The Playing of O'Neill's *Misbegotten*

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Abstract

In A Moon for the Misbegotten, *Eugene O'Neill's last completed work, the characters' emotional struggles are depicted in a psychologically realistic manner. The first two acts of the play are broadly comic, relying on stereotypical, even hackneyed formulae, harking back to vaudeville. The second two acts move the drama toward confessional tragedy. Within these seemingly conventional contexts, however, characters plainly calculate their own performativity and otherwise overtly call attention to multiple levels of theatrical representation and illusion. Audiences are sporadically pulled out of the text and reminded that what they are participating in has been composed and is being performed. This paper will attempt to use definitions of what has been termed metadrama to characterize layers of playing therein.*

Eugene O'Neill's dramas take place in settings described in painfully meticulous detail. The words his clearly defined (if psychically complex) characters speak can be readily understood, at least on the level at which plotted events are pushed to climax. Yet the people in *Strange Interlude* (1927) are trying to break through the fourth wall to address directly themselves or / as audience. In productions of *The Great God Brown* (1925), viewers see characters masked, unmasked, donning the persona of the other; when Dion Anthony removes his plastic face and speaks to Margaret, she is confused and frightened. For 20 years, until the poorly-received 1934 production of *Days Without End*, O'Neill had experimented in his plays with formal devices like quasi-diagetic sound, characters split into two, prolonged dialogue asides, Greek choral effects and grandiose tableaux. In a 1923 letter George Jean Nathan O'Neill writes, "Damn that word, 'realism!' […] I meant something […] spiritually true, not meticulously life-like." (S*elected Letters*, 175)

Long-established O'Neill scholars, usually when writing for textbooks and anthologies, have proclaimed a return to the "mode of

realism" in O'Neill's last plays, written from 1939-43. (Robinson3, 1176) Travis Bogard mitigates this view.

> [T]he [final] dramas more readily than many earlier works approach the abstraction and symbolism so characteristic of the expressionist mode. […T]o call [for example] *Long Day's Journey into Night* a "domestic tragedy" is to underestimate seriously its emotional effect. It is enlarged, not in the sense of Aristotelian "heightening," but more by its unremitting movement "behind life," in the phrase O'Neill once used to describe [a 1924 production of Strindberg's *Spook Sonata*]. For a play to move "behind life" means that it expands upward, through the surfaces, and toward the core of life itself. […] The inner enlargement of the Tyrone plays not only scrutinize the motives that produce the painful events, they also enlarge an audience's knowledge of the suffering these events produce. (Bogard, 426)

O'Neill's "pipe dream" has become a cliché, at times reflecting a more general modernist preoccupation with reality and illusion. Beyond the seemingly binary conflicts of each character in *The Iceman Cometh* (1939) exist multiple pasts, presents and futures which are continually being recreated. (Manheim2, 148-51) In O'Neill's last one-act, *Hughie*, Erie' and the Night Clerk create versions of themselves and each other, ending when the Night Clerk escapes his inner world long enough to recognize the gangster in Erie's tall tales. The Tyrones' circular, ever-changing alliances finally evince only a paralytic, cathartic equilibrium through their *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1941). In *A Moon for the Misbegotten* (1941-43) Jim Tyrone is defined as actor, landlord, traitor, friend and lover, but, despite all confessions, boundaries among roles can never be so clearly defined. Michael Manheim has referred to a 'pattern of emotional reversals' that is constitutive of a 'new language of kinship' throughout the last plays. (Manheim3)

But in *Moon*, something more reflexive is also taking place. At certain moments characters plainly calculate their own performativity and otherwise overtly call attention to multiple levels of theatrical representation and illusion. What's different in this, O'Neill's last

completed drama, is that within the impassioned struggles audiences (on stage and off) are also sporadically pulled out of the text and reminded that what they are participating in has been composed and is being performed. This paper will attempt to use definitions of what has been termed *metadrama* to characterize layers of playing in this work.

