

TIME AND ILLUSION IN
THE ICEMAN COMETH

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INTRODUCTION

In August 1914 a Boston publishing company, Gorham Press, published a volume of one-act plays by Eugene O'Neill called Thirst and Other One-Act Plays. Brought out at his father's expense it sold badly and received only one notice. Clayton Hamilton, reviewing the volume in a magazine called The Bookman, wrote:

This writer's mood is one of horror. He deals with grim and ghastly situations that would become intolerable if they were protracted beyond the limits of a single sudden act. He seems to be familiar with the sea; for three of the five plays deal with the terrors that attend the tragedy of shipwreck. He shows a keen sense of the reactions of characters under stress of violent emotion, and his dialogue is almost brutal in its power. 1

Two years later in the summer of 1916 a small group of enthusiastic actors, known as the Provincetown Players, gave O'Neill his first production in a converted wharf in Provincetown. The play, Bound East for Cardiff, opened in New York at the Playwrights Theatre on November 3rd of that year with the same company. It was an immediate success and for the next eighteen years O'Neill's plays dominated the American stage. By the time of his death in 1953 he had seen forty-one of his plays published, received three Pulitzer prizes and a Nobel prize. Five more plays have been published and a fourth Pulitzer awarded, posthumously.²

In many ways the observations made by his first critic have been re-echoed time and again in the bulky canon of O'Neill criticism. Hamilton's concern about the subject matter suggests its novelty and indeed many critics agree that O'Neill's prime distinction lies in his introduction of serious themes into American drama at a time when such an infusion was sorely needed. George Jean Nathan, relishing an admittedly "dubious poetic metaphor", writes that O'Neill "alone and singlehanded waded through the dismal swamps of American drama, bleak, squashy, and oozing sticky goo, and alone and singlehanded bore out of there the water lily that no American had found there before him."³

The make-up and quality of that "water lily" has been the subject of rather more controversy. Just as Hamilton noted O'Neill's familiarity with the sea, so numerous critics have studied the plays from a biographical point of view. As early as 1926 Barret H. Clark began issuing a series of volumes entitled Eugene O'Neill: The Man and His Plays, much of the material being provided by O'Neill himself. R.D. Skinner's Eugene O'Neill: A Poet's Quest, 1935, emphasises the influence of O'Neill's Catholicism on his plays.

More modern critical biographies include one by Doris V. Falk who concludes that O'Neill was something of a Prometheus "who strove with defiant integrity to project through the drama his own vision of the truth." To her this was a vision which

"sprang from the inward agony of a mind endlessly doomed to feed upon itself."⁴ A less epic man appears in Croswell Bowen's The Curse of the Misbegotten, 1959. Bowen analyses each play in its appropriate biographical place but as much of the background is supplied by O'Neill's son Shane the picture that emerges is inevitably one-sided. A more objective, but equally limited portrait of O'Neill is found in Doris Alexander's The Tempering of Eugene O'Neill, 1962. Working on the thesis of the psychological importance of the formative years she relates the O'Neill story from his parents beginning up until 1920, and manages to discuss, usually very briefly, the whole of his work in this perspective. The Gelbs biography, O'Neill, 1962, provides in meticulous detail real life antecedents for almost every character and situation from O'Neill's plays, and reproduces many of the original reviews. The definitive biography, however, is promised by Louis Sheaffer. O'Neill: Son and Playwright, 1968, is crammed with detail, but manages only to reach the year of 1920 in O'Neill's history. A subsequent volume is promised to conclude the story.

Before the 1960s the most perceptive criticism of the plays as drama, rather than as extensions of O'Neill's personality, was confined largely to learned periodicals. The criticism from these, relevant to The Iceman Cometh, will be discussed later. Only two full length books of any note concentrate on the drama as such: Sophus Winter's Eugene O'Neill:

A Critical Study, 1934; and Edwin Engel's The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill, 1953. Winter, mainly through detailed plot summaries, discusses O'Neill's ideas in relation to contemporary social and moral philosophy. Engel, again through detailed synopses, analyses all the plays to determine their central themes. Both are essentially literary studies and this is the approach taken up in the last decade notably by Clifford Leech, Frederic Carpenter, and John Henry Raleigh.⁵ The works of the first two are of the critical survey type, while Raleigh's considers O'Neill in relation to American literature as a whole.

But while much has been done from the biographical and literary approach, little consideration, until very recently, has been given to O'Neill's dramaturgy. Timo Tiusanen and Egil Tornqvist concentrate exclusively on this aspect. Tiusanen studies what he describes as O'Neill's "scenic images" and defines as "a scene (or, more often, part of a scene) in which several scenic means of expression are used to achieve an effect charged with thematic significance."⁶ He traces O'Neill's dramaturgical development from the mixture of realism and melodrama of his early plays, through a highly experimental middle period, to the "dynamic realism" of the late plays. What Tiusanen calls "dynamic realism" Tornqvist describes as "super-naturalism". His aim, using much the same approach as Tiusanen, is "to show that the explicit, super-naturalistic devices found in the middle period can be found implicitly also in the early

and late periods, that the undeniable differences in technique are differences on a comparatively superficial level, and that beneath the seeming protean variety in O'Neill's work there is an organic unity."⁷ The approach of these two critics is one to which this study is highly indebted.

In a letter to Arthur Hobson Quinn, expressing discouragement at the misunderstanding of his work by so many critics, O'Neill attempted to outline something fundamental to all his drama:

...I'm always, always trying to interpret Life in terms of lives, never just life in terms of character. I'm always acutely conscious of the Force behind--Fate, God, our biological past creating our present, whatever one calls it--Mystery certainly--and of the one eternal tragedy of Man in his glorious, self-destructive struggle to make the Force express him instead of being, as an animal is, an infinitesimal incident in its expression. 8

As with many of O'Neill's ex cathedra statements the issues he hopes to clarify tend to be obscured by the syntax, but once that is disentangled two things emerge that are central to O'Neill's dramaturgy.

Firstly, behind individual characters in particular situations there is always the larger concept of Man in Time struggling to make some sense of past present and future. The struggle is a futile one because it is waged against an overwhelming adversary which O'Neill calls, with some ambiguity, the Force. Nevertheless, it is this struggle which is the stuff

of tragedy and of most concern to O'Neill. Secondly, just as O'Neill is concerned with interpreting Life, discovering the meaning and reality of existence in general, so the struggle of his characters against the Force is an attempt to define individuality and confirm a sense of being. The assumption implicit here is that the present reality is merely life-denying illusion. Man's need to penetrate this illusion is paramount even though the attempt is self-destructive. From this attempt springs the tension, glory, and tragedy of the drama.

In no play before Iceman does O'Neill directly focus his drama on these two aspects: define precisely the identity of the Force, or question the need of man to struggle against illusion. In Iceman, however, the Force is clearly Time itself and, far from being an adversary which denies a sense of identity to the individual, the position is totally reversed. As Larry says "The lie of the pipe-dream gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of us" (PIII 578).⁹ Time itself is the illusion out of which, paradoxically, a sense of reality can be confirmed.

How O'Neill shapes the Iceman around an exposition of Larry's philosophy is the subject of this thesis. The first two chapters are designed to place the Iceman within the perspective of the other plays. The first, concentrating on the use made of time, will show how, particularly in his dramaturgy, O'Neill creates a form of expression which comes extra-

ordinarily close to the very subject matter of Iceman, but frequently stops at the point where Iceman begins. The second chapter will show how O'Neill, in an effort to find ways of dramatically presenting the reality behind the illusion, utilizes devices which implicitly question the validity of penetrating the illusion: again the very subject matter of the Iceman.

NOTES FOR INTRODUCTION .

¹Quoted by Arthur and Barbara Gelb, O'Neill, 1962, p.258.

²The most recent and complete chronology of O'Neill's plays, listing dates of composition, first production, and publication is in Tornqvist, A Drama of Souls, 1968.

³"Our Premier Dramatist", reprinted from The Intimate Notebooks of George Jean Nathan, 1932, in Cargill et. al., O'Neill and His Plays, 1961, pp. 283-91.

⁴Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension, pp. 200-01.

⁵Clifford Leech, O'Neill, 1963.

Frederic Carpenter, Eugene O'Neill, 1964.

John Henry Raleigh, The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, 1965.

⁶O'Neill's Scenic Images, 1968, p. 12.

⁷A Drama of Souls, p. 43.

⁸Published in Quinn's A History of American Drama, vol II, 1945. Reprinted in Cargill et. al., O'Neill and His Plays pp. 125-26.

⁹All references to the plays are from The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, I-III (New York: Random House, 1941).

I

TIME

O'Neill's concern with Man and Time, as we shall see later, finds its most detailed expression in The Iceman Cometh. The dramaturgy of that play, however, with respect to this concern, has a history which goes back to the earliest plays. As Tiusanan remarks, "Eugene O'Neill did not emerge ready-made from the head of Thespis; every technical device, every means of expression in his mature plays has a prehistory of efforts, failures, and new adaptations, a prehistory written by an obstinate artistic experimentation."¹

The most obvious feature of this constant experimentation is the length of the play itself. Here the range is enormous. The early plays, as we have already noted, were simple one-act plays which in the reviewer's opinion "would become intolerable if they were protracted beyond the limits of a single sudden act." By that criterion O'Neill wrote many intolerable plays.² The nine-act Strange Interlude, for instance, lasts over five hours, while the thirteen-act trilogy, Mourning Becomes Electra, takes even longer to perform. There was no ideal length for a play. In his last years besides writing the lengthy Iceman, Long Day's Journey Into Night, and planning the marathon eleven play cycle A Tale of Possessors Self-Dispossessed, O'Neill was

also writing one-act plays in the projected By Way of Obit series, of which only Hughie is extant. There is a similar range for the internal time sequences. Before Breakfast concerns itself only with the time it takes to enact, whereas Interlude deals with a twenty-five year period. Marco Millions, after a prologue set in the play's present time, has a twenty-three year flashback, from where it then proceeds onward to the present.

All this would be of little interest did not O'Neill put time, in many forms and patterns, to specifically dramatic uses. And here the most common discernable pattern is that of the circle. At its most simple in Beyond The Horizon, for instance, the sequence of events occurs in a movement from spring to fall and from sunrise to sunset. Leech notes "the change in seasons suggests a movement from growth to decline, the change in time of days works conversely."³ This all parallels the changing fortunes of the hero and dramatically focuses the paradoxical theme of the play: Robert Mayo as time progresses declines physically and fails at everything material and yet at his death achieves success in his own terms. The last scene set at the same time of day and in the same place as the first reinforces this suggestion.⁴

O'Neill frequently employs a circular pattern of both time and place. In Electra one of his difficulties was to find a modern dramatic equivalent to the Greek sense of fate. Many devices are used to achieve this as his note-books make apparent.⁵

One of particular note is the use of a visual circular movement. In the directions for the opening scene O'Neill makes explicit the intended visual effect. ~~Onto six white columns of a~~ Grecian portico rays of the declining sun shine directly and cast "black bars of shadow on the gray wall behind them. The windows of the lower floor reflect the sun's rays in a resentful glare. The temple portico is like an incongruous white mask fixed on the house to hide its sombre gray ugliness"(PII 5). The last scene of the trilogy has exactly the same setting. The whole play is a lengthy exposition of the significance of Lavinia's final entrance into that house, but the significance is apparent, in retrospect, from the very beginning. The mask-like exterior of white columns hiding the darkness of the house symbolises the ugliness beneath the rigidly civilised surface of the Mannons themselves, while the glaring windows reflect their defiance of the Force which has created the ugliness. To accept the inevitability of defeat in the struggle against the Force, is to accept total imprisonment behind the black shadows. A nice touch is to have her order the windows shuttered, to glare defiance no more.⁶

In Emperor Jones a similar use is made of an opening scene with an emphasis on visual contrasts. Again the circular movement of the play is directed toward an explanation of the significance of the first visual impression. The room is large, gleamingly white and bare except for a throne "painted in a

dazzling eye-smitting scarlet" (PIII 173). The negro Jones is dressed in a "light blue uniform coat, sprayed with brass buttons, heavy gold chevrons on his shoulders, gold braid on the collar cuffs, etc." (PIII 175). The theme of the play is of a man totally out of place in his environment (suggested by those violently clashing colours) driven by circumstances and an unconscious urge⁷ back to his primitive black origins. Thus the following scenes are in total darkness through which Jones moves as he strips off his clothes until the harmony of colour is complete.

