CHAPTER IV

The Hermeneutics of Friendship:
The Odd Couple, The Star Spangled Girl, The Sunshine Boys and Biloxi Blues
**The Odd Couple** (1965), as is suggested by its title, dramatizes the relations between two ill-assorted persons, Oscar Madison and Felix Ungar, who are both divorcees and friends. When Oscar invites Felix to move in with him, their temperamental differences surface creating strained relations between them which result in their splitting up. However, their living together helps correct their faults, the realization of which makes them part amicably.

The play opens with a weekly meeting of the 'card club'. For a game of poker at Oscar's apartment which, though well furnished, lacking 'the touch and care of a woman' has become a picture of slovenliness. Felix comes late to the game as earlier he and his wife, Frances, separated at her instance, which causes resentment among the assembled players who try to surmise the cause of his absence:
Hey, maybe he's in his office locked in the john again. Did you know Felix was once locked in the john overnight. He wrote out his entire will on a half a roll of toilet paper! Heee, what a nut!

It is a motley company that Oscar has for his poker-games comprising the good natured but dull-witted policeman Murray; Oscar's accountant, Roy, spouting sarcasm; the thoughtless Vinnie who wants to go to Florida at the height of summer because of the rates being cheaper then, Speed who plays cards to get away from the hassles at home, besides the sentimental Felix who contemplates suicide on splitting up with his wife but being concerned enough to send her a 'suicide telegram'. When Felix arrives unkempt and dishevelled, Oscar tries to reason him out of his resolve to end his life after sending away the others. Their conversation reveals that while Oscar wants to appear carefree Felix openly confesses his being 'nothing' without
his wife and children which makes Oscar chide him in a facetious way:

What do you mean, nothing? You're something! A person! You're flesh and blood and bones and hair and nails and ears. You're not a fish. You're not a buffalo. You're you! You walk and talk and cry and complain... and send suicide Telegrams... You're the only one of its kind in the world!²

Blaming himself and not his wife for their separation, Felix dilates upon his faults like his cleaning the rooms after his wife and the maid has cleaned them up and re-cooking the meals as he considers himself a better cook than his wife as also his drinking too much and allowing his cigars to burn holes in the furniture. Oscar also confesses his loving to bluff and boast while playing poker with his friends and his being unable to live
alone which is what makes him invite Felix to move in. Listening to Felix's account of his faults Oscar remarks that he has "never seen anyone so in love" with himself as Felix. Their conversation is interrupted by Frances who telephones asking Felix to take away his things as she wants to rearrange the room which makes Felix realize that his marriage is at an end. Two weeks later, the poker players find Oscar's apartment transformed, cleaned up and rearranged which has been the work of Felix, who is accused of playing "Mr. Clean" by Oscar in order to make him guilty about his slovenly habits as also of being passive. He asks Felix not to 'bottle up his feelings', saying:

Do something that you feel like doing —and not what you think you're supposed to do. Stop keeping books, Felix. Relax Get drunk. Get angry. C'mon, break the goddamned cup!.

He proposes their dating the Pigeon sisters staying
in the same apartment building to which Felix rather reluctantly agrees. The scene ends on a comic note with Felix telephoning his wife for her London broil recipe which he wants to try out for three evenings with their 'dates'.
The evening with the girls starts on a comprising note with the London broil overcooked, Oscar coming late having stopped over at a bar for a drink as also the two guests.
Left alone with them by Oscar, Felix breaks down while talking to them about his separation from his wife and children which moves them and when invited to their apartment as the dinner is spoiled, he flatly refuses to accompany Oscar who remarks that he has not changed at all.