Lionel Abel's book *Metatheatre* (1963) describes the self-reflexivity of certain stage works. "The playwright […] acknowledge(s) in the very structure of his play that it was his imagination which controlled the event from beginning to end." (Abel1, 61) Among Abel's esoteric examples are elements from the works of Aeschylus, Calderón and Brecht. He contends that characters as different as Hamlet and Tartuffe, for instance, are each too big for the plays that bear their names. *Hamlet* has been labelled a tragedy, *Tartuffe* a comedy, but the two title characters seem to want to escape entrapment in their plays' plots and to create their own. They are their own playwrights, trying to create their own destinies, responding to as well as creating layers of presentation. These characters reflect for an audience an extreme awareness of their own performativity, a doing unto others as well as being done to. In this case a different form can be designated, what Abel called a new *genre* – the metaplay. (Abel1, 41)

Abel contrasts his genre with tragedy, calling the ancient form the "historical and cultural prerequisite" for metatheatre. (Abel1, 41) But the concept of unadulterated metadrama may also be differentiated from that of pure psychological realism. One convention of realistic drama may be seen as presuming the audience as outside of the action, clearly on the other side of the proscenium. Metaplays, however, continually force the viewer to admit participation, even collaboration with theatre artists – the line between performer and spectator becomes blurred. The form contains self-consciously theatrical characters that change personas within micro-dramas, relate stories about performance (sometimes referring to the play they are in at the moment) and also remark directly about the nature and consequences of playing for self and the other. Hamlet can be recognized as the first character in a drama who *acknowledges* that his very existence, as are all of ours, is theatrical. (Abel2, 22)

The word *metadrama* can convey at least two overlapping meanings. One, an uncountable noun and synonym for *metatheatre*, may refer to a framework, a way of deconstructing all performance, using

terms of structure, intertextuality and semiology. *Metadrama* can also identify a specific work. This term is countable, and may be a synonym for *metaplay*. Both meanings denote metadrama as a deconstruction and finally, a denial of the binary opposition of a world inside and outside of the theatre. (Sampey, 192)

One method of calling attention to the nature of playing is to break realistic stage conventions, as Pirandello does in *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), in which the characters admit they come from one author's mind, and seek another's insight. A more subtle way of reminding viewers of this self-consciousness may be found in *Waiting for Godot* (1953).

> Beckett's characters […] acquire their duality through the use of language, which must be constantly interpreted on two levels. [E]arly in the play Vladimir welcomes Estragon back. "So there you are again" and "I'm glad to see you back" […] But the reunion also has significance for the other portion of Didi and Gogo's identities: as actors, they have been apart after the prior day's performance of the play and have once more returned. (Schleuter, 112)

Godot premiered on Broadway on 19 April 1956; the first production of *A Moon for the Misbegotten* began on 8 May 1957. Normand Berlin compares Beckett and O'Neill.

> Each in his own way had to confront the terrifying prospect that there are no firm values, no scientific absolutes, no ultimate meanings, that there is no God, that man's struggle against necessity is self-destructive. And O'Neill's last plays and Beckett's first plays belong to a post-World War II atmosphere of suffering and despair, of irrational demonic forces at work in man, of the possibility of catastrophic destruction. (30)

Moon was written at a time of physical and emotional agony in O'Neill's life, between winter 1941 and spring 1943. (Bogard, 422) A disease related to Parkinson's was wracking O'Neill's fingers, and he had always written in longhand. The long-time apolitical O'Neill was also affected

by the United States' entry into World War II. He finished the original manuscript of *Moon* on 20 January 1942, and complained in his Work Diary, "had to drag myself through it since Pearl Harbor and it needs revision – wanders all over the place." (Barlow, 116) The war, the disease and the well-publicized affair of his daughter Oona with Charlie Chaplin drove O'Neill into deep depression.

Earlier O'Neill had abandoned an ever-increasing cycle of plays dealing with the saga of generations of an Irish-American family – his sole project in the years immediately following his winning of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1936. (Bogard, 366) He had written *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *The Iceman Cometh.* The tremor in O'Neill's hands was now making work almost impossible. (Bogard, 422) Still resolved to write, his health failing, on some level O'Neill must have acknowledged this might be his last play.

The finished *Moon* would contain many references to and parodies of theatrical conventions; it seems a bittersweet farewell to his life's work. The drama's archetypal story, about Jim Tyrone's purported sale of the Hogan farm, unfolds in the first two acts. The audience learns later that this "maze of false clues and blind alleys" is completely meaningless to the central situation of the play – that of redemptive love between Josie Hogan and Jim Tyrone. (Carpenter, 161) Throughout, each main character dons various masks for the amusement or consternation of the others, and these game dynamics constantly change over the course of the drama. Taken in a larger perspective, these various roles combine to form three small plays within the play. Around these, O'Neill's characters relate anecdotes describing other performances.

