himself through several yoga positions and regulated breathing exercises, cracks his knuckles, shakes his
legs out like a track star and runs in place" (235). He is obviously not an authority figure to be taken seriously by the audience. However, his "calls" produce serious effects. He declares Crow winner of Round One, the second round he calls a draw, and in Round Three he pronounces Hoss down and out with a TKO. In all three instances, Hoss protests.

The reader detects discrepancies between Hoss's assessment of Crow's condition and Crow's play-acting; for instance, at the end of Round One, Crow "lies flat on his back and relaxes completely," which to Hoss means Crow is "Wasted on his back and I'm still smokin'" (239). Despite these errors in Hoss's judgment, the reader is likely to sympathize with the victim and question, along with Hoss, the Referee's decisions. Because the Referee is comically judgmental--"I can't make heads or tails out of this," he says about Round Two (242)--the theater audience is likely to distance itself humorously from his opinions. The placement of a natural fool on stage seems to foster an intellectual distance in the audience, a strengthening of its attachment to the victim.

However, the final fooling in The Tooth of Crime is Shepard's, and it is his fooling as playwright which undercuts Hoss's tragedy and steers the reader toward a sense of comedy and a tentative acceptance of Crow. Powe discusses the music in Tooth of Crime as a metacommentary, parallelling the themes of the play or the action. The metatheater in Act Two also involves the cast from Act One entering as absurd cheerleaders, mooing the audience during the first round of the duel; of Becky stripping and imitating with her
hands Hoss's approaching a point of date rape, a reenacted event of
the past; and of the Four Guys, again from Act One, singing in tuxedo
a capella a sentimental good-bye to the old Hoss. These
metatheatrical (metatheatrical in the sense that these are instances
of mini-theater which self-reflexively comment on the main action of
the drama as a whole) vaudevillian stunts or acts all contain varying
degrees of comedy (note: Becky escapes the stage before Hoss goes
too far). They constitute a break-up of the flow of text.  
Why does Shepard introduce these comic elements in an act which concentrates
on the life-or-death struggle between Crow and Hoss?

Sypher says that "in an artist like Dostoevsky the comic
experience can reach as deeply down [as the tragic], perhaps because
the comic artist begins by accepting the absurd, 'the improbable,' in
human existence. Therefore he has less resistance than the tragic
artist to representing what seems incoherent and inexplicable, and
thus lowers the threshold of artistic perception. After all, comedy,
not tragedy, admits the disorderly into the realm of art; the
grotesque depends upon an irrational focus. Ours is a century of
disorder and irrationalism" (201). Shepard, too, is afraid to be taken
too seriously in this play as a tragic artist; his vision admits the non-
linear, the carnivalesque, keeping the play in a postmodern,
unpredictable state of affairs. In the main, Shepard wants us to

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6Bachman calls these intrusions "Brechtian-style devices"
which "reduce somewhat the immediate physical menace" of the duel
(412).
understand *The Tooth of Crime* as a comedy. There is more celebration, although dark and fretful, at the end than despair.

In any case, the boasters of Act One who were assisting Hoss's image, or who were counterbalancing through confidence Hoss's crumbling self, now shift gears in this act and play postmodern clowns or buffoons, fools who comically juxtapose the contest between Crow and Hoss. In this way, Shepard keeps the ending more of a balance between Hoss and Crow: what Hoss achieves existentially through suicide is offset by the comedy of Crow's victory, celebrated by performers who are no longer boasters but who (although they lament the passing of Hoss) are now quite willing to take up with Crow if he will let them. Having been in Hoss's performance mode in Act One, they are in Crow's performance mode in Act Two. If the audience is invited to regard Hoss's dilemma of self-identity sympathetically, it is also asked not simply to shrug off Crow but see him for what he is: a trickster who, in his attempt to help Hoss relearn a Gypsy image, also has his sympathetic side. The violence of performance is tempered by outreach.

**Trickster Brothers in *True West***

In *True West*, Lee, the unregenerate, criminal brother of Austin, the clean-cut yuppie, is a trickster who ends up playing the role of the Hollywood script writer. He is a marginal figure with regard to Austin, who is the audience's representative, resembling the culturally literate person who would attend a Shepard production. Lee's ties are with the confidence men, who play a game
defined as "the practical making and manipulating of belief without substance for it. The confidence man is a manipulator or contriver who creates an inner effect, an impression, an experience of confidence, that surpasses the grounds for it" (Lindberg 7).

On the other hand, Lee possesses attributes of a more mythical beast; in a Jungian sense, "Lee is Austin's shadow self" (Orbison 514): "This confrontation between the conscious ego (Austin) and the hidden psychic forces (Lee) forms the initial action of the play" (Orbison 515). On a more human level, Lee is "a con man and a bully" (Orbison 509), a trickster who disrupts the Hollywood social fabric or discourse as represented in the relationship between Austin, who has been working on a project for several months, a synopsis of a romance, and Saul, the producer who has been negotiating with Austin in order to sell it to Hollywood. As in The Tooth of Crime, we see the mechanics of Shepard's theater at work, as a more ordinary self is threatened by the performance of an outsider. Austin, although playing an unconscious Hollywood role, is the equivalent of Hoss, a character who possesses a stable persona which is undermined, confounded, by trickster duplicity.

In a culture in which everyone is playing a variety of confidence game, Lee plays an old-fashioned, less modernist, form of confidence man whom sociologist Erving Goffman would distrust because he becomes a disrupter of the game:

In his [Goffman's] vision of collective social action, all those illusion-makers carry out their tasks with the utmost seriousness, always fearing gestures or words that might
spoil the show and thus watching each other with the same
nervous dread that they feel about their own pretended roles.

We might expect Goffman to use con men as explicit
models, given his premises about social relations, but he
overtly and firmly disapproves of them, and I suspect it is this
issue of moral seriousness that determines his judgment. He
sees the real crime of the confidence man as . . . [causing] a
metaphysical spoiling of the show. (Lindberg 235)

Lee is this old-fashioned confidence man who disrupts the show.

In Lee's view, Austin is a parasitical fool who is a leech of other
fools higher up in the social scale, like Saul, and the effect of Lee's
performance as trickster is to force Austin out of his dependent,
fool's role, and into an imitation of Lee's primary role as marginal,
criminal entity. In Scene Four, Lee accurately calls Austin a
"parasite": "I'm not like you. Hangin' around bein' a parasite offa'
other fools" (22). Austin still doesn't understand the way he is
playing a part that is a social construction, scripted and rehearsed
and engineered by the demands of a situation: "A parasite? Me?"
(22). When Austin retorts by calling Lee a parasite for making his
living by stealing people's televisions, Lee jokes virulently, "They
don't need their televisions! I'm doin' them a service" (22).