The climactic scene in this play occurs when it opens on the preparations being made for the final poker game - a scene that discloses Oscar's being exasperated by Felix's ways to the extent of telling that if he wants to continue he should
confine himself to his room to which he objects saying that he pays half the rent. Provoked by Felix's remark Oscar hurls at Felix his plate and in sheer despair tells him:

For six months I lived alone in this apartment. All alone in eight rooms. I was dejected... then you moved in - my dearest and closest friend. And after three weeks of close, personal contact - I am about to have a nervous breakdown! Do me a favor. Move into the kitchen. Live with your pots, your pans, your ladle and your meat thermometer. When you want to come out, ring a bell and I'll run into the bedroom. I'm asking you nicely, Felix, - as a friend. Stay out of my way! Then Oscar goes into the bedroom only to be drawn
back into the 'fray' by Felix's remark:

Walk on the paper, will you? The floors are wet.  

Infuriated by Felix's instruction, Oscar returns and chases Felix around the couch and finally returning with a suitcase, asks him to get out:

It's all over, Felix. The whole marriage. We're getting an annulment! Don't you understand? I don't want to live with you any more. I want you to pack your things...and get out of here.

Felix agrees to leave but not before making a puzzling remark:

But remember, what happens to me is your responsibility. Let it be on your head.
As Walter Kerr observes:

Those two men haven't learnt anything from their quarrels that will help them share an apartment now, and they aren't going to learn anything from their quarrels now that will help them next time around... They aren't going anywhere, except into new failures.

Significantly, after ordering Felix out of the house, Oscar is worried, especially because of Felix's remark and is made to appear guilty by Murray who tells him:

Frances sent him out in the first place. You sent him out in the second place. And whoever he lives with next will send him out in the third place. Don't you understand? It's Felix. He does it to himself.

**Oscar** : Why?

**Murray** : I don't know why. He doesn't know why.

Felix's behaviour as much Oscar's is expressive
of the rigidity that marks their engagement with the life as also their being unable or unwilling to correct themselves in the interest of forging a harmonious relationship. However, their living together has had a salutary effect on each other as is evidenced by Felix's asking Murray to tell his wife that he is "not the same man she kicked out three weeks ago" and Oscar's chiding the players, "Watch your cigarettes, will you? This is my house, not a pig sty".

Though Oscar pretends to be indifferent to Felix, he is, indeed, concerned about him and so is glad when the door bell rings. But to his surprise it is not Felix but Gwendolyn Pigeon who has come to collect Felix's things and who tells him that Felix is a 'sweet tortured man' which annoys him. At that moment Cecily Pigeon enters with Felix who is supposed to have agreed most unwillingly to stay with them till he finds his own place, which amazes Oscar and the other poker players. As Felix comes out of the bed-room
carrying his things, Oscar who is worried about Felix's curse, asks him whether he is not going to thank him "for the two greatest things I ever did for you. Taking you in and throwing you out." In response Felix tells him:

"In gratitude, I remove the curse" 

The play has a happy ending with Felix and Oscar parting amicably and their wives telephoning to them. Significantly, Felix agrees to join them for the poker game, saying:

"Marriages may come and go, but the game must go on".

The play suggests that incongruity is what complicates the human relationships which are central to the human reality. In the case of Felix and Oscar it is not that Felix is finicky about neatness and order whereas Oscar is careless but that they are too rigid to be able to appreciate the importance of mutual concession to harmonious living.
The Star-Spangled Girl (1966) traces the disturbances, emotional and professional, experienced by two insolvent editors of a politically radical magazine, Fallout, Andy Hobart and Norman Cornell, when an Olympic swimmer, Sophie Rauchmeryer, the star-spangled girl, moves into the building in which they have their apartment. To avoid eviction for non-payment of rent Andy pretends to respond to his land-lady's ardour, while Norman woos Sophie neglecting his work. To make Norman resume work on the next issue, Andy invites Sophie, who has become fond of him, to work for his magazine. The play ends with Andy being able to persuade Sophie and Norman not to leave.

Interestingly, Neil Simon considered the piece to be "the least successful play I've written", the reason being its having a weak plot and lacking in character development. Moreover, as Simon remarked referring to the characters' motivations:
I think it was false in that I chose to say that their physical attraction for one another would win out over their intellectual dislike. In real life, I think, they might have had a brief physical relationship, but their intellectual differences would have been dominant.  

