O. Henry’s Use of Stereotypes in His New York City Stories: An Example of the Utilization of Folklore in Literature

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O'HENRY'S USE OF STEREOTYPES IN HIS NEW YORK CITY STORIES: AN EXAMPLE OF THE UTILIZATION OF FOLKLORE IN LITERATURE

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of Modern Languages and Intercultural Studies
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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts

by
Martin B. Ostrofsky
June 1982
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Stereotyping is a folkloristic process which permits people to reduce the complexities of the real world into simplified, abstract terms. O. Henry, one of America's most popular short story writers, made generous use of stereotypes in his stories. By examining O. Henry's use of stereotypes, insight may be gained into the essential role which folklore often plays in creative literature. Stereotypes greatly influence the composition, function and reception of O. Henry's work. O. Henry's personal habits and circumstances demanded that he produce a prolific stream of short stories which would have the greatest popular appeal. Clever manipulation of stereotypes permitted O. Henry to swiftly write stories which gratified the reading public's needs and expectations. New York City is the most popular location for O. Henry's stories, and major categories of stereotypes which define New York City include
business-mindedness, conviviality, notoriety and cosmopolitanism. Occupational, social and ethnic group stereotypes add a further dimension to O. Henry's New York City stories.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The short story was a prominent form of literature in the United States during the first two decades of the twentieth century, and the most dominant influence upon short story writing during that period was O. Henry. O. Henry is the pen-name of William Sydney Porter (1862-1910), who achieved great popularity among his contemporaries. Although some of the stories for which he is most famous take place in other locations, O. Henry has always been closely associated with New York City, the location for the bulk of his work. The premise of this thesis is that O. Henry employed a wide body of stereotypes of New York City and of New Yorkers in his stories, which aided him in producing his work and which helped insure his popularity. Stereotypes used by O. Henry will be examined within their folkloristic and literary contexts and against the historical background of the stories in which they appear. The use of stereotypes in O. Henry's New York City stories provides an excellent display of the application of folklore in literature.

William Sydney Porter was born to a middle-class family in Greensboro, North Carolina, on September 11, 1862. Porter's mother died in 1865, and because of the increasingly reticent role of his father, Porter was brought up largely under the influence of his aunt, Lina Porter. Aunt Lina was a self-reliant and capable woman, who earned a living as a schoolteacher, and encouraged Porter in developing a great love for literature and for storytelling. Porter's inventive wit and amiability, coupled with his talents for drawing and storytelling, endeared him to his friends. In 1879 Porter started working at his Uncle Clark's drugstore. The drugstore served as a meeting place where local residents gathered to exchange news, play checkers, or perhaps tell tales. It is probable that his close contact with the colorful personalities who frequented the drugstore helped sharpen Porter's already well-developed talents of defining character types and narrative storytelling.²

Porter became a licensed pharmacist in 1881, but left North Carolina and traveled to Texas the following year to stay as a guest on the ranch of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Hall. During his stay with the Halls Porter gained much first hand experience with life on the range.

in the southwest, which materializes in the settings of many of the short stories he was later to write. After a couple of years living on the Hall ranch, Porter moved to Austin where he stayed as a guest of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Harrell. In 1887 Porter secured a position as a draftsman in the Texas Land Office, and in that same year he married Athol Estes. In 1888 Athol gave birth to a son, who died shortly afterwards, but in the following year she gave birth to a daughter, Margaret.

In 1891 Porter lost his job in the Texas Land Office because of changed political appointments, and he found work as a teller in the First National Bank of Austin. Porter was forced to leave his job at the bank in 1894 when shortages were found in his accounts. During this period, Porter was also exercising his writing talents by publishing a humor weekly called *The Rolling Stone*, which survived for one year. Porter had been indicted to stand trial in 1894 because of the shortages at the bank, but the case was temporarily closed in 1895, during which time he secured a job as a feature writer for the *Houston Post*. In 1896, however, Porter was once again indicted to stand trial for the same charges, but this time he fled to New Orleans and then to Honduras. As in Texas, Porter accumulated a wealth of descriptive material in New Orleans and Honduras, which he would later incorporate in his short stories. Porter quickly returned to Texas
when he received news that Athol, who had been very ill since Margaret's birth, was in serious condition.

Athol died in 1897, and the following year, despite much support from friends and relatives, Porter was sentenced to five years imprisonment. During the time of Athol's illness Porter had his first short story accepted for publication by a national periodical. Porter continued to write while in prison, using several pseudonyms (among them O. Henry), and had over a dozen stories published in national magazines. After having served a three year sentence, Porter was released from prison for good behavior. He eventually moved to New York City in 1902, where he assumed the pseudonym O. Henry for the duration of his prolific career.

His arrival in New York City was a turning point for Porter, for it was there that he wrote the bulk of his stories, set the trend for short story writing in America for the next couple of decades, and eventually achieved worldwide fame. Porter, who was an avid walker, explored the haunts and byways of New York City, and developed an intimate acquaintance with the sights and sounds of the city. Taking advantage of the relative anonymity offered by the big city (he did not want his experience in prison to become known), Porter was intrigued by the display of variety and color to be found among the inhabitants of New York. New York City soon became the milieu with which
Porter was as closely associated as was Bret Harte with the American West, or Mark Twain with the Mississippi. Porter found himself writing short stories for several national magazines at the same time, and in 1903 he signed a contract with the New York Sunday World to provide one short story each week for the Sunday supplement. The first of several collections of short stories by O. Henry (reprinted from his work for the newspapers and magazines) appeared in book form in 1904. In 1907 Porter married Sara Lindsay Coleman, an old friend from Greensboro, North Carolina. Porter continued to write short stories, and even tried his hand at an unsuccessful theatrical venture, but his inability to remain out of debt due to his extravagant spending habits, plus his flagging health, soon diminished his output. On June 5, 1910, Porter died after a serious illness, but during his brief career in New York he established O. Henry as a household name.

The latter half of the nineteenth century was a period of great social change in the United States. Mass migrations of population occurred, due partly to the unrest left in the wake of the American Civil War. An even greater contributing factor to migration within the United States during the nineteenth century was the advent of mass industrialization to what previously had been primarily a mercantile and agrarian society. Nineteenth century migrants in the United States often traveled
towards the western frontier, but many more flocked to the country's urban centers. Augmenting the swelling populations of the urban centers was the massive influx of immigrants to the United States during the middle of the nineteenth century until the first few decades of the twentieth century. The changes in the concentration of population in the United States, especially within the country's urban centers, prompted diverse changes in lifestyle. As masses of people began to populate its cities, nineteenth century America saw the rise of institutions such as factories, tenements, department stores, theaters and public facilities; of social classes such as the working class and the nouveaux riches; and of social problems and movements towards social reform.

One notable development in the United States which began in the nineteenth century was the trend towards a free and universal public education. Public education in the United States resulted in a huge new segment of the population which could read and write. The residents of major cities in nineteenth century America were not only gaining the opportunity for a better education because of the increasing number of schools due to the size of their populations, but the trend towards a mandatory elementary education was developing as well.

As the American public became increasingly literate, its desire for mass entertainment in the form of literature
also increased. Classic and elite works of literature continued to be read, but to fulfill the American public's seemingly insatiable desire for literary entertainment there grew a huge field of popular literature which manifested itself in such forms as newspaper sketches, magazine articles, short stories, dime novels, and inexpensive romances. The various forms of popular literature were speedily written, quickly produced, and cheaply sold, making them accessible not only in quantity but also to a broad spectrum of the public. Popular literature is in many ways far less removed from its audience than elite literature, and it may often closely reflect the attitudes, aspirations, and opinions of its audience. Whether the content, form or style of popular literature may be considered worthwhile when compared in the eyes of the critic to the belles lettres is of no concern here. The fact remains that the popular literature which was produced in the United States during the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century had wide appeal. Regardless of whether the techniques and materials used by its authors may be considered good, bad, or otherwise, popular literature satisfied the needs of the general public and, in fulfilling that function, was readily embraced by its audience.

Shortly after his arrival in New York City in 1902, O. Henry burst upon the scene of popular literature.
O. Henry's short stories soon appeared in syndicated magazines, in newspapers, and, after a while, as collections in book form. During the short duration of his literary career in New York, O. Henry became a leading influence upon the state of the art of the short story, leaving behind many imitators in his wake.

The reasons for the quick acceptance and immense popularity of O. Henry's stories are many. O. Henry was expert at combining the proper proportions of humor, romance, sentimentality and sensation in his stories to keep the average reader interested week after week. Adding to his appeal as a popular writer, O. Henry's style of writing is light and chummy. O. Henry does not appear as a remote narrator, but almost as a physical presence in front of the reader, telling stories, trading jokes, familiar and intimate. At the same time, however, that O. Henry is playing the role of the convivial storyteller, often employing overly romanticized characters and situations, he is also adding just the right touch of realism. Giving his characters some illusion of reality, O. Henry makes abundant use of slang and dialect in his stories. Moreover, one of O. Henry's most notable traits is his ability to concisely and accurately describe the locale of his stories, which gives them a flavor of authenticity.

The fusion of romantic sentimentality with the sense of realism in O. Henry's stories does much to endear
them to the public. In effect, O. Henry creates an illusionary world of his own in which he presents a conflict between real life and life as we would wish it to be. In his make believe world, cloaked in the trappings of reality, O. Henry can manipulate the characters at will, creating denouements which satisfy our common desires. O. Henry is resolving the conflict between real life and life as we would wish it, by creating a seemingly real situation but then by distorting, exaggerating, and often mocking it. In his stories O. Henry is playing the game of life by his own rules, and because of the intimate relationship he develops with his audience, his readers can play too. Not all of O. Henry's stories have happy endings, which adds to their appeal because the element of surprise keeps the readers continually alert and interested. The tension created by even the most tragic of O. Henry's stories, however, is relieved by some final comic remark, which allows the story social comment and impact without overly disconcerting the audience.

Equally as important as O. Henry's use of romanticism and realism is his profuse employment of humor. By a pervasive use of humor in his stories, O. Henry maintains a light and chatty atmosphere which makes them interesting and yet easy to read, traits which would have appealed especially to the newly literate masses at the turn of the century. O. Henry's use of humor also links
his stories to a long tradition of humor as a characteristic element in American folklore and literature. The exaggerated, irreverent and sometimes self-mocking humor which O. Henry utilizes is typically American and helps lend a peculiarly American spirit to his stories. O. Henry projects himself as the trickster; his audience must constantly be on the lookout for whatever he is going to pull next. O. Henry does not become malicious, however, and his humor is always mellowed by a sympathy for the human condition. By reflecting the overall spirit and values of his audience, O. Henry gives added impetus to his popularity.

In his short stories O. Henry combined the talents of the journalist, the humorist and the local colorist. O. Henry had a superb command of vocabulary, which he could manipulate to achieve the effects he desired. With a few well chosen words or sentences O. Henry could effectively paint a locale, sketch a character, or describe a situation.

From a technical viewpoint, O. Henry's work has been described as mechanical. The mechanical nature of O. Henry's stories is attested to by the schools of imitators which arose in his stead. Although his imitators could never capture that unique spark of individual talent and spirit which was O. Henry's, they strived diligently at duplicating his manner of storywriting. O. Henry
relied heavily upon the use of formulas when writing his short stories. All of O. Henry's stories may easily be dissected to show the use of such formulae as the seemingly irrelevant opening, the adoption of recurring themes, the continual use of various humorous devices, and the surprise ending.\(^3\)

The incessant use of formulas in O. Henry's stories served a necessary purpose. O. Henry spent his income freely and was in continual need of money. In order to provide for his financial needs, O. Henry tried to write and sell stories as frequently as he could to newspapers and syndicated magazines. The media which O. Henry wrote for catered to a mass audience, so O. Henry strived to produce stories which would have the greatest popular appeal. By continuously utilizing tried and true formulas for his structure, themes and language, O. Henry was able to quickly turn out stories in great numbers. Through his own ingenuity and prowess with language and humor, O. Henry was able to revitalize well accepted formulae and breathe new life into them. So adept was he at reworking his stock of formulas that O. Henry's works became not only immensely popular but were often acclaimed as brilliant and original creations.

Among the various kinds of formulas employed by O. Henry are his stereotypical depictions of characters

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\(^3\)Current-Garcia, *O. Henry*, pp. 135-155, 158.
and of setting. O. Henry often goes to elaborate lengths to describe the details of a character's appearance or of a particular section of New York. Despite his seemingly realistic portrayal of characters and of locale, however, O. Henry is in effect merely ornamenting already existing stereotypes of New York City and its residents.

By using stereotypes of New York City and of New Yorkers in his stories, O. Henry is fulfilling the same functions as he does with the other formulas he utilizes. O. Henry's use of stereotypes helped him to write his stories quicker so as to meet publication deadlines and financial needs. The stereotypes in O. Henry's stories also helped the stories gain mass appeal because they presented characters and situations which were readily accepted and popularly understood by the reading public. When the reader encounters an already accepted stereotype, he immediately perceives the situation O. Henry is projecting, and feels familiarly comfortable with it. At the same time that O. Henry gains the readers' understanding and familiarity by using stereotypes, he also economizes his storytelling and moves swiftly along with his narrative. Stereotypes play an indispensable role in the structure, characterization, development and success of O. Henry's short stories.

The term "stereotype" was coined by Walter Lippmann in his book Public Opinion which was published in 1922.
Lippmann points out that because of the complexities of the modern world we can only hope to personally perceive a small portion of all that transpires. Since our perception of the world is limited, we are often forced to define matters not by personal observation but by predetermined definitions already existing within our culture. When we are confronted with a given situation or matter, we notice a familiar trait and then proceed to fill in the rest of the picture using the stockpile of culturally preconceived notions already in our heads.4

Lippmann argues that because there are sufficient "uniformities" in life and because of the need for "economizing attention" that the loss of stereotypes would "impoverish human life." Stereotypes not only help us to economize and order an otherwise overwhelmingly complex world, they also serve as a defense mechanism by supporting our position in the world as we see it. Stereotypes form the "core of our personal tradition." Since they are fundamental to our view of the order of things, stereotypes can become highly personal and emotional; "they are the fortress of our tradition, and behind its defenses we can continue to feel ourselves safe in the position we occupy."5 Lippman points out


5Ibid., pp. 63-64.
that although stereotypes were a human necessity, care must be taken to scrutinize the content of the stereotype and the way in which it is employed.

A stereotype, as defined by Lippman, may be a culturally preconceived concept of human nature, history, time, space or any other number of elements. The bulk of scholarship pertaining to stereotypes, however, has presented them as a "group concept," primarily defining the characteristics of ethnic groups, but also dealing with characteristics of other groups (social groups, religious groups, occupational groups, the sexes, etc.). An exemplary study of stereotypes as a group concept was conducted by Daniel Katz and Kenneth Braly in 1933, in which students were asked to assign traits from a prepared list to members of selected ethnic groups which the students considered to be the most characteristic in describing the members of the groups.6

The large number of stereotypic studies conducted according to the Katz and Braly model, plus the growing popularity of the term "stereotype" in the English language, have given stereotypes the connotation of being inaccurate but rigid views of groups. Very often a stereotype is thought of as a prejudiced and bigoted view of an ethnic group. Joshua A. Fishman points out that

stereotypes should not be defined by their content, particularly when there may be much disagreement concerning the stereotype's content (i.e., is the stereotype accurate, inaccurate or perhaps partially accurate?). Fishman believes that the stereotype should be defined and studied by its "process." In other words, Fishman feels that a stereotype is definable by the manner in which it works and that it is the operation of the stereotype, with its inherent creation, survival and functions, that is of primary interest. In Fishman's opinion, a stereotype is an "inferior judgemental process," a process which bypasses empirical analysis of a situation and which substitutes efficiency for accuracy. Fishman also cites the "group-relatedness" of the stereotype. A stereotype functions in defining the relationship of the individual who holds the stereotype to a group, the relationship of the individual being stereotyped to a group, and of the relationship between the two groups. Fishman's broader concept of stereotypes and their functions is much closer to Lippmann's concept of stereotypes than are the concepts which tend to define the stereotype primarily by its content. Fishman's definition of stereotypes also allows much greater scope for studying stereotypes, both because it allows for a greater amount of subject matter which may be defined as "stereotypes" and because it actively advocates studying the dynamics of stereotypes. For instance,
Fishman shows great interest in the formation of stereotypes, in the modification of stereotypic behavior, and in the borrowing and application from other social science disciplines of theories which relate to the processes of stereotypes. 7

W. Edgar Vinacke emphasizes that stereotypes should be thought of as "concept-systems" which serve to "organize experience." Vinacke is again thinking of stereotypes in terms of group concepts, with particular emphasis upon personality traits attributed to groups. However, Vinacke also clearly rebels from defining stereotypes by their content and would rather view them as thought processes which should be studied with the methodologies of other concept-systems. As with other concept-systems, stereotypes have intensional components (subjective aspects which may differ from one person to another) and extensional components (objective aspects which nearly everyone would agree with). The uniqueness of stereotypes as compared with other concept-systems is that the stereotype's intensional properties are often accepted as extensional. In other words, the appraisal of a personality trait, which when studied empirically would be considered more intensional in nature, is treated as much more extensional in the stereotype. Stereotypes are a "social reality" and

merit serious consideration. Vinacke echoes Lippman when
he says that stereotypes may be useful because they are an
"inevitable consequence of social learning." Vinacke goes
on to say that not all stereotyping is necessarily prejudiced (bigoted) and that stereotypes and prejudices should
be treated separately. It is not enough merely to examine
the content of stereotypes. Vinacke believes that the
"dynamic aspects" of stereotypes, such as their genesis,
functions, and effects, deserve much more study.8