Despite Jose Quintero's successful 1956 production of *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, O'Neill's final work had been looked upon as one of his weakest. Critics have in particular have called attention to the contrived plot. In 1987 Doris Falk wrote that the play's "pathos" is not enough to compensate for "the weakness of its outward situation – the theatrical cliché of clichés, for which there is no other word but corn." (30) She points out, for instance, the stereotypical small-man (Hogan) / big-woman (Josie) "vaudeville" routines. Yet perhaps this is overlooking the means by which O'Neill calls attention to and parodies theatrical convention, wanting audiences to embrace the repetition. The author clearly wants us play the game of realism, to be caught up in the action

of the people we are watching. Yet at certain points the veil of maya is pierced, and we are reminded not to believe, bringing us out of the drama (Robinson1, 122).

For a four-hour play, not many plot events unfold. A scheming Irish farmer, Phil Hogan, says that he is worried that the tenant farm he works with his robust daughter, Josie, will be sold to his rich English neighbor. Hogan convinces Josie, who parades herself as a slut but is really a virgin, into tricking the farm's owner, Jim (Jamie Tyrone in *Long Day's Journey*) into marriage. Hogan does this ostensibly to acquire the farm for his family, but in the final act he admits the real reason for his trick: "[T]o bring the two of you to stop your damned pretending, and face the truth that you loved each other. I wanted you to find happiness." (944)

The two do love each other, but Tyrone is too caught up in guilt over past mistakes to partake in a romantic relationship. He hates himself because of his conduct right before and just after his mother's death. For Tyrone, the only possible solace before his own approaching demise would be an absolution of sorts from a woman he really loves, one that sees beyond his cynical mask. Josie Hogan – as strong as any man, virgin and mother in one – becomes that figure. But this communion is not sexual. In an early draft of the play, Jim "cannot feel flesh and spirit united – it must be one or the other – they are evil and good." (Barlow, 125)

The light comedy in the first two acts leads to a moonlight confession in the third. These long speeches were O'Neill's main focus and the play's climax from the beginning of his work on the project. (Bogard, 446-47) Tyrone leaves the stage, taking all possibilities for a happy ending with him. Josie's benediction on Jim ends the play: "May you have your wish and die in your sleep soon, Jim darling. May you rest forever in forgiveness and peace." (946)

James O'Neill, Jr. was dead soon after the September date in which the play is set, in November, 1923. He was nearly blind when he succumbed to acute alcoholism. *A Moon for the Misbegotten* was O'Neill's elegy to his older brother, to whom perhaps he felt he had not done justice in *Long Day's Journey*. Jim Tyrone's play can also be seen as a winking, yet sentimental good-bye from O'Neill himself.

> *Long Day's Journey into Night* needs the resolution *A Moon for the Misbegotten* brings as it offers, finally, a pervading belief in the knowledge that death is good, and that in welcoming it, man can find respite from terror, and in love, transcend pity. (Bogard, 452-53)

But this is later; scheming and role-playing immediately come forth in the first scene. Speaking to his sister, Mike Hogan accuses his absent father of the trick the elder Hogan will soon play to force the marriage of his daughter and Tyrone. Mike quickly exits, never to return; Hogan returns and denies any deceit. Josie tries to see through his performances.

> That's enough out of you, Father. I can never tell to this day, when you put that dead mug on you, whether you're joking or not, but I don't want to hear it anymore – (867)

* * *

> You old divil(sic), you've always a trick hidden behind your tricks, so no one can tell at times what you're after. (869)

But Josie seems fooled by the old man. She is to believe that Tyrone has made plans to sell the farm and to evict them. Josie angrily goes along with Hogan's scheme to trap Tyrone into marriage.

Not only Josie is tricked by Hogan's tale, but the audience is kept guessing as well. The meandering trickery of the first two acts does nothing except set up the one-night communion of Jim and Josie in the final two. Certainly O'Neill could have set up the final coming-together of the lovers in a much more economical way. The contrivance can be seen as O'Neill's projection of the beautiful futility in which all lives are projected. O'Neill, through Phil Hogan, "wise and loving father" as well as "stage leprechaun, an incorrigible meddler and practical joker," (Manheim1, 153) coaxes everyone to accept all of the plotting tricks.