7 In his study of court fools, Zijderveld discusses a
contemporary version of fool-ruler relationship, with the "Hollywood
press agent" playing the part of the parasitical fool: "it is the press
agent's job constantly to flatter and entertain his client, the famous
star of the big screen--to cheer him up when he is depressed, to
shield him from prowling visitors, to absorb his irritations and
frustrations, even to function as the passive target of his aggression.
In many respects the Hollywood flack functions as a pet to be
fondled and kicked, and as a lightning rod to divert the surplus
energy and frustration of the star" (129). This suggests that the
Hollywood star system cultivates a pyramid of fools, each catering to
According to Lee, Austin, the screenwriter, the character playing the Hollywood game, is the one with the lines, who has scripted himself according to a fictionalized social performance. When Austin tells Lee, who wants to borrow his car, that "I don't want any trouble, all right?" (8), Lee responds with: "That's a dumb line. That is a dumb fuckin' line. You git paid for dreamin' up a line like that?" (8). In contrast with Austin, who speaks appropriate and cultivated sentences, Lee incorporates physical violence and so becomes a disrupter of conversational flow, antagonistic to conversational game-playing. When Austin says, "Look, I can give you some money if you need money," "Lee suddenly lunges at Austin, grabs him violently by the shirt and shakes him with tremendous power" (8).

Lee possesses a raw, uncultivated self, or breaks out of any conversational entrapment, any directional harnessing, with dexterous non-linear patterns of verbal or physical violence. His inner self remains somewhat speculative and secretive, so one is never sure who Lee really is. When he hints to Austin that he "did a little art myself once," he deflects any attempt of Austin's to pursue the matter: "Never mind what I did! Just never mind about that" (6). Lee keeps an inner self hidden from view, whereas Austin's self seems more located in his speech, or in the particular script of "upwardly mobile young adult Hollywood screenwriter."

the next one up the production ladder, until the ruler, the Hollywood star, is reached.
In Scene Three, we overhear Austin's conversation with Saul without his brother Lee present. The start of the scene presents a slice of life of the conversational game, the slick role-playing being observed and counter-observed, the performances of each character held in place by the simultaneous position of each as audience believing in the other's part and in the necessity for the game being played in this particular way: "Well, to tell you the truth Austin, I have never felt so confident about a project in quite a long time" (15). The adjective "confident" provides a clue as to the confidence game Saul is playing.

When Lee enters with a stolen television set, he begins a slow, wheedling assault on Saul's confidence, so that we see two different types of confidence men coming into contact. Lee is an outsider, but he expertly picks up the game where Austin trails off ineptly, creating a disturbance by playing it too well. What creates unease is the mismatch of Lee's costume as outcast bum and his language as country club golfer; the discrepancy produces an uncomfortable self-reflexivity in Saul. What we also see is that Saul is trapped by the rules of the game as he plays it, cannot let his guard down, and continues his performance as though Lee were an appropriately dressed interlocutor. To change his voice or style would admit that he is all surface and show in his business transactions, something the nature of the game forbids him to do.

That Saul is nervous and hesitant, disoriented by Lee's aggressive role playing, is evident at several points in the scene, especially as Lee suggests a game of golf and "a little orange juice
right afterwards" (17). There is a "pause," followed by Saul's question: "Orange juice?" (17). Orange juice, apparently, is not the appropriate beverage for a country club golf excursion. In order to recover his poise, Saul "smiles at Austin," upon whom he can depend to play the game properly, and says, back in his self-confident role, "Well, you make it sound very inviting, I must say" (17).

The overall effect of Lee's role-playing the Hollywood script writer is to force Austin out of his complicit part in his fool's role and into the more marginal role, Lee's primary role, of criminal. The effect of the movement is that Austin steps out of this contemporary role into a void where he is scriptless. On the other hand, Lee is role-playing, and lets his brother know he is role-playing. As Austin helps him write the outline of the Western he wishes to show Saul at golf the following morning, Lee says, "I think there's easier money. Lotsa' places I could pick up thousands. Maybe millions. I don't need this shit. I could go to Sacramento Valley and steal me a diesel" (24).

In a sense, Lee is educating his brother, informing Austin that his world is built on social lies and roles. After Lee's golf game with Saul, Lee informs his brother that he has sold Saul on his story about the West. Austin claims that "That's what he told me about my story! That's the same thing he said to me" about the project being one of the best things he's come across. Lee brings in the simple reality of the situation, revealing Saul as a confidence artist himself: "Well, he musta' been lyin'. He musta' been lyin' to one of us anyway" (31). Podol points out that "Shepard's utilization of violence
in this drama reflects his struggle to achieve a higher form of realism in which identity is not fixed, but in a constant state of flux. The aggressive nature of his theater in both form and content reflects his determination to shatter the demarcation between 'real life' and theater" (153). Lee is a trickster-con artist who creates this shattering by playing a theatrical role in order to disrupt the theater that is already being played by Austin.

Lee breaks down the pinions of the Austin-Saul confidence arrangement; in a sense, this could be viewed as a positive move on Lee's part because it forces Austin out of a habitual mold and into a void where he must relearn himself, discover a new territory of the self, establish a new identity not founded on the social script. At one point, Austin breaks out of his typical, quiet, mild-mannered part and initiates direct confrontation with Saul, a lion's roar emerging from his previous mouse's larynx: "(to Saul) I'm not doing this script! I'm not writing this crap for you or anybody else" (34). Later, betting Lee that he can go out and steal toasters from neighborhood dwellings, Austin is on the verge of switching trickster roles with Lee, by becoming more the mythical trickster, an entity more socially marginal and dark, the "shadow self" that Orbison recognizes. "I'm gonna' steal some other stuff too. I might even commit bigger crimes. Bigger than you ever dreamed of. Crimes beyond the imagination!" (39).

Like Hoss, Austin, as a more realistic, knowable character, duplicates the role of the trickster-intruder. Hoss's original intention simply to duel with "skivs" is redirected into a "style match" with
Crow, where he plays the part of verbal trickster or performer. When Austin's part is undermined by Lee's trickster performance, he adopts Lee's predilection for criminal activity. Shepard's drama seems to demonstrate how easily the realistic character can be pulled out of orbit—like Emerson's fear about the American scholar being pulled out of his own orbit by the books he reads—by a performance founded more on the "reality" of the mask, of the pretend self.

The difference between the two brothers is still that Lee can imitate Austin, playing Austin's role, but step out of it, which he does, undamaged and self-intact, retreating to his original being; whereas Austin, once dislodged from his studio identity, can play the part of the trickster, in a fairly innocent and foolish way, more as a type of jester, a comedian playing at stealing by going only for toasters on a dare, and not doing it because he has to in order to survive.

The entrance of the mother (Mom) in Scene Nine functions similarly to the intrusion of comedy elements in Act Two of Tooth of Crime. This may be another case of Shepard playing the fool with his audience, with his own text, but in this case, instead of undercutting the seriousness of the outcome, erasing the prefix of tragicomedy, Shepard uses the dialogue of a natural fool, a sort of simpleminded middle-aged woman, to produce a new direction in the action, to bring it to its violent, "unending" (Orbison 153) end, in which Austin and Lee face off in a deadly stalemate.

