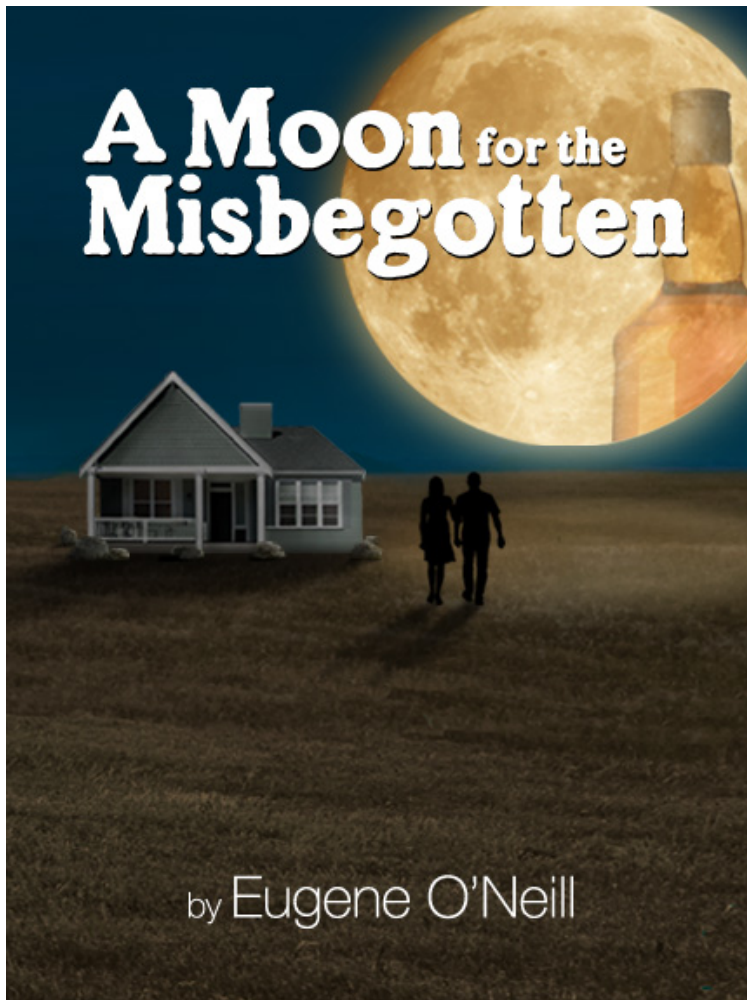


Jewel Theatre Audience Guide

Addendum: James Tyrone, Jr. Character Description



directed by Joy Carlin

by Susan Myer Silton, Dramaturge
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JAMES TYRONE, JR.

James Tyrone, Jr., played by Rolf Saxon, is an actor and gambler, and the landlord of the property where Phil Hogan has his pig farm. The character is the son of James Tyrone and Mary Cavan Tyrone and the brother of Edmund Tyrone, all of whom call him Jamie. All four are characters in *A Long Day's Journey Into Night*. He is ten years older in *A Moon for the Misbegotten*.

James Tyrone, Jr., is possibly the most tragic figure in O'Neill's canon. If O'Neill is "America's Shakespeare," so called by Patrick Murfin in his article, "The Sailor Who Became America's Shakespeare," James Tyrone and Josie Hogan are the Irish-American Romeo and Juliet, enmeshed in a doomed love.

James Tyrone, Jr., or Jim as he is called by the Hogans, is modeled on James O'Neill, Jr., who was called Jamie by his family. Jamie was born on September 10, 1878 (*A Moon For the Misbegotten* is set in September 1923, his 45th birthday month), the first of three sons of James and Ella O'Neill, both of whom emigrated from Ireland. Edmund, the second son, died while he was a baby. Jamie died at 45 on November 8, 1923, having spent the previous two months in a sanatorium in New Jersey—alone, nearly blind and in the terminal stages of alcoholism. Eugene "had been unable to forgive his brother's outrageous behavior during the months before his death, and would not visit him at the sanitarium" (Barbara Gelb, "A Second Look, and a Second Chance to Forgive". *The New York Times*, March 19, 2000). The unforgivable acts were exactly what Jim Tyrone relates to Josie in Act III of *Moon*.