Such patterns as these, on one level, are obviously designed to give the sense of a well-wrought play. Any circular movement by its nature is satisfactory and aesthetically pleasing, but O'Neill usually has a more weighty purpose. The appeal of the circle lies in its ability to express the idea of continual movement with no linear progress. Despite all her machinations to control events Lavinia ends up essentially as she began: frustrated, alone, imprisoned within the circle. Jones dies exposed as the primitive superstition-riddled negro always present behind the facade. But a circular framework for a play can only be fully appreciated at the final curtain, and would not be particularly effective unless the shape be discernable from an early point. To achieve this O'Neill utilizes many devices--all with one feature in common: repetition.

O'Neill's oft-noted use of repetitive sounds, for instance

does more than increase tension and accentuate mood. In Bound East For Cardiff the blast of the steamer's whistle is heard at regular intervals, giving as one critic notes a sense of space outside the limits of the set.⁸ More emphatically in Emperor Jones the pulse-beat rate of a tom-tom drum, heard in the opening scene "continues at a gradually accelerating rate from this point uninterruptedly to the very end of the play" (PIII 984), and defines the ever-decreasing circumference of the circle within which Jones is trapped.

When characters are unaware of the circle a certain irony abounds, particularly when the sense of fate is given through a repeated phrase. In Anna Christie at the end of three out of four acts Chris curses "dat ole davil sea" as the cause of his family's misfortune, in particular, of his daughter's prostitution. There is no doubt of his sense of fatalism. The other repeated reference, however, is to the fog. Chris' early complaint of "dirty vedder-yust fog, fog, fog, all bloody time!" (PIII 7) is echoed in the play's closing speech: "Fog, fog, fog, all bloody time. You can't see where you vas going, no" (PIII 78). Anna in her fallen state likes the fog: "I love it! I don't give a rag if it never lifts!...It makes me feel clean--out here--'s if I'd taken a bath" (PIII 26). The only time of sunshine is in Act III and here, ironically, is where Anna's fortunes seem at their lowest. Proposed to by Burke she confesses her past and finds the offer promptly withdrawn. At

the end of the act she summons a defiant resignation which scarcely masks her total despair. Given back some hope of a new life in the last act by Burke's change of mind she celebrates her new role of housewife to the accompaniment of Chris' renewed mutterings about the fog. The circular motif they form makes any suggestion of a new future for Anna highly ambiguous. For her, alone and in despair, the sun shone. With her renewed hope for a change, the fog comes down. She cannot escape the circle.⁹

In Desire Under The Elms, on the other hand, certain characters do escape from a fate which others are trapped by. This fact, together with the use of a repeated phrase in the same setting, gives recognisable shape to the play as it progresses and, with respect to the characterisation of the Force, clarifies certain points.

The number of references made by Cabot to a Calvinist God could give the impression that O'Neill's controlling Force in this play is on the lines of a more traditional concept. A theme of the play is a familiar one of conflict between nature and man's works, and is set in a rigorously puritanical world of a New England farm. Some of the stones from the hard land form a wall around the house.¹⁰ This wall confines the acting on the stage and suggests a limitation on the freedom of the central characters who enact many of the scenes by a gate in the wall. The nature of the circle, however, is carefully defined. It is man made and therefore unnatural. Thus when

Cabot complains, "God's hard, not easy! God's in the stones!" (PI 1237), clearly the God is of his own making.

In the case of Eben, his son, the situation is somewhat different. The opening scene of the play is set before the gate with Eben calling his brothers to supper. He stares up at the sky:

He sighs with a puzzled awe and blurts out with halting appreciation

EBEN God! Purty! (His eyes fall and he stares about him frowningly...He spits on the ground with intense disgust, turns and goes back into the house.) (PI 203)

The significance of this gesture, we later learn, is that the land once belonged to his mother and that his father married her solely to gain possession of it. Thus Eben, deprived of what is his, despises both his father and the land. Once he becomes sole heir by buying out his brothers, his desire for his mother's property is expressed in terms which provide a direct parallel to the first scene. On the following morning he

stares around him with glowing possessive eyes. He takes in the whole farm with his embracing glance of desire

EBEN It's purty! It's damned purty! It's mine! (He suddenly throws his head back boldly and glares with hard, defiant eyes at the sky) Mine, d'ye hear? Mine! (PI 217)

The reversal of attitudes in his doom--suggested in the word "damned"--and clearly the driving force is the wrong done to his mother. The relentlessness of the grip of the past on Eben,

and his inescapable destiny, is further suggested by the brothers' act as they leave the farm. The wall cannot stop them, born as they are of different woman and, as if to emphasise their freedom from the Force, in a gesture of defiance, they take the gate with them. Through that gap, however, comes Abbie and in Eben's relationship with her the influence of the dead mother and the past is brought out fully.

The consummation of their desire takes place in his mother's old room with Abbie playing the maternal role in her seduction of the boy: "Don't be afeered! I'll kiss ye pure, Eben--same's if I was a Maw t'ye--an' ye kin kiss me back's if yew was my son--my boy--sayin' good night t'me!" (PI 243). Incestuous love somehow turns into True Love, but it is noticable that the only way this can be affirmed, the only way Eben can escape the circle, is through death. When Abbie kills the child to prove her affection Eben shares the guilt. On their way to prison, and presumably execution, they pause by the gate:

EBEN (...points to the sunrise sky) Sun's a-rizin!
Purty, haint it?

ABBIE. Ay-eh! (They both stand for a moment
looking up raptly in attitudes strangely
aloof and devout.)

SHERRIFF. (Looking around at the farm enviously--
to his companions) It's a jim-dandy
farm, no denyin' it. Wished I owned
it! (PI 269)

Structurally the play completes the circle while again Eben finds the sky "purty" and wishes to be released from the land.

But on this occasion the desire is for freedom from his dead mother's influence, freedom from the grip of time itself.¹¹

The most striking examples of recurrent stage action, however, are found in Electra where the whole of the third play is an extended parallel to the first. Orin and Lavinia re-enact almost exactly the role of their parents in the first play, with Peter and Hazel substituting in the role of the children. That so many of the interior scenes are performed beneath the portrait of the grandfather, whose facial characteristics the next two generations resemble, also increases the time dimension beyond the play's limits. And, as in Desire, the controlling event of the characters' lives is something that happened in the past: old Abe Mannon's treatment of the Canuck girl and his brother. The familial love triangle of the first generation and the curse that engendered is repeated through the next two generations. With Lavinia left as the sole Mannon it is her choice whether or not to renew the pattern, which she would do simply by producing offspring. She comes to a recognition of this in her closing speech: "I'll live alone with the dead and keep their secrets, and let them hound me, until the curse is paid out and the last Mannon is let to die!" (PII 178).

The importance of the use of events outside the immediate time scope of the play, as in Desire and Electra, greatly enlarges the limits of the circle which the play's dramaturgy

defines. In Emperor Jones, Jones re-enacts in his circular movement the events of his life which occurred before the play begins. In The Great God Brown three generations of the Anthony and Brown families seem to repeat the same pattern. The Prologue to the play, set seven years before the time of the first act, establishes the relative positions of Brown Sr. and Anthony in their joint business; and the rivalry of their sons for the love of Margaret. The action of the play develops the rivalries of the second generation whose fortunes are in reverse proportions to their fathers'. The Epilogue is set four years after the final act and eighteen years after the Prologue, in the same place, the same time of day, and with characters in the same situation.¹² There is an overwhelming sense that the whole procedure is about to start again. As Margaret says in the curtain speech: "We are where centuries only count as seconds and after a thousand lives our eyes begin to open..." (PIII 325).

This sense of timelessness is precisely the effect intended in Strange Interlude.¹³ Here again the most important event of the play, the death of Gordon, occurs before the play begins. The effect of this on Nina Leeds and her effort to come to terms with it is the theme of the play. With each male that comes into her life she attempts to re-invoke Gordon's presence in a way which notably parallels O'Neill's description of the Force as life-destroying. Her father, Sam, Marsden, Ned

and young Gordon become infinitesimal incidents in giving life and being to Nina. On one level she is merely a severely unbalanced individual, but on another she is the controlling Force itself. Critics have always found unsatisfactory Nina's constant allusions to the concept of a female God.¹⁴ They take on great significance and become highly ironic if they are seen as a commentary on Nina's own actions. For example, she says: "We should have imagined life as created in the birth pain of God the Mother. Then we would understand why we, Her children, have inherited pain, for we would know that our life's rhythm beats from Her great heart, torn with the agony of love and birth" (PI 42-43). She struggles all the time to avoid becoming a life-giving woman as she absorbs all the males in her life.

In the central scene of the play each of the men is sitting on his chair, while "Nina remains standing, dominating them," and thinking : "My three men!...I feel their desires converge in me!... to form one complete beautiful male desire which I absorb...and am whole..." (PI 133,135). At this point she is at her utmost power, but even she is subservient to a greater power: time itself. This is why the controlling event of her destiny is rooted in the past, and why from the point of her triumph onwards the whole fabric of her power declines.

The final scene of the boat race completes what once again has become a circle. With the death of her father and

her husband, and the final break with her lover Ned, Nina has only two men left: her son young Gordon, and Marsden. That the circle is complete with the loss of her son to Madelaine, is emphasised by a repetitious sound effect which increases in intensity--a device from Emperor Jones: "The whistles and sirens from the yachts up the river begin to be heard. This grows momentarily louder as one after another yachts join in the chorus as the crews approach nearer and nearer until towards the close of the scene there is a perfect pandemonium of sound" (PI 176).

Young Gordon's success in the race is Nina's loss. With only one man, Marsden, left in her life, Nina is in the same position as she was in the first scene where she had only the solace of her father. The significance of marrying Marsden is left in no doubt. As Engel has pointed out, in marrying Marsden Nina "shall be wedded to her father, to death."¹⁵ The black costume worn by Marsden in the last scene has already been associated in Act V with death and father: "Black...in the midst of happiness...black comes...again,..death...my father ...comes between me and happiness!..."(PI 98). That Nina by facing death will escape the circle is indicated by the way young Gordon departs. Just as the first Gordon left Nina by his death in a plane crash so the second flies off in a plane. As he does so he makes a farewell circle in the sky and completes the circle of her existence.

The defining of the present and the future in terms of the past, implicit in the circular structure of the plays discussed above, receives explicit treatment in the plays written closer in time to the Iceman. Nina's utterance, "the only living life is in the past and future...the present is an interlude...strange interlude in which we call on past and future to bear witness we are living..."(PI 165), is one which could be spoken by any character in the later plays.