> Hogan has emerged as a comic gangster, the trickster common to folklore and the plots of Old Comedy […]

> weaving comic plots for the purposes of entertainment and fooling audiences along the way – like a vulgar, farcical, Celtic variation on Shakespeare's Prospero.
> (Robinson2, 63)

As the Hogans anticipate the visit of their landlord, Hogan teases his daughter about Tyrone and their feelings about each other. Josie warns Hogan, "don't play jackass with me." (870) She recalls the usual meetings between Tyrone and Hogan, and asks if they will "play the old game about a drink." (874) A comedy routine begins as Jim Tyrone makes his first entrance onto the stage.

> TYRONE
> *(approaches and stands regarding Hogan with sardonic relish. Hogan scratches a match on the seat of his overalls and lights his pipe, pretending not to see him. Tyrone recites with feeling)*
> "Fortunate senex, ergo tua manebunt,
> et tibi magna satis, quamvis lapis omnia nudus."
>
> HOGAN
> It's the landlord again, and my shotgun not handy. *(He looks up at Tyrone.)* Is it Mass you're saying, Jim?
>
> TYRONE
> Translated very freely into Irish English, something like this. *(He imitates Hogan's brogue.)* "Ain't you the lucky old bastard to have this beautiful farm, it is full of nude rocks."
>
> HOGAN
> […] It's easy to see to see you've a fine college education. It must be a big help to you, conversing with whores and barkeeps. (875)

Tyrone tells the droll tale of how at university, to create an excuse for staying out all night, he coaxed a prostitute to play the role of his pious sister. She "had no makeup on, and was dressed in black, and had eaten a pound of Sen-sen to kill the gin on her breath." He relates how they

were caught when she told the priest, "Christ, Father … I wish to hell I could stay here." (876) As Dutch Maisie allowed her guise of devout sister to slip, so will Josie allow her role of whore to be forsaken in Act III.

The Tyrone / Hogan exchange is an example of a play within a play, complete with Josie as audience. She comments, "Ain't you the old fools, playing the old game between you." (879) Yet during these joking games are moments when the actors let their masks fall, allowing other selves to emerge. Tyrone admits "Couldn't sleep. One of those heebie-jeebie nights when the booze keeps you awake instead of - *(He catches her giving him a pitying look - irritably)* But what of it!" (877)

This glimpse of pathos is exceptional this early in the play. Meanwhile, comedy continues during the next playlet. Tyrone informs the Hogans that a T. Stedman Harder, their oil-heir neighbour, will soon be visiting to complain about the Hogans' pigs. Both Hogans relish this opportunity to taunt and abuse the Englishman. Hogan calls Harder's visit "beautiful news" and the stage directions make it clear that Harder does not stand a chance:

> *(The experienced strategy of the Hogans in verbal combat is to take the offensive and never let an opponent hit back. Also, they use a beautiful, coordinated, bewildering change of pace, switching suddenly from jarring shouts to low, confidential vituperation.)* (884)

The Hogans are insulting, then pretentious. The classic vaudeville and silent film theme of poor folks exacting comic revenge on the pompous upper classes is renewed (as well as a bit of Irish revenge against the English.) Harder has come to complain about the Hogan's fence. But they turn the tables on Harder and accuse him of the "contemptible trick" of enticing the Hogans' "poor pigs to take their death in your ice pond." Harder's costume, as well as every line he mutters is used against him.

HOGAN

> I don't think he's a jockey. It's just the funny pants he's wearing […]

HARDER
(Beginning to lose his temper)
Listen to me, Hogan. I didn't come here to –

HOGAN *(shouts)*
What? What's that you said? You didn't come here? […] *(He turns to Josie – in a whisper)* Did you hear that, Josie? *(He takes off his hat and scratches his head in comic bewilderment.)* Well that's a puzzle, surely. How do you suppose he got here? (885-886)

Tyrone, who is hidden inside the Hogan house, as well as the audience is in on the joke. All parties involved (except Harder, straight man and foil) are fully aware of this layer of performance, and of the confusion it causes. James Robinson points out that Harder is "an inferior performer, lacking presence, unable to improvise, incapable of even remembering his script." (Robinson2, 62) For the comedy to work, it must be so. By contrast, the dramatic proficiency of the Hogans is highlighted.

In this episode O'Neill also lays the groundwork for Phil Hogan's plot to bring Tyrone and Josie together. Tyrone toys with his tenants about the possible sale of their farm to Harder. After Tyrone leaves, Hogan takes on another character for Josie – that of angered tenant and betrayed friend – making her upset enough to take on the role of seductress to Tyrone. Once again, Josie is moved and deceived by her father's performance (as is the audience.)