The question does frequently arise as to how much
truth, if any, is to be found in stereotypes. Current
thought is that stereotypes are neither completely true
nor completely false, but that they contain a "kernel of
truth." The kernel of truth theory of stereotypes allows
that there may be some factual basis to a stereotype, and
that the amount of truth in the stereotype may vary
depending upon the particular stereotype and the individual
holding it. The stereotypes held by one individual may
contain almost no factual basis at all, whereas the stereo-
types held by another individual may contain a great deal
of truth. In a survey conducted for UNESCO, Otto Klineberg
points out that despite the effects of mass media, changes
in stereotypes due to international tensions, and other

8Edgar W. Vinacka, "Stereotypes as Social Concepts,"
factors which might refute the validity of stereotypes, many national groups do possess distinctive characters which may lend some truth to the stereotypes about them. Klineberg recommends that detailed studies be made of the characters of national groups. A comparison of objective national character studies made with the popular stereotypes of those national groups would afford a much more accurate appraisal of the degree of truth to be found in the stereotypes.9

Adherents to the kernel of truth theory E. Terry Prothro and Levon H. Melikian contend that when several different groups of different cultures possess similar stereotypes about a given group, it is an indication of a factual basis to those stereotypes. Cross-cultural agreement on a stereotype of a given group is not in itself proof of the validity of the stereotype because of the effects of mass communication and other contingencies which might affect the dissemination of the stereotype. A further method for determining the factual basis of stereotypes, to be used in conjunction with cross-cultural analysis, is to test for changes in the stereotypes of a group with increased familiarity with that group, all other factors remaining the same. As a test case Prothro

and Melikian compare a study of character traits assigned to Americans by Arab students in Lebanon in 1951 with a subsequent study of character traits assigned to Americans by Arab students in Lebanon in 1952. During this period the presence of Americans in the area had greatly increased although all other socio-economic factors remained the same. The results indicated that although several features of the stereotypes remained the same in both studies, there were some new traits in the second study. These additional traits may be attributed to increased familiarity with the subjects of the stereotypes. As a control, the Arab students were asked in both tests to assign character traits to other nationalities as well; in both cases the traits remained the same. Finally a cross-cultural comparison was made of the Arab students' stereotypes of Americans from the second study with British stereotypes of Americans (the British having a tradition of long and close ties with Americans). Comparison showed great similarity between the Arab and British stereotypes of Americans thus suggesting that Americans have a "characteristic stimulus value," a distinctive national character which is perceived in the stereotypes of them held by other people.10

The value of accurate studies of national character

is stressed by Washington Platt. Platt believes that the majority of individuals in a group show a relative degree of uniformity. Individuals are a product of their culture, and culture is a group's shared responses—"man's substitute for instinct." Platt feels that from a practical standpoint, American diplomats, when dealing with a foreign nation, would be aided by a solid understanding of the character of the people of that nation, of the influential groups within that nation, and of the nation when it acts as an entity in its own right. Platt advises caution, however, when dealing with stereotypes. A good, objective understanding of national character makes for good foreign relations, and helps to vaguely anticipate the future course of foreign events. Inaccurate, possibly false, views of a foreign nation, gotten from national stereotypes, may only serve to damage relations with that country.\(^ {11}\)

When discussing stereotypes of national character we are talking about preconceived concepts determined by culture and handed down informally through tradition; in effect we are dealing with a folkloristic process. Joshua A. Fishman recognizes a link between the study of stereotypes and folklore and suggests that folkloristic

theory be applied to stereotypic studies.\textsuperscript{12}

William Hugh Jansen alludes to folkloristic materials which contain stereotypes when he describes the "esoteric-exoteric factor in folklore." By the esoteric factor in folklore Jansen refers to "what one group thinks of itself and what it supposes others think of it." By the exoteric factor in folklore Jansen means "what one group thinks of another and what it thinks that other group thinks it thinks." To clarify the last concept Jansen supplies the following statement: "They think that we think that they are inferior." When Jansen talked about the esoteric concepts a group has of itself and the exoteric concepts a group has about another group, he is clearly associating stereotypes (even though he does not use the term "stereotype") with the study of folklore.\textsuperscript{13}

Alan Dundes goes further to establish the intimate relationship between stereotypes and folklore. Dundes points out that stereotypes are transmitted by traditions about national character ("folk national character studies"), and he shows how these stereotypes may be found in diverse folkloristic materials. As a matter of fact, in referring to stereotypes, Dundes claims that "there is probably no

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{12}Fishman, "An Examination of the Process and Function of Social Stereotyping," pp. 54-57, 60.
\end{itemize}
other area of folklore where the element of belief is more
critical and potentially dangerous, not only to self but
to others." Dundes shows particular interest in the
"ethnic slur" in which the traits of a group are generally
mocked. However, Dundes says, the ethnic slur does not
necessarily have to relate to an ethnic group, nor does it
necessarily have to be demeaning. Moreover, folkloristic
materials of many different genres (i.e., proverbs, songs,
tales, etc.) may be considered ethnic slurs. Dundes uses
the term "ethnic slur" as a "functional rather than
generic category"; in effect, he discusses group stereotypes.
The significance of what Dundes says is that he
not only shows a direct relationship between stereotypes
and folklore but that he also stresses the importance and
need for additional studies of stereotypes by professional
folklorists.14

A more recent article linking group stereotyping
with folklore is "Cueing the Stereotype" written by
William M. Clements. Clements contends that ethnic jokes
are not necessarily malicious remarks aimed at a given
group but cues to the audience that an "outsider" is being
discussed. The moment a particular ethnic group is hinted
at, by either word or gesture, the audience summons forth
preconceived and shared stereotypes of that group. The

14Alan Dundes, "A Study of Ethnic Slurs: The Jew
and the Polack in the United States," Journal of American
Folklore 84 (April-June 1971): 186-203.
ethnic stereotype helps the joke teller evoke whatever character types he is trying to portray and allows him a common understanding with his audience.\textsuperscript{15}

Stereotyping is a process which defines more than ethnic groups alone. Folklore studies have been made of many popular character types which are, in effect, stereotypical representations of ethnic, regional and occupational groups. Jere C. Mickel, for instance, traces the development of the Toby character type which frequently appeared in the American theater. Toby was a freckled-faced, red-haired country bumpkin who extolled the virtues of a simple life; his native-born common sense and inherent purity triumphed over adversity and the wickedness of city life. Although Toby could be traced to known literary origins at the beginning of the twentieth century, Mickel shows how the character type was existent for centuries, finally manifesting itself on the American stage during the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.\textsuperscript{16}

Many other folkloristic studies have been conducted which examine various character types. Representative studies of character types include those made by Mody C. Boatright (oil field workers), Mary Sue Carlock (Methodist


preachers) and George Korson (coal miners). Richard M. Dorson looks at various character types when documenting American legends. Dorson classifies some character types according to broad occupational groups such as cowboys, lumberjacks and railroaders. Other character types such as backwoodsmen Davy Crockett and Mike Pink help illustrate regional stereotypes. Dorson’s description of Mose the Bowery B’hoy is particularly interesting because of its treatment of a stereotypical character who frequented the streets of New York City during the mid-nineteenth century.17

In addition to stereotypes which attempt to define the characters of specific groups, stereotypes of larger social aggregates such as cities also exist. One pioneer study conducted by Bayrd Still asserts that many cities are often defined by stereotypical "personalities" which are determined by such influences as architecture, odor and population. Still examines the personality of New York City and cites four major attributes which have historically characterized the city: business-mindedness, conviviality, cosmopolitanism and constant change. The

attributes with which Still defines New York City are all
to be found in O. Henry's stories. The trait of "notoriety,"
however, plays a significant role in O. Henry's stories
and will therefore replace "constant change" as a category
for this paper.18

Like other forms of folklore, stereotypes which
appear in oral tradition are often reflected in written
literature as well. A folkloristic study of stereotypes in
literature would therefore adopt the methodology of folklore
in literature studies. The basic methodology for studying
folklore in culture and for studying folklore in literature,
according to Alan Dundes, is almost the same. Dundes' methodology may be broken down into two parts: first the
identification of the subject matter as a folkloristic item
and then the interpretation of the subject matter through
folkloristic analysis. Rosan Jordan de Caro elaborates
further on Dundes' proposed methodology, urging a more
holistic approach to the problem. De Caro accepts Dundes' methodology but feels that folkloristic items found in
literature should not be analyzed solely in a literary context but in their cultural contexts as well, giving a broader view of their significance and meanings.19

18Bayrd Still, "The Personality of New York City,"

19Alan Dundes, "The Study of Folklore in Literature
and Culture: Identification and Interpretation," Journal
of American Folklore 78 (June 1965): 136-142; Rosan Jordan
De Caro, "A Note About Folklore and Literature (The Bosom
Serpent Revisited)," Journal of American Folklore 86 (March
Richard M. Dorson, who spoke at a symposium on folklore in literature on "The Identification of Folklore in American Literature," also cites a basic twofold methodology for studying folklore in literature, which may again be construed as identification and interpretation. Dorson's methodology is, however, much more selective in its scope than Dundes'. Three principal kinds of evidence are needed to insure that the subject matter under study is truly folkloristic material: biographical evidence, internal evidence and corroborative evidence. Biographical information about the author may show direct familiarity with the folklore in his story, and internal evidence within the story itself may also indicate such familiarity. Corroborative evidence should also be used to demonstrate the authenticity of the elements of folklore in the story. Likewise, as part of the task of interpreting the folkloristic materials once they have been established, Dorson feels that it should be shown how an understanding of the materials offers new insights into the creative writings in which they are found.20

Also addressing the American Folklore Society symposium on folklore in literature, but taking slightly different views of the subject than Dorson, were Carvel Collins and John W. Ashton. Collins, who comes from a

literary rather than a folkloristic background, called for increased efforts on the part of folklorists towards the analysis and understanding of folklore in literature. Collins likewise recommended a twofold methodology for studying folklore in literature. The first part of the dichotomy again calls for the identification of folkloristic materials in literature, but the second part calls for the identification of large over-all motifs and structure culled from folklore and used in literature. Collins is not as interested in proving the pedigree of specific folkloristic items, and the author’s contact with those items, as he is in underlying structures and larger motifs borrowed from folklore regardless of how indirect their source. John W. Ashton asserted the acceptability of folkloristic materials not directly taken from oral sources. Ashton showed how a better understanding of Elizabethan literature might be achieved if folkloristic materials drawn from written sources and combinations of oral and written reports were studied.21

Daniel G. Hoffman, who acted as the chairperson for the symposium on folklore in literature, tried to mediate between the two seemingly divergent approaches

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espoused by Dorson and by Ashton and Collins. Hoffman argues that if folklore exists within communities which survive in isolation from the predominant culture, then the realm of folklore in literature would more or less be restricted to regional literature and the "backwaters" of the "mainstreams" of literature. Hoffman contends, however, that it is more likely that folklore exists in a dynamic relationship with the dominant culture. The folk society comes into being when a pre-industrialized but civilized society enters industrialization. The dominant society and the folk society continue to live juxtapositionally, leveling their influence upon each other in varying degrees. As the level of industrialization within the society increases, the influence of the dominant society increases, until the folk society ceases to exist. Traditions of the folk society very often enter into the dominant society during their period of coexistence, becoming the traditions of the dominant society and continuing to exist even after the demise of the folk society which spawned them. A theory of a dynamic relationship between the folk society and the dominant society would allow for the influence of folklore on broader fields of literature, rather than on regional literature alone. Folklore in literature may then be studied in terms of large motifs and broad patterns and structures which have become part of the dominant culture, as well as
in terms of specific folkloristic items which can be verifiably linked to the direct influence of a folk society.22

Roger D. Abrahams places new emphasis upon the importance of the basic patterns and structures of folklore. Abrahams is not so much concerned with the "surface features" of folkloristic materials as he is with "deeper patterns of organization." Abrahams believes that in order for a performer of an artistic endeavor to be successful, he must draw upon the "deep cultural matrix" of the audience to set up "rhythms and expectancies" which will prompt the audience's reaction. The artist is aided by traditions and conventions which reflect the sense of order and world-view of the audience. For example, metaphor, local color and manner of closure are conventional organizational elements utilized by the literary artist. Abrahams cites the need for studies of folklore in literature to demonstrate why a writer uses folklore and to what effect. Abrahams suggests that authors of local color fiction and their audiences are attracted to simple, familiar and uncomplicated images of life which present an alternative to modern-day complexities.23


MacEdward Leach credits regional literature (local color literature) as a major influence on the development of literature in the United States. Regional literature in the United States was popular and easily produced, and American folk culture was a primary ingredient. Leach cites eight different but overlapping ways in which American regional writers use folklore:

1. Folklore is carried over into regional literature with little adaptation or change.

2. Regional literature often reconstructs a folk society revealing its customs, beliefs, speech, etc. It is selective, often arbitrarily, so as to establish a point.

3. A folk story, song, character, or tradition is reworked for any of a number of reasons, such as to place it in the popular aesthetic, or to use it to point a moral. A story, song, character, or tradition may be invented according to a folk pattern, or what is thought to be a folk pattern.

4. Folklore elements are used as symbols in regional literature.

5. Literary forms use folk forms: ballad, informal tale, poetic patterns, protest patterns, protest songs.

6. Folk materials are used in regional literature to inculcate a sense of the past.

7. Regional literature may use folk speech as fresh or poetic idiom.

8. Folk humor is the basis for most regional humorous literature.

As can be seen, although Leach is dealing specifically with regional literature, he is interested both with unchanged folkloristic materials which enter literature directly from
oral tradition and with broader, more indirect patterns and symbolism.  

Gene Bluestein also cites the influence of folklore upon the development of literature in the United States. Bluestein adapts Constance Rourke's argument that the foundations of American literature lay in its folk tradition, particularly in its humor. Rourke attempted to examine the sources of American literary tradition and the function of humor in its development. According to Bluestein, the primary phase of American literature was not purely folk, but a "hybrid concatenation of folk and popular." Bluestein feels there is much value in Rourke's efforts to analyze the function of American humor, thereby hinting that he, too, is not as interested in whether or not folkloristic materials used in literature are taken directly from an authentic folk source as he is with the function of the material in its literary form.

Folklore in literature studies encompass diverse genres such as the influence of folklore on an author's structure, motifs, theme and symbolism. The identification and analysis of character types in literature is of particular interest to this thesis and is found in the

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works of several folklorists. A random sampling of character type studies might include Robert C. Wess who contrasts the stereotypical characters of Yankee and Dutch settlers in New York State as reflected in writings by Washington Irving. Robert A. Fink and John M. Vlach, respectively, deal with James Fenimore Cooper's depictions of frontiersmen and Yankee peddlers. A large variety of stereotypical characters, ranging from New England Yankees to Southern Negroes and from Western settlers to American Indians, is cited when Geoffrey A. Grimes examines the works of humorist Artemus Ward. A final example of folkloristic character type studies in literature is provided by James K. Murphy, who discusses the Georgian mountaineers in local color literature written by Will N. Harben.26

O. Henry himself was manifestly conscious of his use of stereotypes and had no qualms about revealing his modus operandi to the reading public. Popular literary themes and character types are subject to humorous assaults by O. Henry. In stories such as "Tommy's Burglar," "Elsie in New York" and "The Sparrows in Madison Square,"

O. Henry candidly satirizes contemporary literary conventions.27 O. Henry is also quite open about his use of stereotypes which extend beyond the confines of popular literature and which are the focus of this thesis. In "The Trimmed Lamp," O. Henry introduces Nancy by saying:

Nancy you would call a shop-girl--because you have the habit. There is no type; but a perverse generation is always seeking a type; so this is what the type should be.28

In his inimitable and forthright style, O. Henry tells his readers that he employs stereotypes to gratify their expectations.

O. Henry was aware of the reputed personalities of cities and seized upon city stereotypes as subject matter for several of his stories. When describing the travels of the vagabond Raggles, O. Henry informs us:

Through the ancient poets we have learned that the cities are feminine. So they were to poet Raggles; and his mind carried a concrete and clear conception of the figure that symbolized and typified each one that he had wooed.29

O. Henry illustrates his observations on the personalities of cities with brief, personified descriptions of Chicago, Pittsburgh, New Orleans, Boston, Louisville and St. Louis.


New York City, however, poses an unprecedented challenge to Raggles, and his attempts to define New York provide the theme for "The Making of a New Yorker."\(^{30}\)

The search for a definitive formula with which to define New York City in O. Henry's stories does not rest with Raggles alone. The theme of "The Voice of the City" centers on the narrator's endeavors to isolate the essence of New York:

Here are 4,000,000 people . . . compressed upon an island, which is mostly lamb surrounded by Wall Street water. The conjunction of so many units into so small a space must result in an identity--or, rather a homogeneity--that finds its oral expression through a common channel. It is, as you might say, a consensus of translation, concentrating in a crystallized, general idea which reveals itself in what may be termed the Voice of the City.\(^{31}\)

Once again O. Henry takes the opportunity to contrast New York with other major American cities. Contrast is a device which frequently appears in American folk humor, as in the "Arkansas Traveler" genre of anecdotes which pit the country rube against the city slicker.\(^{32}\) In stories

\(^{30}\)Ibid., pp. 1097-1100.

\(^{31}\)Ibid., "The Voice of the City," pp. 977-979.