If there is one play prior to Iceman which utilizes all the devices so far discussed it is All God's Chillun Got Wings in which setting, repeated scenes, visual and sound motifs, and a strong sense of the past, combine to create an overwhelming impression of the circle in which Jim and Ella are trapped.¹⁶

The stage is the meeting point of three narrow streets: "Four-storey tenements stretch away down the skyline of two streets. The fire escapes are crowded with people. In the street leading left, the faces are all white; in the street leading right, all black" (PII 301). In three successive scenes from each group simultaneously a lone singer is heard, the groups and the song reflecting the respective moods, which initially are of joy and laughter, but by the third scene are of melancholy and fatigue. Besides setting the mood for the ensuing action, the function of this choral effect is to widen the application of the themes developed on the stage principally by only two people, and give their actions a sense

of inevitability. In addition, in each scene a man with a hand-organ enters playing some currently popular tune.

The full effect of this repetition comes in a climactic fourth scene. There is a set change and no detail is without significance. The foreground is a street with a church at back-center stage "in a yard enclosed by a rusty iron railing with a gate at centre. On each side of this yard are tenements." All the windows have blinds drawn and there is total silence. A Negro is heard singing a simple poignant song. With one clang of the church bell the empty set bursts into life: "As if it were a signal, people--men and women, children--pour from the two tenements, whites from the tenement to the left, blacks from the one to the right. They hurry to form into two racial lines on each side of the gate, rigid and unyielding, staring across at each other with bitter hostile eyes." Jim and Ella emerge from the church door which slams behind them. The whole tableau freezes and the organ-grinder enters. "As he finishes the bell of the church clangs one more stroke, instantly dismissing." Then Jim in a halting monologue articulates a theme of pathetic hope to finish the scene.(PII 318-20)

The movement of the second half of the play completes the circle already seen to be taking shape. Also in the second act O'Neill introduces a mask as a symbolic piece of stage property. As part of the room's furnishings, it is set in

significant contrast to the other pieces of furniture described as "naively, childishly gaudy". The mask is "a grotesque face, inspiring obscure, dim connotations in one's mind, but beautifully done, conceived in a true religious spirit. In this room, however, the mask acquires an arbitrary accentuation. It dominates by a diabolical quality that contrast imposes upon it" (PII 322). The connection between the mask and the other devices which combine to limit the freedom of Jim and Ella and define the circle is made apparent in the second scene of the act: "The walls of the room appear shrunk in, the ceiling lowered, so that the furniture, the portrait, the mask look unnaturally large and domineering" (PII 331).

The naive Ella, totally bewildered by the efforts of her husband to make manifest in his actions the quality of culture that produced the mask, does everything possible to frustrate him. The mask represents for Ella both the "diabolical qualities her prejudiced mind fears to be inherent in her husband, and an actual mask covering his white soul. With knife in hand she addresses the mask:

What have I ever done wrong to you? What have you got against me? I married you, didn't I? Why don't you let Jim alone? Why don't you let him be happy as he is--with me? Why don't you let me be happy? He's white, isn't he--the whitest man that ever lived? Where do you come in to interfere? Black! Black! Black as dirt! You've poisoned me! I can't wash myself clean! Oh, I hate you! I hate you! (PII 339).

In the final scene of the play Ella thrusts a knife through the

the mask to kill it, and in a mood of exaltation she and Jim revert to their childhood world of playing games. The only way they can find peace is to re-create the present in terms of the past, to re-create a world of illusion where the "reality" of race does not matter.

The device of the mask dramatically brings into focus the theme of prejudice as illusion of the mind, while the circular movement suggests both the inevitable control this illusion has over the characters and emphasises, once again, that the struggle is waged against time itself. That time is as much an illusion is implicit in All God's Chillun and, as we shall see, in almost every play where reality and illusion are the central concern.

In none of the plays written during O'Neill's period of active dominance of the American stage, 1916-1933, does he concern himself with the assumptions about Man and Time that lie behind the dramaturgy of his plays. We have seen how he creates a sense of timelessness by giving thematic emphasis to an event prior to the play's beginning, and by indicating through parallel situations that the future will be no different. We have seen how the lack of any linear progress, dramatized by repetitions and circular movements, suggests a concept of static time in which the past, present, and future are the same. Characters such as Lavinia Mannon, Nina Leeds, Eben Cabot, Jones, Margaret Anthony, all have an acute awareness of

the past, and the inevitability of their respective fates is left in no doubt.

But as long as the struggle against the Force is seen as tragic and enobling, the dramatic emphasis is on the glory of that struggle rather than on a depiction of the nature of the Force. When O'Neill's concern shifts to dramatizing how Lavinia, Nina and Anna Christie, manage to live behind their closed doors, at the completion of their circles, when he begins a play, as he does in Iceman, at the point where so many previous ones finish, then the idea of progressive time as illusion, an idea implicit in the dramaturgy of so many earlier plays, becomes the dominant theme.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER ONE

¹O'Neill's Scenic Images, p. 80.

²It is interesting to note that O'Neill's lengthier plays tended to be his biggest commercial successes. Strange Interlude in the first production of 1928 ran for a total of 426 performances, the longest run for any O'Neill play before the 1956 revival of Iceman. Even Electra achieved a total of 150 performances before it was taken on an equally successful road-tour. Miller, Eugene O'Neill and The American Critics, pp. 132-165, has a chronological list of all important domestic productions of O'Neill's plays.

³Eugene O'Neill, pp.20-21.

⁴The significance of the last scene has been the subject of much controversy. Opening night critics saw no point in it and, much to O'Neill's distress, the scene was completely cut in subsequent performances. See Gelbs, O'Neill, p. 412. Doris V. Falk, oblivious to the ironic parallels between first and last scenes, finds it a "non-sequitor" (Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension, p. 44).

⁵The shanty "Shenandoah"--use this more-- as a sort of theme song--its simple sad rhythm of hopeless sea longing peculiarly significant-- even the stupid words have striking meaning when considered in relation to tragic events in play. ...On the question of dialogue-- think I have hit on the right rhythm of prose--monotonous, simple words, driving insistence --tom tom from Jones in thought repetition...and reptition of same scene--in its essential spirit, sometimes even in its exact words, but between different characters--following plays as development of fate--theme demands this repetition-- Mannon & Christine (about Brant) in 1st play, Christine & Orin (about Brant) in second play--Mannon & Christine in 4th act, 1st play, Lavinia & Orin in 2nd act, 3rd play--etc. Reprinted in Horst Frenz, ed., American Playwrights on Drama, pp. 3-15.

⁶Michael Kahn's 1971 production of Electra at Stratford Conn. abandons O'Neill's naturalistic set in favour of a more symbolic one. Huge, bare, white panels, form a semi-circle around a raised circular stage flanked by two white columns. The characters are dwarfed and enveloped by the mausoleum-like structure for both interior and exterior scenes. The sense of fate, of imprisonment within the circle, is ever-present. The

whiteness serves as a contrast to the violently coloured actions and passions of the Mannons, and also strongly suggests impotence and a sense of total emptiness in their lives.

⁷Falk quotes O'Neill's acknowledged interest in Jung, and interprets Emperor Jones on the lines of "Jung's fundamental premise--the existence and power of the collective unconscious" (Eugene O'Neill and The Tragic Tension, p. 66).

⁸Koischwitz, O'Neill, pp. 104-05. Quoted by Tiusanen, O'Neill's Scenic Images, p. 45.

⁹When Anna Christie was first performed critics complained, to O'Neill's amazement, at the "contrived happy ending". Feeling compelled to correct this misinterpretation, in an article printed on Dec. 18 in The Times he wrote: "I wanted to have the audience leave with a deep feeling of life flowing on, of the past which is never the past--but always the birth of the future--of a problem solved for a moment but by the very nature of its solution involving new problems...Three characters have been revealed in all their intrinsic verity, under the acid test of a fateful crisis in their lives. They have solved this crisis for the moment as best they may, in accordance with the will that is in each of them. The curtain falls. Behind it their lives go on...". Reprinted in Gelbs, O'Neill, p.481.

¹⁰In The Straw Eileen shrinks "instinctively as far away as she can from the mysterious darkness which rises at the roadside like an imprisoning wall" (PII 383). In More Stately Mansions many scenes take place within a walled garden, where the wall explicitly symbolises the Force within which Deborah is trapped: "But a time comes when, suddenly, a discontent gnaws at your heart while you cast longing eyes beyond the garden wall at Life which passes by so horribly unaware that you are still alive!" (MSM 11).

¹¹Tornqvist analyses these repeated scenes to show how differing attitudes among the characters towards the land signify the strength of the hold it has on them. Eben in the end is completely free from the land "seeing only the rising sun, the grace of God, the hope of resurrection" (Drama of Souls, p. 249).

¹²Tornqvist notes "the repetition renders the situation archetypal, timeless and, in a sense, fated" (Drama of Souls, p.252).

¹³Leech rightly says, "Strange Interlude had to be a long play because the spectators had to feel the long stretch of time,

and yet at the end had to see it not only as a relentless but a very small thing." See "Eugene O'Neill and his Plays", Critical Quarterly, III (Autumn 1961), 251.

- 14 Raleigh sees the play as another example of O'Neill's "principle of polarity" at work in the imagination of Nina whose "obsessions with rhythm and polarity congeal into a kind of mythology about the existence of a Mother God" (The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, p. 12). Tiusanen dismisses them as usually not "well integrated with the rest of the play", and merely "a conspicuous literary layer" (Scenic Images, p. 220). Falk is more to the point seeing Nina as "an embodiment of God the Mother, but not as the Cybel she describes" (Eugene O'Neill and The Tragic Tension, p. 125).
- 15 The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill, p. 209.
- 16 Tiusanen rightly asserts that the entire first act "can be called an example of how repetitions, unnecessary on the printed page, may in the stream of stage action prove to be assets for the playwright" (Scenic Images, p. 177).

II

ILLUSION

In an article called "Memoranda on Masks",¹ published in The American Spectator of November 1932, O'Neill stated his credo on the use of masks in drama:

...I hold more and more surely to the conviction that the use of masks will be discovered eventually to be the freest solution of the modern dramatists problem as to how--with the great possible dramatic clarity and economy of means--he can express those profound hidden conflicts of the mind which the probings of psychology continue to disclose to us... A comprehensive expression is demanded here, a chance for eloquent presentation, a new form of drama projected from a fresh insight into the inner forces motivating the actions and reactions of men and women (a new and truer characterization, in other words), a drama of souls, and the adventures of "Free Wills", with the masks that govern them and constitute their fates...

For all the promise of a "new form of drama" envisaged in this passage O'Neill was not the dramatist to bring it to fruition. To be sure Days Without End, produced in 1933, is a type of mask drama but the production not only marked the final attempt by O'Neill to utilize the mask device, it also marked the end of his period as an active dramatist. Not until twelve years later, with the production of Iceman, did O'Neill return to the American stage, and as we shall see, Iceman raises questions about illusion and reality quite contrary to the spirit and intent of the "Memoranda".