The true story that drives *A Moon for the Misbegotten* is that of the final illness, in 1922, of Jim's (and Eugene's) mother, Ella. After their father's death in 1920, Jim had at last given up drinking for his mother's sake [Note: Ella herself had withdrawn from her morphine addiction at the same time Jamie gave up alcohol]. Sober for a year and a half, he accompanied her to California to look into one of his father's real estate investments, and there she fell ill with an incurable brain tumor. Awaiting her death in terror, Jim began drinking again as she lay in a coma. He became convinced that she awakened long enough to be aware of his condition and to die in despair.

Even worse, on the train bearing his mother's coffin home he picked up a prostitute and locked himself with her into his compartment, arriving in New York too drunk and debauched to attend to the disposition of his mother's body. All this soon became known to his appalled brother.

Arthur and Barbara Gelb provide details about the period leading to Ella's death in their book, *By Women Possessed: A Life of Eugene O'Neill* (Penguin, 2016). They write that Ella and Jamie moved to Los Angeles in early February 1922, planning to stay for the next six months to settle some of James, Sr.'s property after his death in the summer of 1920. By this time, Ella had been clean since 1914 and Jamie sober for nearly a year and a half. "Living together, traveling together, confiding daily in each other," the Gelbs observed, "the mother and son intimacy mimicked a married

life; certainly this was the closest Jamie would ever be to having a wife. Perhaps for the first time in his adult life, Jamie was at peace with himself and the world ...”.

Things changed rapidly, beginning when Ella had an episode that left her dragging her leg. On that same side, her mouth twisted unnaturally. She refused medical help, but finally agreed to see a doctor on February 9, who confirmed that she had suffered a slight stroke. Jamie, “flung off balance”, wired Eugene in New York, where he was working on *The Hairy Ape*, soon to open in the Village. A few days later, Jamie’s tone had changed—he assured Gene that Ella was better and that they would return to the East as soon as she had sufficiently recovered. His optimism was short-lived, however, when Ella suffered a second, far more paralyzing stroke on February 16, less than two weeks after she had come to California. Jamie urged Gene to hurry to Los Angeles, but his older brother refused, wiring that he was “unwell”. Eugene continued to protest poor health, even when Jamie insisted, in a second wire, that he come immediately. Louis Scheaffer explains Gene’s reticence in *O’Neill: Son and Artist* (1973), the second volume of his two-book biography: “despite what he told Jamie, Eugene was in fairly good health at the time. Most likely he would have refused to go to California even had he not been involved with *The Hairy Ape* or some other production. Unable to cope with ordinary problems and difficulties of quotidian life ... he was completely at a loss in a crisis. ‘The thought of death,’ Agnes [Boulton, his second wife] says, ‘unnerved him. He hated anything that had to do with death’ ... but even though he never went to the Coast, he was not to be spared a close-up view of her wretched end.”

Left on his own by Gene, it became too much for Jamie. “His brief happy life as companion to the one woman he had ever truly loved came to an end. Dissolving into helplessness, he once again sought reassurance in the bottle” (Arthur and Barbara Gelb, *By Women Possessed*). On February 28, the day of his mother’s death, he notified Eugene and then wired Frank W. Dart of New London, the administrator of the O’Neill estate: “My dear friend, my mother died this morning. I know your devotion to yours so you can appreciate the awful desolation that has come into my life” (Louis Scheaffer, *Son and Artist*).

Before she and Jamie moved to Los Angeles, Ella contacted Libbie Drummer, her old friend and former hairdresser from the East who now lived there, to tell her of her impending stay. Mrs. Drummer saw Ella several times before her death. She wrote about Ella a few weeks later in a letter to an O’Neill family friend, who forwarded it to Eugene. Excerpts from that letter, reprinted below, attest to Jamie’s disintegration at that time:

I am so glad you told me about the funeral. I was so worried. I did not know if Jamie would ever reach New York alive. He was in a dreadful condition . . . when he left.

I received a card from Mrs. O’Neill that she was in town and would love to see me. Well, I went out to call on her. When she opened the door, I felt very bad.

She dragged one foot . . . and her mouth was a little crooked. Before I left Jamie came in. He was not drinking at that time and I invited them both to dinner the following Sunday ...—they came to dinner [and] I will never forget [that] Mrs. O'Neill was dressed lovely and her whole face was all to one side. I told them to see a doctor. Jamie came to the store [where Mrs. Drummer worked] and said that his Mother had another stroke and would I come out there. I went out and oh what a sight. All of her right side was dead from head to toe. I stayed for a few hours as Mrs. O'Neill wished me to. I think that was the day that Jamie started drinking. He is very weak. Then Jamie came to the store and asked me to come out that night [February 16] as his mother was going to make her will and he wanted me for his witness.

