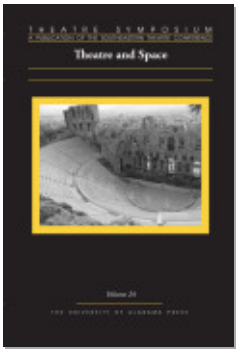
Setting Their Sites on Satire: The Algonquin Round Table's Non-Theatrical Spaces of Creative Genesis



Christine Woodworth

Theatre Symposium, Volume 24, 2016, pp. 76-87 (Article)

Published by The University of Alabama Press
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.1353/tsy.2016.0006*

Setting Their Sites on Satire

The Algonquin Round Table's Non-Theatrical Spaces of Creative Genesis

Christine Woodworth

On a warm summer afternoon in 1933,[1] a small rowboat full of tourists landed on the shore of Neshobe Island in the tiny Lake Bomoseen near Castleton, Vermont. While enjoying a picnic lunch on the beach, the tourists were interrupted by an ax-wielding, mud-smeared naked man in a red fright wig who screamed and chased them back to their boat. This seemingly crazed person was none other than Harpo Marx who was, rather enthusiastically, preserving the isolation and privacy of the island, which was owned and populated by a special group of friends. Marx recollects, "I volunteered to deal with the interlopers. I stripped off all my clothes, put on my red wig, smeared myself with mud, and went whooping and war-dancing down to the shore, making Gookies[2] and brandishing an ax. The tourists snatched up their things, threw them into the boat, and rowed away fast enough to have won the Poughkeepsie Regatta. That put an end to the snooping that season. It also, I'm sure, started some juicy new rumors about our crazy goings-on."[3] The "crazy goings-on" alluded to by Marx were the antics of the iconic theatrical and literary wits of the Algonquin Round Table.

The prevailing image of the denizens of the Round Table more often than not situated them in the refined urban space of the Algonquin Hotel's elegant Rose Room. Indeed, dozens of comic illustrations portray them seated around the table, where they ate, drank, and vivaciously (or viciously, depending on one's perspective) discussed the theatrical and literary events of the day.[4] While their matrices of connection were initially forged around the table in the Rose Room, other non-theatrical spaces of camaraderie, whimsy, and debauchery, including Neshobe Island and Neysa McMein's painting studio, fueled creative theatrical genesis for the Algonquin Round Table and its hangers-on. An examination of the

atmosphere and activities of these three social spaces—the Algonquin Hotel, Neshobe Island, and McMein's studio—offers a glimpse of the ways in which the spatial and social dynamics of the Round Table impacted the American theatre.

The members of the Algonquin Round Table offered myriad direct and indirect contributions to the theatre of the 1920s and early 1930s. Round Table gatherings in non-theatrical social spaces profoundly shaped theatre on countless stages in New York City and beyond. Their festive and ruthless get-togethers in a number of venues generated theatrical criticism as well as theatrical production, transforming these spaces into sites of critical and creative genesis. By examining locations of collaboration and contestation outside of traditional theatres, seemingly benign social sites can be recast as charged spaces of creation that are essential to theatre-making. Additionally, the Round Table's non-theatrical venues were simultaneously spaces of theatrical inclusion, as collaborative partnerships were forged, and exclusion, as some artists and productions were panned and reviled. These non-theatrical social spaces were the points of origin for the Round Table's impact on the theatre. The aftershocks of their theatrical influence are still felt today.

An extraordinary number of the Round Table wits wrote theatre criticism for one of the over fifteen daily newspapers in New York in the 1920s. Yet their contributions to theatre history extended far beyond print journalism. Kevin C. Fitzpatrick asserts: "The single unifying element among almost all members of the Round Table was the live theater business. Sitting at the table at any given point was at least one person who made his or her living on Broadway. Some wrote the shows that others acted, while across the table critics lay in wait to tear both of them down. Press agents drummed up publicity and ticket sales, so they sat next to the newspaper columnist who needed backstage gossip for the next day's edition. Directors and producers, the men behind the scenes, were among the most powerful in the city. Young actresses floated into the hotel dining room and held their own at the table."[5]