But as a statement on the subject matter of the drama written up to that date the "Memoranda" differs only slightly from the letter written to Quinn in 1924.² Again O'Neill expresses his concern to dramatize "the adventures of 'Free Wills' with the masks that govern them and constitute their fates". Clearly the idea of "man's glorious, self-destructive struggle to make the Force express him" is still uppermost in O'Neill's scheme of things. The difference between the two statements lies in the characterization of the Force. In the earlier declaration he describes it as "Fate, God, our biological past creating our present, whatever one calls it--Mystery certainly..." In the "Memoranda", however, the reference of the "inner forces" suggest that the Force is not an external one, that it derives its power from within the mind of the individual himself. This being the case, man's lack of free will is a self-inflicted restriction, a paradoxical state of affairs which presumably O'Neill recognises by his use of quotation marks around "Free Will".

Why there should be a self-inflicted restriction is not a question given much consideration by O'Neill in the drama before Iceman. Rather, the existence of the Force is taken for granted and the dramatic emphasis is on man's struggle against it. Nevertheless, by studying O'Neill's use of masks it is possible to determine some of the assumptions about illusion which the dramaturgy implicitly suggests. These assumptions

are ones which come to the forefront in Iceman and are ones which make the promise of a "new form" of drama envisaged in the "Memoranda" highly unlikely.

As was noted in the first chapter, O'Neill uses a mask as a symbolic piece of stage property³ in only one play: All God's Chillun Got Wings, where it represents, as a work of art, the validity of Jim's claim to equality with the white-man.⁴ At the same time it functions as a mask representing the illusion of inequality of which Ella's racial prejudice is based. This conflict of functions is an embodiment of the warring impulses within Ella's mind as she veers from love to hatred of her husband. That there is little difference between the two emotions is suggested by the use of one symbol to represent both. Thus Ella's destruction of the mask is an act of both love and hate. She symbolically destroys the illusion of Jim's inferior status, but also the evidence of his equality. That the two need to recreate a world of childhood illusion in order to find peace after this act suggests that while illusion may be iniquitous in the one case it is clearly necessary in some form or another.

There is no acceptance of this need within the play, however. The drama concentrates almost entirely on the struggle of Jim to cast off his negritude and become a white man, while simultaneously wishing to be Ella's slave. The latter motive triumphs because it coincides with Ella's foremost desire to

retain her sense of superiority. The cost to Jim of this submission, presumably, is what O'Neill sees as the tragedy. Certainly Jim's and the play's closing speech is fraught with pathos and irony. In an "ecstasy of religious humility" Jim begs God for forgiveness: "Let this fire of burning suffering purify me of selfishness and make me worthy of the child you send me for the woman You take away!" (PII 342). The hope is as illusory as that expressed at the end of the first act, where Jim professes a similar belief in the joy that his marriage will bring. That failed totally and we are surely meant to see Jim's final plea as equally deluded.⁵

The heroism and pathos O'Neill sees in this struggle to avoid fate belies any question as to whether or not such a struggle is worthwhile. Many characters in O'Neill's earlier plays share Jim's determination to fight the Force, because this for O'Neill is the essence of tragedy. Yet particularly in those plays where the mask is used in one form or another, O'Neill portrays a world where illusion, from the later point of view of a more compassionate and less romantic O'Neill, would be confirmed as absolutely necessary.

In The Hairy Ape, for instance, Yank is living in a world of illusion at the beginning of the play. The description of the forecastle seems realistic: "Tiers of narrow, steel bunks, three deep, on all sides. An entrance in rear. Benches on the floor before the bunks". But this is followed by an ex-

pressionistic declaration:

The treatment of this scene, or of any other scene in the play should by no means be naturalistic. The effect sought after is a cramped space in the bowels of a ship, imprisoned by white steel. The lines of bunks, the uprights supporting them, cross each other like a steel framework of a cage. The ceiling crushes down upon the men's heads. They cannot stand upright. (PIII 207)

The purpose, of course, is to express visually the predicament Yank eventually will find himself in. The play develops as a gradual process of exposing Yank's illusion that he has any freedom or place in the world other than as a prisoner in a cage, whether it be the unrecognised one of the ship's forecastle, or the all too evident one of the ape's cage in the zoo.

Initially Yank is happy with the illusion of freedom. To Paddy's lament that they are all "caged in by steel from the sight of the sky like bloody apes in the zoo!" (PIII 214), Yank retorts: "Slaves, hell! We run de whole woiks. All de rich guys dat tink dey're somep'n, dey ain't nothin'! Dey don't belong. But us guys, we're in de move, we're at de bottom, de whole ting is us!" (PIII 216). Yank is not the only one trapped in a cage, however. His name indicates he is a type of Everyman, and as he moves into the outside world he progresses from cage to cage whose inhabitants, regardless of social status, are depicted as the same type of people.⁶ The "procession of gaudy marionettes" on Fifth Avenue with their "detached, mechanical unawareness" (PIII 263) resembles the stokers who work in "a

mechanical regulated recurrence, a tempo" (PIII 223). Just as Yank is unaware of imprisonment on the ship, so the crowd on Fifth Avenue are quite oblivious of their predicament. In the first production this crowd were masked.⁷

But The Hairy Ape is not a play to question why the illusion is present. Yank's illusion of belonging has to be shattered because the subject of the drama, according to O'Neill, "is the same ancient one that always was and always will be the one subject for drama, and that is man and his struggle with his own fate".⁸ O'Neill at this point is at one with Ahab in his determination to smash through the "paste-board mask".⁹ It is inconceivable that man can live in a world of illusion: "Dogma for the new masked drama--one's outer life passes in a solitude hounded by the masks of others; one's inner life passes in a solitude hounded by the masks of oneself".¹⁰

That was written in 1933 and is an apt description of the theory behind many of the plays already written. For others, however, it is not so apt. The sense of torment, of characters "hounded" by masks, is contrary to the sense of peace many characters find in hiding behind a mask. In a number of plays the faces of characters are compared to masks in the stage directions.¹¹ The masks are ones which usually express an attitude of extreme emotion, as if the only way to cope with the emotion is to freeze it into a mask. In Horizon, for instance, after the death of her husband and the failure of her son to keep the

farm and his marriage thriving Mrs. Mayo's face "has lost all character, become a weak mask wearing a helpless, doleful expression of being constantly on the verge of comfortless tears" (PIII 112). In Strange Interlude, Nina's face is described as "a pale expressionless mask drained of all emotional response to human contacts" (PI 39), following the death of her lover, father, and her frenetic love affairs in the hospital. After the death of his mother Marsden's face similarly "becomes distorted into an ugly mask of grief" (PI 98). These characters adopt mask-like expressions in a purely defensive reaction. For them, illusion is a means of controlling emotions which otherwise would be intolerable. In Desire, Cabot when he learns that the dead child is not his "hardens his face into a stony mask" and explains: "I got t'be--like a stone--a rock o' jedgment" (PI 264).

In all instances the mask expression is connected with death, and those who adopt it seem determined to die a little themselves, to become as hard and as unresponsive as stone. In The Fountain Death itself is masked: we see "a tall woman's figure, like a piece of ancient sculpture, shrouded in long draperies of a blue that is almost black. The face is a pale mask with features indistinguishable save for the eyes that stare straight ahead with a stony penetration that sees through and beyond things" (PI 438). But characters who willingly adopt masks, who wish to die a little in life are not at the

centre of O'Neill's drama. Rather he is concerned with those who struggle against the mask, who are hounded by masks.

In Electra, although no actual masks are called for in the stage directions,¹² emphasis is placed on the mask-like expression that every member of the Mannon family wears to represent the idea of "fate springing out of the family".¹³ This fate has cursed generations. In the interior scenes portraits of the past Mannons show faces all which "have the same mask quality of those of the living characters in the play" (PII 79). The success, or rather lack of success, that the Mannons have in their struggle against the curse can be gauged by changes in the mask-like expressions on their faces. Initially those of Christine and Lavinia are "wonderfully lifelike", but masks nevertheless in which only the eyes are really alive. Ezra's mask is "more pronounced" as he will be the first to die. After Orin's death Lavinia's face undergoes changes which should suggest how near her own end is: "The Mannon mask semblance of her face appears intensified now. It is deeply lined...congealed into a stony emotionless expression" (PII 170). Although she does not actually die, that her life will be a living death is indicated by directing our attention toward her eyes. The one feature of her face which always indicated life behind the mask becomes "frozen" (PII 179).

In the plays where actual masks are used there is no one explanation of their function. In The Great God Brown, for

instance, the almost unanimous reaction of its first critics was to regard them as symbols of the false fronts the characters put on to face the world.¹⁴ But O'Neill, it seems, had a far more ambitious purpose. In the note prefacing the Wilderness edition of the play he wrote: "I sought to convey the dramatic conflicts in the lives and within the souls of the characters. The use of masks seemed indispensable for the accomplishment of this purpose. The mask enabled me to dramatize the transfer of personality and express symbolically the mystery inherent in all human lives."¹⁵ This mystery failed to appear in the performance, however. In a letter to Benjamin de Casseres, O'Neill deplored the distorted impression people received from the production:

When you read what I wanted those masks to get across--the abstract drama of the forces behind the people--as is suggested in the script you will remember more clearly how wrong they were in the production. They suggested only the bromidic, hypocritical and defensive double-personality of people in their personal relationships--a thing I never would have needed masks to convey. 16

For all his protestation to the contrary the masks in Brown, at least those of the women, are worn as protective coverings. In Cybel the prostitute's parlor her mask lies beside an alarm clock while she "chews gum like a sacred cow forgetting time with an eternal end" (PIII 278), like an "unmoved idol of Mother Earth"¹⁷ (PIII 284). She explains to Dion that the mask is for the customers who try to know too much: "It

makes them weak. I never puzzled them with myself. I gave them a Tart. They understood her and knew their parts and acted naturally. And on both sides we were able to keep our real virtue, if you get me" (PIII 284). Whereas Cybel's mask protects the heart of pure gold against the ravages of men and time, Margaret's mask protects only her public image. It is "the brave face she puts on before the world to hide her suffering and disillusionment", while beneath the mask her real face becomes "lined, drawn and careworn" (PIII 291).

When the mask involves the transfer of personality, however, the issues become more complicated. In a letter to the New York Evening Post, Feb. 13, 1926,¹⁸ O'Neill painstakingly explained the psychology involved in the mask of Dion Anthony:

Dion Anthony--Dionysus and St. Anthony--the creative pagan acceptance of life, fighting eternal war with the masochistic, life-denying spirit of Christianity as represented by St. Anthony--the whole struggle resulting in this modern day in mutual exhaustion--creative joy in life for life's sake frustrated, rendered abortive, distorted by morality from Pan into Satan, into a Mephistopheles mocking himself in order to feel alive...

The struggle between the two conflicting aspects of personality is primarily an internal one. It is aggravated not initiated by the outside world, as O'Neill makes clear:

Dion's mask of Pan which he puts on as a boy is not only a defense against the world for the supersensitive painter-poet underneath it, but also an integral part of his character as the artist. The world is not only blind to the man beneath, but it also sneers at and condemns the

Pan-mask it sees. After that Dion's inner self retrogresses along the line of Christian resignation until it partakes of the nature of the Saint while at the same time the outer Pan is slowly transformed by his struggle with reality into Mephistopheles...

Billy Brown, on the other hand, "the college-bred American Business man" (PIII 274) and without an ounce of artistic sensibility in him, has no need to adopt a defensive mask. However he does assume the mask of the dead Dion because, as O'Neill explains, he

has always envied the creative life force in Dion --what he himself lacks. When he steals Dion's mask of Mephistopheles he thinks he is getting the power to live creatively, while in reality- he is only stealing that creative power made self-destructive by complete frustration. The devil of mocking doubt makes short work of him. It enters him, rending him apart, torturing and transfiguring him until he is even forced to wear a mask of his success, William A. Brown, before the world as well as Dion's mask toward wife and children. Thus Billy Brown becomes not himself to anyone. And thus he partakes of Dion's anguish...