Well, she seemed to get worse every day and Jamie kept drinking harder all the time and the worst part of it [is] I think she knew he was drinking before she died and realized everything and was helpless.

Then she passed away the following Tuesday morning. . . . The next day [the nurse] phoned me and wanted me to come out to the house to see if I could do anything with Jamie . . . I went and oh, my dear, it was pitiful. The two nurses were there with him and his condition was dreadful between dope and drink and his mother at the undertaker's, and he wanted to ship her home to Eugene [and] remain here [in Los Angeles]. I said by no means, you are going back with your mother or I wire Eugene. Then the next day I went to the undertaker's and had a talk with them. He had left the whole thing to them, even to buying his ticket. I told them not to let the body go back without him . . . The nurse came the next day and said that she had seen him off and that he had ten bottles of whiskey with him and that he had a compartment. It was the saddest closing chapter of any story I have ever read. (Louis Scheaffer, *Son and Artist*).

Eugene did not hear from Jamie for several days after Ella's death until he received a wire on March 4 that Jamie was leaving that day on the train. Jamie engaged a prostitute for the journey, then drank himself to near-oblivion each of the next five days until the train bearing him and his mother's coffin reached New York.

The train arrived March 9, the same night *The Hairy Ape* debuted at the Provincetown Playhouse. Agnes was to attend the première with Saxe Commins, editor of the Random House Modern Library, which published Eugene's work. Gene was supposed to meet the train at Grand Central Station with William P. Connor, one of his parents' oldest friends. As the arrival time drew closer, his nerves got the best of him. He telephoned Connor that he was unable to join him. Connor firmly insisted that he fulfill his duty to his mother, but Eugene dug in his heels. Connor then asked his nephew to accompany him. The two men waited at the station while the passengers disembarked and cleared the platform. They located Ella's coffin and had it loaded on an empty luggage wagon. Jamie couldn't be found. They searched the cars in vain until the stationmaster led them to Jamie's compartment, where he lay on the floor in a drunken stupor, surrounded by empty bottles. Connor and his nephew managed to

get him into a taxi, which took them to a hotel off Times Square where they left him. Appalled by the behavior of both brothers, “Connor telephoned Eugene and in a voice of cold disgust gave him a report” (Louis Scheaffer, *Son and Artist*).

Following the play, which was extremely well-met by the audience, Agnes and Saxe met Gene at the hotel where the O’Neills were staying. Guilty over leaving Connor to deal with his mother’s corpse, evasive about Jamie, and indifferent to news of the premiere, he fabricated a story from some of the things Connor had told him to lead them to believe that he had met the coffin at Grand Central. He then asked Saxe to go for a walk in Central Park with him, and there he spent the next few hours excoriating his family in a bitter rampage that would one day form the basis of *Long Day’s Journey Into Night*. He spoke of his mother and father, their respective miseries, addictions, lapses in judgement, loss of fortune, sparsity of affection and toxic marriage. “And there was Jamie,” Sheaffer wrote, “who had thrown his life away, Jamie, whom Eugene considered more talented than himself; he was smart, he was witty, he had a genuine feeling for literature, and yet it had all come to nothing, a life wasted on sex, drinking and other pleasures. Probably Jamie, his brother felt, was the most unfortunate of them all, for he had had scarcely anything to sustain him, nothing except his love for his mother.”

Ella’s funeral service was held on the morning of March 10 at St. Leo’s on East Twenty-Eighth Street, a church she used to attend. When it looked like Jamie wasn’t going to show up, Connor’s sister and nephew stopped by his hotel to fetch him. They found him as he was sending a bellhop out for more liquor—drunk but cognizant of who they were. He declined to return to the funeral with them, saying that he was too upset.

In 1931, 10 years before Eugene began to write *Moon*, Joseph McCarthy, an old schoolmate of Jamie’s, asked him if his older brother was still alive. “No, my brother is not alive,” he replied. “He died in 1923. Booze got him in the end ... He and I were terribly close to each other, but after my mother’s death in 1922 he gave up all hold on life and simply wanted to die as soon as possible. He had never found his place. He had never belonged. I hope like my *Hairy Ape* he does now.”