Further, Andy's supposed fanatical political commitment is not shown to have influenced his daily life nor is it made known that the writings of Andy and Norman are focused on, which is, perhaps, deliberate in that Simon does not want to distance the members of his audience from them. However, the play is highly entertaining replete with gags.

Set in the time of the Vietnam War, the play projects an unlikely triangle with Sophie at its apex, since Sophie is poles apart from Andy and Norman in that she is provincial and
patriotic whereas they are highly critical of their country's policies. The play opens in a shabby San Francisco duplex which serves as living quarters and office for Andy and Norman.

Andy comes in and finds that Norman has gone out to avoid Mr. Franklin, the printer, to whom they owe 600 dollars. To avoid eviction for non-payment of rent, Andy is forced to go out with his landlady, Mrs. Mackininee, a middle-aged, dark-haired widow and is unhappy about it. Andy complains to Norman:

You don't think it's humiliating to sit in a night club with a dark-haired widow who wears blonde braids and picks up the bill?\(^\text{18}\)

Norman, being totally devoted to his work, refuses to listen to Andy who asks him to go out with a girl and relax saying that he will go out only when
a beautiful, gorgeous blonde will move into the empty apartment next door and I'll fall madly in love. \(^{19}\)

Strangely enough, as though in response to his wish, Sophie Rauschmeyer, a lovely young blonde, appears telling him that as she has just moved into the apartment next door, she has come to make a courtesy call on her neighbour.

Norman is bowled over by her, and does not allow Andy to answer the door bell. When he opens the door Sophie stands in the doorway with a cake in her hands and tells him that, being an Olympic swimmer in training, she is not allowed to eat the fruit cake with rum in it and so offers it to him. For Norman it is a case of love at first sight as he tells Andy:

\textit{It's for me. All for me. God loves me and He gave me something wonderful.} \(^{20}\)
Though broke and forced to dine on one sardine on a frozen waffle, Norman buys presents for Sophie including 22 dollars' worth of delicacies from the United Nations Gourmet Shoppe and paints her name on the steps, which irritates Sophie who tells him bluntly that she is engaged to be married to a naval officer, Burt Fenneman, adding "and I intend to be happily married to him for the rest of my natural life. Do you understand that?"

But Norman is so infatuated with her that he starts mopping her kitchen floor which so annoys her that she threatens to call the Police. Andy tries to calm her by telling her that Norman is one of the most distinguished writers and that in their monthly magazine, *Fallout* they protest against things which she protests against every day. He succeeds in persuading her not to call the Police, to be kind to love-sick Norman and to read an issue of *Fallout*. Though Norman has promised not to do things annoying
to her, he goes back on his word and visits the YWCA swimming pool where she works as a swimming-instructor taking a gift of a duck with him which bites everyone. As a result she loses her job, and is offered a job by Andy with his magazine. Sophie has certain reservations, which she expresses to Andy:

Do you think Ah would work for that bomb aimed at the heart of America? ...Mr. Hobart, Ah don't know if you're a communist, or a fascist, or just... old-fashioned traitor - but you are certainly no American.  

When Andy asks her why she calls him a traitor, she replies:

For holding your country up to ridicule in black and white. All Ah read last night was the table of contents, but if you don't like the country that gave your birth, why don't you go back where you came from?
But Andy tries to correct her opinion by saying:

I don't know what you're talking about, but writing constructive criticism about the degenerating American way of life is certainly not treason.\(^{24}\)

Andy's reason for employing her on 75 dollars a week even though she cannot type, take shorthand or do filing, is to keep his partner, Norman. He tells her:

We're both trying to make the best out of an impossible situation. You need money. I need you to say goo-goo to my partner once in a while.\(^{25}\)