Documenting their own interactions and influence was clearly not at the forefront of Round Table members' minds in the midst of these social settings. As a result, limited artifacts have survived to reconstruct these gatherings. Yet what remains does afford intriguing possibilities for recovery and interpretation. Recently, theatre historians have worked to recover the labor and processes of artists, craftspeople, and technicians that have customarily been hidden or obscured to preserve the so-called magic of theatre.[6] By making visible the invisible labor and rewriting historical narratives to reflect that unseen work, theatre historians have revealed

the toil and artistry of figures that may have been historically marginalized because of the nature of their jobs or because of other facets of their identities. This recovery work presents innumerable archival and historiographical challenges. How might this recovery trend and its methodologies extend to an examination of the non-theatrical spaces whose environs and interactions brought to bear countless theatrical collaborations for the Round Table? James Traub argues: "Theater is, of course, an inherently collaborative medium, but what is still remarkable about the [vicious] circle[7] of the 1920s is the extent to which they *were* a circle—a group of people who lived an almost collective life and whose work was in many ways, the record of that charmed, overheated, fiercely competitive society. It was the special privilege and delight of the audience, both in theaters and in living rooms across the country, to eavesdrop on this wicked and inspired conversation."[8] Exploring the Round Table's spaces of social camaraderie, and the atmosphere created therein, presents exciting—and daunting—methodological considerations. The physical remains of these spaces bear little resemblance to the sites where the Round Table assembled in the 1920s, as they have been renovated and remodeled over time. We are left with accounts of these gathering spaces and their occupants that have been preserved in memoirs and autobiographies. Countering these recollections are newspaper articles and columns by writers outside of the Round Table, who offer a more removed and critical perspective of the reputation of the Algonquin figures and the effect of their social gatherings on the theatre of their day.

The precise origins of the Algonquin Round Table have themselves become the stuff of folklore. Some scholars assert that tenacious theatre critic Alexander Woollcott began the gathering by inviting friends to join him at the hotel for lunch one day.[9] The prevailing origin story, however, traces the beginnings of the daily gatherings to a trick played on Woollcott. In 1919, press agents John Peter Toohey and Murdock Pemberton lured Woollcott to the Algonquin under the guise of decadent pastries with the ulterior motive to persuade him to write favorably about Eugene O'Neill. Woollcott abruptly dismissed their request and instead spent the remainder of lunch sharing stories of his own World War I escapades. In retribution for this, Toohey and Pemberton organized another lunchtime gathering of Woollcott's friends and colleagues who were brought to the hotel to roast the bombastic critic.[10] What precisely happened during that lunch has largely been lost. But Margaret Case, daughter of the hotel's proprietor, Frank Case, recollected that as lunch was breaking up someone remarked, "Why don't we do this every day?"[11] And indeed, they did.

The lunchtime gatherings initially were held in the hotel's Pergola room, but in 1920 Case moved the witty set to the Rose Room.[12] A large

round table was placed in the middle of the room, and Case eventually added a red velvet rope "to set off the Rose Room from celebrity lunchtime watchers," thus transforming the dining space into a site of social and artistic exclusion.[13] The membership of the Round Table included theatre critics, playwrights, directors, actors, press agents, novelists, and so forth.[14] Membership to the group and access to the hallowed space of the table was usually facilitated by an invitation from a current member. The conversation was fast-paced and full of clever statements, many of which have subsequently become immortalized.[15] The wits gathered for close to ten years; Andrew B. Harris asserts that the Algonquin Round Table was the "epicenter of Broadway banter . . . where the wits gathered to either talk up or talk down the shows."[16] The Rose Room was the actual and figurative space of theatrical taste making in the 1920s and 1930s.