\(^{32}\)The "Arkansas Traveler" tale type and its place in American folk humor are discussed in Bluestein, The Voice of the Folk, pp. 80-90.
such as "The Pride of the Cities" and "The Call of the Tame," O. Henry contrasts New Yorkers with out-of-towners, and in so doing, distinguishes between New York and other cities.\textsuperscript{33}

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CHAPTER II

NEW YORK CITY'S BUSINESS-MINDEDNESS

Harvey Maxwell, a broker, quickly enters his office accompanied by his stenographer, Miss Leslie. Maxwell, oblivious to all else, immediately throws himself into his work while the office becomes animated in a great flurry of incessant activity. O. Henry depicts Maxwell's businesslike manner in no uncertain terms:

The machine sitting at that desk was no longer a man; it was a busy New York broker, moved by buzzing wheels and uncoiling springs.¹ O. Henry's choice of language is significant. Mr. Maxwell is not described by O. Henry in terms which set him apart as a unique and complex character but rather as a carbon copy of every other New York broker.

O. Henry extends his description of the typical broker so that not only is Mr. Maxwell a carbon copy of all other brokers, but brokers in turn are also just another component of New York's rush hour crowd of workers:

He who has been denied the spectacle of a busy Manhattan broker during a rush of business is handicapped for the profession of anthropology. The poet sings of the 'crowded hour of

The image that O. Henry conjures up of a New York broker is that of a businessman, in perpetual motion, totally devoted to his work and oblivious to all else:

... The man was working like some high-gear, delicate, strong machine strung to full tension, going at full speed, accurate, never hesitating, with the proper word and decision and act ready and prompt as clockwork. Stocks and bonds, loans and mortgages, margins and securities -- here was a world of finance, and there was no room in it for the human world or the world of nature.

By using unrestrained exaggeration as one of his stylistic devices, O. Henry plays upon the picture he has drawn of a typical New York broker to achieve a surprise ending for his tale. Mr. Maxwell proposes to Miss Leslie, only to find out that in his preoccupation with business he had forgotten that they were already married the evening before!

O. Henry's portrayal of Mr. Maxwell, a man obsessed with business, falls readily into a long tradition of stereotypes which depict New York City and its inhabitants as business-minded. The predominance of stereotypes which attest to the business-minded nature

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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., p. 69.
4 Ibid.
of New York City is illustrated by Bayrd Still:

Surely the most frequently asserted attribute of New York City's personality is its business-mindedness, a quality that has resulted from the commercial character of the community, its preoccupation with trade, industry, and finance, and its residents' apparently unending pursuit of wealth. More references have been made to this aspect of New York's personality than to any other, throughout the more than three centuries of its urban existence—from its beginnings as a wilderness trading post to the period in which the vertical thrust of its skyscrapers appeared to symbolize the dynamic drive of its business community.5

As Mr. Still points out, New York City's bond with commerce dates back to its very conception. The early development of New York's mercantile stereotype is linked with Henry Hudson's discovery of New York Harbor aboard his ship the Half Moon, in an account by an anonymous author which personifies the city:

'De Halve Maen' had brought commerce to the island at the mouth of the Hudson River, and it had deep root. Born in commerce, the City of New York thought in terms of commerce and grew through commerce.6

'Commerce,' was to become New York City's byword.

The stereotype of New York City and its inhabitants as being preoccupied with business steadily grew and flourished just as the city itself grew and flourished.


Written reports made throughout the nineteenth century by foreign visitors abound in descriptions of the commercial character of the city. A few examples of comments describing New York's business-mindedness should serve to illustrate the stereotype being disseminated during the nineteenth century by European travelers. John Lambert of Great Britain characterized New Yorkers when he visited the city in 1807 by writing that "every thought, word, look, and action of the multitude seemed to be absorbed by commerce."7 Several years later, in 1815, a Frenchman named Baron de Montlezun stated that "New York ... is uniquely a city of business."8 Another Frenchman, Ernst Duvergier de Hauranne, visited New York in 1864 and noted indignantly that "everybody is obsessed with business."9

The commercial stereotype of New York City was also prevalent among American publications during the nineteenth century. A representative view of New York seen through American eyes was written by James D. McCabe, Jr., who remarked that "everything here gives way to business."10 Herman Melville, the celebrated American

8Ibid., p. 63.
9Ibid., p. 187.
author, may also be cited for referring to the considerable influence of commerce on New York City. Melville described New York in 1850 as "belted round by wharves as Indian isles by coral reefs--commerce surrounds it with her surf." Melville's description of New York comes to mind when more than fifty years later O. Henry slyly remarks "Here are 4,000,000 people ... compressed upon an island, which is mostly lamb surrounded by Wall Street water." Although it cannot be certain whether O. Henry was directly familiar with Melville's comments on New York City, the commercial stereotype had apparently survived half a century to find itself expressed in one of O. Henry's stories, in a metaphor remarkably similar to that used by Melville.13

Closely related to the stereotypes which depict New York City and its inhabitants as being preoccupied with business are those stereotypes which depict the continual hustle and bustle and pandemonium of the city. New Yorkers are addicted to business, and their ardent pursuit

11Still, Mirror for Gotham, p. 131.


13There is a subtle difference between Melville's commercial "surf" and O. Henry's "Wall Street water": Melville is referring to trade which was the most prominent feature of New York's business activity during the early half of the nineteenth century, whereas O. Henry is referring to finance which became more dominant during the latter half of the nineteenth century.
of business necessitates ceaseless rushing and crowding and clamor. The crowds of rush-hour workers being conveyed to and from their jobs, the incessant din of machinery in action, and the unending round-the-clock activity of a city which lives for business, are all aspects of New York City's business-mindedness.

A British visitor to New York, Andrew Bell, wrote in 1835 about "the hurry-scurry of the Broadway and Wall-Street," the "driving, jostling, and elbowing," and "the crashing noises of rapid omnibuses, flying in all directions, and carts... a jumble of sights and sounds easy to understand but hard to describe." The stereotypes of noise, confusion and hustle, already existent in Bell's time, are perpetuated by O. Henry to set the tone for several of his stories. O. Henry's description of an out-of-towner's confrontation with New York City is expressed in much the same terms as used by Bell:

The daily cyclone of Sixth Avenue's rush hour swept him away from the company of his partners true. The dust from a thousand rustling skirts filled his eyes. The mighty roar of trains rushing across the sky deafened him. The lightningflash of twice ten hundred beaming eyes confused his vision.15

By the time, just after the turn of the century, that O. Henry wrote his short stories which take place in New York, business and shopping had extended northwards up

14Still, Mirror for Gotham, p. 81.
along Sixth Avenue, but the bustle and uproar remained the same.

Observations by visitors to New York often paralleled those made by Lady Emmeline Stuart-Wortley who visited the city in 1849 and commented as follows:

New York is certainly altogether the most bustling, cheerful, lifeful, restless city I have yet seen in the United States. Nothing and nobody seem to stand still for half a moment in New York; the multitudinous omnibuses, which drive like insane vehicles from morning till night, appear not to pause to take up their passengers, or it is so short a pause, you have hardly time to see the stoppage, like the instantaneousness of a flash of lightning. 16

O. Henry clearly reflects stereotypes of the hustle and bustle of New York City when he writes about the "rush-hour tide of humanity" 17 and describes the elevated railroad where "a flock of citizen sheep scrambled out and another flock scrambled aboard" as "the cattle cars of the Manhattan Elevated rattled away." 18 O. Henry meticulously depicts the discord of the city where "the elevated crashed raucously, surface cars hummed and clanged, cabmen swore, newsboys shrieked, wheels clattered ear piercingly," 19 and from whose heights New Yorkers appear "like the irresponsible

16 Still, Mirror for Gotham, pp. 143-144.
black waterbugs on summer ponds [where] they crawl and circle and hustle about idiotically without aim or purpose."20

Even the outcome of one of O. Henry's romances hinges on the chaos and congestion of New York City's traffic. A millionaire's son wishes to propose to the woman he loves before she embarks for a prolonged stay in Europe, but her busy schedule will not allow him ample time alone with her to pop the question. The millionaire, knowing his son's problem, engineers a traffic jam:

... a congested flood of wagons, trucks, cabs, vans and street cars filling the vast space where Broadway, Sixth Avenue and Thirty-fourth Street cross one another as a twenty-six inch maiden fills her twenty-two inch girdle. And still from all the cross streets they were hurrying and rattling toward the converging point at full speed, and hurling themselves into the straggling mass, locking wheels and adding their driver's imprecations to the clamor. The entire traffic of Manhattan seemed to have jammed itself around them. The oldest New Yorker among the thousands of spectators that lined the sidewalks had not witnessed a street blockade of the proportions of this one.

The traffic jam lasts for two hours, during which time the millionaire's son and his lady-love become engaged.21

Another stereotype directly related to the business-mindedness of New York City is its cold indifference. New York is often pictured as a huge, crowded


21Ibid., "Mammon and the Archer," p. 45.
metropolis populated by citizens who rush about concerned only with their personal business and who are indifferent to all else. The lack of concern that New Yorkers are reputed to have for the affairs of others adds the element of anonymity to stereotypes of the city. The concept of being "lost in the crowd" develops in which one may be surrounded by masses of people and yet remain unnoticed by any of them.

In a letter written on June 5, 1867, Mark Twain described New York City using many of the stereotypes which are related to the city's business-mindedness:

... I have at last, after several month's experience, made up my mind that it is a splendid desert--a domed and steepled solitude, where a stranger is lonely in the midst of a million of his race. A man walks his tedious miles through the same interminable street every day, elbowing his way through a buzzing multitude of men, yet never seeing a familiar face, and never seeing a strange one the second time. ... Every man seems to feel that he has got the duties of two lifetimes to accomplish in one, and so he rushes, rushes, rushes, and never has any time at his disposal to fool away on matters which do not involve dollars and duty and business.22

Twain refers to New York's crowds and noise, to the rushing and incessant milling about, to the preoccupation with business, and most of all, to the indifferent attitude of the city towards the lonely stranger who gets lost in the crowd. James D. McCabe, Jr. echoed Twain's sentiments towards the indifference of New Yorkers when he wrote

Men concern themselves with their own affairs only. Indeed this feeling has been carried to such an extreme that it has engendered a decided indifference between man and man. People live for years as next door neighbors without ever knowing each other by sight.

McCabe cites the case, which he admits may be a bit exaggerated, of a man who once noticed that the surname of his neighbor who lived next door to him for several years was the same as his own. The man had never met his next-door neighbor, but when he confronted the neighbor about the similarity of their last names they discovered that they were brothers. 23

O. Henry delights in portraying scenes of newcomers first arriving in New York. A young man from upstate pays a visit to New York City and

knowingly, smilingly, the city crowds passed him by. They saw the raw stranger stand in the gutter and stretch his neck at the tall buildings. At this they ceased to smile, and even to look at him. It had been done so often. . . . Even the newsboys looked bored when he scampered like a circus clown out of the way of cabs and street cars. 24

In another of O. Henry's stories a Russian immigrant arrives, "pleased by the roar, and movement of the barbarous city" where "light as a cork, he was kept bobbing along by the human tide, the crudest atom in all the silt of the stream that emptied into the reservoir of


Liberty." In yet another story by O. Henry, a Columbian general confronted by the noise and confusion of New York City exclaims, "'Valgame Dios! What devil's city is this?'" Perhaps remembrances of his own arrival in New York prompted O. Henry to time and again depict such scenes.

O. Henry not only utilizes the stereotypes of New York City's cold indifference in descriptive phrases and passages, but he occasionally incorporates the stereotype as a theme for his stories as well. Sometimes the theme of New York's indifference takes on a comical guise as in the story of two Kentucky mountaineers who are caught up in a long and bloody feud. One of the mountaineers learns that the other is living in New York City, so he arms himself and travels to the city to kill his foe. Upon his arrival to New York, the mountaineer is so disoriented and lonely that when he does chance upon his enemy, he is overjoyed at seeing a familiar face and they clasp in friendship. Occasionally O. Henry ends a story in tragedy. In one story a young man and a young woman succumb to poverty, overwork and frustrated hopes, and

finding no source of comfort in the callous, impersonal city, they commit suicide—"transients in abode, transients in heart and mind." 28

Although O. Henry often depicts New York City as cold and indifferent, he also tends to reveal an underlying warmth and humanity which is not always apparent at first glance. In even the most squalid and dehumanizing surroundings O. Henry's characters are generally possessed of a kindliness and human dignity which displays itself in self-sacrifice and concern for other people. New Yorkers may seem to be frozen in indifference, but in O. Henry's words

When a New Yorker does loosen up . . . it's like the spring decomposition of the jam in the Allegheny River. He'll swamp you with cracked ice and backwater if you don't get out of the way. 29

O. Henry's characters do not always demonstrate vehement outpourings of affection, but they usually do display at least a subtle gloss of benevolence. The good nature and nobility of some of O. Henry's characters may not seem realistic, but he is not striving for realism beyond the outward appearance of the story's locale. O. Henry is writing fanciful stories which will cater to the romantic


29Ibid., "Innocents of Broadway," p. 240.
sensibilities of the popular audience. By placing benevolent, self-sacrificing, noble characters in the midst of a seemingly callous and indifferent environment, O. Henry is creating a conflict which is usually resolved to the audience's satisfaction.

The paradox of stereotyping New York City as both cold and uncaring and also as warm and kindhearted has historical precedence. James D. McCabe, Jr., who has already been cited for referring to New York's indifference, also commented on its warmth:

In its charities, New York stands at the head of American communities--the great heart of the city throbs warmly for suffering humanity. . . . New York never turns a deaf ear to an appeal for aid.\(^{30}\)

Although New Yorkers may be self-absorbed according to McCabe's comments, he also apparently feels that they have the time and sensitivity to devote to those in need. A song which gained great popularity during O. Henry's time, and which has since been closely linked to New York City, is "The Sidewalks of New York." Written in 1894, "The Sidewalks of New York" portrays the view of a native New Yorker towards his city:

\(^{30}\)McCabe, Jr., *Lights and Shadows of New York Life*, p. 56.
Down in front of Casey's old brown wooden stoop,
On a summer's evening we formed a merry group,
Boys and girls together, we would sing and waltz
While the Ginnie played the organ on the sidewalks
of New York.  

The lyrics and the frolicsome melody of "The Sidewalks of 
New York" give a feeling of warmth and congeniality quite 
removed from the aura of loneliness and isolation which is 
often used to delineate the city. The stereotype of the 
warmth of New York City clearly coexisted with the stereo-
type of the city's coldness, though the latter was perhaps 
more prevalent, particularly among outsiders.

O. Henry uses the dichotomy of New York's warmth 
and coldness as the theme for the story of Raggles, a 
tramp with poetic spirit who, having visited all the other 
great cities of the United States, comes to visit "the 
greatest of all." Raggles lands in New York with the 
confident air of an experienced traveler, but he is soon 
thrown into bewilderment:

On Broadway Raggles, successful suitor of 
many cities, stood, bashful, like any country 
swain. For the first time he experienced the 
painful humiliation of being ignored. And 
when he tried to reduce this brilliant, swiftly 
changing, ice-cold city to a formula he failed 
utterly. Poet though he was, it offered him no 
color similes, no points of comparison, no flaw 
in its polished facets, no handle by which he 
could hold it up and view its shape and struc-
ture, as he familiarly and often contemptuously

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31B. A. Botkin, Sidewalks of America; Folklore, 
Legends, Sagas, Traditions, Customs, Songs, Stories, and 
Sayings of City Folk (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 
had done with other towns. The houses were interminable ramparts loopholed for defense; the people were bright but bloodless spectres passing in sinister and selfish array.

The thing that weighed heaviest on Raggles' soul and clogged his poet's fancy was the spirit of absolute egotism that seemed to saturate the people as toys are saturated with paint. Each one that he considered appeared a monster of abominable and insolent conceit. Humanity was gone from them; they were toddling idols of stone and varnish, worshipping themselves and greedy for though oblivious of worship from their fellow graven images. Frozen, cruel, implacable, impervious, cut to an identical pattern, they hurried on their ways like statues brought by some miracle to motion, while soul and feeling lay unaroused in the reluctant marble.

O. Henry's description of Raggles' perplexity upon his initial confrontation with New York City colorfully utilizes the stereotypes of the city's coldness and self-interest. Later in the tale Raggles is accidentally struck down by a moving vehicle. To his amazement Raggles awakens to find that all of the seemingly self-absorbed people he had encountered, ranging from a street tough to a high society lady, have rushed to his side, "their faces wearing the deepest concern." Three days later Raggles becomes involved in a fight while convalescing at the hospital, because a fellow patient was criticizing his town. Raggles, the lifelong vagabond, had never paid loyalty to any one city, but when asked by the nurse what town he was so fervently defending replied in the truest of native accents, "Noo York." The tension that O. Henry has created by placing Raggles in a hostile
environment through the use of one stereotype (New York's coldness) has been resolved by making Raggles a loyal participant in that environment through the use of the other stereotype (New York's warmth). 32

O. Henry's New York often reveals traits which belong to the stereotypes of business-mindedness: preoccupation with business, hustle and bustle, pandemonium, coldness and indifference. If New Yorkers in O. Henry's stories are so engrossed in stereotypical commercial activity, then it follows that O. Henry must pay some attention to their occupations, and that he would employ stereotypes to depict occupational groups. Many diverse occupational groups are included by O. Henry in his stories. Sometimes O. Henry only mentions an occupational group with a passing remark to help set the tone of the story. Occasionally a character's occupation is pivotal to the plot or outcome of an O. Henry story, such as the architect in "Witches Loaves" or the pharmacist in "The Love-Philtre of Ikey Schoenlein."