Sophie's job is to cook and her presence in their apartment cheers up Norman who starts working feverishly on the current issue of the *Fallout* which pleases Andy.
Norman is so infatuated with her that while even typing he is able to 'smell' her by ringing a bell to call her from the kitchen to look up words in the dictionary. Unable to resist he starts following her around which annoys her so much that she threatens to leave. Andy asks Norman to get a bottle of wine so as to 'smooth matters over'. Availing herself of Norman's absence Sophie tells Andy that she has informed her 'Marine fiance' of it. Returning with a bottle of wine Norman is taken aback to find Andy and Sophie in a compromising position but regaining his composure, remarks bitingly:

The least you could have done was chipped in for the wine!26

The next morning Andy finds Norman packing to depart, leaving the current issue of the magazine unfinished. Andy anxious to retain Norman, tells him that Sophie has kissed him because she has found his 'smell' irresistible and handcuffs him to the steam pipe, warning him that he will not release him till the last page of the last article is finished.
Norman refuses to do so saying that he will work for the A.P. Sophie too prepares to leave and Andy offers her a job at half the salary which she refuses saying that she is not marrying her fiance but would go to Hunnicut and prepare for the next Olympics. Before leaving Norman asks Andy what he is going to do and is startled to hear that he would go back and work for his father. Surprisingly, Norman returns almost immediately and two of them decide to finish the magazine. While at work, they cannot help discussing Sophie. Andy rushes out to get her back.

Sophie who waits outside the door rushes in hearing her name called and explains:

Ah didn't get on the bus because Ah'm not goin' anywhere. Ah heard every thing you said and if you were gonna give up this subversive magazine Ah was personally gonna come here and tear you apart mahself. (Comes Down One Step) Ah may not agree with what you say, but if you stop
sayin' it, then no one will disagree and that is not the idea of democracy. (Down one more step). We got free speech in this country and Ah'm here to see that it stays free and spoken.27

The play ends with Andy and Norman engaged in finishing the magazine and Sophie sharpening pencils and singing *The Battle Hymn of the Republic.*

Though the play suggests that the physical attraction does count in the forming of friendship, it does not, perhaps, sustain it for long, as is pointed out by Norman:

Physical attraction is n't enough.
It's like chewing gum. It starts off great, but the flavour doesn't last long.28

Andy endorses it by pointing out:

That's why they put five sticks in a pack.29
The Sunshine Boys (1972) differs from all other plays of Neil Simon, featuring as it does two aged actors - Al Lewis and Willie Clark - who are over seventy years old and who have worked together for forty three years as a Vaudeville team called "The Sunshine Boys". Receiving an offer from Willie's nephew, Ben Silverman, to recreate one of their old sketches for a TV special planned to commemorate the golden age of comedy, each of them expresses his opposition to working with his former partner on the ground that they have not seen or talked to each other for the past eleven years. They are, however, persuaded to attend a studio rehearsal at which they start bickering which ends in Al Lewis walking out and Willie suffering a heart-attack. Feeling guilty Al visits Willie in the hospital and agrees to move into the same Actors' Home as the one Willie has planned to enter presumably to continue their partnership as they await their 'final curtain'.

Though the play has a thin plot, it offers a rich comedy exploiting not only the various symptoms
of senility like absent-mindedness, irritability, peevishness and cantankerousness but also the lively exchanges that break out between Willie and Al on account of their failing to wrench themselves out of their past when they were truly the sunshine entertaining performers. The opening scene set in a hotel room is highly comic in that Willie is seen sitting in front of a T.V. but hardly watching it on account of his dozing off and on and mistaking the whistle of the tea kettle for a telephone ring which makes him answer the phone instead of turning off the burning stove. Tripping over the cord of the TV which makes it go dead, Willie calls out to Sandy to come up and repair it. It is at that time that Willie's nephew, Ben Silverman, who is in early thirties, arrives on his regular weekly (Wednesday) visit and is not able to enter the room as Willie, as usual, has so much difficulty with the latch that he thinks he is to lock in until he is asked by Ben to slide it, not force it. The ensuing conversation brings out some significant particulars concerning Willie such as his failing
memory (forgets even the names of Ben's children) and bad health aggravated by his ignoring the doctor's advice (he should eat only salt-free food and should not smoke cigars) as also his sole interest being show business.