In a 1945 essay entitled "The Myth of the Algonquin Round Table," George S. Kaufman refuted the notion that friends gathered "intent upon praising each other to the skies and rigidly damning the work of any upstart outsider." Instead, he asserted, "The Round Table members ate at the Algonquin because Frank Case was good enough to hold a table for them, and because it was fun. The jokes, as I recall, were rather good but completely unimportant. I cannot recall that a serious literary note was ever injected, and anyone who tried to inject one would have had a piece of lemon chiffon pie crammed down his throat."[17] Yet the notion that Algonquin Round Table members promoted the work of their own membership persisted. A 1926 comic by John Held Jr. that was printed in the *New Yorker* features a group of eight men around a table, each scratching the back of the man[18] on his right. The caption for this image reads "Back Scratching at the Algonquin."[19] The notion that the wits of the vicious circle gathered in this space to manufacture and facilitate each other's literary, journalistic, and theatrical successes was nothing new to readers of newspapers and periodicals. As early as May 27, 1922, O. O. McIntyre's "Bits of New York Life" column—which was syndicated in papers across the country—stated, "Greenwich Village calls members of the 'circle' log-rollers. They are accused of the knavish vice of 'backscratching.' And whether true or not, the belief is growing that they are banded together as puff-hucksters for members only."[20]

While the round table in the Rose Room was seen as the iconic space of the Round Table members, part of what made their effect on theatre so potent was the fact that they carried their camaraderie and collaborations into a number of other spaces outside the Algonquin too. A few blocks uptown from the hotel was Neysa McMein's art studio, located on 57th Street, near Carnegie Hall. McMein's international fame stemmed primarily from her work as a painter and illustrator. She created covers for

the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Woman's Home Companion*, *The Ladies World*, *McClure's* and, most notably, *McCall's*, for which she was the exclusive cover artist from 1923 until 1938. Her studio was across the hall from the apartment where Dorothy Parker lived with her first husband, and it soon became the auxiliary meeting space of the Algonquin Round Table's vicious circle and its many acolytes. Stuart Y. Silverstein describes McMein's studio as "New York's leading salon of the time."[21] In addition to the famous literary figures of the Algonquin Round Table, McMein's salon was host to countless actors, musicians, artists, and playwrights. Marc Connelly recounts in his memoir: "The world in which we moved was small, but it was churning with a dynamic group of young people. . . . Neysa's studio on the northeast corner of Sixth Avenue and Fifty-seventh Street was crowded all day by friends who played games and chatted with their startingly [*sic*] beautiful young hostess as one pretty girl model after another posed for the pastel head drawings that would soon delight the eyes of America on the covers [of] periodicals."[22] Woollcott similarly noted, "If you loiter in Neysa McMein's studio, the world will drift in and out."[23] He describes the denizens of her salon: "Over at the piano Jascha Heifetz and Arthur Samuels may be trying to find out what four hands can do in the syncopation of a composition never thus desecrated before. Irving Berlin is encouraging them. Squatted uncomfortably around an ottoman, Franklin P. Adams, Marc Connelly and Dorothy Parker will be playing cold hands to see who will buy dinner that evening. At the bookshelf Robert C. Benchley and Edna Ferber are amusing themselves vastly by thoughtfully autographing her set of Mark Twain for her."[24] In addition to Connelly and Woollcott, other theatre artists and performers who frequented McMein's salon (and potentially sampled her legendary bathtub gin) included Mary Pickford, Robert Sherwood, George S. Kaufman, Charlie Chaplin, Paul Robeson, George Gershwin, Moss Hart, Alfred Lunt, and Lynn Fontanne.[25] One of the most prominent—albeit infrequent—visitors to McMein's studio was Noël Coward, who was one of her closest friends. McMein was instrumental in directing press attention to Coward's work in the United States, as he recounts in his diaries.[26] Coward described the inhabitants of McMein's studio as "swimming round and in and out like rather puzzled fish in a dusty aquarium."[27]

McMein's studio reverberated with activity as models, actors, writers, and friends came and went, ate and drank, and played countless games with one another. The informal chaos of the studio space nurtured new friendships, romances, and countless creative collaborations. In the midst of this flurry, McMein played casual hostess while focusing determinedly on the easel in front of her. As Coward attested, "Neysa paid little or no attention to anyone except when they arrived or left, when, with a sudden