The moment O. Henry opens a story by saying, "I suppose you know all about the stage and stage people," the scene is being set for the use of stereotypes to depict the world of the arts. Many of O. Henry's characters come from professions related to the arts: artists, 32

actors and actresses, and writers. O. Henry's use of so many characters with artistic occupations in his stories, particularly writers, is in keeping with the preference for such characters by American novelists at the time. George A. Dunlap remarks upon "the predominance in themes of young people who come to the city seeking their fortunes," in American novels of the nineteenth century, claiming that "the largest number seek a footing in the literary field." Dunlap goes on to explain

In the eighties and nineties the exodus of young men and women from the small towns to the large cities became particularly noticeable. . . The prominence which these writers gave to seekers after literary laurels may be explained partly from the fact that fiction was at that time greatly on the increase, and partly from the fact that they were writing about their own profession. . . .33

O. Henry was clearly very aware of the popular trends in contemporary literature and lampoons them when he describes a young man who gets his literary start by selling an article about the sparrows in Madison Square to the New York Sun:

I cannot recall either a novel or a story dealing with the popular theme of the young writer from the provin-ces who comes to the metropolis to win fame and fortune with his pen in which the hero does not get his start that way.34

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Although O. Henry may satirize popular literary conventions, he himself is susceptible to those conventions, as may be evidenced by his own predilection towards writers and others of artistic pursuits.

The high incidence of these characters in O. Henry stories is probably due to the familiarity and empathy he would share with them since he himself belongs to such a field. O. Henry's identification with the writers in his stories is evident in tales such as "A Little Local Color," in which O. Henry relates in the first person a trip to the Bowery "in search of characteristic New York scenes and incidents."35 "A Little Local Color" is plainly drawn from O. Henry's own habit of transversing the city in search of a story: in this case all of the characters he encounters refuse to fit into their proper stereotypes thereby creating a humorous situation. The majority of O. Henry's writers, actors, actresses, and artists are young people, many of whom flock together in the theater district and Greenwich Village, areas which O. Henry frequented. The tendency of people of artistic pursuits to congregate in certain areas of New York City is explained by Dunlap:

Men of letters, journalists, artists, and musicians found in the city the greatest possibilities for development of their abilities.

and they found there also congenial fellow-workers with whom they could profitably associate. In stories such as "The Last Leaf," "Extradited from Bohemia," and "The Country of Elusion," O. Henry is complying with popular tastes, and his own realm of experience, by presenting young people of artistic inclination who come to the city to seek their careers.

The theme of a young person seeking his or her fortune in the big city, which was widespread in the literature of the day, frequently appears in O. Henry's stories, with particular emphasis on working women. Single, vulnerable young women who have to fend for themselves in the midst of a cruel and seductive world appear time and again. O. Henry continually employs the stereotype of the pure, simple, defenseless maiden, usually ill-equipped save for her beauty to cope in the world of men. If O. Henry is to be criticized for his patronizing depictions of female characters (popular enough during an era before women even had the right to vote) it should be mentioned in all fairness that occasional characters such as Hetty Pepper in "The Third Ingredient," and Mary Adrian in "The Country of Elusion," appear as intelligent, capable individuals on a par with any of their male counterparts. It should also be mentioned that even when O. Henry did characterize working women in a condescendingly stereo-

typical way, he was among the first to give a sympathetic portrayal of their plight.37

Artists and actresses account for several of O. Henry's female characters, along with an occasional waitress, housekeeper, landlady, cypist, stenographer, teacher, model and factory worker. The working woman with whom O. Henry appears to be the most fascinated however, and who appears in the greatest number of his stories, is the shopgirl. In his usual manner O. Henry bluntly states that he is employing a stereotype even as he mocks it:

Nancy you would call a shopgirl--because you have the habit. There is no type; but a perverse generation is always seeking a type; so this is what the type should be. She has the high-ratted pompadour and the exaggerated straight-front. Her skirt is shoddy, but has the correct flare. No furs protect her against the bitter spring air, but she wears her short broadcloth jacket as jauntily as though it were Persian lamb. On her face and in her eyes remorseless type-seeker, is the typical shopgirl expression. It is a look of silent but contemptuous revolt against cheated womanhood; of sad prophecy of the vengeance to come. When she laughs her loudest the look is still there. The same look can be seen in the eyes of Russian peasants; and those of us left will see it some day on Gabriel's face when he comes to blow us up. It is a look that should wither and abash man; but he has been known to smirk at it and offer flowers--with a string attached.38


Nancy is a representative model of O. Henry's shopgirls so her appearance, deportment and attitude merit attention.

Nancy dresses the best she can despite being impoverished, a condition testified to by the historical fact that salesgirls generally received low wages, particularly in comparison to their male colleagues. The unfair and discriminatory wages received by salesgirls is touched upon in several of O. Henry's stories and provides the theme for some of his finest tales, such as "The Skylight Room," "An Unfinished Story," and "Brickdust Row." O. Henry's descriptions of shopgirls' salaries and status, such as in "The Trimmed Lamp" where a shopgirl and a factory girl are compared, is historically accurate. O. Henry even touches upon the progression by which a woman may work her way up from a cash girl to a wrapper to a shopgirl and finally to a model: a system which is historically verifiable.

Despite her lack of money Nancy is careful to dress as attractively as possible and in the correct style. The stereotype of the shopgirl's attractiveness existed for good cause: many stores hired shopgirls largely for their appearance, to serve as models for the female


40Wertheimer, We Were There, p. 158.
customers and as objects of flirtation for the males. Nancy has not only adopted the requisite appearance of a shopgirl but she has acquired the shopgirl's air as well: a noticeable imitation of the manners of the socially elite. Referring to Nancy, O. Henry explains:

"The people she served were mostly women whose dress, manners, and position in the social world were quoted as criterions. From them Nancy began to take the best from each according to her view.

... Suffused in the aura of this high social refinement and good breeding, it was impossible for her to escape a deeper effect of it."

Hutchins Hapgood, a social commentator of O. Henry's time, closely paralleled O. Henry's description of Nancy:

"... The shop-girl refinement is, indeed a manufactured article. It is as indefinable as the walk of a sailor but it immediately affects all the capable and ambitious girls who come into its atmosphere. ... They are not taught, but it is in the air about them, and they insensibly learn to put on 'front' and 'style'."

Nancy's imitation of the manners and graces of high society is more than just pretension, for the theme of "The Trimmed Lamp" hinges on her hopes to some day marry a millionaire. Hapgood observed the existence of a class of working women

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who strived to mingle with a higher social element with the desire of eventually "marrying well." 44

Nancy's appearance, bearing and aspirations are representative of the stereotypical shopgirl at the turn-of-the-century. One adverse effect of the shopgirl stereotype was that the picture of the poor but attractive, defenseless but refined, young lady, who was but a step from starvation while looking for a man to save her from it all, might attract men with less than honorable intentions. Nancy's "typical shop-girl expression" reveals that she has encountered men who would take advantage of her position. Another of O. Henry's shopgirls, Dulcie, encounters the advances of Piggy, in a story which sympathetically portrays the plight of the working woman. 45

In a private conversation O. Henry later disclosed that he was Piggy! 46 Perhaps O. Henry's fondness for portraying working women both stereotypically and yet sensitively was due to his cognizance that he was projecting stereotypes which he himself held.

44 Ibid., pp. 128-129.


CHAPTER III

DIVERSION AND EXCITEMENT IN NEW YORK CITY

New York City's interest in commerce, which dates back to its beginnings as the trading colony of New Amsterdam, has played an influential role in the lifestyles of its citizens. The lure of the career opportunities offered by life in New York brought a huge transient population into the city. The continual influx of businessmen, immigrants and travelers, from all over the world, has led to extensive and varied forms of public entertainment and social life.

New York City's "convivial nature" has often been cited by commentators as one of its major attributes. An affinity for public celebrations and entertainments in New York can be traced back to the days of the New Amsterdam settlement. The Dutch in New Amsterdam, free from the restraints of some of their more puritanical neighbors, displayed a fondness for various games, sports, and social gatherings.¹ When New Amsterdam came under British

dominion, it continued to grow and flourish as the City of New York. Considered the "gayest of the British colonial towns," New York City had already begun to gain its reputation as a haven for excitement, entertainment, and diversion. The American Revolution once again shifted the control of New York City into other hands, and in 1789, George Washington took the oath to become the United States' first president, in New York City, the United States' first capital.

By the time of Washington's inauguration, several trends had emerged among New York City's inhabitants which helped insure the city's reputation for conviviality. From the very outset of its settlement, New York was populated by a large transient class of merchants and seamen who were attracted to the city by its commercial activity. In later years, as a vogue of fascination with the New World developed in Europe, New York City, because of its convenience as a port, became a favorite destination for European travelers who were passing through on their way to see America. New York's port also made the city a popular landing point for immigrants. Finally, New York

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2 Still, Mirror for Gotham, pp. 25-27.

City's brief role as the political nucleus of the United States (later to be replaced by its much more lasting role as the financial center of the United States) brought waves of politicians, and others, who would often move about with no permanent abode.

The rise of a large, unsettled population in New York City led to the boarding house and the hotel as visibly dominant modes of housing. High property costs and a scarcity of domestic help were further inducements for New Yorkers not to settle down in permanent homes. The transience of New York's inhabitants reached such proportions that during the first half of the nineteenth century landlords would post their rents for the upcoming year on February 1, and those who declined the proposed rents would be expected to move to other dwellings by May 1. For a period of several years, the first of May was a traditional "moving day" in New York City, during which the streets would be filled with people en route from one house to another.4

The transient nature of life in New York City would frequently result in a feeling of freedom from restrictions and a need to seek entertainment on a public level, since the sanctity of home life was no longer as strong. Furthermore, since many of New York's inhabitants, such as its merchants, seamen and tourists, had money to spend,

public entertainment soon developed into a popular and lucrative industry. George Combe, who visited New York City in 1838, remarked:

the condition of the population is precisely that in which places of public amusement may be expected to be most successful. The city, at all times, contains a large number of strangers, whose evenings are at their own disposal; of young men engaged in trade, who live in boarding houses and hotels, who have plenty of money and no domestic ties; and of rich merchants, and their families, whose tastes are, to a certain extent, intellectual, but whose mental resources are not very extensive; and these form a solid phalanx of play-going people. Combe's observations were evidenced by the popularity of theatres, concert halls, saloons, restaurants, museums, parks, and other facilities for public entertainment during the next few decades. Succeeding generations saw a proliferation of places for amusement and recreation which kept pace with New York's growth into a thriving metropolis.

The conditions which prompted the growth of public entertainment in New York, and the resultant stereotype of New York as "fun city," were to heavily influence O. Henry's life. At the time of his arrival in New York City, O. Henry was a drifter, with no fixed abode, seeking anonymity and freedom from restrictions. O. Henry's profession required no fixed hours, and his salary was very respectable according to the standards of his day. Because of the circumstances of his mode of living, O. Henry was irresistibly

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5Ibid., p. 93.

6Ibid., pp. 138-139, 176-177, 224-226.
attracted to the public amusements offered by New York City, which appear with frequency in his stories.\(^7\)

One of the most popular pictures of O. Henry held by the public, which was fostered by his admirers, critics and biographers, was of an anonymous but gregarious stranger who scoured the streets of New York, visiting the haunts of both the high and the low with equal facility and impunity, in search of incidents and impressions which he would transform into stories. O. Henry's wanderings often led him to various establishments for food and drink throughout the city, such as those which lined Broadway, the Bowery, and Greenwich Village. The profusion of saloons, bars, cafes, rathskellers, roof-gardens, and restaurants in his stories testify to the significant role that such places played in O. Henry's view of New York City and the life he lived there.\(^8\)

The saloon and the bar are frequent points of rendezvous for characters in O. Henry's stories, particularly those of the lower and working classes.\(^9\) Very often one of O. Henry's characters will stop by a saloon


\(^8\)Current-Garcia, O. Henry, p. 123.

for a quick beer, as was "Tiger" McQuirk's intention, until he was waylaid by the lure of spring.\textsuperscript{10} A saloon may also call for more serious drinking, as that of the usual Saturday night crowd in "Tale of a Tainted Tenner."\textsuperscript{11} Saloons sometimes provide the locale for a bit of business or deceit in an O. Henry story, as when Andy Donovan insures his political career with the friendship of Tammany man Big Mike Sullivan, or when Hastings Beauchamp Morley bluffs his way out of paying a debt.\textsuperscript{12}

In a couple of stories, the saloon becomes essential to the plot. Bartender Con Lantry finally summons up the courage to propose to Katherine Kenealy after sipping a potent new alcoholic concoction, thereby overcoming his intense shyness.\textsuperscript{13} In another story, Bob Babbitt reestablishes domestic bliss by giving up a drinking habit which was beginning to get the better of him.\textsuperscript{14} No matter how disastrous the outlook of an O. Henry story, however, there is always hope so long as the bar doesn't run dry, as is witnessed by a tenant of Beersheba Flats during one


\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., "The Tale of a Tainted Tenner," p. 1146.


\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., "The Lost Blend," pp. 1114-1117.

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., "The Rubaiyat of a Scotch Highball," pp. 1073-1076.
of the hottest nights of the year: "and when the hot nights come along we kept a line of childher reaching from the front door to Kelly's on the corner, passing along the cans of beer from one to another without the trouble of running after it."\textsuperscript{15}

Cafes appear with great frequency in O. Henry's stories. Sometimes the term "cafe" is little more than an euphemism for "bar" or "saloon." In one story, Jabez Bulltongue, of Ulster County, comes within inches of being fleeced of his fortune by the patrons of a particularly rough cafe he wanders into.\textsuperscript{16} A cafe may also be a small restaurant serving alcoholic beverages but having a more family oriented and more refined atmosphere than bars and saloons. When Danny McCree enters Dugan's Cafe, seeking the meaning of Easter, he does so via the "family entrance," and addresses his earnest inquiries to a waiter rather than a bartender.\textsuperscript{17} Some of O. Henry's establishments take on a distinctively bohemian atmosphere, such as Cafe Andre and Cafe Terence, which dot the environs of Greenwich Village and of Broadway.\textsuperscript{18} The more bohemian and elite cafes boast patrons drawn from the

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., "The City of the Dreadful Night," p. 1025.


\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., "The Day Resurgent," p. 1173.

middle and upper classes. With tongue-in-cheek, O. Henry slyly describes the luxurious interior of one of the better cafes:

... the marble-topped tables, the range of leather-upholstered wall seats, the gay company, the ladies dressed in demi-state toilets, speaking in an exquisite visible chorus of taste, economy, opulence or art; the sedulous and largess-loving garçons, the music wisely catering to all with its raids upon the composers; the melange of talk and laughter--and, if you will, the Wurzburger in the tall glass cones that bend to your lips as a ripe cherry sways on its branch to the beak of a robber jay. I was told by a sculptor from Mauch Chunk that the scene was truly Parisian.19

Simple or plush, rowdy or bohemian, New York City provides a wealth of cafes for the pastime of its inhabitants. In O. Henry's words: "Hard by was a cafe. 'Tis ever so in the big city."

Just as the distinction between the saloons, bars, and cafes, which provide the background for many of O. Henry's stories, is nebulous, so is that between the numerous restaurants and roof-gardens. Roof-gardens vie with the better saloons and cafes in that they employ waiters and waitresses to serve meals and beverages to their customers. The name "roof-garden" conjures up a picture of an open air atmosphere adorned with flora and the enchantment of nature. A roof-garden in an O. Henry story fairly well lives up to the image implicit in its


name, when on a hot summer day "the breeze was cool from the bay" and "around and above ... were stars."21

Another story by O. Henry suggests that some of the comforts of certain roof-gardens were due more to man-made contrivances than to nature, when an allusion is made to one roof-garden's "artificially cooled atmosphere."22 The truth is that several establishments which called themselves "gardens" sometimes bore no more relation to a real garden than one described by a French visitor, where "the walls alone represented the garden in highly inflamed patches of red, green and yellow paint."23 The unifying trait which distinguishes roof-gardens, of all sorts, from other similar enterprises appears to be the elaborate forms of entertainment which roof-gardens offer. Saloons and cafes often entertain their clientele with music, ranging from "coon songs" being hammered out on a piano to waltzes played by an orchestra.24 Roof-gardens, in O. Henry's stories, go so far as to offer vaudeville acts for the amusement of their patrons.25

23 Still, Mirror for Gotham, pp. 198-199.
The restaurants which O. Henry uses to provide the background for his stories run the gamut of variety: from small establishments to palatial halls, from simple culinary fare to ethnic diversity, from quiet solitude to musical entertainment. At one end of the spectrum is Schulenberg's Home Restaurant, which furnishes a menu as modest as its name. El Refugio provides an unassuming but exotic environment peopled by Spanish-American exiles and revolutionaries. Somewhat less sectarian than the atmosphere of El Refugio, is that of Tonio's, an Italian restaurant which consciously strains to affect a bohemian aura. O. Henry broadens the international flavor of his stories with a few establishments of German decor, including one rathskeller, a type of German restaurant. Towards the other end of the spectrum are high class restaurants, such as the one where John Platt chose to court the beautiful Miss Asher, or the one where political boss Bill McMahon seeks the recognition of the aristocratic Cortlandt Van Duyckink.

The prevailing influence of the restaurant in O. Henry's stories makes itself evident, not only with

26Ibid., "Springtime a la Carte," p. 47.
restaurants providing ideal settings for social interaction and liaisons, but also, on occasion, when the restaurant acts as an integral part of the plot. The plot of "The Halberdier of the Little Rheinschloss" and the denouements of "A Philistine in Bohemia" and "A Bird of Bagdad" hinge on O. Henry's manipulation of restaurant life in those stories. Perhaps the final indictment of the intoxicating influence of New York City's stereotypical abundance of food and drink is Greenbriar Nye's conversion from a preference for the rugged life of the West to the comforts of the city, when "he saw a New York restaurant crowd enjoying itself." 31

Resorts for drinking and dining are but one outlet for entertainment in O. Henry's New York. Theaters not only serve to attract young newcomers to New York in search of fame and fortune, but they are also a great source of diversion for the city's residents and tourists. O. Henry himself was known to have had a fondness for frequenting many of the less reputable, and more common, sources of public amusement such as saloons and vaudeville theaters. 32 O. Henry's choice of theatrical settings seems to have been largely dictated by his own personal tastes in entertainment, for he concentrates primarily on

31 Ibid., "The Call of the Tame," p. 1194.
32 O'Connor, O. Henry, pp. 142-146.
musical-comedy and vaudeville, while he tends to neglect the elite theater, opera, ballet, and symphony concerts.