Being fond of his uncle, Ben is exasperated by his stubbornness and gives vent to his feelings:

You sit in your pajamas all day in a freezing apartment watching soap operas on a thirty-five-dollar television set that doesn't have a horizontal hold. The picture just keeps rolling from top to bottom - pretty soon your eyes are gonna roll around your head ... you never eat anything. You never go out because you don't know how to work the lock on the door. Remember when you locked yourself in the bathroom overnight? It's a lucky thing you keep bread in there, you would have starved ... And you wonder why I worry.
Further, chided by Willie for not finding a job for him, Ben tries to impress on him that it is not easy to find him a job

Because the word is out in the business that you can't remember the lines and they're simply not interested. Therefore, Ben springs a surprise on him by telling that the C.B.S. TV wants to invite the Sunshine Boys to do at a $10,000 fee for one of their famous sketches, 'the Doctor and the Tax Examination' for their special on the history of comedy. Willie rejects the offer as he cannot work with Al Lewis who has the habit of poking him in the chest and spitting in his face when uttering certain words. When questioned how he worked with him for forty-three years, Willie replies:

Because he was terrific. There 'll never be another one like him ... No body could time a joke the way he could time a joke. No body could say a line the way he said it I knew what he
was thinking, he knew what I was thinking .... One person, that's what we were. 32

Willie adds

As an actor, no one could touch him. As a human being, no one wanted to touch him. 33

Further, Willie is angry with Al because he abruptly announced his retirement which left his partner without an act. Willie says to Ben:

Don't forget, when he retired himself, he retired me too. And goddamn it, I wasn't ready yet. 34

Ben informs Willie that he has spoken to Lewis on the phone and that he has agreed to do the show for his grandchildren who never saw him although he does not care for money. Further, although Lewis does not want any rehearsal, he agrees to do so at Willie's place. On the appointed day Ben arrives and is shocked to hear that Willie has changed his
mind about doing the show, which as he has committed himself to the CBS. Al Lewis knocks on the door, Ben asks Willie who feels nervous to go in and make tea. Trying to make conversation Ben notes down the props required for the show from Al. Ben departs leaving Willie and Al who soon start trading insults. Their conversation demands to be understood at two levels - the comic and the tragic. When Al says that at his daughter's house as he has a room to himself he is not bothered by his grandchildren, he is actually wanting to be bothered. Likewise, when Willie says that as he likes a busy life, he loves the city, he wants to be involved as he is no longer wanted. Indeed, the appeal of the play lies in its suggesting these two levels of meaning which make it once entertaining and poignant, since it focuses on the problem of old age which does not receive much attention in the present youth-oriented time.

Trying to rehearse, Willie and Al arrange and rearrange the furniture and room start bickering
about the opening line which ends in Willie shouting "ENNN-TERRRR" and Al yelling "LUNATIC BASTARD". In the following scene (Act II) which is set in CBS studio the Sunshine Boys manage to overcome their difficulties in putting across their sketch but not before Ben has apologized to the Director for the 'technical problems' which has held up the rehearsals for one week problems which are related to their personalities. Interestingly, in tune with Willie's lecture to Ben that the 'K' sound denotes comedy, the Doctor (played by Willie) is Klockmayer, the Collector (played by Al) is Korncheiser, and the nurse's name is MacKintosh.

It may thus be seen that Neil Simon exploits every element of comedy including the most trivial to enrich this play. As is to be expected, the rehearsal runs into difficulty since Al Lewis pokes the finger into Willie's chest and spits on his out of force of habit resulting in an exchange of personal insults which infuriates Lewis so much that taking off his
wig and jacket he walks out ignoring Willie who starts screaming after him:

I don't need you. I *never* needed you. You were nothing when I found you, and that is what you are today .... Maybe his career is over, but not mine. Maybe he's finished, but not me. You hear? not me! Not 

at which he seems to have had a heart attack, since he falls down.