spurt of social conscience, she would ram a paint-brush into her mouth and shake hands with a kind of disheveled politeness."[28] Ruth Gordon recollects, "People eddied around the studio and talked with each other or to, or at, or about, and then drifted off and were missed or not."[29] The afternoons and evenings at the studio (in addition to lunchtime gatherings at the Algonquin, weekly dinners at the brownstone of Ruth Hale and Heywood Broun, parties at "412" [the home of Jane Grant and Harold Ross], and long weekends away at Woollcott's country home) provided an environment ripe for creative genesis, as writers and musicians developed friendships and mischief, and a space in which to rehearse those collaborations. Jane Grant, who was instrumental in the creation of the *New Yorker*, participated in a series of interviews for the Academy Award–winning documentary on the Algonquin Round Table, created by Aviva Slesin. In the notes and transcripts of that interview, Grant asserted that McMein helped create performances for any occasion (birthdays, new jobs, sale of a manuscript) and that her studio was the space where the theatrical culmination of the Round Table's satire—a production called *No Sirree!*—was created and rehearsed.[30]

Created collectively by the Round Table members, the production had its genesis and development primarily in McMein's studio, although it opened in a conventional theatre space. On April 30, 1922, *No Sirree!*, "An Anonymous Entertainment by the Vicious Circle of the Hotel Algonquin," was mounted for one night only at the 49th Street Theatre, which had been built the previous year by the Shuberts. The production was a series of vignettes and musical numbers, which spoofed the Broadway theatre of the time.

A review published the next day in the *New York Times* noted that the cast primarily featured critics and playwrights and "the only well-known persons in the cast took minor parts."[31] Scant evidence has survived of this piece other than a facsimile of the playbill and a handful of reviews.[32] In describing actress Laurette Taylor's reviews published in the *New York Times*, playwright Marc Connelly recollects, "Laurette rolled up her sleeves and with serious gusto panned hell out of everyone connected with *No, Sirree*."[33] Taylor admonished, "I would advise them all to leave the stage before they take it up. A pen in their hands is mightier than God's most majestic words in their mouths."[34] It is understandable that an actress might relish an opportunity to turn the tables on the vicious circle and their legendary acid pens.

In spite of the comical vitriol of Taylor's two reviews, this was a well-attended, invitation-only event.[35] The audience was a veritable who's who of the New York theatre, including Florenz Ziegfeld, Samuel Shipman, and Lee Shubert. The sketches lampooned the writings of Shipman, A. A.

Milne, Zoe Akins, and Eugene O'Neill.[36] While the event was something of a closed affair for New York theatre circles, it echoed beyond the city as syndicated dispatches appeared in papers as far away as Leavenworth, Kansas, and Portsmouth, Ohio. Lucy Jeanne Price in her "New York Letter" column dubbed the event "the finest fun imaginable" and asserted that the spoof was crafted with "infinite delicacy and whole heartedness."[37] O. O. McIntyre's "New York Day-By-Day" column stated, "The truth is that the critics gave one of the most amusing performances of the entire year in New York."[38] From the exclusive creative space of McMein's studio to the select coterie audience of New York theatre elite, *No Sirree!* eventually reverberated beyond its own limited spheres. For one member of the Round Table, this production was life changing. Robert Benchley's performance of his "Treasurer's Report" sketch impressed Irving Berlin so much that he booked Benchley into his Music Box Revue, which eventually catapulted him into acting.[39] Larger-than-life critic Alexander Woollcott was also allegedly invited to return to the stage by Samuel Shipman in one of his plays.[40] *No Sirree!* inspired Connelly and Kaufman to create another musical revue called *The Forty-niners*, which was a flop, running for fifteen performances in November of that same year.[41]

Shortly after *No Sirree!*, Woollcott and nine friends (including McMein and Harpo Marx) purchased the seven-acre Neshobe Island for their private retreat. An escape from the casual chaos of McMein's salon and the animated fervor of the Algonquin, Neshobe Island soon became a space of play for the Round Table. Woollcott was undeniably the host. McMein's husband saw this as a major drawback to visiting the island with his wife and referred to Woollcott as the "Bashaw of Bomoseen and Nabob of Neshobe," describing his leadership of the group as a dictatorship.[42] In a 1939 profile of Woollcott in *Life*, the writer dubs him the "Lord of Neshobe" and notes that "his guests wear old clothes on land, sometimes none at all when swimming—the sight of huge Woollcott floating in the water has been described as 'majestic.'"[43] The formality required by the space of the Algonquin Hotel's Rose Room was jettisoned when Round Table members were on the island. Dorothy Parker was rumored to have spent an entire weekend wearing only her hat.[44] Clearly, Harpo Marx was not the only inhabitant known for taking off his clothes while on the island, as the members of the Round Table revealed much more than their wit to one another.