Vaudeville is a collection of variety acts which includes comedy, drama, music, and dance. Sometimes O. Henry depicts vaudeville acts being performed for the amusement of patrons at roof-gardens, whereas other times they are performed at theaters which have been built to house such entertainment. Vaudeville receives passing mention in several of O. Henry's stories, and in a couple stories it plays an essential role. Miss Rosalie Ray's stage performance included "a song and dance, imitations of two or three actors who are but imitations of themselves, and a balancing feat with a step-ladder and featherduster"; her specialty, however, was to fly high over the heads of her predominantly male audience on a swing bedecked with flowers, wearing a "filmy, brief skirt," and a yellow garter which she would kick off her leg to a member of the audience. Rosalie forsook the stage and became engaged to marry Reverend Arthur Lyle, a Methodist minister who knew nothing of her previous career. Reverend Lyle treasured a little rosewood box which he told Rosalie contained a keepsake—a memento of a pure and ideal love from afar. One day Rosalie's curiosity got the better of her, and upon opening the box, she promptly broke off her engagement. Rosalie had discovered that the memento was one of
the yellow silk garters she had kicked off during a performance. The character of Miss Rosalie Ray was probably suggested to O. Henry by a young woman who actually did perform a similar act at the Dewey Theater on Union Square.

The theater, whether mentioned in brief or at length by O. Henry, often exercises a profound, if not always evident, influence on its performers and their audience. The vaudeville team of Hart and Cherry are the subject of one O. Henry yarn, and he describes them in considerable detail. Bob Hart had traveled the country for four years performing an act which included "a monologue, three lightning changes with songs, a couple of imitations of celebrated imitators, and a buck-and-wing dance that had drawn a glance of approval from the bass-viol player in more than one house--than which no performer ever received more satisfactory evidence of good work."

Winona Cherry is discovered by Bob while she is doing character songs and impersonations at a rival theater, and the two of them join together to perform a sketch written by Bob called "Mice Will Play." The sketch, of which O. Henry gives a lengthy description, is a big success for Hart and Cherry and launches them on a successful career.


Hart and Cherry are veteran troopers on the stage, but what of the audience they try so hard to entertain? Seeking an evening’s enjoyment, and a little diversion from their everyday toil, Dan Owens suggests “a little vaudeville” to his companions Nancy and Lou. O. Henry shows insight into the importance of theater to the common working classes when Dan asks, “How about looking at stage diamonds since we can’t shake hands with the real sparklers?”

The various saloons, restaurants and theaters which dot the pages of O. Henry’s stories are the major sources of amusement and social interaction for his characters, but other diversions do occasionally appear. Miss Claribel Colby is drowsy following a night of frolic at the annual ball and oyster fry of the West Side Wholesale Fish Dealers’ Assistants’ Social Club No. 2, while Kid Mullaly and Liz face their destinies at the bi-monthly dance of the Small Hours Social Club. Norah O. Donovan spends part of her wedding night riding a cab through Central Park and playing at a casino there, while Kid McGarry helps lead a police raid on an illicit gambling den. Even organ-grinders, at one time so common a fixture on New York City streets that James D. McCabe, Jr. devotes


38 Ibid., “From the Cabby’s Seat,” pp. 55-56; Ibid., “‘Little Speck in Garnered Fruit,’” pp. 991-992.
several pages documenting them, provide inexpensive entertainment to the city's residents.\textsuperscript{39}

One of the more spectacular amusements offered by New York City lay not in the island of Manhattan but across the East River in Brooklyn. The Gravesend area of Brooklyn, and the sections which helped to comprise it---Kings Highway, Sheepshead Bay, Brighton Beach, Manhattan Beach and Coney Island---boasted several beach resorts, hotels, and as many as three racetracks.\textsuperscript{40} By the last few decades of the nineteenth century, Coney Island had developed into a popular amusement center which drew huge, bustling crowds to its multitude of attractions.\textsuperscript{41}

Coney Island plays a prominent role in several of O. Henry's stories. The predictions of a fortune-teller plying her trade at Coney Island help Daniel Tobin find his lost sweetheart, Katie Mahorner, newly arrived from County Sligo, Ireland.\textsuperscript{42} Another colleen, Norah Flynn, and her boyfriend, Dennis Carnaham, quarrel at the Dairymen and Street-Sprinkler Drivers' semi-annual ball. Against a


\textsuperscript{41}Still, Mirror for Gotham, p. 226.

background of the sights and wonders of Coney Island, which O. Henry describes in some detail, Dennis and Norah wander to a secluded spot, where they meet and make up. The marriage plans of millionaire Irving Carter are, however, thwarted when the shopgirl he loves, Masie, mistakes his proposed honeymoon in Europe for a trip to Coney Island.

The impact that Coney Island has upon another of O. Henry's millionaires is perhaps more dramatic. Blinker was spoiled, bored, thoughtless and class-conscious, until one day he ventures to Coney Island and meets a shopgirl named Florence. Blinker is at first contemptuous of the plebian multitude surrounding him, but his opinion is altered when he realizes that Florence sees him as the "holder of the keys to the enchanted city of fun":

He no longer saw a mass of vulgarians seeking gross joys. He now looked clearly upon a hundred thousand true idealists. Their offenses were wiped out. Counterfeit and false though the garish joys of these spangled temples were, he perceived that deep under the gilt surface they offered saving and apposite balm and satisfaction to the restless human heart. Here, at least, was the husk of Romance, the empty but shining casque of Chivalry, the breath-catching though safeguarded dip and flight of Adventure, the magic carpet that transports you to the realms of fairyland, though its journey be through but a few poor yards of space. He no longer saw a rabble, but his brothers seeking the ideal. There was no magic of poesy here or of art; but the glamour of their imagination turned yellow calico into cloth of gold and the megaphone into the silver trumpets of joy's heralds.


Unfortunately, Blinker's awakening to the plight of his fellow man is too late, for he is separated from Florence, who lives in one of the slums he owns. 45

New York City's vast reservoir of amusements and entertainment, coupled with the sheer size and variety of its population, earned it the stereotype of a haven for excitement and adventure. O. Henry echoes the popular stereotype of New York City when he states that "in the big city the twin spirits Romance and Adventure are always abroad seeking worthy wooers." 46 The abundance of places of interest in New York resulted in the development of a sightseeing industry to cater to the tourist trade, which included "rubber-neck wagons." 47 O. Henry incorporates a sightseeing tour bus in a story, referring to it as "the Rubberneck Auto" and "the Glaring-at-Gotham car." So compelling is the tendency for diversion that "the sidewalk was blockaded with sightseers who had gathered to stare at sightseers, justifying the natural law that every creature on earth is preyed upon by some other creature. 48 In his characteristic manner, O. Henry exaggerates the propensity of the curious to seek out events and objects of interest

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in "the Caoutchouc City." William Pry and Violet Seymour are such devoted rubber-neckers (as suggested by their surnames), that on the day of their wedding a search for the missing bride and groom reveals, that because of habit, they have joined the crowd of onlookers trying to see the ceremony! 49

The exotic and adventurous nature of New York City is epitomized by O. Henry's frequent comparisons of New York with the Bagdad of the monumental collection of Arabic folktales, The Thousand and One Arabian Nights. O. Henry takes great delight in drawing parallels between the legendary Bagdad and New York City:

Night had fallen on that great and beautiful city known as Bagdad-on-the-Subway. And with the night came the enchanted glamour that belongs not to Arabia alone. In different masquerade the streets, bazaars, and walled houses of the occidental city of romance were filled with the same kind of folk that so much interested our interesting old friend, the late Mr. H. A. Raschid. They wore clothes eleven hundred years nearer to the latest styles that H. A. saw in old Bagdad; but they were about the same people underneath. With the eye of faith, you could have seen the Little Hunchback, Sinbad the Sailor, Fitbad the Tailor, the Beautiful Persian, the one-eyed Calenders, Ali Baba and Forty Robbers on every block, and the Barber and his Six Brothers, and all the old Arabian gang easily. 50

O. Henry makes repeated references to Caliph Haroun al Raschid, the great luminary and benefactor of the Arabian


Nights tales, and finds it hard to resist the pun when he states that "the spectacle of the money-caliphs of the present day going about Bagdad-on-the-Subway trying to relieve the wants of the people is enough to make the great Al Raschid turn Haroun in his grave." 51

According to O. Henry, "the great city of Bagdad-on-the-Subway is caliph-ridden." O. Henry goes on to explain that New York City's "palaces, bazaars, khans and byways are thronged with Al Raschids in divers disguises seeking diversion and victims for their unbridled generosity." 52 Although O. Henry often shows a predilection for the joys and pursuits of the lower and working classes, many of his stories do revolve around the rich. A favorite theme of O. Henry's stories is the pursuit of adventure and excitement in the big city. By using wealthy characters and surroundings, O. Henry is able to contrast the rich against the poor and also present New York City as a glamorous and opulent rival to Bagdad itself. Carson Chalmers is a fine example of one of O. Henry's self-styled caliphs, when during a melancholy mood he has a homeless derelict brought to dine with him. Chalmers' guest, Sherrard Plumer, then emulates Scheherazade by reciting the story of his downfall. Plumer's revelation, in turn, helps relieve Chalmers of his dilemma. 53

Another of O. Henry's caliphs is Cortlandt Van Duyckink. Less tempermental in his philanthropy than Carson Chalmers, Van Duyckink also possesses great wealth and, perhaps more importantly, aristocratic prestige. O. Henry describes Van Duyckink as "a man worth eight million, who inherited and held a sacred seat in the exclusive inner circle of society." Privileged society towards the end of the nineteenth century was increasingly being classified by a dichotomy: the old order of inherited wealth and aristocracy, and the new order of self-made millionaires from common backgrounds. O. Henry plays upon the refined nobility of the aristocracy and the vulgarity of the nouveaux riches, adding both glamour and ironic contrast to his stories. An example of O. Henry strikingly contrasting the two orders of the elite is when he tells how

54 Ibid., "The Social Triangle," p. 1106.

55 The rivalry of New York's aristocracy and nouveaux riches reached a peak when the Metropolitan Opera House was opened in 1883. The Academy of Music had been the almost exclusive cultural domain of the aristocracy, but the Opera House gave proof to the influence of the city's powerful new social element which built it. Stephen Longstreet, City on Two Rivers: Profiles of New York--Yesterday and Today (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1975), p. 185; Still, Mirror for Gotham, pp. 224-225. The contrast between the traditional aristocracy and those who endeavored to climb the ranks of social prestige has provided one of the major themes for American novels about the city. George Arthur Dunlap, The City in the American Novel, 1789-1900 (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1965), pp. 92-93.
Old Anthony Rockwall, retired manufacturer and proprietor of Rockwall's Eureka Soap, looked out the library window of his Fifth Avenue mansion and grinned. His neighbor to the right—the aristocratic clubman, G. Van Schuylight Suffolk-Jones—came out to his waiting motor-car, wrinkling a contumelious nostril, as usual, at the Italian renaissance sculpture of the soap palace's front elevation.56

The use of a Dutch surname in an O. Henry story, indicative of descent from New York City's founding families, automatically identifies the character as a member of the old aristocracy.57

Aristocratic descent may not necessarily dictate wealth, however, as in the case of the Old Gentleman who buys Stuffy Pete his annual Thanksgiving dinner. The yearly Thanksgiving feast for the homeless Stuffy Pete has become a fixed tradition for the dignified Old Gentleman. Although he himself hasn't eaten for three days, the Old Gentleman's sense of honor compels him to watch Stuffy Pete devour every last bit of the sumptuous meal. Perhaps, because of his own deprivation, the Old Gentleman is the noblest of O. Henry's caliphs.58


CHAPTER IV

NEW YORK CITY'S NOTORIETY

The large numbers of transients who visited and inhabited New York City throughout its history contributed not only to the city's stereotypical conviviality but also to its purported notoriety. The surge of immigrants and migrant Americans who flocked to New York City during the nineteenth century resulted in overcrowded, depressed neighborhoods where dirt, unemployment and crime became rampant. Prostitution, drinking, gambling and other sundry vices thrived in areas of New York City, and vagrants and street gypsies (homeless children) were prolific. Street gangs whose practices ranged from robbery to an occasional murder arose in some districts. Fueled by the incidence of such crimes, the stereotype, which magnified the city's vices, developed. New York's stereotypical notoriety was evidenced by scores of publications, popular during the nineteenth century, which warned prospective visitors of the dangers and sins of the city while creating an
unsavory yet sensational lure.\(^1\) O. Henry utilized the stereotype of New York's notoriety to add a bit of spice and pseudo-realism to his stories.

As in the cases of the other stereotypes which delineate New York City's personality, the stereotype of New York's notoriety rests on a foundation of historical commentary. Asa Greene enumerated several of New York's vices in 1837, when he described it as

... a rather queerly governed city; an uncommon badly watered city; a very considerable of a rum city; a very full-of-fires city; a pretty tolerably well-hoaxed city: and moreover, a city moderately abounding in foul streets, rogues, dandies, mobs, and several other things, concerning which it is not necessary to come to any specific conclusion.\(^2\)

Historic commentary soon translated into popular belief, and the stereotype of New York City's notoriety was eagerly employed by enterprising writers. James D. McCabe, Jr., for instance, cautions his readers in the preface to Lights and Shadows of New York Life; or, the Sights and Sensations of the Great City:

\(^1\)Some titles which allude to the more notorious aspects of life in New York City are: George G. Foster, New York by Gas-Light; with Here and There a Streak of Sunshine (New York: Dewitt and Davenport, 1850); James D. McCabe, The Secrets of the Great City; A Work Descriptive of the Virtues and Vices, the Mysteries, Miseries, and Crimes of New York City (Philadelphia: National Publishing Co., 1868); George Thompson, The Gay Girls of New York; or, Life on Broadway; Being the Mirror of the Fashions, Follies and Crimes of a Great City (New York: George W. Hill, 1854).

The curiosity of all persons concerning the darker side of city life can be fully satisfied by a perusal of the sketches presented in this volume. It is not safe for a stranger to explore these places for himself. No matter how clever he may consider himself, no respectable man is a match for the villains and sharers of New York, and he voluntarily brings upon himself all the sequences that will follow his entrance into the haunts of the criminal and disreputable classes. The city is full of danger.  

McCabe delves into "the darker side of city life" in lurid detail, finally building up to a dramatic conclusion:

Year after year the waters cast up their dead, and the Morgue is filled with those who are known to the police as 'missing.' Men and women, the victims of the assassin, and those who are tired of life, find their way to the ghastly tables of the dead house; but they are not all. There are long rows of names in the dreary register of the police against which the entry 'found' is never written. What has become of them, whether they are living or dead, no one knows. They were 'lost in New York,' and they are practically dead to those interested in knowing their fate. Year after year the sad list lengths.

In many a far off home there is mourning for some loved one. Years have passed away since the sorrow came upon these mourners, but the cloud still hangs over them. Their loved one was 'lost in New York.' That is all they know—all they will ever know.

McCabe's depiction of New York City, which is demonstrative of similar works of popular literature, helps illustrate how well established the stereotype of New York's notoriety

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4Ibid., p. 850.
was in the nineteenth century.

The Five Points district of lower Manhattan was, during much of the nineteenth century, the city's most infamous slum and a breeding place for dirt, poverty and crime. Charles Dickens, famous for his sensitive portrayals of Victorian England's slums, made it a point to visit the Five Points during an American tour in 1842:

There are many by-streets, almost as neutral in clean colors, and positive in dirty ones, as by-streets in London; and there is one quarter, commonly called the Five Points, which, in respect of filth and wretchedness, may be safely backed against Seven Dials, or any other part of famed St. Giles's.5

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, as the city expanded northwards, the slum districts extended to include the lower East Side and Hell's Kitchen. The appalling conditions of New York's lower East Side provoked widespread public indignation when they were graphically depicted by Jacob A. Riis in How the Other Half Lives.6 Almost fifty years after Dickens compared the Five Points with St. Giles's, Riis contrasts one neighborhood in the lower East Side with London's infamous slums:

5Still, Mirror for Gotham, p. 122.

6The impact of Riis' book was so pronounced that it did lead to the implementation of some reforms, and Theodore Roosevelt was prompted to comment that Riis was "the most useful citizen of New York." Charles A. Madison, Preface to How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York, by Jacob A. Riis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890; reprint ed., New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1971), p. vii.
It is said that nowhere in the world are so many people crowded together on a square mile as here. . . . the packing of the population . . . has run up the record here to the rate of three hundred and thirty thousand per square mile. The densest crowding of Old London . . . never got beyond a hundred and seventy-five thousand. Even the alley is crowded out. Through dark hallways and filthy cellars, crowded, as is every foot of the street, with dirty children, the settlements in the rear are reached.7

The lower East Side appears in several of O. Henry's stories, as in "The Social Triangle," where a millionaire ventures into a tenement district:

Down Delancy slowly crept the pale-gray auto. Away from it toddled coveys of wondering, tangle-haired, barefooted, unwashed children. It stopped before a crazy brick structure, foul and awry.