At this point, the lights dim and the voice of the Announcer is heard.'

The golden age of comedy reached its zenith during a fabulous and glorious era known as Vaudeville-Fanny Brice, W.C. Fields, Eddie Cantor, Ed Wynn, Will Rogers and a host of other greats fill its Hall of Fame. There are two other names that belong on this list, but they can never be listed separately.
They are more than a team. They are two comic shining lights that beam as one. For, Lewis without Clark is like laughter without joy. When these two greats retired, a comic style disappeared from the American scene that will never see its likes again ... Here, then, in a sketch taped nearly eleven years ago on the Ed Sullivan Show, are Lewis and Clark in their classic scene, "The Doctor will See You Now!".

Two weeks after he has suffered a heart attack Willie is in his hotel room and is attended by a black nurse, who is a match to Willie as is reflected in their lively verbal exchanges. Ben brings a magazine, Variety and about two hundred get-well telegrams from show world people which indicates that his illness has been noticed in the world of show business. Ben tries to persuade Willie to retire from show business which is strange in that
Willie has not been working for the past eleven years. Willie insists on making the decision for himself. But Ben tells him:

No. I'll decide for Willie Clark. I am your closest and only living relative, and I am responsible for your welfare ... You can't live here anymore, Willie. Not alone ... And I can't afford to keep this nurse on permanently .... We have to do something, and we have to do it quickly.38

Ben makes two suggestions as regards the place where he can reside. He asks Willie to choose between his own house in which there is a small spare room where he can be comfortable and the Old Actors' Home in New Jersey. Willie rejects the first suggestion saying:

I don't like your kids. They're noisy. The little one hit me in the head with a baseball bat.39
Ben tells him that he knows the reason why he is not prepared to come to his house:

I know the reason you won't come. Because Al Lewis lives with his family, and you're just trying to prove some stupid point about being independent.

Willie agrees to move into the Old Actors' Home on being assured that he would be well looked after there and that Ben would visit every Wednesday. He is furious when Ben informs him that Al Lewis is waiting in the lobby:

First you commit me to the Old Man's Home, bring that bastard here and then you ask me?

However, he consents to meet him and insists on sitting on a chair with two pillows putting on it as he wants to look down on him as also have his chair pulled back so as to make Lewis walk what would seem a considerable distance for one suffering
from arthritis like him. When Lewis knocks on his
door, he responds by saying 'EN-TERRRR' as he did
earlier in the rehearsal and pretends to be asleep.
Lewis enters clutching his hat to overcome his nervous-
ness and is prepared to leave as Willie appears
to be asleep. But Ben anxious to bring them together
'awakens' him and goes out to get refreshments.

As is to be expected, the two actors as usual
indulge in word warfare. Lewis tells Willie that
he has come up to say 'hello' and not to apologize
as expected by Willie.

Willie : Funny, to me you look tired.
A little troubled. Like
a person, who had something
on his conscience, what
do I know?

Al : I have nothing on my conscience.

Willie : (A pause) Are you sure you
looked good?

Al : I have nothing on my conscience
The only thing I feel badly
about is that you got sick.

Willie : Thank you. I accept your apology!

Al : What apology? Who apologized?
I just said I'm sorry you got sick.

Willie : Who do you think made me sick?

Al : Who? You did, that's who!
Not me. You yelled and screamed and carried on like a lunatic until you made yourself sick... and for that I'm sorry.

A foregoing dialogue suggests that old habits die hard and what follows is like their old Vaudeville act which when detected by them makes them smile. Lewis discloses that as his daughter is expecting another baby requiring the use of his room, he will be going to the Old Actors' Home. Al tells him

If you're not too busy, maybe you'll come over one day
to the Actors' Home and visit me. 43

It is ironic that Al should ask Willie to visit him at the old Actors' Home, since Willie himself is going to move into it. The play has what may be considered to be an open ending, since Al and Willie engage themselves in an argument about a certain Bernie Eisenstein whose death is reported in Variety, which seems pointless in that it should not matter whether he was the house doctor at the Palace or Rodriguez. Again, Al talks of forgotten players of the theatre which shows that they had not broken with their past.