Whether at the Algonquin, in Neysa's studio, gathered in someone's home, or visiting the island, the Round Table members transformed their spaces into sites of camaraderie and play. When in the city, they were famous for playing poker and other card games as well as word games. While on Neshobe, croquet was largely the game of choice during the

day with spirited word, card, and guessing games dominating the evening. The most popular game was Murder, which was part mystery, part role-playing, and part hide-and-seek.[45] The entire island could be transformed into a larger-than-life stage space for these various activities. Woollcott helmed each adventure much like a director might helm a theatre production. As *Life* noted: "The host herds his guests from cribbage board to bridge table to lawn where he plays a murderous variant on croquet."[46] As a 1938 article in the *Salt Lake Tribune* noted, "Vermonters on the near-by mainland are given the opportunity to watch the wits of Broadway cavort at games and work—mostly games, as the rotund Woollcott is a genius at organizing the guests in amazing concoctions of his own that invariably inspire intense competitions."[47] While the locals may have seen the island as a theatre and themselves as the audience to the antics of its inhabitants, according to Harpo Marx, Woollcott saw himself as the audience on the island. Marx recollects, "Neshobe Island was in fact a kind of theatre to Aleck, with a continuous show. Each dawn raised the curtain on a new scene, each season was a new act, and each year a new drama."[48]

These three iconic spaces of camaraderie and play among the wits of the Round Table set the stage for a number of theatrical collaborations. While *No Sirree!* remains one of the most iconic iterations of their creative genesis, countless other theatrical renderings owe a debt to the web of relationships and atmosphere of social interplay afforded by the Algonquin Hotel, Neysa McMein's studio, and the private residence on Neshobe Island. Some of these renderings left material traces in theatre history. Dozens and dozens of theatre reviews written by members such as Woollcott, Parker, Benchley, Broun, Kaufman, and Hale have survived, providing valuable archival evidence of the New York theatre in the 1920s and underscoring how these spaces of camaraderie and contestation were the catalysts for much criticism of the time. Theatrical careers were launched and supported by the various Algonquin wits, including Noël Coward's American success and Lynn Fontanne's US acting career. Members of the Round Table and their goings-on in these various gathering spaces were the inspiration for thinly veiled characters in plays—including McMein, who was said to have inspired S. N. Berhman's 1932 play *Biography*, and Alexander Woollcott, who was famously dramatized in Kaufman and Hart's 1939 *The Man Who Came to Dinner*. Kaufman and Connelly wrote the play *Dulcy*, taking inspiration from a recurring character in one of Franklin Pierce Adams' columns. *Dulcy* was commissioned as a vehicle for Lynn Fontanne—eventually a regular visitor herself to McMein's studio and Neshobe. McMein herself created the cover art for the published edition of the play. Connelly and Kaufman went

on to collaborate several more times, as did Kaufman and Edna Ferber; as Fitzpatrick argues, "At every stage of George S. Kaufman's career was a member of the Round Table."[49] And at every stage of Round Table membership, denizens of the vicious circle could be found in one of the myriad social spaces that set the stage for later collaborations.