The mother has the comic potential of resolving the conflict between the brothers peacefully, by taking them to a museum to see
Picasso. However, Austin goes against the grain of this natural fool's dialogue by informing her, "Picasso's dead, Mom" (54). The mother, however, remains obtuse: "No, he's not dead. . . . This is the chance of a lifetime. Can you imagine? We could all go down and meet him. All three of us" (55). Lee plays the part of cultural illiterate, playing along obtusely with the mother: "Uh--I don't think I'm really up fer meetin' anybody right now. I'm uh--what's his name?" (55). The question again is: Why does Shepard bring in this sort of comedy into the last scene? In this case, the presence of the natural fool provides the trickster with his excuse to drop his disguise altogether and abandon the game he has been playing with Austin: "(to Mom) I don't really think Austin's cut out for the desert do you?" (55). The mother, as in the Picasso dialogue, coincides with Lee's point of view: "He's too thin" (55).

As In The Tooth of Crime, Shepard brings a natural fool on stage as an evaluator of trickster conflict. Like the Ref, Mom tends to favor the outsider, the marginal entity who assaults the identity of the more realistically oriented character. In contrast with the mother, the theater audience will probably sympathize with the underdog, with Austin as victim, but also be alarmed or fascinated by the changes transpiring in this character, just as it has probably been mesmerized by the trickster performances of Lee throughout the play. Both trickster and on-stage evaluator refuse to recognize the changes in Austin; both desire to return him to his original status as dependent fool.
Finale Fooling in *Fool For Love*

The previous two plays concerned male-male contests, verbal duels, one male pitted against another for dominance or control. Each play involved trickster activity to an extent as well. In *Fool for Love*, we are led to believe that the contest will again be between two males, for the possession of a woman, May. The battle lines are drawn between Eddie, whom we learn is May's half-brother and on-again off-again lover, and Martin, May's date. Martin, however, is not a contender in Marlon Brando's sense but a natural fool, a down-to-earth character who can barely follow the contours of the narratives Eddie and May tell: "Who is this guy?" (62), the Old Man asks.

The chief contest, bringing us back to the way Blanche pits herself against Stanley, is between female and male. Eddie is a trickster playing a fifteen-year on-going prank with May, but also using narrative as a trickster device. May is a reality oriented character, who adopts a trickster strategy in her own narrative as a counter-measure. The Old Man, as a character who inhabits a shared space of Eddie's and May's consciousness, is also a trickster, in a more mythological sense. He is the central subject of Eddie's and May's combative narratives wherein he is a trickster whose victimization of May's and Eddie's mothers has produced the incestuous relationship between Eddie and May.

Martin's presence parallels the presence of natural fools or unconscious fools in *True West* and *Fool for Love*. He functions as a
spectator. Wilson calls attention to the male gaze in *Fool for Love*, but concentrates on the gaze of the Old Man, ignoring Martin. But Martin again is the "natural" spectator, the on-stage audience who is caught up by the trickster performance of Eddie; supposedly in May's camp, he is pulled away from May's reality orientation, her realist self, and drawn to Eddie's fantasist self.

As Eddie discovers Martin's thick-headedness, he plays the jester, dominating Martin through force of wit and language. The contest is one-sided (since Martin does not compete), and Eddie seems to be attacking, like a dummy in football practice, an unresistant target or victim. Martin, as a spectator in the real present world of the stage, provides a contrast with the Old Man, an off-stage (or marginal) spectator in the minds of May and Eddie alone, a sort of face-off. The gaze is male but is split between two different men as auditors of the stories May and Eddie tell. Because Martin is a natural fool who allows Eddie a free verbal rein (and reign), Eddie overextends himself as a jester by telling an extended story which provides an eavesdropping May with the impetus to tell a different narrative about the Old Man. The presence of Martin as a natural fool facilitates this story-telling situation. If Martin had been a more aggressive verbal competitor, we would have a different focus and outcome, a male against male battle.

Eddie comes across in two ways: first as a Stanley Kowalski type, a version of the "roarer," the physical "stuntman" who uses tricks and images of potential and impending physical violence as a way of maintaining an intimidating identity, but who can also use
words to his advantage, not in the sense of the boaster, of building his image through words, but more as a trickster, a jokester, who can undermine the normal or ordinary reality (which Martin may represent in a dense way, or densely). For instance, in Eddie's jokes with Martin, as he feels or scouts his verbal territory, like a dog sniffing the capabilities of his mongrel opponent, Eddie tells Martin about the vodka he has been offered: "You should thank the entire Mexican nation in fact. We owe everything to Mexico down here. Do you realize that? You probably don't realize that do ya'. We're sittin' on Mexican ground right now. It's only by chance that you and me aren't Mexican ourselves" (54). This defies common sense, since it is more than by chance that Eddie and Martin are not Mexican. That Eddie involves Martin in some sort of fool show comes across when Eddie invites Martin to "get down on your hands and knees" after telling him how there is "less tension" nearer the ground: "Well, you could get down on your hands and knees right now if you want to. I don't mind." To which Martin "(grins, gets embarrassed, looks at bathroom door [where May is])" and says, "Naw, I'll stand. Thanks" (59).

Eddie defies common sense in a general, philosophical way, and outlines in a nutshell a point of view about realism which he has learned from the Old Man: "Lying's when you believe it's true. If you already know it's a lie, then it's not lying" (58). The Old Man previously instructs Eddie in "realism" when he begins with a fabrication or lie and claims it as the truth or reality; he asks Eddie whether Eddie would believe that he is married to Barbara Mandrell,
and when Eddie replies negatively, the Old Man counters by saying: "Well, see, now that's the difference right there. That's realism. I am actually married to Barbara Mandrell in my mind. Can you understand that?" (27). This produces an "understanding" between Eddie and The Old Man, in the Old Man's terminology (27), which will be important to the Old Man later when he demands Eddie represent his version of reality in confutation of May's version.

Eddie and the Old Man are the epitome of the "Like Father, like Son" cigarette commercial: each is a fantasist, a trickster. The Old Man is a mythical trickster, the subject of the legends told about him, who acted the part of trickster in the past by living two separate lives with two separate mothers, those of Eddie and May respectively. He coaches the son in present-day trickster activity which takes place on the verbal level, in terms of the story as a trick.

May presents herself as a counter-trickster early in the play; she is also a violent and physically dangerous woman, holding to the female version of the backwoods roarer, and providing a physical match-up against Eddie who adheres to this same sort of tradition. But the full extent of her trickster ability does not come through until the end of the play and is expressed in terms of her handling of narrative, her management of point of view, from the female perspective. As Wilson shows, "May's version speaks the experience of the women. . . . [H]er version, the final one, insists that the image of the Old Man as suffering romantic be subverted and the pain, and finally, death, which he brought to the women be acknowledged" (53).
Like Andy Griffith, who, in the Mayberry television series, understood his role as that of a normal human being surrounded by fools, May seems to fit this category: ordinary person, normal, grounded in a common sense reality, calling Eddie’s bluffs, as though at a poker game. May establishes herself early in the play as a nonfool who can see through Eddie’s trickster games: “How many times have you done this to me? ... Suckered me into some dumb little fantasy and then dropped me like a hot rock” (24). As a feminist adventurer or a screamer woman of frontier lineage, she does just that: she screams. She launches assaults on threatening figures through vocal power; when May thinks the Countess has arrived once more to challenge her relationship with Eddie, she screams the following: “(yelling at door) Come on in here! Come on in here and bring your dumb gun! You hear me? Bring all your weapons and your skinny silly self! I’ll eat you alive!” (51). If we were to add a “Whoo-oop” to this, we’d have true screamer or boaster dialogue.