Willie's relations with Al are governed not only by professional concerns but also by their psychological needs, since it is their complementary traits that have made them become 'one person' as Willie declares in response to Ben's query as to why he has continued his
partnership with Al for forty-three years, even though he hates him. It is but fitting that they would be spending the rest of their lives in the Old Actors' Home which would ensure the continuance of their association that helps Willie acknowledge his being an old man as his partner has earlier done gracefully. Significantly, they converse in one-liners which is the only language they know as is pointed by Simon:

> I spent my life growing up with these men. If they spoke in one-liners and punch lines instead of conversation, it's because it was the only language they knew.  

Several of the lines they speak besides being funny are integral to the very structure of the play, since they help define the characters of Willie and Al as also distinct features of their friendship.

*Biloxi Blues* (1986), set in the training
camp of army recruits during World War II, spells the dawn of realization on Eugene, the protagonist of the play who is aspiring to become a writer, of the importance of integrity to good writing as a result of his association with Epstein, a fellow Jewish recruit.

The play is a continuation of the quasi-autobiographical fiction started with *Brighton Beach Memoirs*, detailing the progress of Eugene Morris Jerome from adolescence to young manhood which is complexified by his ambition to become a writer.

The action of the play takes place in 1943 and Eugene who has been drafted into the Army along with four other recruits is on his way, by an old railroad train pressed in service because of the war, to Bilo to undergo basic training before being sent to Europe. The opening scene set in a scruffy Army train brings out Eugene's pompousness and keen observation which mark his memoirs, as also his view of Epstein who is to play an important role
in his life. As per Eugene's account

Arnold Epstein of Queens Boulevard, New York, was a sensitive, well-read, intelligent young man. His major flaw was that he was incapable of digesting food stronger than hard-boiled eggs... I didn't think he'd last long in the army because during war time it is very hard to go home for dinner every night.45

The other companions, Joseph Wykowski, Roy Selridge, and Don Carney, serve as sound boards for Eugene's views of men and matters. The first of the fourteen scenes making up the play, makes known Eugene's plans and hopes as recorded in his memoirs:

There were three things. I was determined to do in this war. Become a writer, not get killed and lose my virginity.46
Arriving at Biloxi, Mississippi, they have their first contact with Sergent Merwin J. Toomey who is in charge of their company during their training and who makes clear to them what they are in for, in realistic, though alarming, terms:

... during your ten weeks of basic training here in Beautiful Biloxi, Mississippi... those of you who have survived the heat, humidity, roaches, spiders, snakes, dry rot, fungus, dysentery, syphilis, gonorrhea and tick fever, will be sent to some shit island in the Pacific or some turdpile in Northern Sicily. In either case, returning to your mommas and pappas with your balls intact is highly improbable. There is only one way to come out of a war healthy of body and sane of mind and that way is to be born the favorite daughter of the President of the United States ... I speak from experience
having served fourteen months in the North African Campaign where seventy three per cent of my comrades are buried under the sand of an Arab Desert. 47

The opening scene which sets the tone of the rest of the play features what characterizes an army camp in which the inmates indulge in jokes about masturbation, orgasm, flatulence and such other things introduced in a matter-of-way that make for the realistic portrayal of it.

The characters figuring in it are all stereotypes with the exception of Epstein and Eugene whose perceptions concerning his fellow recruits recorded in this memoirs provide vivid profiles of them:

Roy Selridge ... smelled like a tuna-fish sandwich left out in the rain. He thought he had a terrific sense of humor...

......