. . . Down the steps of the building came a young man who seemed to epitomize its degradation, squalor and infelicity—a narrow-chested, pale unsavory young man, puffing at a cigarette.8

If O. Henry's description seems somewhat reminiscent of Riis', two points may be contributing factors: the first is that O. Henry and Riis are both describing the same neighborhood in the lower East Side, which they both probably personally observed; the second is that the squalor of slum life had already entered New York's folklore tradition. Because the stereotype he was using had

7 Jacob A. Riis, How the Other Half Lives, p. 85.
become popular by that time, even readers who may have never seen the lower East Side would have immediately grasped O. Henry's description.

New York City's notoriety relied upon more than just the dirt and poverty of its slums. Drinking, gambling and drug abuse were reputed to be rampant in slum areas, taking place in all manner of bars, alleys and cellars. Establishments which catered to the vices tended to attract dubious clientele, such as gang members, thieves and prostitutes. Gangs sporting colorful names such as Dead Rabbits, Plug Uglies and Bowery Boys held sway over criss-crossing streets and alleys with such foreboding appellations as Ragpicker's Row, Bandit's Roost, Battle Alley and Rat Trap. Existing side by side with gang members and criminals were prostitutes of various classes.9

The lower East Side provides the setting for O. Henry's "Past One at Rooney's," a tale precipitated by the rivalry of the Mulberry Hill Gang and the Dry Dock Gang. The story is a bit unusual for O. Henry because of its particularly squalid environment and shady characters. "Past One at Rooney's" leans heavily upon the stereotype of New York City's notoriety: it includes gang warfare, a

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knifing, crooked politicians, a disreputable bar, a reference to drugs, women smoking, illegal drinking, a police raid, and policemen on the take. The theme of "Past One at Rooney's" revolves around the romance of gang member Cork McManus and Fanny. Cork meets Fanny amidst the seedy surroundings of Rooney's, while the police are looking for him for knifing a rival gang member. Fanny is a prostitute, a rare character in an O. Henry story, but she hides her profession from Cork because she falls in love with him. A late night police raid almost leads to Cork's arrest, but Fanny saves him, revealing her identity in the process. Despite the scandalous and seemingly realistic trappings of the story, Cork and Fanny's courtship takes on an idealistic, romantic tone which results in a happy ending.10

The "fallen woman" was a character who aroused the curiosity of nineteenth century readers; she was sometimes innocent and sometimes world-weary, sometimes kind-hearted and sometimes callous, a fallen angel or the devil incarnate.11 O. Henry often portrayed young women, generally shopgirls or aspiring actresses, who were heroically struggling to maintain their virtue and survive. On


11 See James D. McCabe, Jr., Lights and Shadows of New York Life, pp. 579-617, for a good example of the lurid fascination with which popular nineteenth century literature depicted "fallen women."
occasion, one of O. Henry's female characters loses the battle and falls prey to the seductive influence of the city. O. Henry was conscious of contemporary trends in popular literature, which he occasionally parodied. One of O. Henry's parodies was of the best selling "Elsie" stories. In the popular literature of O. Henry's time, the Elsie character type was pure, innocent, patriotic, hard-working and virtuous.12 O. Henry brought Elsie to New York City. "Especially for the vagrant feet of youth are the roads of Manhattan beset 'with pitfall and with gin,'" warns O. Henry. O. Henry's fears prove true, for poor, innocent, virtuous Elsie becomes ensnared by the lecherous Mr. Otter (every bit the weasel his name implies):

Lost, Your Excellency. Lost, Associations, and Societies. Lost, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Lost, Reformers and Lawmakers, born with heavenly compassion in your hearts, but with the reverence of money in your souls. And lost thus around us every day.13

Elsie may have triumphed over all the vicissitudes of life, but in O. Henry's hands she met her match in New York City.14


14Ibid., pp. 1148-1153.
Much further to the north of the lower East Side, on the west side of Manhattan, was Hell's Kitchen. The streets of Hell's Kitchen were sprinkled with grimy tenements and buildings, intermingled with warehouses and abattoirs, which bordered on the North (Hudson) River and the adjacent railroad yards. By the end of the nineteenth century, Hell's Kitchen had superseded the Five Points for the sordid distinction of being New York's most infamous district of gang warfare and criminal activity. An anecdote reflecting the notoriety of Hell's Kitchen was told of a conversation between O. Henry and a policeman:

While talking with one of the blue-coats in Hell's Kitchen one night, years ago, [O.] Henry said that they were suddenly startled—at least, that he was—by two loud revolver shots. 'Some one's been killed!' he exclaimed. 'No, don't worry,' returned the 'cop,' coolly, 'only injured. It takes at least three bullets to kill any one in this part of town.'

In "Vanity and Some Sables," O. Henry describes a few of the denizens of Hell's Kitchen:

The Stovepipe Gang borrowed its name from a sub-district of the city called the 'Stovepipe,' which is a narrow and natural extension of the familiar district known as 'Hell's Kitchen.' The 'Stovepipe' strip of town runs along Eleventh and Twelfth avenues on the river, and bends a hard and sooty elbow around little, lost, homeless De Witt Clinton park. Consider that a stovepipe is an important factor in any kitchen and the situation is analyzed. The chefs in 'Hell's Kitchen' are many, and the 'Stovepipe' gang wears the cordon blue.

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The members of this unchartered but widely known brotherhood appeared to pass their time on street corners arrayed like the lilies of the conservatory and busy with nail files and pen-knives. Thus displayed as a guarantee of good faith, they carried on an innocuous conversation in a 200-word vocabulary, to the casual observer as innocent and immaterial as that heard in the clubs seven blocks to the east. 

The members of the Stovepipe Gang, however, are far from innocent loiterers. O. Henry's description of their activities is colored with the sensational flair which characterizes the popular stereotype of Hell's Kitchen:

... off exhibition the 'Stovepipes' were not mere street corner ornaments addicted to posing and manicuring. Their serious occupation was the separating of citizens from their coin and valuables. Preferably this was done by weird and singular tricks without noise or bloodshed; but whenever the citizen honored by their attentions refused to impoverish himself gracefully, his objections came to be spread finally upon some police station blotter or hospital register.

The police held the 'Stovepipe' gang in perpetual suspicion and respect. As the nightingale's liquid note is heard in the deepest shadows, so along the 'Stovepipe's' dark and narrow confines the whistle for reserves punctures the dull ear of night. Whenever there was smoke in the 'Stovepipe' the tasselled men in blue knew there was a fire in 'Hell's Kitchen.'

Kid Brady, an ex-member of the Stovepipe Gang, and his fiancee, Molly McKeever, stumble into an awkward situation, but his sense of honor and her "stubborn true-heartedness"


17Ibid.
save the day. As ominous as the characters and locale of "Vanity and Some Sables" may have sounded, the story remains consistent to O. Henry's light, romanticized style.18

Although O. Henry often made sly, sarcastic comments on society and its institutions, only occasionally did social comment actually become the theme of his stories. One of O. Henry's most powerful social commentaries is "The Guilty Party." "The Guilty Party" is a tragedy which takes place in the lower East Side:

Outside was one of those crowded streets of the east side, in which, as twilight falls, Satan sets up his recruiting office. A mighty host of children danced and ran and played in the street. Some in rags, some in clean white and beribboned, some wild and restless as young hawks, some gentle-faced and shrinking, some shrieking rude and sinful words, some listening awed, but soon, grown familiar, to embrace—here were the children playing in the corridors of the House of Sin. Above the playground forever hovered a great bird. The bird was known to humorists as the stork. But the people of Chrystie Street were better ornithologists. They called it a vulture.19

The protagonist of the story is Liz, the quiet daughter of a neglectful father, who is drawn to the ways of the street by her boyfriend, Kid Mullaly. The Kid decides to take someone else to the bi-monthly dance of the Small Hours Social Club, and a vengeful Liz searches for him:

18Ibid., pp. 1100-1104.

19Ibid., "'The Guilty Party,'" p. 1121.
Through the land of the stork-vulture wandered Liz. Her black eyes searched the passing crowds fiercely but vaguely. Now and then she hummed bars of foolish little songs. Between times she set her small, white teeth together, and spake crisp words that the east side has added to language.20

Liz comes upon the Kid, and the encounter results in murder and suicide. O. Henry glosses over the full impact of the tragedy by adding a biting yet humorous ending to the story; nevertheless, "The Guilty Party" remains a shocking indictment of slum life in New York City.21

Crime, neglect and corruption play a destructive role in the lives of the characters of "The Guilty Party."

Adding to the dramatic climax of the story is a mob scene:

And then followed the big city's biggest shame, its most ancient and rotten surviving canker, its pollution and disgrace, its blight and perversion, its forever infamy and guilt, fostered, unreprieved and cherished, handed down from a long-ago century of the basest barbarity -- the Hue and Cry. Nowhere but in the big cities does it survive, and here most of all, where the ultimate perfection of culture, citizenship and alleged superiority joins, bawling, in the chase.22

New York City was plagued with frequent riots during the nineteenth century, the most famous of which were the Draft Riots of 1863. Thousands of New Yorkers took to the streets during the Draft Riots, which raged for a week, and areas of the city were under mob control for several

20Ibid., p. 1122.

21Ibid., pp. 1120-1124.

22Ibid., p. 1123.
days. O. Henry picked upon the theme of massive mob rioting for a satirical piece entitled "A Little Talk About Mobs." The days of the greatest, most violent riots were over by O. Henry's time, but the stereotype of mob activity in New York was still stamped in the consciousness of the general public.

Gangs and mobs are not the only factors which contribute to crime in O. Henry's stories. Grafters, burglars, thieves and murderers color the pages of several stories, sometimes adding a touch of ironic humor, occasionally lending an air of sensation and suspense.

Many of O. Henry's grafters are not actual New Yorkers, but out-of-towners, usually from the West, who have come to New York City to practice their art. Remarks made by one of O. Henry's grafters, who has descended on the city, are illustrative of their attitude:

Me and Andy never cared much to do business in New York. It was too much like pothunting. Catching suckers in that town, is like dynamiting a Texas lake for bass. All you have to do anywhere between the North and East rivers is to stand in the street with an open bag marked, 'Drop packages of money here. No checks or loose bills taken.' You have a cop handy to club pikers who try to chip in post office orders and Canadian money, and that's all there is to New York for a hunter who loves his profession.25

23 For a detailed account of the New York City Draft Riots see Cook, The Armies of the Streets.


Parley-voo Pickens and Buckingham Skinner are so remorseful about the ease with which they've swindled poor women and children in New York, that they give back their ill-gotten gains, declaring, "Me and Pick ain't Wall Streeters like you know 'em."26 Skinner's comment bears the implication that New York's Wall Street businessmen are much more accomplished and unrepentant swindlers than any out-of-town grafters. Montague Silver and Billy Pescud, also grafters from the West, find that there are more native New York swindlers than on Wall Street alone. Thinking to make some money through some trickery, they themselves end up being taken in.27

Grafters, swindlers and con artists cheat the general public with slyness and trickery, but other O. Henry characters resort to more direct, sometimes violent means. Thieves and robbers in O. Henry's stories cast a foreboding aura over New York City: "One was 'Bully' McGuire, whose system of sport required the use of a strong arm and the misuse of an eight-inch piece of lead pipe."28 Like McGuire, there are other suspicious characters in O. Henry's stories who go about similarly armed:

In 'Pigeon' McCarthy's pocket was a section of one-inch gas-pipe eight inches long. In one end of it and in the middle of it was a lead plug. One-half of it was packed tight with solder. Black Riley carried a slug-shot, being a conventional thug. 'One-ear' Mike relied upon a pair of brass knucks--an heirloom in the family. 29

As menacing as some of O. Henry's criminals may seem, not all of them are quite so threatening. In a very humorous tale called "Tommy's Burglar," O. Henry satirizes the popular, contemporary, sentimental vogue of writing in which a hardened criminal is reformed by a pure-hearted child. O. Henry flaunts literary convention and popular stereotypes with sequences of amusing dialogue, such as

'Listen to that,' exclaimed the man, in a hoarse voice. 'Am I a burglar? What do you suppose I have a three days' growth of bristly beard on my face for, and a cap with flaps? Give me the oil, quick, and let me grease the bit, so I won't wake up your mamma, who is lying down with a headache, and left you in charge of Felicia who has been faithless to her trust.'

'Oh dear,' said Tommy, with a sigh. 'I thought you would be more up-to-date. This oil is for the salad when I bring lunch from the pantry for you. And mamma and papa have gone to the Metropolitan to hear De Reszke. But that isn't my fault. It only shows how long the story has been knocking around among the editors. If the author had been wise he'd have changed it to Caruso in the proofs.' 30

In "Tommy's Burglar," O. Henry clearly demonstrates his conscious use of popular, well-accepted character types and formulae, which he arranges in his own innovative style.


The most dangerous of O. Henry's characters are guilty of more than theft or assault; they are murderers. Dr. Charles Spencer James is a well-endowed physician, of good standing in his community. Unknown to Dr. James' patients and neighbors, he is also a successful burglar. Unlike his counterpart in "Tommy's Burglar," Dr. James strikes a respectable pose, but he is infinitely more dangerous. In "The Marionettes," Dr. James coolly and methodically commits murder. It is interesting to note the contrast, yet balance, between Dr. James and his victim, a man guilty of abusing his wife:

Yet it were a droll study in egoism to consider these two—one an assassin and a robber, standing above his victim; the other baser in his offenses, if a lesser law-breaker, lying, abhorred, in the house of the wife he had persecuted, spoiled, and smitten, one a tiger, the other a dog-wolf—to consider each of them sickening at the foulness of the other; and each flourishing out of the mire of his manifest guilt his own immaculate standard—of conduct, if not of honor. 31

As in many of O. Henry's stories, it is the upper caste of society who are guilty of some of the greatest crimes, whether it be the rich employer taking advantage of the poor shopgirl, the feckless husband abusing his wife, or a successful doctor turned thief and murderer. O. Henry does add a characteristic twist, tempering the story's ending, and Dr. James performs an unexpectedly generous

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and noble deed.\textsuperscript{32}

As always, O. Henry can take the most serious of matters, even murder, and make light of it. In "The Detective Detector," Avery Knight, "the great New York burglar, highwayman, and murderer," overtly shoots a man in Central Park, to prove that within forty-eight hours of the murder he can locate the detective sent to apprehend him. Knight leaves every possible clue which can lead the police to arrest him, from dropping a case of his calling cards, with his name and address, at the scene of the crime, to confronting a police officer and confessing his guilt. The police are baffled. Knight finally catches the detective sent to find him following the exact opposite of all the clues given, and casing Andrew Carnegie's residence!\textsuperscript{33}

New York City's stereotypical claim to notoriety rests with more than its criminal element alone. One of the most scandalous aspects of New York City life during the last few decades of the nineteenth century was the widespread corruption of city politics and law enforcement. The political organization known as Tammany Hall, or "The Ring," exercised enormous control over New York City's political, social and economic life. "Boss" Tweed, a Tammany leader after the Civil War, became the object of

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., pp. 757-765.

\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., "The Detective Detector," pp. 1300-1303.
national attention, receiving legendary status as a symbol of arrogance, graft and corruption. The Tammany political machine continued to thrive after Tweed's downfall, into the beginning of the twentieth century. By the twentieth century, legislative reform mended many of the evils of New York City's political system, but the long-standing stereotype of an ill-governed city remained.34

During O. Henry's time, New York City was divided into political "wards" which were lorded over by a hierarchy ranging from ward "heelers" to "bosses." A ward boss exerted considerable influence over his district, and often granted favors to constituents whom he would rely upon for support. The favors bestowed by Tammany ward bosses sometimes stretched, or broke, the limits of the law. Cork McManus, for example, awaits the beneficent intervention of Tim Corrigan, in "Past One at Rooney's," to escape prosecution for an assault he committed.35

Tammany Hall was known to have close ties with the New York City police department, so that the police were sometimes themselves vulnerable to charges of graft and corruption. The Captain, in "According to Their Lights," is a police officer cast down from his high position because of


a public scandal and political shakedown.\textsuperscript{36}

Tammany's popularity amongst the poor and working classes was unquestioned. Despite The Ring's reputation for corruption, Tammany men were astute enough to provide such aid and services to their constituents as to win their affection and loyalty. O. Henry depicts the adoration of a poor resident of the lower East Side for the local political boss, making a reference to "The Tiger," the symbol of Tammany Hall:

Ikey's legs carried him to and into that famous place of entertainment known as the Cafe Maginnis--famous because it was the rendezvous of Billy McMahan, the greatest man, the most wonderful man, Ikey thought, that the world had ever produced.

Billy McMahan was the district leader. Upon him the Tiger purred, and his hand held manna to scatter. Now, as Ikey entered, McMahan stood, flushed and triumphant and mighty, the centre of a huzzaing concourse of his lieutenants and constituents. It seems there had been an election; a signal victory had been won; the city had been swept back into line by a resistless besom of ballots.\textsuperscript{37}

Since political control over a district meant power, wealth and prestige, politicians were wary of the efforts of rivals to upstage them. An associate of Mike O'Grady, a district leader in "A Night in New Arabia," jealously guards Mike's lower East Side neighborhood from the

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., "According to Their Lights," pp. 1124-1128.

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., "The Social Triangle," p. 1104.
charitable intentions of a wealthy philanthropist, for fear that O'Grady might lose his political clout:

'Say, Sport, do you know where you are at? Well, dis is Mike O'Grady's district you're buttin' into--see? Mike's got de stomach-ache privilege for every kid in dis neighborhood--see? And if dere's any picnics or red balloons to be dealt out here, Mike's money pays for 'em--see? Don't you butt in, or something'll be handed to you.'