Brown's adoption of Dion's mask is the transfer of personality O'Neill wished to dramatize. What happens to Brown, presumably, is meant to parallel Dion's fate. Certain inconsistencies in the function of the Mephistophelean mask, however, make this quite untenable. The destructive part of Dion's personality derives its power from forces as much internal as external: the St. Anthony in Dion will not allow the Dionysian artistic impulses the freedom they require. Not only has Brown no artistic sensibility, we are given no indication that he possesses the moral forces equivalent to Dion's Christianity.¹⁹ There is no

satisfactory explanation as to why Brown should suffer Dion's fate, or why the mask of Mephistopheles should contain such independent power.

If the audiences failed to understand the subtilities of the masks in Brown, O'Neill made sure there would be no lack of comprehension toward Lazarus Laughed, at least with regard to the masks. All characters are masked except Lazarus who raised from the dead and "freed now from the fear of death, wears no mask"²⁰ (PI 274). Others less fortunate wear masks through a fear of both death and life: "Men call life death and fear it. They hide from it in horror, Their lives are spent in hiding" (PI 309). Again we see the mask adopted as a means of defense. Lazarus and O'Neill's message, reiterated time and again, is that fear and masks are unnecessary: "There is no death" (PI 279). Considering the fate of Lazarus' followers it is difficult to imagine any production of the play in which the stark reality of what happens on the stage does not make nonsense of the theme of the play.²¹ However many times Lazarus reaffirms the power of life over death those who follow his word are butchered, albeit in a state of ecstasy and much to the confusion of the general sent to kill them: "They did not wait for our attack. They charged upon us, laughing! They tore our swords away from us, laughing, and we laughed with them! They stabbed themselves, dancing as though it were a festival" (PI 321).

In contrast to Lazarus Laughed there is only one masked character in O'Neill's last proper mask drama, Days Without End.²² The two conflicting elements in the characters of John Loving are played by two actors. John's face is "handsome, with rather heavy, conventional American type of good looks". Loving, invisible to the other characters in the play, wears a mask "whose features reproduce exactly the features of John's face--the death mask of a John who has died with a sneer of scornful mockery on his lips" (PIII 493-94). The cause of this split in John Loving's personality, it turns out, can be attributed to the death of his parents which destroyed his belief in a just God, but did not destroy his need to believe in something. The search, continually hampered by the new found scepticism embodied in Loving, takes in and rejects all forms of religion and philosophies and finally settles on love. This is the point John and Loving have reached at the beginning of the play. John's love for his wife, on the other hand desperately needed while on the other scorned as hypocritical and self-restrictive, is the subject over which John and Loving have their final battle.

As Elsa lies dying of remorse at her husband's adultery, the guilt in John overcomes the destructive cynicism of Loving and he returns to the Catholic church for help. This time his prayers are answered. Loving dies helpless in the face of faith and Elsa recovers. John Loving, a whole personality again, reaffirms his belief in God: "Thou art the Way--The Truth--the

Resurrection and the Life, and he that believeth in Thy love, his love shall never die!" (PIII 566).

As Falk comments, Days is an "unconvincing drama and a philosophical whistling in the dark".²³ Clark quotes O'Neill saying some years after its production that "the hero's final gesture calls for alteration".²⁴ But as Falk demonstrates O'Neill changed the ending of the play in almost every draft.²⁵ However embarrassing the final conclusion may be it indicates, as in no other play before Iceman, O'Neill's grudging acceptance that illusion is necessary.²⁶

If O'Neill had followed the promise of writing a new form of drama set out in "Memoranda on Masks" John Loving would surely have found no comfort in a return to his faith. O'Neill's whole concept of tragedy during the years up until 1933 is based on the never ending heroic struggle of man against such self-deluding myths. As we have seen O'Neill frequently portrays a world in which illusion dominates. Characters adopt mask-like expressions or hide behind actual masks in an effort, conscious or otherwise, to preserve a grasp on life, to defend themselves against forces which otherwise would destroy them. There is little acceptance that this is a desirable state of affairs. Yank, Jim, Lavinia, Dion and Brown, Lazarus, all must fight against illusion or there would be no tragedy and no drama. The struggle ends in heroic death, or in the case of Jim and Lavinia, a move back into an illusory world--a living death. But Days

Without End finds the hero resorting to a belief in faith and to a hope in the future. The only difference from the ending of Chillun lies in the very hope expressed in the ability of illusion to support life. In the one play the hope is pathetic, in the other proven by a miracle. It is a difference in attitude on O'Neill's part, but a crucial one in that it forms the basis of the drama written in the last period of O'Neill's life.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER TWO

¹Reprinted in Cargill et al., O'Neill and His Plays, pp.116-18.

²See Introduction, p. 5.

³Tiusanen sees the use of this mask and indeed much of O'Neill's concept of the mask play as the influence of Kenneth Macgowan and his book Masks and Demons. (O'Neill's Scenic Images, p.178).

⁴Leech, O'Neill, p. 44, and others make this point.

⁵Francis Fergusson sees in the "evasive finale" an "extraordinary failure of Mr. O'Neill's to master his material" (Cargill et al., p. 275). Carpenter claims the end "rings false" (Eugene O'Neill, p. 104). Falk while admitting the "ending is right and inevitable for this play, perfectly consistent with the portrait of Jim" nevertheless finds it "a travesty of the resurrection implied in true tragedy" (Eugene O'Neill and The Tragic Tension, p. 90).

⁶Tornqvist notes the close parallels between both the characters and situations of Yank and Mildred: "Super-race and sub-race, are...found to be in basically the same dilemma, a dilemma arising from their removal from nature and their inability to attain spiritual stature" (A Drama of Souls, pp.219-20).

⁷According to the Gelbs, O'Neill, p. 495, this was on the suggestion of Blanche Hayes, the costume designer for the first production.

⁸From the New York Herald-Tribune, March 16, 1924. Reprinted in Cargill et al., pp. 110-12.

⁹Raleigh sees Melville as the one American writer "to whom O'Neill has the most affinities, in the content, in the form, in the very language that he wrote" (The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, p. 251).

- 10 From "Memoranda on Masks", Cargill et al., p.117.
- 11 Tornqvist analyses these references and comes to the conclusion that "when dealing with the mask face symbiosis, we should not think so much in terms of surface and depth or persona and shadow as in terms of conflicting impulses of death and life, hatred and love, (Nietzschean) pride and (Christian) humility" (A Drama of Souls, pp. 119-20).
- 12 According to O'Neill, "masks were called for in one draft of the three plays. But the classical connotation was too insistent. Masks in that connection demand great languages to speak--which let me out of it with a sickening bump!" ("Second Thoughts", The American Spectator, December 1932). Reprinted in Cargill et al., pp.118-20.
- 13 "Working Notes and Extracts", Frenz ed., American Playwrights on Drama, p. 7. First published as "O'Neill's Own Story of Electra in the Making" in the New York Herald-Tribune of November 3, 1931.
- 14 Gilbert W. Gabriel called the play "a cycle of our naked souls and the masks in which we shield them" (New York Sun, January 1926). Reprinted in Cargill et al., pp. 175-76. The Gelbs reprint more reviews, all of which find the play "interesting" but "confusing" (O'Neill, pp. 592-93).
- 15 Vol. X, p. xi.
- 16 Quoted in Tornqvist, A Drama of Souls, p. 122.
- 17 Tornqvist, noting the juxtaposition of mask and clock, comments: "The prostitute, this seems to indicate, is the temporal, perverted counterpart of the eternal, virtuous Earth Mother" (A Drama of Souls, p. 123). Raleigh, noting her lines of "gnomic wisdom" scattered throughout the play, sees Cybel as the spokeswoman for the view of the world as a "recognisable and unambiguous monolith, with certain recurring and basic repetitions, which one simply accepts" (Eugene O'Neill p. 119). Cybel is to Leech "both the literary stereotype of the good-hearted prostitute and the earth-mother, all wise", and "especially difficult to endure" (O'Neill, p. 66).
- 18 Reprinted in Barret H. Clark, Eugene O'Neill: The Man and His Plays, pp. 104-06.
- 19 Falk sees the masks of Dion and Billy as ultimately halves of one and the same personality, on the lines of Jungian psychology (Eugene O'Neill and The Tragic Tension, p. 105). Carpenter sees

them "in one sense, two separate and opposing characters; in another, they are conflicting aspects of the single character, 'Man'. Both the complexity and the confusion of the play lies in its uncertainty concerning these two alternatives" (Eugene O'Neill, p. 111). Tornqvist, having analysed the contradictions in the use of the masks, concludes that "the confusion stems from the fact that there is no unifying principle underlying the scheme. Or, if there is, no one, including the author himself, has yet revealed it" (A Drama of Souls, p. 127).

²⁰ Raleigh notes that Lazarus alone is "a complete, unified, and harmonious human being" (The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, p. 44).

²¹ Lazarus Laughed is one of the few O'Neill plays yet to have a professional production. It was performed at the Pasadena Community Playhouse in 1928 where, according to George C. Warren it succeeded as "a pageant...more than as a play, interesting as the text is" (The San Francisco Chronicle, April 10, 1928). Reprinted in Cargill et al., pp. 178-80. Leech generously comments: "...To stage it or to see it would be at the best an exhausting exercise" (O'Neill, p. 71).

²² Falk, quoting O'Neill's opinion of Faust: "For is not the whole of Goethe's truth for our time just that Mephistopheles and Faust are one and the same--are Faust", sees the play as "O'Neill's version of the Faust legend" (Eugene O'Neill and The Tragic Tension, p. 147).

²³ Ibid., p. 146.

²⁴ Eugene O'Neill: The Man and His Plays, p. 142.

²⁵ Eugene O'Neill and The Tragic Tension, pp. 148-52.

²⁶ Raleigh couples the play with Welded as "dreadful plays, two of O'Neill's worst in banality, stale rhetoric, inconclusive characterization, and a kind of embarrassing...outpouring of the author's own thoughts and desires". He rightly notes, however, that "it was probably necessary for O'Neill to write these plays, in order to cast off their burdens, so as to go on and write the last masterpieces" (The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, p. 132).

III

TIME AND ILLUSION IN THE ICEMAN COMETH

The Iceman Cometh, the last O'Neill play produced on Broadway during his lifetime, opened at the Martin Beck Theatre on October 9, 1946. "Most of the daily newspaper critics", to quote the Gelbs, "applauded the Guild production. As for the play itself, the critics were divided among those who considered it a masterpiece, those who praised it with reservation, and those who found it a great disappointment. Most of the reviewers, even those favorably disposed, complained that the play was unnecessarily long and repetitious."¹ From what is known of the details of the production its praise at the expense of the play itself is somewhat surprising. The producer Lawrence Langner, for example, repeatedly insisted on many cuts and obviously saw no value in the repetitions. As O'Neill allowed the play to be reduced by only fifteen minutes, the repetitions, with no use made of them, must have seemed extremely tedious. James Barton, the actor playing Hickey, apparently had little or no voice left for his twenty minute speech in the fifth act. And, worst of all, it seems the production was totally without humour.² Newspaper criticism, however, by its nature is not expected to be profound. Literary critics with more time to evaluate the play rather than its production are usually more perceptive and analytic.