May is not so much a trickster herself, operating out of this kind of duplicitous mindset, but a counter-trickster, and develops a counter-strategy to Eddie’s fantasist attempts at “buffaloing” her. The verbal plan she outlines for Eddie about how “I’m just gonna’ let you have it. Probably in the midst of a kiss. Right when you think everything’s been healed up. Right in the moment when you’re sure you’ve got me buffaloed” (20), she carries through in a milder form: “They embrace. Long, tender kiss. They are very soft with each other. She pulls away from him slightly. Smiles. She looks him
straight in the eyes, then suddenly knees him in the groin with tremendous force" (26), illustrating that in terms of trickster strategies revolving around love play or emotion she is as she claims earlier "smarter than you" (19).

There are only two extended narratives in Fool for Love, the first being the Old Man's, addressed to May, the second being Eddie's, addressed to Martin but which May continues and finishes. Bauman distinguishes between the "performance event" (the actual act of story-telling before an audience) and the "narrated event" (the event being advanced by the story itself) (Story 3-5). What creates interesting tensions between performer and on-stage audience is that the dramatic characters themselves, constituting the performance event, are also characters within the stories, elements of the narrated event.

The Old Man's story describes how the Old Man on a road trip with May and her mother stops the car and carries May into a field in order to let the "cold air" stifle her crying. The Old Man and child are surrounded by unidentifiable shapes which turn out to be cows, and their mooing quiets the baby. This narrative is a fairly straightforward personal experience, with a few hesitations built in: "I'll never forget this as long as I live--and I don't even know why I remember it exactly"; "So I stopped the Plymouth by the side of the road. Middle a' nowhere. I can't even remember where it was exactly" (36). May is the addressee; second-person "you" is employed throughout. However, she is in a state of "mourning" (36) for Eddie's temporary departure and is seemingly oblivious to the
story; as reader or audience, we are not sure if she is listening to the story or not, although “May stops rocking abruptly” as soon as the Old Man tells her “You never made a peep after that” mooing (37). May, as a curled-up "baby" on stage mirrors the baby of the story, her current mourning ceasing with the quieting of the child in the narrative.

As far as point of view goes, we are with the Old Man as a character in the narrated event, following his footsteps; he develops his story chronologically, cluing the reader into knowledge of events only as they become clear to him as a character. This strategy creates a sense of suspense, but also a sense of identification with the Old Man. In this story, the reader ends up identifying with the Old Man, standing in his shoes, performing the story along with him in a sense; the only comedy in the story that might make the reader step back with laughter is when the Old Man imitates the mooing of a cow. The reader and audience member may contrast their enjoyment of the story with May's obliviousness; they may form a bond via entertainment with the Old Man and keep a critical distance from May. At the same time, we understand the story as a means the Old Man is employing to form a direct and sympathetic bond with May via the route of sentiment and nostalgia.

This is taking place fairly early in the play, when we have already admired May for her self-confidence and counter-trickster abilities; and we have already witnessed the trickster bond formed between father and son. If we suspect that the Old Man's narrative is made-up, nothing indicates it as a fabrication. There are no tall-
tale elements. We are also confused by May's weakness as auditor; if the Old Man is a product of her consciousness alone, is the story the Old Man tells something May is telling herself--fabricating--by way of self-consolation? The Old Man as story-teller goes against the grain of his trickster nature we have already seen him display, as well. The reader and audience tend to pull closer to the male-trickster-liminal arena in this narrative. This may impinge on our understanding of the Old Man as spectator later in the play.

In contrast with the audience reaction to the Old Man's story is our response to the narrative Eddie tells to Martin. The reader and audience member are going to step back more critically from this story, mainly because we have experienced Eddie's jesting personality to a greater extent that we have the Old Man's. On the other hand, the reader and audience member may find themselves in Martin's position as auditor, curious about Eddie and May's relationship, wanting to hear more, so that we would probably ask the same kinds of questions Martin does if we were in his place: "Well, how come you didn't know each other until High School, then?"; "She must've suspected something was going on" (63).

Martin is eager for tabloid details of an incestuous affair, and mirrors the audience's own desire for knowledge of the event. Martin, however, is somewhat more gullible than the ordinary audience member; we are probably going to be more critical and scrutinizing, partly because we have access to the Old Man's reactions as a second auditor. The Old Man supports the audience's suspicions that Eddie's story will be slightly or in part a fabrication, susceptible
to revision: "Now don’t be too hard on me, boy. It can happen to the best of us" (63); "That was no Studebaker, that was a Plymouth," he corrects the narrative detail at one point when Eddie mentions a type of car (64). (Martin is also marched by Eddie around the perimeter of the stage as the narrative proceeds, an act to which Martin is "reluctant" (64). There is this comic overlay in the process of telling the story, again calling attention to Eddie as a manipulator, a verbal trickster, and cuing Martin and the audience to be cautious, hesitant, restrained.)

The narrative itself describes the Old Man’s trek across a field from Eddie’s household to May’s, and how Eddie followed and then accompanied him, ending with his first glimpse of May and, in his view, an immediate falling in love. The reader is both tabloid-curious and analytical-distant (as cued by Martin and Old Man as diametrically opposed spectators or auditors). In the main, the narrative is in first person; "I" is used almost exclusively: "I remember it was just plowed and our feet sank down in the powder"; "That was the first thing I saw"; "They were drinking beer and laughing and I remember being jealous"; "And I remember feeling sorry for him" (65). The phrase "I remember" predominates, emphasizing the first-person memory, calling extensive attention to the idea that this is a remembrance, something filtered through memory, subject to any tricks of memory, to "retroactive falsification." Like the Old Man’s story, there is a sense of suspense, because we are limited to Eddie’s point of view as a child-character in the narrated event, as we are led through town and are exposed to
all the details of his pilgrim’s progress from the one household to the other, the suspense being simply what the outcome of this quest (narrative quest?) will be. May enters the stage toward the end of the narrative, at the point in the narrative when Eddie describes the “girl” (May) whom he sees behind the embrace of the Old Man and May’s mother: “She just appears” (67) in the narrated event of the story and in the narrative event of the play.

At this point, the story does not satisfy the tabloid curiosity of Martin, and it does not stretch the audience’s credulity to a breaking point; except that it is romantically tinged with a “love at first sight” ending, there is no sense of fabrication. May enters as a third auditor and intrudes on the narrative frame: “Boy, you really are incredible! You’re unbelievable! Martin comes over here. He doesn’t know you from Adam and you start telling him a story like that. Are you crazy? None of it’s true, Martin” (67). She not only intends to destroy the credibility of the narrative but break Martin’s suspended state of disbelief. However, we are not really sure what is forming the basis of May’s accusations, what is “incredible,” “unbelievable,” “weird,” or “sick” about the narrative so far. The reader knows there is some connection between Eddie and May that has been playing on May like a “yo-yo” for fifteen years; and we know or believe that May and Eddie are half-siblings.