Some politicians, a chosen few, transcend the rivalries of ward politics. Mike Sullivan, in "The Count and the Wedding Guest," has reached a stature aspired to by lesser politicians, yet he sports the nickname "Big Mike," true to Tammany's practice of relating itself to the common man. "Big Mike's" influence and power surpass the boundaries of New York City or New York State, but he retains the loyalty of his constituents:

'He's the biggest man in New York... He can about do anything he wants to with Tammany or any other old thing in the political line. He's a mile high and as broad as East River. You say anything against Big Mike, and you'll have a million men on your collarbone in about two seconds. Why, he made a visit over to the old country awhile back, and the kings took to their holes like rabbits.'

Corrupt though it may have been when seen through the eyes of some civic-minded citizens, Tammany Hall endeared itself to much of New York's electorate because of its gregarious, open-handed manner.

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Another element of society contributing to New York City's notoriety, which is amply represented in O. Henry's stories, is the city's homeless. New York's ebb and flow of transient residents and visitors induced conditions which helped it gain its formidable reputation. The most transient group of all in New York City are those who have no home—the city's vagrants.40

The homeless in O. Henry's stories are generally quite affable. O. Henry steers clear of the true degradation which characterized New York City's vagrant class: the filth, the disease, the lodging houses, the drunkenness, the crime. Bed lines, park benches, dingy cellars and public poorhouses help set the scene for O. Henry's homeless, but there is never any real sense of desperation. Nor was vagrancy in the city limited to men alone. Many women and children made up the ranks of the homeless. O. Henry, however, is employing stereotypes to define the characters in his stories. O. Henry's women and children, even those living in the most impoverished conditions, tend to share an innate purity and innocence. As for the men whom O. Henry portrays as vagrants, they are generally happy-go-easy characters, unafflicted by the tribulations of the world around them. Soapy, in "The Cop and the

40Vivid portrayals of the squalid lives of vagrants (men, women and children) are found in Jacob A. Riis, How the Other Half Lives, pp. 61-75, 153-163, 201-205.
Anthem," and Stuffy Pete, in "Two Thanksgiving Day Gentle-
men," are comical, almost merry vagabonds, cast down by
fate, but still possessed by a sense of stoicism and
ideals.41

Vagrants of a somewhat more serious nature,
perhaps because they have fallen from greater heights, are
men like Dawson Vallance and Sherrard Plumer. Vallance
and Plumer are men of wealth and ability who are vagrants
because of misfortune, but who still retain their facul-
ties and their sense of honor and idealism.42 Even Murray
and The Captain, both of whom have fallen from either
position or from wealth, and each of whom would be willing
to commit a dark deed, are possessed by ideals which they
stubbornly cling to.43 O. Henry's stereotypical vagrants
give the illusion of reality, but they never really
descend to any true depth of moral or physical degrada-
tion.

41 O. Henry, "The Cop and the Anthen," in The
Complete Works, pp. 30-34; Ibid., "Two Thanksgiving Day

42 Ibid., "The Shocks of Doom," pp. 1008-1011;

43 Ibid., "According to Their Lights," pp. 1124-
1128.
CHAPTER V

NEW YORK CITY'S COSMOPOLITANISM

If the streets of the lower East Side and Hull's Kitchen betokened poverty and vice, other neighborhoods boasted of upper-class wealth, middle-class comfort or bohemian unconventionality. Most American cities could be dissected into neighborhoods of various classes and cultures, but few could boast of the enormous variety in such close proximity which marked New York's neighborhoods. The colorful, multi-faceted diversity of New York's neighborhoods and inhabitants contributed to the stereotype of cosmopolitanism which helps define the city.

The citizenry of New York City ranged from the extremely wealthy to the extremely poor, the differences of which were manifestly visible in their respective neighborhoods. The contrast between rich and poor was even more visible in the borough of Manhattan because middle-class residents often tended to move to the outlying boroughs of Brooklyn, the Bronx and Queens, and because Manhattan's geography prompted even radically different neighborhoods to coexist adjacent to one another. An example of the conspicuous contrast of two contiguous streets was given by an English visitor in 1881 who was describing Fifth and Sixth Avenues: "these representatives
of the Ten and the Million, patrician velvet and plebian corduroy.¹

O. Henry takes full advantage of the contrast between the rich and poor to provide humor and irony in his stories. The juxtaposition of characters such as the well-fed tramp Stuffy Pete and the starving Old Gentleman is a common element in O. Henry's stories.² O. Henry continues his use of ironic contrast in stories such as "Lost on Dress Parade" and "While the Auto Waits." In "Lost on Dress Parade" Towers Chandler, posing as a rich aristocrat, meets Marian, a common shopgirl. Towers and Marian are attracted to each other, but he carries his role-playing too far and spoils what may have been a budding romance. Although Towers never knows it, Marian too was in disguise; instead of being a shopgirl, she is really a rich heiress. The plot of "While the Auto Waits" runs along similar lines, except the male and female roles are reversed.³

Many O. Henry stories take characters out of their environment and place them in unfamiliar surround-


³Ibid., "Lost on Dress Parade," pp. 71-75; Ibid., "While the Auto Waits," pp. 996-999.
ings, thus providing an additional means of contrast. Common working men like John Hopkins may be suddenly whisked away for a brief adventure in a brownstone mansion while drunks like Fuzzy may momentarily find themselves surrounded by the palatial splendor of a millionaire's home. Conversely, the aristocratic Cortlandt Van Duyckink wanders through the throngs of the lower East Side while wealthy Alexander Blinker explores the plebian joys of Coney Island and the squalid hopelessness of Brickdust Row. O. Henry treats his readers to a colorful variety of characters and trappings: from the quiet luxury of the aristocracy to the expensive vulgarity of the nouveaux riches, and from the comfortable respectability of the middle-class to the crushing poverty of the poor.

Turn a corner in New York City and you may find yourself in a totally different world. After escorting an author friend of his downtown in search of some local color for his stories, Rivington announces: "We are now on the famous Bowery . . . the Bowery celebrated in song and story." Rivington's boast was no empty one;


the Bowery was indeed the subject of many stories and songs. One ditty dating from sometime toward the end of the nineteenth century was "My Pearl is a Bowery Girl!":

My Poil is a Bowery goil,
She's all de woid to me.
She's in it wit' any de goil's 'round de town,
An' a corkin' good-looker. See?
At Walhaller Hall she kills dem all,
As waltzing togedder we twoil.
She sets dem all crazy, a spieler, a daisy,
My Poil's a Bowery goil.7

The dialect in which the song is written was attributed in a broad sense to New Yorkers and, more specifically, to the residents of the Bowery. O. Henry occasionally utilizes stereotypical Bowery jargon to add a bit of color to his stories, as in the case of one boy who exclaims

'Lady... dat gent on de oder bench sent yer a song and dance by me. If yer don't know de guy, and he's trying' to do de Johnny act, say de word, and I'll call a cop in t'ree minutes. If yer does know him, and he's on de square, w'y I'll spiel yer de bunch of hot air he sent yer.'8

When O. Henry employs a character speaking with a Bowery accent, he automatically conjures up the image of a brawling, street-wise individual descended from the "Bowery b'hoy" and "Bowery g'hal," stereotypes which flourished


earlier in the city's history. Even while stereotyping the Bowery, O. Henry takes a sarcastic swipe at such stereotypes. Rivington attempts to expose his friend to authentic Bowery slang by having him meet "some of the typical Bowery Boys," but the closest they come to the argot they seek is in the affected speech of a college professor and a social economist. When Rivington and his friend do come upon a typical Bowery boy, they are shaken to find that the Bowery boy's speech is polished and sophisticated.

Another neighborhood in New York which appears occasionally in O. Henry's stories, and which has an aura quite its own, is Greenwich Village. Greenwich Village is not characterized as being either rich or poor, for its residents run the gamut of the social spectrum. The trait which distinguishes Greenwich Village, often referred to as "Bohemia" by O. Henry, is the abode of aspiring artists, writers and thespians; it is a community thriving on creative impulse, freedom of expression, brilliance and mediocrity, success and failure. One of the more successful


characters found frequenting Greenwich Village is Mary Adrian, a book reviewer who came to New York City from a small town called Crocusville. Mary is captivating and witty, a habitant of Bohemia's cafe life. Two young artists of somewhat more modest means are Sue and Johnsy who share a studio apartment in Greenwich Village. Having come to New York from Maine and California, both girls are pursuing their artistic careers amid the quaint surroundings of Bohemia.

Many of the characters in O. Henry's New York actually come from outside of the city. Artists, writers, shopgirls and other young people seeking independence and careers in O. Henry's stories come to the city from places such as Greenburg, New York or Harmony, Vermont. Businessmen who hail from cities such as Nome, Alaska, and Cactus City, Texas arrive in New York to fulfill the obligations and duties of their respective businesses. Tourists and honeymoon couples visit New York in O. Henry's stories from such places as Cloverdale, Missouri, and Topaz City, Nevada. One out-of-towner receives special attention

from O. Henry because of his worldly attitudes and global experience:

I was sure that I had found at last the one true cosmopolite since Adam, and I listened to his world-wide discourse fearful lest I should discover in it the local note of the mere globe-trotter. But his opinions never fluttered or drooped; he was impartial to cities, countries, and continents as the winds or gravitation.14

O. Henry's "true cosmopolite" shows a flaw, however, when he becomes involved in a fight because someone had slandered his hometown--Mattawamkeag, Maine.15

The cosmopolitan stereotype of New York City implies much more than the city being a focal point for citizens from all over the United States; it implies that New York is heavily affected by influences from all over the world. One avenue for the international, particularly European, influence on New York City is the globe-trotting habits of the rich. O. Henry depicts several characters such as Honoria Clinton who is preparing to embark for an overseas journey and Mrs. Chalmers who is on a European tour. One of O. Henry's better traveled characters is Ives who returned to New York "from a three years' ramble around the globe." Despite his extensive traveling, Ives does not find happiness until he returns home.16


The major source of international influence on New York City, and the city's primary claim to cosmopolitanism, is the diversity of its ethnic population. The period during which O. Henry lived in New York, 1902-1910, was a time when immigration to the United States reached unprecedented levels. New York was thronged with masses of immigrants from all the nations of the world, and the city's streets became a colorful tapestry of dress and sounds as varied ethnic communities grew and mingled. New York's lower East Side, in particular, was an area where immigrants converged:

in the cause of national or personal freedom they have found a refuge here. . . . Italy, Poland, the former Spanish possessions and the polyglot tribes of Austria-Hungary have spilled here a thick lather of their effervescent sons. In the eccentric cafes and lodging-houses of the vicinity they hover over their native wines and political secrets.17

O. Henry drew upon the unique experience of the mass turn-of-the-century immigration to New York and used it to color his tales.

In "The City of the Dreadful Night" O. Henry playfully depicts the residents of an apartment house named Beersheba Flats during a heat spell, referring to their different national origins:

Now, 'twas a peaceful and happy home that all of us had in them same Beersheba Flats. The O'Dowds and the Steinowitzes and the Callahans and the Cohens and the Spizzinellis and the Joneses—all the nations of us, we lived like one big family together.18

One trait of O. Henry's style which may be noticed in the preceding quote is that although he is actually describing the dreadful conditions of a tenement crowded with immigrants, conditions which received vigorous condemnation from muckrakers and leading citizens at the time, he glosses over the full severity of the situation. O. Henry is not unaware of the true nature of tenement housing, but for the sake of effecting a light and humorous tale he draws his picture of tenement life with tongue-in-cheek.

A second quirk of O. Henry's which may be garnered from the language of the foregoing quote is that the narrator is speaking with an Irish accent. O. Henry uses Irish dialect in many of his stories and a large number of his characters have Irish surnames.19 The majority of O. Henry's working class characters are Irish, and he even has the Statue of Liberty adopt an Irish brogue. When questioned by the statue of Diana, which once adorned Madison Square Garden, about her accent, Miss Liberty


19The Irish-English dialect O. Henry uses is authentic, as are other ethnic dialects which appear in his New York City stories, according to Arminda Timmons Yates, "Dialects in O. Henry's Stories," Master's Thesis, Hardin-Simmons University, 1948.
replies:

'If ye wasn't so light-headed and giddy ye'd know that I was made by a Dago and presented to
the American people on behalf of the French
Government for the purpose of welcomin' Irish
immigrants into the Dutch city of New York.
'Tis that I've been doing night and day since I
was erected. Ye must know, Miss Diana, that
'tis with statues the same as with people--'tis not their makers nor the purposes for which
they were created that influence the operations
of their tongues at all--it's the associations
with which they become associated, I'm telling
ye.'

An Irish Statue of Liberty, built "for the purpose of
welcomin' Irish immigrants," is demonstrative of the close
association of the Irish with New York City, for in Miss
Liberty's words: "it's the associations with which they
become associated."21

Since O. Henry's New York City is stereotypically
Irish, many of his characters take on aspects of the
popular ethnic stereotypes of the Irish. Terms which have
been used to stereotype the Irish include jolly, reckless,
good-natured, contentious, ignorant, passionate, priest-
ridden, whiskey-loving and thriftless.22 Caricatures
of stereotypical Irishmen from the second half of

Works, p. 707.

21For an example of the Irishness of New York
City during the second half of the nineteenth century, see
Still, Mirror for Gotham, p. 214.

22Carl Wittke, The Irish in America (Louisiana
State University Press, 1956; reprint ed., New York:
the nineteenth century portrayed ignorant, uncivilized, ape-like creatures, bedecked in shamrocks, who sported jugs of whiskey and shillelaghs. Popular sayings referring to the Irish proliferated in nineteenth century America, such as "Scratch a convict or a pauper, and the chances are that you tickle the skin of an Irish Catholic" or "The Irish are never at peace but when they're fighting." O. Henry did not utilize the more deprecatory stereotypes of the Irish in his stories; he did not depict the Irish as sub-human or ignorant, and he always steered clear of religion. By the first decade of the twentieth century, public opinion was not as harshly anti-Irish as it had been a generation or two earlier, and O. Henry himself may not have harbored any prejudices against the Irish. Furthermore, much of O. Henry's audience, the readers of popular English language newspapers and periodicals in turn-of-the-century New York, were Irish. The stereotypes of the Irish which O. Henry uses, although seemingly distasteful in some cases, had an esoteric appeal to the Irish community themselves and would have been smiled at.

One stereotype which was held by the non-Irish community in a rather derogatory sense, and by the Irish community as a sense of pride, was that the Irish loved

23Ibid., p. 46.
to fight. Irishmen and women had reputations for brawling and rioting, and many New York City gangs owed their numbers to Irish membership. Many riots during the nineteenth century involved Irish crowds, and Irish rioters were in the majority during the infamous New York City Draft Riots. Numerous tales were told during the American Civil War of the tenaciousness and gallantry of Irish troops. One Irish soldier was reputed to have complained to his captain "The boys want a fight bad; they hadn't one now for a long time, and sure they can't be always without a scrimmage of some kind or another, just to keep their hand in, as one may say." War and fighting was also the theme of many Irish popular and folk songs which bore titles such as "God Save Ireland," "The Fenian Girl's Song," "Green Above the Red," "The Irish Marseillaise," and "The Wild Irish Boy." "Love of fighting among Irish" (X691.7.1) is even a motif in Ernest W. Baughman's Type and Motif Index of the Folktales of England and North America.

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26 Wittke, The Irish in America, pp. 244-245.

There is no short supply of toughs and gang members in O. Henry's stories, most of whom have Irish surnames. The Clover Leaf Social Club, for example, whose name is reminiscent of the Irish shamrock, includes the following members and their girlfriends: Jimmy Burns, Anna McCarty, Maggie Toole, Dempsey Donovan, Andy Geoghan, William McMahan and Rose Cassidy. The members of the club "were wont to engage the police and rival social and athletic organizations in joyous combat." The Clover Leafs' two-fisted leader, Dempsey Donovan, is a lieutenant of "Big Mike" O'Sullivan whose political power safeguards Donovan from criminal prosecution. The Irish were closely linked with Tammany Hall politics and "Big Mike" O'Sullivan is only one of the Tammany men who appear in O. Henry's stories, all of them Irish. As for Donovan, like so many of O. Henry's tough, street-wise characters, he reveals a distinct sense of honor, nobility and fair-play.  

Another type of fighting Irishman in O. Henry's stories is not of the same overtly violent nature as gang members and does not participate in illegal activities. Characters such as Kid McGarry, Jimmy McQuirk and Danny McCree are independent, athletic young men with strong senses of bearing and authority. McGarry is a welter-weight boxer who courageously makes use of his flashing

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fists to perform a task for his newlywed bride while at the same time aiding the police. The police themselves often sport Irish surnames in O. Henry's stories, and the prevalence of Emerald Societies in New York's police and fire departments today is a reminder of the heavy Irish influence in those organizations. Jimmy "Tiger" McQuirk comes upon a fellow Irishman while pondering the advent of spring and "made the attack with the characteristic suddenness and fierceness that had gained for him the endearing sobriquet of 'Tiger.'" McQuirk's bout with his foe seems to be more a friendly question of honor, however, than the ruthless vengeance of gang warfare. Danny McCree does not become involved in any altercations while seeking the meaning of Easter, yet there is an air of contention about him. McCree adopts a quarrelsome tone with his parents ("Who pays the rent and buys the food that is eaten in this house?"), but his authoritative, almost belligerent attitude only masks the deep love and devotion he feels for his parents and is understood by them as such. 29

A third incident of the stereotypical warlike qualities of the Irish occurs in O. Henry's portrayal of two married couples. Mr. and Mrs. McCaskey routinely complement their arguments by throwing household utensils

at each other. Officer Cleary passes on his beat, hears
the McCaskeys fighting, and observes:

'Tis Jawn McCaskey and his missis at it
again. . . . I wonder shall I go up and stop the
row. I will not. Married folks they are: and
few pleasures they have. 'Twill not last long.
Sure, they'll have to borrow more dishes to keep
it up with.'