With respect to the early critical reaction to The Iceman this is not the case. Many of O'Neill's plays generated an extreme response, favourable or otherwise, but none attracted the venom that came to be directed at The Iceman. Three critics in particular have championed the anti-O'Neill cause and each one of them exemplifies Dudley Nichols' remark that "The Iceman Cometh, like any great play, reveals its reviewers more than they reveal the play."³ In The Times Literary Supplement of April 10, 1948, there appeared a scathing attack on The Iceman and much of O'Neill's other drama. The fury of the anonymous reviewer is stoked not so much by the quality or otherwise of the drama as by the fact that Hickey is the son of a clergyman whose portrait simply does not correspond to the fact that "nearly one in 12 of the Americans who have risen to distinction are clergymen's sons." He also objects violently to O'Neill's view of mankind: "There is nothing here of courage and endurance, nothing of unflinching faith, nothing of self-sacrifice deliberately made. The O'Neill world is a dirty pub, frequented by drunks and disorderlies and shiftless loafers..."⁴ Ladies Home Journal indignation may be understandable in ex-army majors of clergyman stock, but what excuse has Mary McCarthy? Her analysis of the play labours under exactly the same critical criterion: if the play does not correspond to one's own view of reality then the play is a bad one. Her specific complaint is that O'Neill's drunks are not true to life: "...None of the charac-

ters is visibly drunk, nobody has a hangover, and, with one brief exception, nobody has the shakes."⁵ To equate naturalism with verisimilitude is bad enough but Miss McCarthy's faculties are further put in question when, in her "bony synopsis" she describes Hickey as mad. A cursory reading of the text makes clear that Hickey's madness is the last of his illusions. Eric Bentley's criticism of the play is equally disingenuous and a perfect example of how to damn with faint praise. He notes how O'Neill was "raised to the American peerage: his picture was on the cover of Time magazine," and how "he had been honored with prefaces by Joseph Wood Krutch and Lionel Trilling"; so Bentley thinks it "really would be nice to like O'Neill." Speaking as a director Bentley insists that "To get to the core of reality in The Iceman-- which is also its artistic, its dramatic core--you have to cut away the rotten fruit of unreality around it. More plainly stated: you have to cut."⁶ His production was a failure.

Jose Quintero's 1956 production of Iceman at the Circle in the Square is important for two reasons: it proved the untampered play could be produced successfully; and it heralded a reappraisal of the play by the critics. What Quintero did, judging from the reviews, was to produce the play as it is written. Hickey was given his proper role as the protagonist (Bentley had made Larry the centre of dramatic interest) and portrayed as a evangelist: "His unction, condescension and

piety introduces an element of moral affectation that clarifies the perspective of the drama as a whole", wrote Brook Atkinson.⁷ The comedy was restored and sense made of the length. Quintero recognised that Iceman is not written in an orthodox way: "It resembles a complex musical form, with themes repeating themselves with slight variations, as melodies do in a symphony. It is a valid device, though O'Neill has often been criticized for it by those who do not see the strength and depth of meaning the repetition achieves."⁸

To decide what these themes are has been the aim of critics ever since. At least five distinct themes have been isolated and each proclaimed the centre of the play: love, death, illusion, peace, existence. According to Engel, "the unmasking of love is the main intention of the play."⁹ Chabrowe sees a more elevated purpose: "If men were capable of a higher form of spiritual life by which they could overcome reality, they would not have to escape it in death...Reality is...ultimately a choice between psychological and physical death. If the pipe dream which is psychological death is shattered, there is no choice but physical death inasmuch as life itself is unlivable."¹⁰ Day supports this contention with his view of the play: "All men are waiting for the iceman, but only those who have shed their ultimate illusions are aware that the final end and realized meaning of their lives is death."¹¹ Falk says the Iceman shows that "all self-images are illusions...projected by

a self that is worthless, if it exists at all." According to her the play affirms that "the self and the ideal are equal-- and both equal to zero."¹² Engel sees peace as the "central human need" of the characters in Iceman, but it is peace without love-- peace in "dream, drunkenness, or death."¹³ Rosamund Gilder in an early review describes the play as "an allegory of man's pitiful state, a parable of his search for redemption."¹⁴ Larry Slade's "existential dilemma"¹⁵ is seen by Brustein as the pose of a young O'Neill who in Iceman wrote a "chronicle of his own spiritual metamorphosis from a messianic into an existential rebel."¹⁶ Certainly all these themes are present, but whether any can be isolated and labelled the theme of the play is questionable. Nichols is right when he states: "The truth is about The Iceman Cometh, all kinds of things are happening all the time, but you have to listen and watch, and you hear repetition because that is the way O'Neill planned it, so that you cannot miss his meaning, and the emotions generated by his drama."¹⁷ Nevertheless, although all kinds of things are happening there has to be some unifying factor which draws themes together and achieves a unity.

We have seen in the previous chapters how the circular structure of earlier plays implicitly suggests a concept of static time; how illusion is frequently the final resort of characters unable to continue any longer the struggle against a Force which is life-denying; how the struggle can be seen as

one waged against the Force of time itself. In Iceman the characters no longer struggle to break out of a circular pattern of time, simply because they pretend they are not in one. An escape into illusion has taken place before the play begins. The villain of the piece is still static time, but there are no heroes who struggle against it. Rather the force is defeated by a wilful pretence that it does not exist. Those who attempt to shatter the illusion are seen as the cohorts of the Force, as harbingers, intentional or otherwise, of death. With Iceman, O'Neill writes the play which brings to the forefront the suppositions about man and time so frequently unrealized in the earlier drama.

The plot of The Iceman Cometh is one of the simplest O'Neill ever devised and, as it is not of central importance to the following discussion, a brief summary may dispense with it. A collection of down and outs in Harry Hope's saloon share a liking for alcohol and a belief that tomorrow they will retrieve their former positions in life. This belief, held by all but two who have their own pipe dreams, is illusory and deliberately shattered by a visit from a salesman and old acquaintance of the inmates, Theodore Hickman, come to celebrate Hope's birthday. Hickey ruins the party by telling of his wife's recent death and trying to persuade all to dispense with their pipe dreams. They reluctantly try and despair is the result. Hickey reveals

that his wife was murdered, that he himself killed her and, to his own surprise, hated her. This last admission he attributes to a fit of momentary insanity. As he is taken away the roomers extend Hickey's moment of insanity to include the time he has been with them. If the truth about themselves came from a madman it can be ignored. They return to their pipe dreams.

The sub-plot involves only two characters. Larry, a roomer whose pipe dream is of an eagerly-awaited death, is visited by a young boy, perhaps his son, who has betrayed a group of anarchists to the police, among them his mother Rose. Parritt's motivation, hatred, is not revealed until the end of the play at which time, on Larry's reluctant advice, he commits suicide. Onto this bare framework O'Neill grafts a play about love, death, illusion, peace, and existence. These themes revolve around a belief that time is static; that yesterday, today and tomorrow are meaningless divisions of something which in reality does not change; or, to quote from another play: "The past is the present, isn't it? It's the future, too" (LDJ 87).

The Iceman may be a play concerned with time but in common with the other plays of this period, and unlike many previous plays, the unities of time and place are closely observed.¹⁸ All action takes place within thirty-six hours, while the setting for the whole of the play is the back room and a section of the bar in Harry Hope's saloon. The lengthy and detailed descriptions of the setting are meant, in a typical O'Neill fashion, to reflect

the condition of the characters, for most of whom the saloon is home.¹⁴ Thus O'Neill notes that the windows are "so glazed with grime one cannot see through them", and that the lighting is artificial. This is apt in more ways than one. Light from the outside world would indicate the movement from day to night--something which has no significance to men whose habits are tied only to a movement from relative sobriety to alcoholic oblivion, and who delude themselves that yesterday was and tomorrow will be different from today. An external source of light would also suggest the existence of another world outside that of the saloon, whereas O'Neill's intention, as we shall see, is to portray the saloon as a world in microcosm. The roomers' preference for artificial light further suggests a disliking for natural illumination²⁰ which, in a sense, is what Hickey brings with him, with disastrous consequences. O'Neill also notes that "the walls and ceiling were once white, but it was a long time ago, and they are now so splotched, peeled, stained and dusty that their color can best be described as dirty" (573). A state of decay is a common characteristic of the roomers.

As with the setting O'Neill gives much attention to detailed descriptions of the characters. The differences between them may be minor, but they are important. The bunch is a cosmopolitan one of English, Irish, Scots, Dutch, Negro and Italian origins, as well as American.²¹ On the one hand they can be seen

as representatives of American ethnic groups, on the other they are a further indication of O'Neill's intention to broaden the application of his drama. Moreover, they are drawn from all types of life: a circus man, a police lieutenant, a student lawyer, a proprietor of a negro gambling house, an army captain, a farmer-soldier, a journalist, an editor of an anarchist periodical, a syndicalist-anarchist, two pimp-bartenders, and three prostitutes. The common denominator for the majority is the phrase "one-time". Thus the characters are immediately given two faces and a contrast is established between what they are now (alcoholics everyone) and what they once were. They are not, however, alcoholic zombies. Many of the descriptions are qualified. Hugo, for instance, may wear threadbare and frayed clothing, "but everything about him is fastidiously clean". Joe Mott "still...manages to preserve an atmosphere of nattiness and there is nothing dirty about his appearance". Despite Wetjoen's physical decay "there is still a suggestion of old authority lurking in him". James Cameron's "forehead is fine, his eyes are intelligent and there was once a competent ability in him". A further aspect they all share is a certain mellowness. Larry's face has an "expression of tired tolerance". Joe's face "would be hard and tough if it were not for its good nature and lazy humor". Jimmy has the quality of a "likable, affectionate boy who has never grown up". McGloin's face "must once have been brutal and greedy, but time and whiskey have

melted it down into a good-humored parasite's characterlessness". Harry Hope "attempts to hide his defenselessness behind a testy truculent manner, but this has never fooled anyone". All of them in fact wear masks, fashioned by alcohol and time, which blend extremes of character into simple tolerance. It is worth dwelling on these initial descriptions (574-77) because they contain the essence of the themes developed in the play and provide a touchstone against which the ensuing action can be measured.

Much of the first act dramatises and emphasises the points noted in the stage directions. Primarily the characters are kept alive by their illusions of the past, and the hope that tomorrow will be different. All of them "have a touching credulity concerning tomorrows" because as Larry says, "The lie of a pipe dream is what gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of us, drunk or sober" (578). One notable peculiarity, however, is the amount of awareness individuals have about each other. Larry considers himself an exception among pipe dreamers. He proclaims that he has only the "comforting fact of death to face". Rocky the bartender replies with scepticism: "Yeah, just hangin' around hopin' you'll croak, ain't yuh? Well, I'm bettin' you'll have a good long wait. Jeess, somebody'll have to take an axe to croak you!" (578) Larry's reaction is simply to grin. Rocky's own illusion is that he is not a pimp and that his stable of women are not whores. When Hugo taunts him

about his "leedle slave girls" his reaction is "more exasperated than angry" (579). Individuals recognise other's illusions but not their own. Harry Hope's illusion about the past is that his dead wife Bessie was a loving and devoted wife. His illusion about the future is that he will go out into a world which he has not seen for twenty years. All know that Bessie "nagged the hell out of him", and that he has no intention of fulfilling his ambition. And yet, like Larry, Hope is the one who looks with "condescending affectionate pity" (604) at the others as they relate what they will do tomorrow. The effect, of course, is highly comic, but the point is also made that these characters only half delude themselves and are not fooled by each other. Again, when challenged they are invariably good humoured.