So our critical attention turns its spotlight on May; because we fail to understand her point of view, we are curious to learn more about her accusations. By the point in the story when May arrives with her accusations, our initial reservations have probably melted
away. Like the Old Man’s story, Eddie’s account has a simple, sincere, straightforward way of drawing us in, making us subject to its narrative spell. We may actually resent the way May challenges Eddie as a story-teller, becomes a Prospero wand-breaking intruder who calls the audience and reader back to their critical faculties.

May’s story, the way she finishes Eddie's, resembles the way George, in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, finishes Martha’s and his story of their son, the way he completes their narrative game forever by moving from fantasy to reality. May as story-teller says she is going to tell the story straight, without any “tricks” (70); the reader or audience can only believe that this will be a real story, that compared with Eddie’s it will be one based on some prior actuality of experience. She addresses the story to Martin explicitly, since Eddie has been addressing the story to Martin. The story does not correct Eddie’s or even finish it so much as start over from a different vantage point; it is a somewhat different chronology altogether, apparently occurring before the events of Eddie’s story, describing how May and her mother tracked down the town that Eddie’s family lived in and how the father ended up leaving, the love interest between Eddie and May beginning apparently with May’s knowledge that Eddie was her half-brother.

In any case, the trickster males are the ones who are a resistant, protesting audience, whereas Martin appears docile. The effect of the story on its on-stage audience is to isolate the Old Man, quarantine him, place him back in a marginal position, and to draw Eddie into alignment or agreement with May’s version of events, as
she describes the suicide of Eddie’s mother. Wilson says that because
the last word of the play remains with the Old Man, this undermines
the feminist edge which grants a narrative victory to May: the play
is “overdetermined by the masculine” (56). However, the Old Man
goes back at the end to being a trickster, fantasizing again that he is
married to Barbara Mandrell, and this, in this context, is no longer
amusing but pathetic, solitary, unhappy. The Old Man looks like a
fool himself, his only company the natural fool, Martin.

May’s story exhibits a resilience and strength, basically because
she challenges Eddie as audience, or addresses him in a
confrontational way throughout: “See, my mother--the pretty red-
haired woman in the little white house with the red awning, was
desperately in love with the old man. Wasn’t she, Eddie?” (70);
“Eddie and his mother were talking but the old man never said a
word. Did he, Eddie?” (71); “Eddie’s mother blew her brains out.
Didn’t she, Eddie? Blew her brains right out” (73). Her story builds
the suspense value which maintains Martin’s interest as primary
audience, and at the same time draws Eddie as hostile audience into
complicity with her point of view. In essence, May’s story drives the
play home to a nonfoolish resolution, forcing into view a sobering
reality without flourishes or tricks.

A comparison with *The Emperor Jones* and with *A Streetcar
Named Desire* may clarify the way trickster discourse in Shepard’s
drama has reshaped itself from more traditional models. In *The
Emperor Jones*, Jones plays a very self-conscious part as trickster
with a definite motive, that of conniving superstitious natives into thinking he's indestructible so that he may exploit them through taxation. The trickster is a social oppressor. In addition, Jones is somewhat selfless; the role he presents through braggart monologue is his self. Jones's victims, the "natives," turn out to be competent stage managers themselves, arranging Jones's stripping away of his identity or pose as Jones is assailed by the demons of his own psyche.

Blanche, too, is a trickster full of demons, a neurotic madness, which is expressionistically portrayed as a preoccupation with the waltz and gunshot on the night of her husband's death. There is no stable self at the center; instead, her neurosis, her need to find a niche in an alien community, generates her tricks of "illusion," her role-playing the part of a younger woman, for instance, who can charm Mitch into marrying her. The chief victim, in this case, is Mitch, an incompetent, natural fool, who needs Stanley to open his eyes to the reality of Blanche's condition and position in society.

The trickster-intruders in Shepard's drama, like the tricksters in O'Neill's Jones and Williams's Streetcar, invade the stage from marginal positions, from the periphery of social power. Their performances undermine the statuses of characters who, like the "natives" and Stanley, are less the product of a verbal mask, who are more rock-solidly real. On the other hand, Shepard's tricksters have no internal demons with which to deal; their masks are not so easily stripped away. Also different from O'Neill and Williams is the trickster's motive. With Shepard, we have less of an idea of what the
trickster is really after. In Lee's case, it seems he is out for "illicit gain," the motive of "the professional criminal, the official version of the con man" (Lindberg 7). On the other hand, it seems Lee is out to "experience the pleasures of control and self-conscious dexterity," the motive of "the gamesman" (Lindberg 7). The same holds true for Crow and Eddie.

The irony of Shepard's *Tooth of Crime, True West, and Fool for Love*, when contrasted with *Jones* and *Streetcar*, is that it is in the trickster that one can find a reliable, stable self in contemporary American society. Jones and Blanche are caught up in their roles; they are the roles that they play, and their performances ride on these verbal structures. However, their images are unstable and may ripple apart when put under too much social pressure. In Shepard, the trickster image is more durable. Crow's image wins out over Hoss's shortlived real self; Lee reasserts his tough-guy persona in a tableau stalemate with the realist Austin; and Eddie, although defeated by May's realist version of events, does not surrender his image. The Old Man, apparently unaffected, returns to his fantasist daydreaming about Barbara Mandrell.

In O'Neill and Williams, the trickster self is surrounded and defeated by selves which are more authentic, or have more substance to them: the deliberate, staccato utterances of the chieftain Lem or the mother-wit solidity of Stanley. The self-less trickster is the center of dramatic interest. In Shepard, however, the inauthentic, pretend self is the norm of American discourse; the transaction between Saul and Austin is the way an American
audience member probably carries on with his or her own individual life. Only Hoss and May assert a verbal independence but still become caught up in the trickster games of their chief antagonists. Lindberg suggests how in the 1950s, contemporary "group" conning became the American norm: "the con games turned into group performances and game playing emerged as the official ethic itself" (233). In Jones and Blanche, we see the trickster as an anomaly. A confidence culture in which everyone is playing a part is only becoming the theatrical norm. In Shepard, trickster discourse is a given, and the theater audience is presented with the difficulty of separating real from falsified selves.
CONCLUSION

The study of these nine plays of O'Neill, Williams, and Shepard brings to the foreground the problem of the fool as a center of dramatic action. Traditionally, the fool is a marginal figure, on the sidelines of the stage, commenting on the action. In a 1959 production of All's Well That Ends Well, for instance, the Clown-Servant Lavatch was eliminated altogether as a superfluous part (Brockbank 83). Lear's fool buzzes like a mosquito about the heels of the king and then disappears from the action midway through the play. In contemporary Javanese drama, too, "The clown's spatial domain is the stage's edge, where he is onlooker to the story-citizens living their lives in the center" (Peacock 161). In modern comedy, however, the fool as "comic butt or dupe" (Winston 392) and the Trickster as incoherent self (Winston 396-7) have taken center stage.