Josie and her father remember how, when she was a little girl, they fooled the elder James Tyrone (Jim's father) when the rent was due. She would "dress up" and "bat (her) eyes at him […] gaze at him and tell him he was the handsomest man in the world." Hogan acknowledges, "You did it wonderful. You should have gone on the stage." (868-869)

At the end of the second act Josie is again identified as a performer. Though she has been waiting for hours for Tyrone to come back, Hogan reminds her how she has "played games with half the men around here" and, "now you act like a numbskull virgin that can't believe a man would ever tell a lie." Father and daughter know both roles are true, as well as many permutations between these extremes. She loves Tyrone. Her father allows her to save face behind the mask of "great proud slut." (896-897) In Act III, returning from the pub after

consorting with Tyrone, Hogan conspires with Josie to play "the greatest joke on him to teach him a lesson." (903) Betrayed, Josie agrees and angrily retreats to the bedroom.

Left alone, Hogan plots: "God forgive me, it's bitter medicine. But it's the only way I can see that has a chance now." (906) The actor and director must choose to what degree Hogan addresses the audience directly, making direct eye contact, for example. We find out only later that Hogan is really speaking about bringing together Josie and Tyrone, not about saving his farm.

Tyrone returns and Hogan soon departs, pretending to be kicked out for being too drunk, remembering nothing of any prior conversation. The lovers begin this evenings' games. Josie intends to seduce Tyrone, then force him to marry her. But her wrath wavers; her sympathy triggers Tyrone's guilt, thus the need for Josie's forgiveness, as from a surrogate mother.

Robinson contends that this final metadrama "shifts the play from comedy toward tragedy." This shift is embodied by Jim Tyrone. In Act I, Tyrone is a "performer, trading witty lines." Later he is audience to the handling of Harder, then to Josie and Hogan's scheme of revenge. Robinson sees Tyrone's withdrawal from actor to audience as reflecting both Tyrone's death wish, and his longing to "abandon role playing altogether as a form of insincerity which (only) masks the deeper reality of death." (Robinson2, 68) This is also reflected through the various textual recitations Jamie makes, for example from *Othello* and Keats' "Ode to a Nightngale" in Act II. Tellingly, he immediately after reciting the lines "*with deep feeling*," Tyrone "*sneers*." (909)

In the final two acts Tyrone, expresses an inability to escape, or to even fully realize, the role. Tyrone shares, then negates his feelings with Josie; all he can find are masks. Josie's still playing whore.

TYRONE

Nix on the raw stuff, Josie. Remember you said –

JOSIE

(resentment in her kidding) I'd be different? That's right. I'm forgetting it's your pleasure to have me pretend I'm an innocent virgin tonight.

TYRONE

> If you don't look out, I'll call you on that bluff, Josie. (913)

Tyrone finally tells Josie the truth she has known deep down all along – the farm has never been for sale. Josie is relieved from her role of slut / temptress. Tyrone, still torn, bounces back and forth among personae, primary among these being jaded former Broadway actor and tender potential lover. Manheim comments on his "seamless blend of American dialects which run a gamut from racetrack to vaudeville stage to remembered poetry." (Manheim1, 155) Jim finally admits to Josie:

> We can kid the world but we can't fool ourselves, like most people, no matter what we do—nor escape ourselves no matter where we run away. Whether it's in the bottom of a bottle, or a South Sea Island, we'd find our own ghosts there waiting to greet us—"sleepless with pale commemorative eyes," as Rossetti wrote.... The old poetic bull, eh? Crap! *(reverting to a teasing tone)* […] You pretend too much. (923)

His confusion and struggles are once again revealed in his narration of the events surrounding his mother's death. An early anecdote in the play has related how Josie acted for Jim's father. Another has told how a prostitute impersonated Jim's sister. Now Jim will tell the final story of performing that serves as confession as well as an explanation for his self-hatred. In the longest speeches in the play, Tyrone describes how he had gone "on the wagon for two years" (929) before his mother died. When she suddenly became ill, Tyrone tells how he hid from his mother the fact that once again "the old booze yen got me."

> That was my excuse, too – that she'd never know. And she never did. *(He pauses – then sneeringly)* Nix! Kidding myself again […] glad to die. (930)

Tyrone's guilt is compounded by his behavior on the train carrying his mother's body back east from California. He tells Josie how he began drinking, consorting with a "blonde pig." (931) Finally, he relates how he

was too drunk to attend the funeral. This confession in Act III is the climax of the play. Tyrone describes his attachment to his mother, but remembers, "I couldn't feel anything."