Much of the residual influence of the Round Table's social spaces was ineffable and difficult to quantify or archive. Many writers of their time found the influence of the Algonquin wits troubling, as the earlier reference to the "back-scratching" comic suggests. A few years after referring to the Round Table as "puff-hucksters," O. O. McIntyre in his "New York Day by Day" column wrote of brewing tensions among the wits, predicting (inaccurately) that their demise as an organization was near. He wrote, "The so-called Algonquinites in reality represented a sprightly crew of young columnists, critics, playwrights and book reviewers. There were quite a number who had done noteworthy things in literature and the theater, but they were disposed to take themselves too seriously. So a myth grew up about them. And they were caught in a false glitter. Perhaps the chief beneficiary of the entire Algonquin affair is Frank Case, the proprietor, a personable fellow whose restaurant receipts have been amazingly enhanced by the publicity. It fills his dining rooms."[50] Similarly, when asked for a newspaper article what he would do if he won the lottery, press agent Walter J. Kingsley indicated that he "would suppress the Algonquin Round Table and send the young wits out into the world for new material."[51] The theatrical, literary, and social influence of the Algonquin Round Table was undeniable as they transformed seemingly benign social sites into spaces of collaborative creation and critical contestation. As Traub asserts, "The effect of all this nonstop collaborating, chronicling, criticizing, lunching, and drinking was to push the art of the period in the direction dictated by the circle's collective sensibility: wit, speed, sparkle, savoir-faire."[52] The gathering spaces of the Round Table, including the Algonquin Hotel, Neysa McMein's studio, and Neshobe Island, created eclectic spaces of collaboration in which the boundaries between social circle and artistic creation were nebulous. Whether dressed to the nines in the Rose Room or dressed in nothing at all on Neshobe Island, the members of the Algonquin Round Table gathered in these charged spaces, weaving their personal lives, artistry, and criticism together seamlessly, shaping theatrical careers and cultural trends in profound ways. The reverberations of their influence can still be felt today as theatres continue to produce their plays, scholars look to their writing for clues to cultural and social expression of an earlier time, and snarky critics and bloggers aspire to the quips and bon mots of the Algonquinites in a more contemporary idiom.

Notes

1. John Baragwanath, *A Good Time Was Had* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1962), 148.

2. "Gookie" was Marx's signature comic expression, in which he puffed out his cheeks, stuck out his tongue, and crossed his eyes. In his autobiography he describes the real-life inspiration for this, a man named Gookie who rolled cigars in a shop window on Lexington Avenue. When he was twelve, Marx took it upon himself to mimic the faces Gookie made when rolling cigars. Harpo Marx and Rowland Barber, *Harpo Speaks!*, 14th ed. (Pompton Plains, N.J.: Limelight Editions, 2007), 52–54.

3. Ibid., 215.

4. See Aviva Slesin Collection of Research and Production Materials for *The Ten-Year Lunch: The Wit and Legend of the Algonquin Round Table 1920s-1988*, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman Center Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York, for clippings and facsimiles of most of these comics.

5. Kevin C. Fitzpatrick, *The Algonquin Round Table New York: A Historical Guide* (Guilford, Conn.: Lyons Press, 2015), 143.

6. See Elizabeth Osborne and Christine Woodworth, eds., *Working in the Wings: New Perspectives on Theatre History and Labor* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 2015); Christin Essin, *Stage Designers in Early Twentieth-Century America: Artists, Activists, Cultural Critics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Timothy R. White, *Blue-Collar Broadway: The Craft and Industry of American Theater* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

7. "Vicious circle" was another nickname for the Round Table.

8. James Traub, *The Devil's Playground: A Century of Pleasure and Profit in Times Square* (New York: Random House, 2005), 64.

9. Edwin P. Hoyt, *Alexander Woollcott: The Man Who Came to Dinner*, new ed. (Radnor, Pa.: Chilton Book Company, 1973), 132.

10. James R. Gaines, *Wit's End: Days and Nights of the Algonquin Round Table* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 58; Margot Peters, *Design for Living: Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, a Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 22–24.

11. Ibid., 28.

12. Ethan Mordden, *The Guest List: How Manhattan Defined American Sophistication—from the Algonquin Round Table to Truman Capote's Ball* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2010), 16.

13. Gaines, *Wit's End*, 133.

14. For a detailed account of the members of the Round Table, see Fitzpatrick, *The Algonquin Round Table New York.*

15. Hoyt, *Alexander Woollcott*, 133.

16. Andrew B. Harris, *Broadway Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1994), 12.

17. George S. Kaufman, "The Myth of the Algonquin Round Table," in *The*

Lost Algonquin Round Table: Humor, Fiction, Journalism, Criticism and Poetry From America's Most Famous Literary Circle, ed. Nat Benchley and Kevin C. Fitzpatrick (Bloomington, Ind.: iUniverse, 2009), 1.