One sees this tendency in the theater of the absurd, in the vaudevillian hat and shoe routines of Didi and Gogo in Waiting for Godot (Esslin 328) and in the automatic conversation of cliches between the Martins of Ionesco's The Bald Soprano:

Mr. Martin: Excuse me, madam, but it seems to me, unless I'm mistaken, that I've met you somewhere before.
Mrs. Martin: I, too, sir. It seems to me that I’ve met you somewhere before. (15)

Again, there is a deficiency of sense that is peculiar to the fool. Esslin identifies the “age-old traditions” that inform this species of theater, traditions which include “Clowning, fooling, and mad-scenes” and “verbal nonsense” (328). In these plays, one inhabits a strange, alien world; one loses touch with the world of ordinary reality, and the heroes engage their environments with the methodology of the fool:

Estragon: We came here yesterday.

Vladimir: Ah no, there you’re mistaken.

Estragon: What did we do yesterday?

Vladimir: What did we do yesterday? (10)

In the American dramas under consideration, one encounters the absurd while maintaining firm contact with the rational. The fool in these plays is not so much hero as anti-hero or outsider, an intruder into the dramatized social worlds of the play, worlds glued together with beads of rationality or order. There is something aberrant about this intruder. He or she doesn’t fit the ordered contours, the rational projects, of the community of characters which he or she disturbs. He or she is an alien who must be exiled, defeated, quarantined, or else ultimately initiated into the group. In opposition to the abnormality of the intruder as a fool-performer, a rational, nonfoolish point of view is preserved as a given on stage. In O’Neill, the audience member or reader adheres to the rational viewpoints of Jones (as he distances himself from his own foolish hubris), Kublai (as he contemplates Marco’s audacity), and Larry (as
he observes the stages of Hickey's madness). The reader or theater audience, taking its cue from these on-stage auditors, may take a mental step back from the performance of the fool, a performance which is intensely oppressive to the community of characters.

With Williams, however, rationality is unfavorably presented. If one cannot identify with Blanche's illusionistic point of view, one cannot fully embrace Stanley's platform of common sense, which involves brutality as a form of power. In The Rose Tattoo, the common-sense priest and women of the community are comically browbeaten by Serafina, who rigidly adheres to her pose of mourning, and undercut by the antics of Alvaro. Clownishly resilient, Kilroy in Camino Real attempts to elude the authoritarian programs of the stage manager Gutman. In Shepard's plays, too, an on-stage rationality struggles against the irrational schemes of the trickster. Hoss, Austin, and May speak for rationality, or for modes of social reality opposed by the trickster, or con-artist, who disrupts the social script and threatens disintegration of the realist self.

These three American dramatists, in plays involving the fool as a character, do not altogether abandon realism or normalcy. An on-stage proponent of reason tends to brake the forward drives of the fool performer, to hold his or her performances in check. The performance of the fool in each play meets certain on-stage resistances. A figure-ground relationship is established between sense and nonsense, reason and foolishness, reasonable limit and absurd excess. In O'Neill, an auditor's common sense, reflecting the sobriety of the theater audience, attempts to restrain the verbal
power of the fool. In Marco Millions and The Iceman Cometh, the wisdom of the Kaan and the critical faculties of Larry counteract the performative excesses of Marco and Hickey, respectively. Jones maintains the power of the "bad man" persona while realistically recognizing his own diminishing status.

Although Williams comes closer to an acceptance of the traditional nonsense of the fool, to his or her potential for carnival release, the on-stage audience's initial resistance to folly provides the house audience with its first cued response. His plays lean toward anticipated liberation or release, but it is the release into madness of Blanche, solitary and individual, surrounded by sympathetic but uncomprehending practitioners of reality. Likewise, Camino Real encourages a liberation of the imagination but also requires a mental intensity, an ongoing interpretation of symbol and event. On the other hand, Alvaro circumvents resistance; The Rose Tattoo allows the fool to proceed with his rescue of Serafina from her iconic clinging to the past. In contrast, Shepard preserves the integrity of the spectator as a rational onlooker, separated from his or her mirror image on stage, the natural fool who observes without intelligence the contest between trickster and transformed realist character. The realist character also asserts him- or herself against the judgments or predispositions of the natural fool: Hoss shoots the incompetent Ref, Austin rebels against Mom's favoritism of Lee, May lures the bumpkin Martin from his absorption in Eddie's trickster version of reality.
In each play, the integrity of the auditor or of the nonfoolish character is preserved; there is a separation enforced between fool and nonfool. In Shepard, where the transformation of the realist character through trickster contest is dramatized, the realist character still maintains an ultimate sense of a separate self. For instance, as Hoss tries to mold himself into Crow’s Gypsy image, he finally declares, “IT AIN’T ME! IT AIN’T ME! IT AIN’T ME!” (249). The fool as verbal terror (O’Neill), improvisational clown (Williams), or trickster (Shepard) is presented as an object to be initially questioned or suspected because of excessive performative power and an absence of identifiable selfhood. As Winston suggests, in modern comedy “we are distanced almost automatically from a character we cannot understand” (399).

Instead of a carnival figure, a figure who coalesces community, the fool in these American dramas is a suspicious figure, isolated, interrogated, combattted by his on-stage audience. Like the court fools who overstepped their license, these fools must be “reminded of their marginality” (Zijderveld 114). Only Alvaro, the clown of Old World comedy, escapes complete exile, although acceptance comes at the end of the play, after he has been driven to the invisible margins of the stage by Serafina’s broom. Is there some cultural factor which makes the fool in these plays a figure for scrutiny instead of for laughter or comic relief or ironical commentary? Some disinclination toward carnival in American society in general? Some conservative distrust or underlying fear of the taboo nature of the fool? An
intense desire for individuality which keeps the auditor from falling under the spell of the fool?

One factor of resistance to the fool’s power may involve the predisposition of Western theater to the integrity of the spectator, the non-transformative individuality of the audience member. According to Artaud, “The contemporary theater is decadent because it has lost . . . a sense of real humor, a sense of laughter’s power of physical and anarchic dissociation” (42). Even Shepard’s theater, with its emphasis on the free, nonlinear play of the playwright’s imagination, may participate in this “decadence” by adhering to a Western mode of theater which keeps the audience member in his or her seat as a contemplative spectator.

In this succession of playwrights, the fool gains a surer foothold on center stage. The fool attempts to steal the stage from characters more normal or more in the social mainstream. In O’Neill, we witness the incipience of this process, as the fool is brought onto the serious stage from stages more popular, the minstrel and vaudevillian stages. But the fool is reconfigured as the protagonist (or antagonist, in Marco’s case) of a tragicomedy. In The Iceman Cometh, Hickey is a reformed fool among fools; his is the foolishness of a performer stepping outside the norms of the in-group. In Williams, we are midway through the process of the fool becoming center stage. The fool dominates through improvisational ability in a struggle with characters who also resonate a touch of the fool: Stanley as urban oaf, Serafina as commedia dell’arte maid. In The Camino Real, the clownish Kilroy ironically braces himself against the
ebb and flow of a nonsensical playworld. Shepard completes the process as natural fool becomes the spectator of the trickster (as prankster) attempting to make a fool out of the realist character. The fool as trickster has a more permanent presence, as Crow occupies Hoss's throne, Lee squares off against Austin in an interminable stalemate, and The Old Man is left alone on stage with his fantasist daydreams.