Joseph Wykowski ... had the stomach of a goat ... had a
permanent erection

Donald Carney ... an okay guy
until some one made the fatal
mistake of telling him he sounded
like Perry Como.⁴⁸

Even the sergeant, Toomey, in charge of the recruits,
is not individualized but shown to be hard-boiled,
loud mouthed and pig-headed as is seen in the scene
involving him and Epstein. Toomey tells the recruits
of a burglary that has taken place and calls upon
the guilty party to return the sixty-two dollars
from Wykowski's wallet and is surprised when Epstein
puts the money... before him. He tells Epstein
that he is a fool to take the blame for something
he is innocent of, since it is he who has taken
the money;

Last night at 0100 hours I wandered
through this barracks and saw
carelessness and complacency.
Wykowsky's wallet was lying
in an open foot-locker inviting
weakness, avarice and temptation. I took your sixty-two dollars, Wykowski, and returned the empty wallet in its place. I did it to teach you a lesson ... instead, I got ... submarined.49

Stating that while the army has its logic he has his own logic: Epstein says:

Since I'm not guilty of a crime, I reserve the privilege to keep my own motives a matter of confidentiality.50

Pressed by Toomey to disclose his reason for acting as he did; Epstein says:

Because I know that you did. I saw you take it. I think inventing a crime that didn't exist to enforce your theories of discipline is Neanderthal in its conception.51

Toomey's behaviour is preposterous as is shown to Epstein whose own action points to the Jew's
place in a Christian or gentile world. Eugene is aware of his passivity in his personality which accounts for his not standing up for a fellow Jew, but which perhaps, would help him in keeping out and observing others' actions to become a writer.

Eugene's encounter with the prostitute Rowena brings out his naivety as also the loss of his virginity which he wants to prevent, Rowena pulling him over tells him:

Okay, honey. Do your stuff.

Eugene: What stuff is that?

Rowena: Whatever you like to do.

Eugene: Why don't you start and I'll catch up.

Rowena: Didn't anyone ever tell you what to do? 52

The scene detailing Eugene's meeting with Daisy is significant in that he finds himself in the company of one who is well-read. Eugene tells Daisy who is called away:
Goodbye, Daisy ... God, every time I say that name I feel like I'm speaking literature.

since he was reminded of the character in The Great Gatsby.

The next scene features Toomey who is nonplussed by Epstein's disposition. He is curious to know what his father has taught him. Epstein replies:

Not much ... Two things may be ... Dignity and compassion.

Toomey makes Epstein snatch his pistol and charges him with theft and tells him that he has won over Epstein having making him obey the regulations.

The play dramatizes Eugene's initiation into the kind of experience that may prove helpful to his becoming a writer as also Epstein's determined effort to see that dignity and sanity prevail. Eugene's association with Epstein implies tutelage in so far as Eugene is concerned.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


2 Ibid., p. 244.

3 Ibid., p. 246.


5 Ibid., p. 290.

6 Ibid., p. 291.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., p. 292.


10 *The Comedy of Neil Simon*, p. 296.

11 Ibid., p. 300.

12 Ibid., p. 301.

13 Ibid., p. 299.
14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., P.301.


18 The Comedy of Neil Simon, P.309.

19 Ibid., P.311.

20 Ibid., P.313.

21 Ibid., P.325.

22 Ibid., P.350.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., pp.350-351.

25 Ibid., P.353.

26 Ibid., P.372.
27 Ibid., P.390.

28 Ibid., P.387.

29 Ibid., P.388.


31 Ibid., P.312.

32 Ibid., P.319.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., P.320.


36 Ibid., P.367.

37 Ibid., pp.367-368.

38 Ibid., P.376

39 Ibid., P.377.

40 Ibid.
Ibid., P.381.

Ibid., P.385.

Ibid., P.388.


Ibid., P.8.

Ibid., P.11.

Ibid., pp.4-6

Ibid., P.46.

Ibid.

Ibid., P.47.

Ibid., P.63.

Ibid., P.85.

Ibid., P.87.