When his own mother dies, Meursault in Camus' *L'Étranger* feels little and seems to act indifferently, seemingly unaware of the conduct expected of him. Jim Tyrone remembers and relives his mother's service in detail: "the undertakers, and her body in a coffin with her face made up." He describes the setting in the funeral home, among the mourners, "several people around and I knew they expected me to show something."

> Even a crying jag would look better than just standing there […] So I put on an act. I flopped on my knees and faked some sobs and cried, "Mama! Mama! My dear mother!" But all the time I kept saying to myself, "You lousy ham! You God-damned lousy ham!" (930-31)

Jim could not portray sincerely enough the requisite part of grieving son. Likewise, Tyrone cannot accept the role of sincere lover out fear that he will fail again, that he will betray another woman. Before this confession, Josie knows only that when he loses his cheerful façade, he looks "like a dead man." (874) Before she knows the depths of his despair, Josie can hope. She drops her "brazen-trollop act," and the two admit their love for each other. Josie suggests they go to bed, and Tyrone once again slips into his role of jaded heel. *(He looks over her now with a sneering cynical lust.)* But Josie repudiates this act from Tyrone, saying, "Don't … Jim. I'm not a whore." (925) Josie attempts to suspend the games from which Tyrone cannot escape.

Just as Larry Slade in *The Iceman Cometh* admits that he is "a weak fool looking with pity at the two sides of everything until I die," (710) Jim Tyrone is constantly reconfiguring past and present, self and truth.

> Was I trying to rape you, Josie? Forget it. I'm drunk – not responsible […] Must have drawn a blank for a while. Nuts! Cut out the faking. I knew what I was doing. *(Slowly, staring before him)* But it's funny, I *was* seeing

> things. That's the truth, Josie. For a moment I thought you were that blonde pig – (925)

By the end of the third act all plot questions are answered. Josie realizes that Tyrone has accepted all he can from her, one night's peace during the blackout after Act III. As IV begins, the "*first faint streaks of color, heralding the sunrise, appear in the eastern sky at left*." Tyrone slowly awakens in Josie's lap. She is "*looking at the eastern sky, which is now glowing with color*."

> *(He is profoundly moved but immediately becomes self-conscious and tries to sneer it off – cynically)* God seems to be putting on quite a display. I like Belasco better. Rise of curtain, Act Four stuff. *(Her face has fallen […])* Goddamn it! Why do I have to pull that lousy stuff? *(With genuine deep feeling)* God, it's beautiful, Josie. I-I'll never forget it – here with you. (942)

Jamie's reference to David Belasco, the 19th century producer known for melodrama, also calls attention to O'Neill's own "Act IV stuff." Tyrone's ambivalence toward the beauty of a staged dawn parallels his denial, then acceptance of the dream. A sense of redemption, at first unrecollected, helps him not to negate the significance of the night before:

> JOSIE
>
> I want you to remember my love for you gave you peace for a while.
>
> TYRONE
>
> *(Stares at her, fighting with himself. He stammers defensively.)* I don't know what you're talking about. I don't remember–
>
> JOSIE
>
> All right, Jim. Neither do I then. Good-bye, and God bless you.

TYRONE *(Stammers)*

Wait, Josie! *(Coming to her)* I'm a liar. I'm a louse! Forgive me, Josie. I do remember! I'm glad I remember! I'll never forget your love! *(He kisses her on the lips)* Never. *(Kissing her again)* Never, do you hear! I'll always love you, Josie. *(He kisses her again)* Good-bye – and God bless you! (944)

If aspects of metatheatre may be said to destabilize "boundaries between 'illusion' or artifice and "reality,'" then these are present in many works (Davis, Metatheatre). According to the definition put forth earlier, *A Moon for the Misbegotten* cannot be considered a metaplay, one whose primary concern is a formal reconsideration of stage presentation. But Jim Tyrone, Phil Hogan and Josie Hogan all flow between typed characters inside their own plays within the play, tell tall tales about their experiences of performing, and comment directly on their own play's circumstances. Here, side by side with O'Neill's characters' realistically depicted emotional problems, the author's theatrical contrivances are laid apparent for all to see. O'Neill leaves it to us in his last work to be manipulated during the drama, as well as to believe after the play is over.

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