The exile of the fool in O'Neill's plays seems to verify Willeford's thesis that the stage cannot hold the fool, that the fool contains too much performative energy for other dramatic characters to handle: "when the comic character turns out to have too much of the power of the fool, he must be banned altogether, as Falstaff was from Shakespeare's history plays" (49). Like Falstaff, Jones, Marco, and Hickey are self-promoters, braggarts, verbal performers with a heightened sense of social role. Falstaff, however, is a Lord of Misrule, a hub of a community of likewise inebriated characters, not a self in isolation. He wears a mask, but mask and self, individual and role, seem undivided. His verbal performances are underscored by the knowledge that Hal is still king, that his Misrule is permitted by Hal's Rule. Jones, Marco, and Hickey are fools by default. They no longer coalesce a community through scapegoatism or carnivalistic revel but oppress it. Because they step out of their former fool's function while maintaining residues of their previous fool's roles, they are subject to an intense audience scrutiny. One waits along with their on-stage audiences for some hidden dimension to emerge. And one is engaged with the on-stage audience in the struggle
between performer and auditor, with the transformative potentials of performance.

Williams's theater allows more room for the fool performer as a traditional fool, for the fool as an improver of imaginative possibilities. The fool creates a theatrical space for her- or himself, and this again accords with the nature of Williams's theater, its incorporation of the marginal, the "plastic," the improvisational into the seams of realism. There is more possibility that the fool can exist at the center of the stage, that the play can contain and maintain the performance of the fool. The fool again is attempting to create illusion in response to realism. In Shepard's theater, the trickster as a type of fool displaces the realist character (Hoss), transforms him (Austin) into his own image, or lures her (May) from the center of the stage. As Shepard's own nonlinearity and playfulness allow more room for the fool on stage, his theater resists the complete takeover of the stage by folly, suggesting again a common denominator in all three playwrights of an underlying conflict between dramatic forces predisposed to wit, unlicense, and carnival, on the one hand, and, on the other, a conservative resistance to marginality, the restraining factor of individuality.

On-stage resistance to the fool's show and critical scrutiny by the off-stage audience may be accounted for as a general reaction to "the absence or fluidity of self" (Winston 399) in these fool-performers. The mask each fool-performer wears keeps one guessing about interiority. In addition, the rhetorical powers of O'Neill's boasters, the imagination of Williams's neuresthenics and
clowns, and the deviousness of Shepard’s tricksters present the problem of performative limits. When these performers transgress implicit boundaries, as they assert a transformative power over their on-stage auditors, the audience member or reader becomes concerned with the prospect of an absence of internal restraint. The transformative power of the fool-performer encourages the off-stage audience to monitor the dramatized relationships closely. One additional factor which produces a feeling of alarm or terror is the amount of violence connected with the performance of the fool. Again, this violence contributes to a distancing effect in the theater audience.

A dark side of the fool in America is presented by these playwrights. There is a powerful drive of the marginal fool toward the dramatized centers of social power. Marginality prevents the fool from “being fully human” (Zijderveld 113). The fool in America is caught in a double bind. On the one hand, he or she suffers a discontent when in a marginal position and, on the other, suffers a discontent when attempting to move into the mainstream, stage center, to become a person like us. Whereas Marco is oblivious to his victimization by his mentors, as they suppress his romantic instinct, and is likewise oblivious to his status as fool in the Kaan’s court, Hickey has self-consciously suffered in his role as pipe-dreaming comedian, pretending an indifference to his wife with his gag about the iceman, and withstands the contempt of Harry Hope’s court when he adopts his new role as salvationist preacher: "(He breaks--
miserably) Hell, you oughtn’t to act this way with me! You’re my old pals, the only friends I’ve got” (3: 689).

The fool in O’Neill is drawn toward these centers of power, toward the playing of central, authoritative roles, abandoning his original function of comic relief. In Williams’s Streetcar Named Desire and Rose Tattoo, the fool burrows like a termite into the mainstream community out of suppressed need: Blanche’s need to escape persecution in her home community because of her marginal sexual activity and Alvaro’s need to acquire a second income from Serafina in order to support his parchesi-playing and beer-drinking dependents. The agitations of the unstable fool produce a violent chemical reaction as improvisational fluidity mixes with rigid iconicity. The marginal Old World fool—Blanche of the Old Order South and Alvaro of the Old Country Italian comedy—is repelled by New World humorists, individualists without human sympathy: Stanley, the middle-aged clowns Bessie and Flora, a comic traveling salesman.

Shepard’s theater is exceptionally violent. Crow’s victory in verbal dueling leads to the theatrical suicide of Hoss, who unlike Hedda Gabler, remains in full view of the audience as he dramatically shoots himself: “He raises one hand high in the air and pulls the trigger with the other” (251). As an act of revenge and possession, the transformed Austin strangles Lee with a telephone cord, an act which Mom labels as “savage” (58). As the mildest act of violence in Fool For Love, Eddie practices lassoing bedposts in preparation for his encounter with May’s date, Martin (38). In Shepard’s plays, the
power of the trickster is menacing, life-threatening. As in O’Neill’s and Williams’s dramas, the fool (as trickster) is an outsider, a character on the periphery of social power. The steps Shepard’s tricksters take to acquire access to the centers of mainstream society, however, are more physically brutal, direct physical assault aiding the traditional trickster strategy of indirection. As in O’Neill and Williams, the collection of “normal” on-stage characters, the equivalent of the realist actor, attempts to relegate the fool again to the margins, to push him out of the spotlight, and restore the equilibrium of the stage. Because the trickster’s intrusions are so headstrong, the effort to repel him in Shepard’s dramas requires superhuman effort.

Instead of encouraging the mainstream on-stage audience to participate in foolish revel, the fool performer subverts the mainstream center for his or her own ends. There is an attempt by the marginal entity to find a voice, to achieve a position of power, or to locate an authoritative space for itself. Attributes of the fool, of the comic, infuse each marginal character’s role, underlining a dissatisfaction of the fool in America with his or her position along the periphery of dramatic or social action, a break with the traditional fool’s position. Willeford points out that when the fool “demonstrates an authority proper to the central figure of the established order . . . he is often regarded as a usurper with no right to be where he is in the ordered world” (133). Rather than a part of a fool’s show, the dramatic move of the fool to the center of American drama demonstrates a violent urgency, a desperation.
Even when Kilroy stumbles onto the stage of the Camino Real, a stage which corners him into unwilling roles as Patsy and Chosen Hero, he ebulliently announces his entry by scratching out “Coming” in “Kilroy is Coming!” and replacing it with “Here!” (24).