The McCaskeys pause in their hostilities when Mrs. Murphy's
son is reported missing and share a tender moment together.
Mrs. Murphy's son is soon found and Mr. and Mrs. McCaskey
resume their fighting. Officer Cleary once again hears
the sounds of battle, and not knowing about their momentary
truce, exclaims: "By the deported snakes . . . Jawn
McCaskey and his lady have been fightin'; for an hour and
a quarter by the watch." The relationship between Mr.
and Mrs. Cassidy is a bit more turbulent and one-sided
than that of Mr. and Mrs. McCaskey. Mr. Cassidy occa-
sionally beats his wife. Wife beating is a serious problem
and hardly one to be laughed at, but in his usual manner
O. Henry uses sarcastic irony to create a humorous situa-
tion. After beating his wife, Mr. Cassidy always feels
repentant and buys her gifts which arouses the jealousy
of the Cassidys' neighbor, Mrs. Fink. Mrs. Fink becomes
ashamed of her husband and questions his love for her


31 Ibid., pp. 13-17.
because he does not beat her. 32

An anecdote is told of an Irish soldier who fought for the Union cause during the War Between the States. The regimental flag was captured by the Rebel troops, but the Irishman valiantly stormed the enemy lines and recaptured the flag. When the soldier was later decorated for his bravery, he explained that during the initial encounter he had lost his whisky flask behind enemy lines; and when he returned to find it, he decided he might as well take the flag with him too. 33 One stereotype which is reflected in the incident above is the love of the Irish for fighting. An even stronger motivation for the soldier's gallant action, however, is the Irishman's stereotypical affinity for drinking. The correlation of the Irish with drinking is testified to by chronicles such as one dating from the first half of the nineteenth century:

In truth, not only were our countrymen remarkable for the intemperate use of intoxicating liquors, but intemperance had already entered into, and formed a part of the national character. An Irishman and a drunkard had become synonymous terms. Whenever he was to be introduced in character, either in the theatre or on the pages of the novelist, he should be represented


habited in rags, bleeding at the nose, and waving a shillelagh. Whiskey was everywhere regarded as our idol.\textsuperscript{34}

Songs like "Tim Finnigan's Wake," with its drunken brawling and a corpse which resurrects upon contact with whiskey, entered popular tradition.\textsuperscript{35} Drinking became the most recognizable trait of the Irish stereotype; it was the rationale which could explain the belligerance and thriftlessness yet gregarious sociability of the Irish.\textsuperscript{36}

O. Henry makes numerous references to the love of the Irish for drinking. Many of the bars and saloons in O. Henry's stories bear Irish names such as "Grogan's" and "Rooney's."\textsuperscript{37} Kenealy's cafe becomes the scene of romance for bartender Con Lantry and Kenealy's lovely daughter Katherine who "had eyes of dark Irish." Unintentionally helping Con to court Katherine are two other Irishmen, Riley and McQuirk, who are anxiously seeking the lost blend for a magically potent drink they once created.\textsuperscript{38} Thomas McQuade, another of O. Henry's Irish characters, was the coachman for a rich and aristocratic

\textsuperscript{34}Andrew M. Greeley, That Most Distressful Nation: The Taming of the American Irish (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972), p. 131.

\textsuperscript{35}Wittke, The Irish in America, p. 245.

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., p. 48.


\textsuperscript{38}Ibid., "The Lost Blend," pp. 1114-1117.
family but was discharged for drunkenness. The strange series of events which lead to McQuade's reinstatement leave him wondering if they aren't remnants of "one of the last dreams of the booze." The effects of intoxication are perhaps greatest on Jerry O'Donovan, a cab driver who "seesawed on the mizzenmast of his craft as safe as a Steeple Jack rigged to the flagpole of a skyscraper." Jerry spends the night driving Norah Walsh around Central Park, stopping for a couple hours at the casino: "Like shtop at the Cas-sino, lady? Gezzer r'freshm's, 'n lish 'n the music. Ev'body shtops." After their respite at the casino, Jerry demands that Norah pay the fare, which she does not have, and takes her to the police station to have her arrested. Standing before the desk-sargeant, Jerry suddenly comes to himself in the nick of time and realizes that in his drunken state he had forgotten that he and Norah had been married earlier that evening!

The stereotype of the fondness for drinking among the Irish may be linked to that of their good natures and sociability. John Francis Maguire explained in 1868 that the Irish did not drink so much because of "a mere love of liquor" but because "they are genial, open-hearted,

40Ibid., "From the Cabby's Seat," p. 55.
41Ibid., pp. 54-56.
generous, and social in their tendencies; they love company, court excitement, and delight in affording pleasure or gratification to their friends."\textsuperscript{42} The open-handed, carefree friendliness of the Irish manifests itself in many ways in O. Henry's stories. Social clubs, sometimes fronts for gang activity, are a constant source of dances and social get-togethers.\textsuperscript{43} Bars, saloons and cafes are a regular source of diversion for O. Henry's Irish characters and also offer politicians a base for associating with their colleagues and constituents. The gregarious, affable ways of Tammany's Irish politicians serve to heighten their popularity and influence.\textsuperscript{44} In a more general sense, most of O. Henry's Irish characters possess a self-assured, friendly demeanor which usually helps them through whatever situations arise. Chunk McGowan, for instance, successfully courts Rosy Riddle with his good-natured, outgoing manner.\textsuperscript{45} Another example is an easy-going Irish

\textsuperscript{42}Maguire, The Irish in America, pp. 282-283.


\textsuperscript{44}Some examples of Irish politicians socializing in bars are: Billy McMahan in Ibid., "The Social Triangle," pp. 1104-1105; and "Big Mike" Sullivan in Ibid., "The Count and the Wedding Guest," p. 1137.

\textsuperscript{45}Ibid., "Love-Philtre of Ikey Schoenstein," pp. 40-42.
resident of Beersheba Flats who good-humoredly recounts the effects of a dreadful heat spell. Heat spells could have severe consequences in New York City, but the tale is told in a light and unassuming style which suggests the narrator's ability to cope with the worst of circumstances.46

Ethnic groups other than the Irish do not play a prominent role in O. Henry's stories. Italians appear in several stories but usually in minor or secondary roles; furthermore, they are generally depicted in prejudicial and bigoted terms. O. Henry freely uses derogatory epithets such as "Dago" and "Guinea" when referring to his Italian characters. In "According to Their Lights," the Captain attempts to advance his fortunes by proposing to an Italian woman: "she's a peach as far as a Dago could be."47 The Captain's attitude hints that he actually considers Italians to be an inferior race, an attitude not without historic precedent. In the mid-nineteenth century, one historian noted that "the lowest Irish are above the level of these creatures [Italians]."48 Antonio Brunelli strikes a charming and distinguished figure in "A Philistine in Bohemia." Katy Dempsey is cautious of

Brunelli's romantic advances, however, thinking "that he seems to be a sort iv a Dago." Brunelli's romantic Latin bearing and his Italian mannerisms only add to Katy's suspicions about him. Katy finally agrees to marry Brunelli when she mistakes him for a cook in the small Italian restaurant he owns, telling him, "I was near turnin' ye down for bein' one of thim foreign counts!"49 If O. Henry is mocking the plebian attitudes of the shanty Irish, he is also being somewhat contemptuous of even the more respectable of the Italians.

Disparaging stereotypes of Italians depict them as excitable, temperamental, untrustworthy people who are prone to violence. Edward Alsworth Ross' comment in 1914 that "one does not wonder that the Sicilian will stab his best friend in a sudden quarrel over a game of cards" is representative of popular beliefs concerning Italians during the decade in which O. Henry lived in New York City.50 The stereotypical knife-wielding Italian appears in a couple of O. Henry's stories. Martin Burney, an Irish construction worker, is peeved with his boss, Dennis Corrigan. Burney is approached by Tony, the Italian cook for the construction crew who intensely dislikes Corrigan. Tony has a plan for doing away with Corrigan, but he is


50. LaGumina, Wop!, p. 140.
afraid to implement it by himself so he asks Burney to join him. In a moment of weakness Burney agrees to join the plot against Corrigan, but he soon regains his sense of morality and indignantly chases off the hapless Italian:

'What is it, ye tailor haythen? Would ye lay contrivances against the enlightened races of the earth, ye instigator of illegal crimes? Would ye seek to persuade Martin Burney into the dirty tricks of an indecent Dago? Would ye be for muderin' your benefactor, the good man that gives ye food and work? Take that, ye punkin-colored assassin!'\(^{51}\)

Terry O'Sullivan is Maggie Toole's date to the Saturday night dance of the Clover Leaf Social Club. O'Sullivan is tall, dark and handsome, and his charm and grace attract the attention of the girls at the dance. Spurred on by jealousy, Dempsey Donovan confronts O'Sullivan for a fist fight when O'Sullivan pulls out a stiletto. Maggie intercedes in time to knock the knife out of O'Sullivan's hand, revealing that his name is not really Terry O'Sullivan but Tony Spinelli. The members of the Clover Leaf Club permit Spinelli to quietly exit out the back door, granting him as much respect as "a stray dog." "Them Guineas always carries knives," explains Maggie, who had tried to pass Spinelli off as Irish because she "knew there'd be nothin' doin' for him if he came as a Dago."\(^{52}\)

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There are but few Jews in O. Henry's stories. On one occasion O. Henry does use the term "Kike," a derogatory label for Jews, but he never employs the word with the ready frequency with which he uses "Dago" to label Italians.\(^5\)

The names of a few of O. Henry's characters such as Ikey Schoenstein, Ikey Snigglefritz and Abey Zizzbaum suggest possible Jewish lineage. Snigglefritz's job as a tailor and Zizzbaum's part ownership of a wholesale cloak and suit establishment are in keeping with Jewish trades at the turn-of-the-century. However, since neither Schoenstein, Snigglefritz nor Zizzbaum speak with overtly Jewish accents, since they are all from different social brackets and walks of life, and since O. Henry makes no direct reference to their ethnic backgrounds, their race and religion can only be assumed.\(^5\)

One character who is apparently Jewish, although O. Henry does not explicitly say so, is Kerwitz. At one point Kenwitz uses the phrase, "Mein gott," which could be German, but since his surname is Slavic the phrase is probably meant to be Yiddish. Kenwitz is described as serious, intense, learned, philosophical and socialistic--traits which would have been used to describe many a Jew in New York City during O. Henry's time.\(^5\)

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detrimental stereotypes of Jews which were current while O. Henry was in New York do not appear in his stories, and the number of Jewish characters is sparse.

Blacks appear in a small number of O. Henry's New York stories, but only in minor roles. Black men are harmless and unobtrusive when portrayed by O. Henry. "A nigger man" unintentionally incurs the wrath of Irishman Daniel Tobin and receives a beating for his accidental blunder. In another O. Henry story, a giant black man dressed in exotic garb distributes advertising cards for a play; "I'm informed dat it's a furst-rate show, sah," he tells one curious inquirer.56 Black women fulfill the traditional stereotypical role of maids. Sophy, Mary Adrian's "colored maid," opens the apartment door "with an Eliza-crossing-the-ice expression" for visitors.57 Another Black maid is Cindy who, like Sophy, is always referred to by her first name and never accorded a last name. O. Henry's description of Cindy clearly defines the stereotype he utilizes:

A bawling negress clattered down the steps to the pavement. Some medley of words came forth from her mouth, addressed, like as not, to herself—the recourse of her race when alone and beset by evil. She looked to be one of that old vassal class of the South—volatile, familiar, loyal, irrepressible; her person pictured it—fat, neat, aproned, kerchiefed.58


O. Henry's portrayal of Blacks is heavily stereotyped and condescending but devoid of the maliciousness with which he depicts Italians.

O. Henry sometimes uses ethnic characters other than the Irish, Italians, Jews and Blacks in his stories but not to any great degree. Lutz, the barber, Schlegel, the tailor, and Behrman, the artist, are but a few of O. Henry's Germans.\(^{59}\) The German characters in O. Henry's stories tend to be kindly, peaceful and benevolent. An angry German named Bergman accosts Hastings Beauchamp Morley demanding payment for a long overdue debt, but Morley quickly placates Bergman with a few drinks, and the German once again assumes an amiable disposition.\(^{60}\) Other ethnic characters appear in an occasional New York story, such as Native American Bud Kingsbury of the Creek Nation, the Russian Demetre Svangvsk, and General Perrico Zimenes Villablanca Falcon from Columbia, but characters belonging to these nationalities appear infrequently.\(^{61}\)

Of all the ethnic groups in O. Henry's stories which take place in New York City, the Irish are the

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\(^{60}\)Ibid., "The Assessor of Success," p. 1083.

predominant group. The Irish were indeed the dominating immigrant force in New York during the nineteenth century, and the Celtic influence upon all facets of New York life was intense, but by the time that O. Henry came to New York, Central, East and Southern European immigrants were arriving in huge numbers. Four reasons may account for O. Henry's disproportionate representation of the Irish in his stories. For one thing, O. Henry may have found it easier to relate to Irish culture than to the more exotic, non-English speaking cultures of other immigrants. In the second place, by the turn-of-the-century the Irish had become well established in the journalistic field in New York, and O. Henry probably rubbed elbows with Irish colleagues. Third, the greater part of O. Henry's audience was probably Irish (many of the newer immigrants could not yet read English), and he had to appeal to their tastes. Finally, the stereotype of New York City as an Irish city had developed during the last couple of decades of the nineteenth century, and O. Henry was drawing upon already existent stereotypes to write his stories, even if the stereotypes did not correspond exactly with reality. The stereotype of the easy-going, drinking, fighting, sociable Irish fit well with O. Henry's style of writing. Characters defined by the Irish stereotype added a sensational flair to the stories while tempering them with lightness and humor.
Since its founding in the seventeenth century, New Amsterdam, subsequently known as New York City, has evoked widespread curiosity. Tales and descriptions of New York City circulated throughout Europe and America, and preeminent traits were crystallized into stereotypes of the city. The stereotypes of New York City reduced all the complexities of a thriving, multi-faceted metropolis into a few relatively simple descriptive terms. By referring to New York City stereotypes, a person could readily summon a mental picture of the city, whether he had ever been to it or not, which would satisfy his need for definition, avoiding many of the complexities of reality. These stereotypes established themselves in oral and written tradition and became part of New York City's folklore.

By the time O. Henry arrived in New York City at the turn of the twentieth century, the short story had become a popular art form. Mass migration to American cities and its impetus to urban development were accompanied by new strides in public education. The hunger of the newly literate American public to entertain itself was
fed with a diversity of inexpensive novels, romances, newspapers and periodicals. The short story form, in particular, lent itself to the tastes of the common American whose leisure was limited by long hours of work and whose education was often sparse and intermittent. The brevity of the fast moving narrative and the relatively superficial development of short stories were often aided by the use of stereotypes within the stories. O. Henry's works became models for short story writing during the first decade of the twentieth century, and his stories give excellent insight into the mechanics of the short story. By examining the use of stereotypes in O. Henry's stories, one aspect of the valuable contribution of folklore to literature may be seen.

O. Henry wrote to make a living; and since his personal habits demanded a large income, he strove to produce as many stories in the shortest amount of time as possible. A prolific number of stories alone does not account for O. Henry's success; the stories had to have popular appeal as well. Since O. Henry was trying to produce a large number of quickly written stories which would appeal to a mass audience, he had to resort to an inventory of tried and true devices culled from literary and folk tradition. Popular literary themes and irrelevant folk humor, classical allusions and informal chattiness, stock situations and surprise endings all contributed to
the composition of O. Henry's short stories. O. Henry combined the talents of the local-color storyteller, the journalistic sketch writer and the author of popular romances to create romantic fantasies cloaked in the trappings of reality. O. Henry's genius lay in his ability to continually rework his collection of formulae into seemingly brilliant and original creations which stimulated the public's fancy with romanticism, sentimentality and sensationalism.

The use of stereotypes is an important device which O. Henry employs for writing his stories. Stereotypes greatly influence the composition, function and reception of O. Henry's work. By drawing upon already existent stereotypes, O. Henry was able to expedite his writing. Since the scope of his short stories only allowed minimal description and the barest of character development, stereotypes aided O. Henry in conveying the setting and characterization of his stories to the audience. When the reader encounters a stereotypical character, locale or situation, he automatically perceives what O. Henry is projecting because of the preconceived mental image which the stereotype summons forth. The shared knowledge which the stereotype affords reduces the need for excessive characterization, description or development, and permits O. Henry to maintain a light and fast-moving narrative. Stereotypes, with which the reader
may freely and comfortably associate, also lend an air of familiarity to O. Henry's stories.

In his short stories which take place in New York City, O. Henry draws upon many of the stereotypes which have come to depict the city. O. Henry's New York is teeming with business and commerce. Adventure and excitement beckon from every New York City street and alleyway while a host of establishments entertain citizen and visitor alike. Arm in arm with the city's opulence, however, is the city's notoriety, captured in lurid, poverty-stricken neighborhoods and seedy bars. Enveloping New York City as a whole is a cosmopolitan air which gives the city an international flavor. New York's citizens are diverse. Members of varied ethnic groups populate the city's neighborhoods. Americans from all quarters of the nation come to the city seeking independence and opportunity. Aspiring young people pursuing careers intermingling with the lost and the weary. Character types emerge, such as the shopgirl, the artist, the vagrant, the tough, the Irishman and the Italian. These stereotypes define the dimensions, and contribute to the vitality, of O. Henry's New York.
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