For a long time, Jamie did belong. However, two major events in his life changed its course: the death of his younger brother, Edmund, in 1885 and the sight of his mother injecting herself with morphine when he was a young teenager. Edmund died when he was two years old and Jamie was six-and-a-half. Ella had left them in the care of their grandmother in New York while she accompanied James, Sr. on a theatre tour of the West. Jamie contracted measles while they were away and was strictly forbidden to enter the toddler’s room. He did anyway, infecting his brother, who died. This tragedy would dig itself deep into the bones of the family, always just below the surface, always present. Even Eugene, who wouldn’t be born for another three years, was affected by it.

Since his birth, Jamie had traveled from theater to theater, living in cramped hotel rooms with his parents as his father developed his career as an actor. Since his mother was his only close contact in the world—his father was busy with rehearsals and performances—he formed an unnatural attachment to her. When Edmund came along, Ella had far less time and attention to lavish on Jamie. He deeply resented the infant and was jealous of him. In her anguish at the loss of her baby, Ella turned on Jamie, accusing him of deliberately infecting Edmund. The thought of bringing so much pain to his adored mother devastated him. Soon after, he was sent to boarding school in the middle of the country, which he would attend for the next nine years. Perhaps as a way of redeeming himself, he earned high grades and numerous awards in his subjects. He missed his mother terribly and excitedly anticipated her visits, but now he had a life apart from her. He was charismatic and charming, popular among his classmates, a teacher's pet, an excellent stage actor and fine athlete who played shortstop on the baseball team.

This came to a halt in 1892. During a school vacation when he was 14, he accidentally observed his mother shooting herself up with morphine. He was appalled, sickened and betrayed. His alter-ego in *Long Day's Journey Into Night* tells his younger brother, "Christ, I'd never dreamed before that any women but whores took dope!"

He returned to school profoundly changed. For a while, he continued to excel at some of his subjects, but soon began acting out. He blamed his father for his mother's addiction, and the disrespect he showed him soon extended to the teachers whose favor he once sought. He dropped out of the school, and tried two more schools, where his behavior and scholastic progress was less than stellar, before graduating.

Jamie's academic career ended ignominiously when he was expelled from St. John's College in the Bronx, the former grounds of Fordham University, at the beginning of his senior year. His infraction was smuggling a prostitute onto campus, an incident he describes in some of the versions of *Moon*. The occurrence marked the point where his decline became irretrievable. It was followed with failed attempts at employment and even a stint on the stage that was set in motion by his father. Even that eventually failed, as he often took the stage drunk, egged on loudly by the prostitutes he invited to his performances, for whom he made vulgar poses at the stage apron.

His antics threatened his father's acting career, but before he could do permanent damage, his chronic drunkenness ultimately barred him from the stage for good in 1916. He drifted about, begging loans from friends and family and sometimes winning at the racetrack. Jamie was still jobless when his father died four years later, so he was able to devote himself completely to his mother. As mentioned earlier, both Jamie and Ella conquered their addictions and fashioned a close and rewarding life together, which lasted until her unexpected death on February 28, 1922. Jamie started drinking heavily again, and by May was so far gone that his friends involuntarily admitted him to a New Jersey sanatorium.

Arthur and Barbara Gelb write about Jamie's tragic last weeks in *By Women*

Possessed.

Conflict was in the air [Eugene] O'Neill breathed ... His refractory brother had become an intolerable burden; it was all but impossible for O'Neill any longer to feel charitable toward him.

... In fuming over his brother's tantrums, Eugene seemed to have forgotten his own years of self-destructive drinking—or for that matter, his own still-unresolved addiction to alcohol. He was too incensed to feel compassion for the older brother he had worshipped from early childhood, the brother he admired for his worldliness and literary sophistication, and whose cynicism he'd trustingly tried to imitate. For most of their lives, they had been as close as any two brothers of legend. But O'Neill had run out of patience.

On May 20, 1923, Jamie, in an advanced state of delirium tremens [see definition for "D.T.'s" p. 47 of this document], was admitted to the Riverlong Sanatorium in Paterson, New Jersey, an expensive rehabilitation center paid for out of his share of his mother's estate. At 45, Jamie's hair was white, and he was losing his eyesight.

Eugene was kept apprised of Jamie's condition by his sanatorium doctor and by a few visiting relatives and friends from New London and New York. Among them was Francis Cadenas, ... sister of the Madison Square Garden circus acrobat Bill Clarke, Eugene and Jamie's drinking crony from bygone days.