18. The majority of these images are dominated by renderings of the male members of the Round Table set. While there were several women involved in the Round Table, they are outnumbered by the men in the cartoon in which they appear. In one instance, a cartoon bears a caption that describes the animated male figures individually while it offers a single woman who sits with her hat covering her eyes and her mouth closed. It reads, "The solitary lady, who seems awe-stricken by her surroundings, is a composite of the very few members of her sex who have been privileged to penetrate this literary arcanum." *Shadowland*, 1923, 38, Aviva Slesin Collection of Research and production Materials for *The Ten-Year Lunch: the Wit and Legend of the Algonquin Round Table*, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library.

19. Judith Yaross Lee, *Defining New Yorker Humor* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 169. See also Aviva Slesin Collection, New York Public Library.

20. O. O. M'Intyre, "Bits of New York Life," *Atlanta Constitution*, May 27, 1922, 4.

21. Stuart Y. Silverstein, "Introduction," *Not Much Fun: The Lost Poems of Dorothy Parker* (New York, Scribner, 2009), 29.

22. Marc Connelly, *Voices Offstage: A Book of Memoirs* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 81.

23. Alexander Woollcott, *Enchanted Aisles* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1924), 36.

24. Ibid.

25. Silverstein, "Introduction," 29; Gaines, *Wit's End*, 77–78.

26. Noël Coward, *The Noël Coward Diaries*, ed. Graham Payn and Sheridan Morley (New York: Da Capo Press, 1982), 57.

27. Quoted in Baraganath, *A Good Time Was Had*, 78.

28. Ibid.

29. Ruth Gordon, *Myself among Others* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 342.

30. Aviva Slesin Collection, New York Public Library, box 2, folder 2.

31. "Critics Are Actors to Actor Audience," *New York Times*, May 1, 1922.

32. For an account of the historiographical challenges surrounding this event and a reconstruction of the performance, see Jay Malarcher, "*No Sirree!* A One-Night Stand with the Algonquin's Vicious Circle," in *Art, Glitter, and Glitz: Mainstream Playwrights and Popular Theatre in 1920s America*, ed. Arthur Gewirtz and James Kolb (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 147–58.

33. Connelly, *Voices Offstage*, 89.

34. Laurette Taylor, "Actress Gets Back at the Critics," *New York Times*, May 1, 1922, 22.

35. Malarcher, "*No Sirree!* A One-Night Stand with the Algonquin's Vicious Circle," 150.

36. Gaines, *At Wit's End*, 63; Felicia Hardison Londré, "Twitting O'Neill: His

Plays of the 1920s Subjected to `La Critique Créatrice,'" *Eugene O'Neill Review* 26 (2004): 118–43.

37. Lucy Jeanne Price, "New York Letter," *Leavenworth Times*, May 9, 1922, 4.

38. O. O. McIntyre, "New York Day-By-Day," *Portsmouth Daily Times*, May 18, 1922, 16. In 1922 the title of the column was printed with hyphens, however, in 1925 (see note 50) the column title contained no hyphens.

39. Gaines, *At Wit's End*, 66.

40. O. O. McIntyre, "New York Day-By-Day," 16.

41. Burns Mantle, *The Best Plays of 1922–1923* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1923), 9.

42. Baragwanath, *A Good Time Was Had*, 147.

43. "Life Goes Calling on Alexander Woollcott," *Life*, October 30, 1939, 87.

44. Peters, *Design for Living*, 122.

45. Marx and Barber, *Harpo Speaks!*, 218–19.

46. "Life Goes Calling," 87.

47. "Master of Island Retreat Tries Croquet," *Salt Lake Tribune*, August 21, 1938, 20.

48. Marx and Barber, *Harpo Speaks!*, 213–14.

49. Fitzpatrick, *The Algonquin Round Table New York*, 43.

50. O. O. McIntyre, "New York Day By Day," *Times Herald* (Olean, N.Y.), August 15, 1925, 24. In 1922 the title of the column was printed with hyphens (see notes 38 and 41), however, in 1925 the column title contained no hyphens.

51. "When Your Dream Materializes, How Will You Deport Yourself?," *Oakland Tribune Magazine*, May 24, 1925, 94.

52. Traub, *The Devil's Playground*, 64.