The reformed fool in O’Neill reflects Maya Angelou’s interpretation of Genet’s The Blacks: “Genet suggested that . . . the oppressed would take over the positions of their former masters” (172). Escaping their scapegoat functions, O’Neill’s reformed fools verbally oppress their on-stage audiences out of selfish motives: the desire for monetary profit in the case of Jones and Marco, the self-justification of murder in the case of Hickey. Williams’s fools seek the comfort and security of the center, are looking for a home, a stopping place. In Shepard’s case, there may exist an envy factor. Although each trickster seems successful in his own way as a marginal character, eeking out a fruitful existence on the margins, as Gypsy solo artist, as desert drifter, as rodeo stuntman having an affair with a Countess, Shepard’s tricksters cannot resist “fooling” with the mainstream centers of power. They seem to need to prove themselves in competition with it, to possess what it owns: Crow takes the place of Hoss, Lee copies Austin’s Hollywood style, Eddie continues his fifteen-year attempt to “buffalo” May.

This desire of the fool to be at the center of social power may reflect the American folk worldview of unlimited good, the emphasis on the upward social drive in American society. The folk concept of unlimited good suggests the idea of no ceiling or limit on opportunity or success. Materially, “there is no real limit as to how much of any
one commodity can be produced" (Dundes, "Folk" 96). The American "future orientation" to "progress" places emphasis on "the process of becoming a success" (Dundes, "Folk" 98). In terms of social occupation, the fools of O'Neill, Williams, and Shepard derive from worlds peripheral to the mainstream audiences the playwrights intend to read or attend a play. Jones is a renegade Pullman porter, Marco and Hickey are traveling salesmen; Blanche is a rural school teacher, Alvaro a banana truck driver, and Kilroy a mythic drifter; Crow is a Gypsy, Lee a desert bum, and Eddie a rodeo stuntman. In terms of social orientation, the drive of the marginal character to the center reflects the American desire for status, power, a name. In terms of theater, the marginal character's desire for dramatic authority parallels an American disposition to avoid being the fool, in the sense of scapegoat or butt of humor. Kilroy's struggle to remain a "free agent" (49) is the struggle of the American tough or modern "b'hoy" to escape the role of clown or Patsy. Jones, too, maintains the rebellious voice of the "bad man" in order to elude prearranged parts as minstrel fool.

Accompanying the American desire for upward mobility is the American love of the underdog: "Americans love upsets; they love to see favorites and front-runners get beaten" (Dundes, "Folk" 98). As an American, one is always conscious of one's status as simultaneous success and underdog. The fool as underdog (the "old" Hickey, the youthful, uninitiated Marco, Blanche and Alvaro as displaced persons, Austin as innocent victim) produces sympathy, audience attachment; however, the fool as power seeker (the "new" Hickey, for instance, or
Blanche in her insistent role-playing produces distance, an uneasiness in the theater audience. A distancing effect again comes into play because the audience may see in the fool's drive to the center its own marginal desires for power, authority, control. The fool's performance in these dramas is fueled by a monomania or by a childlike impulsiveness.

In O'Neill's case, the fool acquires social power by the monomaniacal manipulation of verbal resources, the step by step acquisition of a foothold in the enemy camp: a Caribbean island, the Orient, the pipe-dreaming crowd of invalids. In Williams's case, the improvisational characters have a childlike, innocent air, and they create the chaos of children who intrude on the more rigid adult worlds of reality and common sense, acquiring control through the play of nonsense and imagination. Shepard's tricksters use physical intimidation and verbal harassment to wedge their way into circles of power. Stable worlds are disrupted. The audience's desire for security, for stable role-playing, is in conflict with its vested interest in characters who desire what the center possesses and who take necessary steps to achieve positions of social power.

Although I have been suggesting that critical distancing is the primary effect of fool performance in these plays, there is still an element of attraction to the fool as performer. The theater audience may share in the fool's need to escape his or her life on the margins. The on-stage audience, too, provides cues that lead us to a tentative acceptance of the fool performer at the same time that his or her show is resisted or repulsed. An exception to the rule of community
indifference, Cora makes sympathetic contact with Hickey during his confessional monologue, when he says he tore up his wife's picture: "(with a muffled sob) Jees, Hickey! Jees!" (3: 698). Stanley seems sympathetically, if coarsely, helpful as the doctor arrives for Blanche. He encourages her to remember what she is forgetting to take with her: "You left nothing here but spilt talcum and old empty perfume bottles--unless it's the paper lantern you want to take with you. You want the lantern?" In the next instant, however, he is "tearing it off the light bulb" (176). In Fool for Love, after her defeat of The Old Man and Eddie, May demonstrates a continued affection, as she and Eddie "embrace. They kiss each other tenderly" (75).

These points of connection between center and margin promote an ambiguity of response in the reader or theater audience. Although reason seems privileged, and intellectually the audience is encouraged to keep its feet set on the theater floor, the audience is also emotionally connected with the fool's performance through sympathy, amusement, and terror. Surrounded by realist characters (with the exception of Iceman Cometh and Camino Real), the fool performer, through the adoption of masks, the self-conscious playing of roles, and the testing of theatrical limits, parallels the actor. On the other hand, the fool as performer has a parallel with the playwright, as creator of possibility, performer of words that do and do not belong to him, and adoption of a self that suits the dramatic moment, a self capable of playing other selves, the introducer of new and imaginative worlds. Bauman describes the social process which places the performer, with his or her potential for altering
community structure, on the margins of society (Verbal 45). On the one hand, then, the fool in American drama is repulsed because of this transformative power inherent in his or her performance. However, the margins, as an out-of-bounds zone, is the source of new possibility, of vitality and renewal: "order must again and again be brought into relation with vital possibilities supplied by the unconscious" (Willeford 113). In this case, the fool in American drama has the potential to reinvigorate the status quo.

These plays of O'Neill, Williams, and Shepard highlight this tension between the imaginative possibilities of the fool for reinvigoration and the threat the fool possesses for creating chaos, social or dramatic anarchy. The predisposition in each playwright's world again reflects the type of theater in which each participates. The realist theater of O'Neill taxes its audience with intellectual problems of psychology and sociology. Although the experience of O'Neill's Emperor Jones, Marco Millions, and Iceman Cometh involves spectacle, theatrics, and entertainment, the theater audience's moral and intellectual faculties are addressed. The on-stage audiences of Smithers, the Kaan, and Larry invite one to carry the problem of the excessive verbal performer home for the sake of analysis.

In Shepard's drama, the realist fabric of drama is unstitched by trickster performance and the spectatorship of the natural fool. Although nonlinearity and absurdity are characteristic of this drama, Shepard concentrates on the chaotic effects of the trickster's intrusions. If Shepard's theater is conservative in its assessment of the value of these intrusions, one explanation may be his theater's
position on the borderline of playful chaos. How nonlinear, carnivalistic, anarchic can the postmodern theater be allowed to proceed before it is no longer theater? In Williams, however, the value of the margins as an antidote to social rigidity and staleness is considered. His theater is positioned midway between the stage of O'Neill, still anchored to the nineteenth-century demands for a realistic script, and the arena of Shepard, continuing to test the possibilities suggested by the experiments of the absurdists. In Williams, the illusionistic possibilities of theater are advanced by the transformative value of the marginal voice of the fool.
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