Jamie talked to Cadenas of his love for his younger brother. He had been hospitalized for a month when Francis was informed by his doctor that his condition had grown critical. "The pain is not only in his limbs but in his hands this week," Cadenas wrote to O'Neill on July 18. "He does not like the place, the food is wretched and he cannot sleep during the night."

She went on to describe his treatment for what had been diagnosed as "alcoholic neuritis": gradual withdrawal from alcohol by "giving him 10 drinks of whiskey during the day and some other kind of drink it before the whiskey, which burns like fire and acts like a purgative." Jamie, she said, "was very skinny, pale, trembles a great deal and of course weak".

"I read him a little part of your letter and he was very happy to hear a message from you. He cannot read or write and he asked me to write for him and to tell you about his condition. He also expressed a great desire to see you."

She promised to continue visiting Jamie and would telegraph O'Neill if there was any change. "I'm sure a letter from you would be very bracing," she prodded gently.

O'Neill rarely wrote to Jamie and never visited the sanatorium. In a letter to Saxe Commins, he confided that Jamie was "almost blind from bad booze ... What the hell can be done about him is more than I can figure. He'll only get drunk, I guess, after he gets out and then he'll be all blind."

Jamey never did get out. It took him three more months to die. According to a cousin, Phil Sheridan, Jamie was "out of his mind" during his final days. Death came on November 8, 1923.

O'Neill did not show up for Jamie's funeral. His wife told friends that he had the flu, but most of the attendees knew that he was drunk, just as Jamie had been during Ella's funeral just a few months earlier.

Gene's drinking was a sure sign that his cruel treatment of Jamie was deeply eating at him. 18 years later, he started to write *Moon*, competing against the progressive illness that was rapidly debilitating him. He completed it, his final performed play, in 1944.

Scholars of O'Neill agree that *Moon* was written as absolution for Jamie. From the perspective of the passing 20 years, and facing his own death, Eugene finally forgave him. At long last, he regarded his brother with compassion. He allowed himself to feel Jamie's agony and self-loathing for letting his mother down by taking up drinking again, relinquishing his familial obligation at the end of her life, his behavior on the train with the "blonde pig", and failing to show up for her funeral and burial. Through Josie, Eugene absolved Jamie, but Jamie was never able to forgive himself.

My take? What Gene did was cowardice and just as egregious as what Jamie did. He refused to come to his mother's deathbed and would not meet her coffin at the station. When he knew he was dying, Jamie so desperately wanted closure, but Eugene refused to visit him.

Jamie's iniquity, because it involved a prostitute, was shocking, especially during that era and within New England puritanical society. While Gene bitterly, deliberately and purposefully inflicted great pain on his brother, Jamie came from a place of profound desolation, intending only to hurt himself. Gene needed to own his actions and forgive himself, too, and perhaps in the act of forgiving his brother, he accomplished that.

In the last scene of *Moon*, Jim Tyrone, blessed by Josie's forgiving love, takes his final leave of her. Josie, "her face sad, tender and pitying," gazes after him. "May you have your wish and die in your sleep soon, Jim darling," she says, "may you rest forever in forgiveness and peace."

By the end of October 1923 (a month after the time of the play's action) a cousin of the O'Neills who had kept in touch with the sanatorium reported to Agnes, "Jim was out of his mind and getting weaker every day." He died on Nov. 8, "his life without doubt the most cruelly blighted of the four tragic O'Neills" (Gelb, "A Second Look").



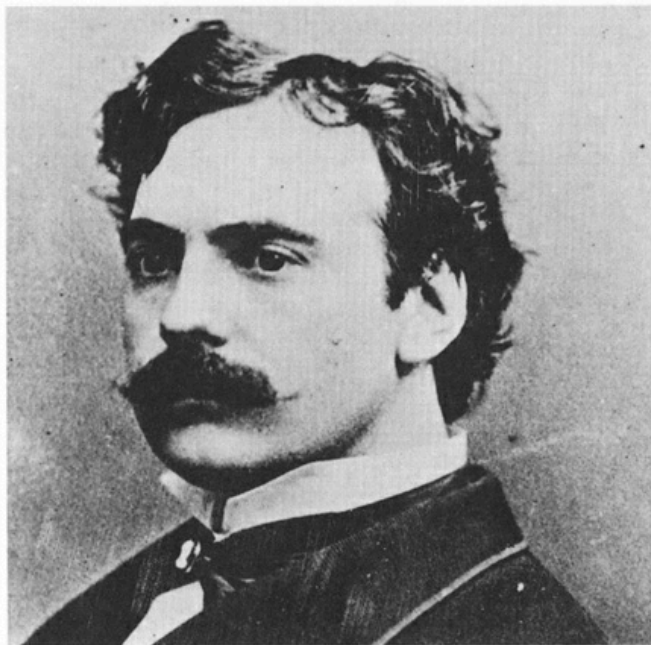
L to R, Eugene, Jamie and James on the porch of Monte Cristo Cottage, New London, 1900