This good humour and tolerance conceal destructive emotions. The Tomorrow Movement to which many of them belong may be ludicrous, but one of its worthwhile points lies in its ability to contain disparate emotions. Lewis and Wetjoen, for example, "dream the hours away in happy dispute over the brave days in South Africa when they tried to murder each other" (593). Willie, playing the lawyer he always wanted to be, taunts McGloin with his past corruption in the police force. At the threat of no more booze Willie instantly apologises and pretends he was only kidding--an apology and an explanation McGloin good-naturedly accepts. Tensions such as these and potentially explosive situations are dampened by a mutual tolerance and good

humour.

It becomes clear in the first act of the play that the contentment of the characters and the value of the Tomorrow Movement are based on certain assumptions about time. What is tolerated, indeed what is quite necessary for happiness, is a concept of time which admits the notion of past, present and future, the notion of progress in time. Thus Harry Hope and his roomers distort the past to make the present tolerable, and have a vision of the future as something quite different from the present. This allows for destructive emotions to be controlled and disguised, and produces a high degree of toleration. This concept of progressive time, however, is illusory and only sustained by whiskey,²² and an implicit agreement not to put it to the test. Thus, all challenges are only half-hearted, no one expects Jimmy Tomorrow to fulfill his ambition, the windows are kept dirty, and there is a notable absence of clocks. Ed Mosher, for example, wears "a heavy brass watch-chain (not connected to a watch)" (576).

In contrast to the Tomorrow Movement is that brought by Hickey, which we might call the Salvation Today Movement. Considerable dramatic attention is focused on Hickey by a lengthy preparation for his entrance.²³ That the roomers should welcome an outsider into their fragile illusory world is a problem avoided simply by making him an "old friend of Harry Hope's and all the gang. He's a grand guy. He comes here twice a year

regularly on a periodical drunk and blows all his money"(586). All that is different about this visit is Hickey's unusually late arrival. According to Rockey: "Yuh could set your watch by his periodicals before dis. Always got here a coupla days before Harry's birthday party, and now he's on'y got till to-night to make it" (580). The difference increases dramatic expectation, but the point is also made that Hickey shared the same attitude towards time as the roomers: the time of the next drink. His unusual lateness is a hint that this link is now broken. Hickey's attitude toward the birthday party confirms the change. Never before has it been treated as anything more than an excuse for an increase in the consumption of alcohol. This time Hickey brings a cake, champagne, and flowers--treats the event as a celebration of time. In his toast to Harry he says, "I hope today will be the biggest day of your life, and in the lives of everyone here, the beginning of a new life of peace and contentment where no pipe dreams can ever nag at you again" (659). To emphasise the point Hickey's present is a watch, engraved with name and date. Not surprisingly, Harry vehemently rejects it.

What Hickey is doing, in effect, is forcing them all to put their illusions of time to the test--the very thing they all strenuously avoid. Hickey's promise of peace is explicitly connected with time: "You'll be in a today where there is no yesterday or tomorrow to worry you" (661). Good salesman that

he is, the benefits claimed for his merchandise are something they already possess and, of course, Hickey's product will not work.

The qualities of the Salvation Today Movement are ironically disclosed by verbal links with the Tomorrow Movement. Larry, for example, describes the saloon to Parrit in images later used by Hickey:

It's the No Chance Saloon. It's Bedrock Bar, The End of the Line Cafe, The Bottom of the Sea Rathskellar! Don't you notice the beautiful calm in the atmosphere? That's because it's the last harbour. No one here has to worry about where they're going next, because there is no farther they can go. It's a great comfort to them. Although even here they keep up the appearances of life with a few harmless pipe dreams about their yesterdays and tomorrows, as you'll see for yourself if you're here long. (587)

We do see, at some length, and the impression of tolerance and relative peace is a powerful one. Hickey's salespitch assumes they are not happy and places the blame on the very thing that has evidently kept them at peace: the Tomorrow Movement. He is going to save them from their pipe dreams:

I know now, from my experience, they're the things that really poison and ruin a guy's life and keep him from finding any peace. If you knew how free and contented I feel now. I'm like a new man. And the cure for them is so damned simple, once you have the nerve. Just the old dope of honesty is the best policy--honesty with yourself, I mean. Just stop lying about yourself and kidding yourself about tomorrows. (622)

He describes his peace, closely echoing Larry:

It's a grand feeling....You can let go of yourself

at last. Let yourself sink to the bottom of the sea. Rest in peace. There's no farther you have to go. Not a single damned hope or dream left to nag you. (625)

The omission of any equivalent to Larry's "appearances of life" is significant. The peace that Hickey offers, of course, is death.

The suggestion that death results in the absence of the illusion of progressive time is implicit from the beginning of the play.²⁴ We have noted that dangerous tensions between the characters are masked only by a whiskey-tolerance, and an acceptance not to question too harshly the illusion. Larry, the only articulate character not in the Tomorrow Movement, reiterates many times that he has only death to look forward to. His illusion is that he is eager for death, not about death itself. Willie unwittingly laments: "Would that Hickey or Death would come" (596). And at the end of the first act Mosher tells a story, the relevance of which is clear only in retrospect.

The story is of a "quack doctor" who spent his life peddling a cure-all remedy of rattlesnake oil which, "rubbed on the prat, would cure heart failure in three days". His other piece of advice was to "drink a pint of bad whiskey before breakfast every evening and never work if you can help it". Mosher relates the last conversation the Doc had with him: "You won't believe me, but this last year there was actually one night I had so many patients, I didn't even have time to get drunk. The shock to my system brought on a stroke which,

as a doctor, I recognised was the beginning of the end."

Mosher finishes his story by quoting the Doc's dying lament:

"I'd hoped I'd live to see the day when, thanks to my miraculous cure, there wouldn't be a single vacant cemetery lot left in this glorious country" (626-28). The relevance of this tale to what Hickey does is not difficult to see. Hickey is the "Great Salesman". His Salvation Today is as useless as the snake oil. Like the Doc he has given up drinking before coming on his greatest ever sales campaign. Most of all, Hickey's unconscious desire, as we shall see, is likewise to fill as many cemetery lots as possible before he goes to his own.

Much of the third act is devoted to showing the effects of Hickey's Salvation. The tarts Margie and Pearl, forced to recognise themselves as whores, taunt Rocky with the word "pimp" and go on strike. The negro Joe, Chuck, and Rocky fight to the point of drawing guns, knives, and broken bottles, at which Larry sardonically laughs and makes the point that the whole act demonstrates: "That's it! Murder each other, you damned loons, with Hickey's blessing! Didn't I tell you he'd brought death with him?"(672). Lewis and Wetjoen, facing harsh reality, taunt each other as they did in the first act, but with undisguised anger and rage. Again, Larry makes the point: "Be God, you can't say Hickey hasn't the miraculous touch to raise the dead, when he can start the Boer War raging again!" (677)

Challenged to implement their beliefs in tomorrow,

most of them leave the security of the saloon. Returning, they are forced by Hickey to admit the unreality of pipe dreams. That they are toying with death is seen by the fate of the leader of the Movement, Jimmy Tomorrow, who was found as Rocky later tells, "sittin' on de dock on West Street, lookin' at de water and cryin'!...He was tryin' to jump in and didn't have de noive..."(699). According to Hickey that moment of self-awareness should be enough. He says to a miserable Harry:

You've faced the truth about yourself. You've done what you had to do to kill your nagging pipe dreams. Oh, I know it knocks you cold. But only for a minute. Then you see it was the only possible way to peace. And you feel happy. Like I did. That's what worries me about you, Governor. It's time you began to feel happy-- (695)

Happy they certainly are not. Not even the booze can compensate for the destruction of the Tomorrow Movement.

Alcohol and illusion have been linked throughout the play and their interdependence becomes evident when, in the fourth act all the miserable bunch desperately try to get drunk. They are also fighting death. Hope "(...tosses down his drink with a lifeless, automatic movement--complainingly) Bejees, what did you do to the booze, Hickey? There's no damned life left in it" (694); "When are you going to do something about the booze, Hickey? Bejees, we all know you did something to take the life out of it" (704); "There's no life or kick in it now" (707). The complaints all rightly come from Hope, the erstwhile dispenser of life-giving booze,

and are re-echoed by all the others.

Selling death in the guise of peace and happiness by forcing them to test the illusion of time; offering them the reality of a "today where there is no yesterday or tomorrow"; this leads one to suspect that Hickey is either full of hate for his brethern or deluded by his own brand of hardware. The truth is a combination of the two. O'Neill directs attention onto the motivations of his characters because the ideas of time, at the core of The Iceman, are based on psychology rather than metaphysics. Time is static because man is basically rotten, selfish, incapable of love, and incapable of breaking the vicious circle of his own folly. Progressive time can only be a reality when man achieves a far greater degree of perfection than he has at present. As Larry says: "When man's soul isn't a sow's ear, it will be time enough to dream of silk purses" (590). The most valuable silk purse is meaning in life which will only come if there is meaning in time. In O'Neill's world there are only two character types. The wretched but fortunate majority who delude themselves with a belief in progressive time and thereby have a semblance of hope in life, and those who, knowingly or otherwise, are agents of destruction. Larry is the exception, but not one to be envied. His awareness of the truth about time leads to a very real desire for death. Hickey represents the real enemy of life. His psychological make-up, and the nature

of his clash with the Tomorrow Movement demonstrates why man, in O'Neill's view, is in such a horrible dilemma.

It is significant that the first piece of information we hear about Hickey is his habit of telling the same joke every time he is drunk. Rocky reminisces: "Remember how he woiks up dat gag about his wife, when he's cockeyed, cryin' over her picture and den springin' it on yuh all of a sudden dat he left her in de hay wid de iceman?" (580) One of the noted differences in Hickey is that he does not make the same joke this time (636). But there is a character who tells a very similar story. Jimmy Tomorrow is in the habit of blaming his wife's adultery for his alcoholism. This is his illusion of the past, exposed by Hickey: "I'll bet when you admit the truth to yourself, you'll confess you were sick of her hating you for getting drunk. I'll bet you were really damned relieved when she gave you such a good excuse...I know how it is, Jimmy. I --...." The pause is enough for Larry to note the half-admission. With "vindictive relish" he attacks Hickey: "Ha! So that's what happened to you, is it? Your Iceman joke finally came home to roost, didit?" (657)

The irony of this is apparent in retrospect. Larry is correct, but in a way he does not realise. Hickey knows that Jimmy's sorrow is a mask to cover gratitude for such a good excuse to drink, but by analogy, Hickey's iceman joke is also wishful thinking.²⁵ That the joke has come home to roost is

apparent, in one sense, as soon as Hickey admits that Evelyn is dead. Larry notes that "Death was the Iceman Hickey called into his home" (680). But in another sense the joke rebounds completely. Precisely because it did not literally come true Hickey killed Evelyn. If she had committed adultery, as Jimmy's wife did, Hickey would have had the excuse he needed to booze away the rest of his life. "That was the trouble", Hickey confesses, "It would have been easy to find a way out if she hadn't loved me so much. Of if I hadn't loved her. But as it was, there was only one possible way... I had to kill her" (706). To kill as an act of love is Hickey's illusion, but the extraordinary feature of his confession is that it comes as no surprise. The sub-plot prepares us for the revelations, and also makes Hickey's motivation in no way unusual.