The Tyrones in the 1962 film version of *Journey*, directed by Sydney Lumet. L to R: Dean Stockwell (Edmund), Jason Robards (Jamie), Ralph Richardson (James) and Katharine Hepburn (Mary). The house is an exact replica of Monte Cristo Cottage. Robards would play Jim Tyrone, Jr. again in the 1973 Broadway revival of *Moon*, and the TV movie in 1975.



Ella O'Neill

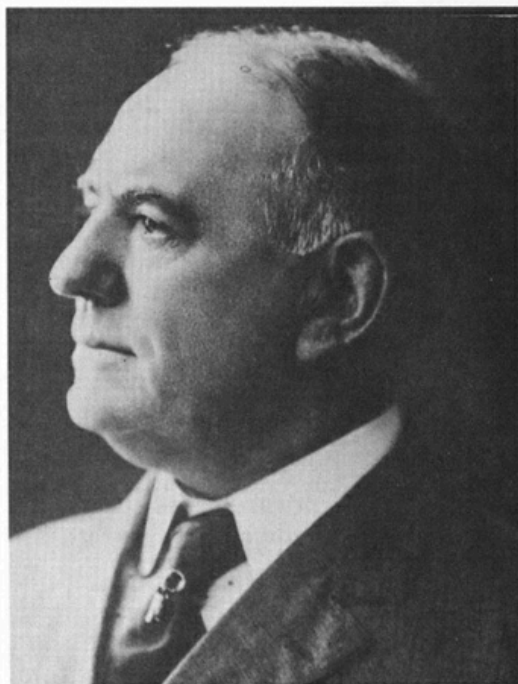


James O'Neill in 1875

In 1869



Circa 1915





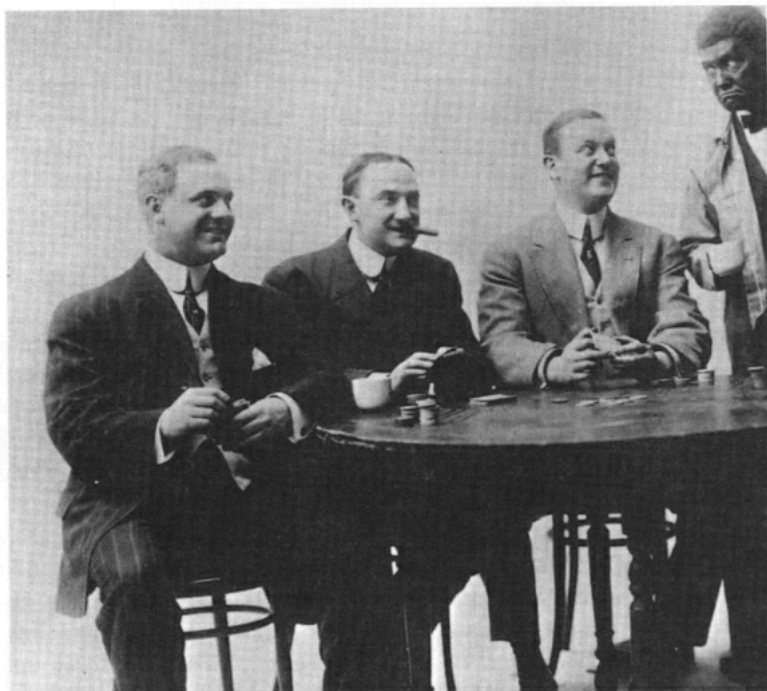
*Ella Quinlan O'Neill around the time
of her marriage in 1877*



In the early 1880s



Jamie in his early thirties



James O'Neill, Jr., second from left, in scenes from The Travelling Salesman



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