The resemblances between Hickey and Parritt are numerous. Questioned as to why Hickey comes to the saloon Larry says it is because he "never runs into anyone he knows in his business here", to which Parritt replies: "Yes, that's what I want, too. I've got to stay under cover..." (586). They are both sober, and again Larry notes the similarity. Referring to Hickey he says: "It's nothing to me what happened to him. But I have a feeling he's dying to tell us, inside him, and yet he's afraid. He's like that damned kid. It's strange the queer way he seemed to recognise him. If he's afraid, it

explains why he's off booze. Like that damned kid again. Afraid if he got drunk, he'd tell -- ..."(638). When Hickey first meets Parritt he instinctively recognises him. They have never met, but Hickey says: "I know damned well I recognised something about you. We're members of the same lodge--in some way" (624). Again, Hickey has the feeling "there's something familiar about him, something between us... No, it's more than that. I can't figure it. Tell me about him. For instance, I don't imagine he's married, is he?... Hasn't he been mixed up with some woman? I don't mean trollops.. I mean the old real love stuff that crucifies you" (642). All this comes before any knowledge of Evelyn's death.

The pointed similarities between the two men would be ignored by the audience were it not for Parritt's story, much of which we hear before Hickey makes his entrance. There are details of his story worth noting. His mother's Anarchist Movement has been betrayed to the police following a "bombing on the Coast when several people got killed" (583). He has fled from a scene of death and cannot sleep (585). Before the incidents Parritt fought with his mother: "She bawled me out because I was going around with tarts" (591). Hugo in vino veritas calls him a "Gottamned stool pigeon!" (592) Enough hints are dropped to make the audience suspect that Parritt has betrayed his mother. Certainly he has a strong dislike of the female: "I have every bitch that ever lived! They're

all alike!" (615) When Hickey recognises Parritt as a "brother" and mentions an inability to sleep, the audience is quite prepared for the rest of his story.

From Act Two onwards, the revelations that both Hickey and Parritt have destroyed a woman, and their confessions, are arranged antiphonally. Parritt, for instance, becomes scared of Hickey after the news of Evelyn's death: "It's that queer feeling he gives me that I'm mixed up with him in some way. I don't know why, but it started me thinking about Mother--as if she were dead... I suppose she might as well be" (666-67). After death is qualified as murder, Larry repeats the phrase "murdered" and Parritt, engrossed in his own guilt, stammers: "You're a liar, Larry! You must be crazy to say that to me! You know she's still alive!" (694) Not until the confession scene, however, do the two characters fully come together:

HICKEY....I loved Evelyn. Even as a kid. And Evelyn loved me....

PARRITT. I loved Mother, Larry! No matter what she did! I still do! Even though I know she wishes now I were dead! You believe that, don't you? (709)

HICKEY....Well, I'm not lying, and if you'd ever seen her, you'd realize I wasn't. It was written all over her face, sweetness and love and pity and forgiveness....Wait! I'll show you. I always carry her picture...No, I'm forgetting I tore it up -- afterwards. I didn't need it anymore.

PARRITT....I burnt up Mother's picture, Larry. Her eyes followed me all the time. They seemed to be wishing I was dead! (714)

HICKEY....I remember I heard myself speaking to her, as if it was something I'd always wanted to say: "Well, you know what you can do with your pipe dream now, you damned bitch!"...No! I never --!
 PARRITT....Yes, that's it! Her and the damned old Movement pipe dream! Eh, Larry? (716)

In one sense these intricate parallels between Jimmy Tomorrow, Parritt, and Hickey simply demonstrate a common hatred of the female. But on another level the linking of motives between three quite different people suggest that man in general is incapable of giving or receiving love. This indeed is O'Neill's contention, one which is further strengthened by weaving into the structure of the play more parallels between characters than has yet been described.

Just as Hickey's relationship with the Tomorrow Movement is characterized by his effort to destroy illusion, so Parritt from the very beginning plays Hickey's game with Larry. Larry's illusion is not only an eagerness for death, he also fools himself as to why he left the Anarchist Movement. His justification is that he saw "men didn't want to be saved from themselves, for that would mean they'd have to give up greed, and they'll never pay that price for liberty" (579). Parritt's goading (589, 590) makes it apparent, however, that Larry abandoned politics because of Rosa. Like a good Anarchist she put into practice her notions of Free Love not only with Larry, but with many others as well. Obviously for Larry there was one too many and he left. Parritt, too, disliked his mother's philosophy. He says to Larry: "It made home a lousy

place. I felt like you did about it. I'd get feeling it was like living in a whorehouse -- only worse, because she didn't have to make her living --" (647). Thus he betrayed the Movement and his mother.

It is worth noting at this point a difference between Hickey and Parritt. They are both set on destroying illusions, but while Hickey is evidently at peace with himself Parritt is plagued with guilt. The reason for the difference is that Hickey believes he killed out of love (706) where as Parritt cannot find an illusion. He pretends initially the betrayal was out of patriotism (648) changes his motivation to one of money-lust, and finally admits, like Hickey, that he acted in a spirit of hate. In O'Neill's scheme of things, however, the difference between peace and guilt is only one of degree. We have already noted that for others Hickey's peace means death, and, indeed, this is the peace he has brought himself. There are hints, early in the play, that Hickey is looking for death. He says at the party: "I knew when I came here I wouldn't be able to stay with you long. I'm slated to leave on a trip" (661). The trip is to the Executioners -- a journey initiated by Hickey himself when he goes out to call the police. Parritt is looking for death as well. The peace of death is the only thing that will put meaning into their crimes.

In the theme of death the Larry/Parritt conflict mirrors

on a minor scale the same theme played out by Hickey and the others. Taunted by Parritt Larry restates his beliefs "(... as if he were trying to hammer something into his own brain) All I know is I'm sick of life! ...Honor or dishonor, faith or treachery are nothing to me but the opposites of the same stupidity which is ruler and king of life, and in the end they rot into dust in the same grave. All things are the same meaningless joke to me, for they grin at me from the one skull of death." Parritt treats this with contempt and Larry is provoked: "Look out how you try and taunt me back into life, I warn you! I might remember the thing they call justice there, and punishment for--" (649). Punishment through death is precisely what Parritt desperately needs, and eventually what Larry gives him: "Go! Get the hell out of life, God damn you, before I choke it out of you! Go up --!" (720) Parritt escapes from the hell of life by jumping off the fire escape.²⁶

Punishment for a crime, however, implies a system of morality, which must be based on a meaningful distinction between right and wrong, which in turn assumes that man is capable of goodness. If this were so, if indeed man were capable of goodness, then not only life but time also would have some meaning. O'Neill insists, however, that meaningful time is the pipe dream of the Tomorrow Movement. As we have seen, and as Hickey demonstrates, its members are incapable

of change. They cannot alter tomorrow, and they are bound in a never changing today by the past. Progressive time is an illusion because it assumes man's ability to change and clearly O'Neill thinks he is incapable of any such action. Those like Hickey who try and change the present state of affairs are motivated by hate, selfishness, and a desire to destroy.

Two characters who may seem to contradict this are Evelyn and Rosa. Although neither appear in the play, their respective influence is widely felt. One feature they seem to have in common is a desire to reform. Rosa is the leader of a political movement set on reforming the world, while Evelyn, daughter of a strong Methodist family, spends the whole of her life trying to reform Hickey's morals. They represent political and religious reform. Furthermore it is their attitude to love which hounds the men in their lives. Rosa, dispensing love to all and sundry except her son (587), forces him to hate her. Evelyn, loving no one but Hickey, places such a burden on his conscience that he, likewise, is driven to hate: "There's a limit to the guilt you can feel and the forgiveness and the pity you can take" (715). Compared to their men, the two women may seem well motivated. O'Neill suggests otherwise.

Rosa's dedication to political reform is hardly altruistic: "To hear her go on sometimes, you'd think she was

the Movement" (590), Parritt complains. This is repeated again: "She was always getting the Movement mixed up with herself" (647). Furthermore Larry left her in the belief she was a whore. In the case of Evelyn there are hints that her love is not quite selfless either. Any woman who could tolerate for a life-time an alcoholic and unfaithful husband, who could forgive being given a venereal disease and pretend it originated in a dirty tea cup (713) must either be a saint or hell-bent on demonstrating some peculiar point. Hickey, like Hope, talks of his wife as a saint and both finally admit the women were bitches (692, 716). In a sense, as we shall see later, Evelyn is meant to represent a non-earthly quality, but she is also as selfish in her chastity as Rosa is in her liberality.

One of the reasons for Hickey's long confession dwelling on his youth is to give a portrait of Evelyn. We learn that she came from a strict Methodist family, who had forbidden her to see Hickey -- from an early age the town's "no-good tramp". Hickey continues: "She always stuck up for me. She wouldn't believe the gossip -- or she'd pretend she didn't. No one could convince her I was no good. Evelyn was as stubborn as all hell once she'd made up her mind" (709-10). The impression Hickey gives is that Evelyn married him as much to prove she could change him as out of love. The more dissolute he became, the more resolute Evelyn. Certainly her love was not pure: "I could see disgust having a battle in her eyes with love. Love always won" (713). What Hickey means is pride

rather than love. Evelyn was surely too proud to admit her misjudgement of both her own ability and Hickey's potential. He repeats: "Evelyn was as stubborn as hell. Once she'd set her heart on anything, you couldn't shake her faith that it would come true -- tomorrow!" (713) Both Evelyn and Rosa, therefore, are no exceptions to O'Neill's view that mankind is essentially selfish and incapable of goodness.

If man is trapped within a circle of his own folly, however, the obvious corrective would seem to be Christianity, which acknowledges that man is stained with original sin but offers forgiveness through Christ, enabling man to be reborn and start again. Hickey demonstrates that such forgiveness places an intolerable burden of guilt on any individual. Evelyn is not merely saintly, therefore, but something of a Christ figure. Her love is one which "passeth understanding" and, like Christ, she is killed. Divine love in O'Neill's eyes is nothing to be thankful for. His attack on Christianity goes further than this. The ultimate blasphemy is to suggest that Christ's motives are as non-altruistic as those of any character's in the play.

Biblical illusions abound throughout the play. The title,²⁷ for example, besides a reference to the bawdy joke, clearly has a biblical ring to it. Whether or not O'Neill had a specific text in mind is not known, but at least two have been provided by critics. Cyrun Day quotes Matthew 25:5-6:

While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh".

According to Day, "union with the bridegroom signifies victory over death. Union with the iceman, conceived as adultery, must, then, be a parody of union with the bridegroom, and signify surrender to death and acquiescence in personal annihilation."²⁸ Clifford Leech, on the other hand, sees the title as "an obvious reference to the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, where Christ speaks of his Second Coming".²⁹ It will be sudden and unexpected by most:

But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. (vv 37-9)

Whether or not Hickey is meant to be the Christ of the first or second time around is not important. There is no absolute analogy, but there are enough references to make Hickey a very ironic Christ figure. His very name,³⁰ for example, Theodore Hickman: a universal idiot bearing the gift of God (Gk. Θεοδωρος, "god's gift") He sends word ahead that he is coming to bring them peace and save them (617). His father was a preacher (622). The midnight party seems to be Hickey's "Last Supper".³¹ Indeed at the Holy Supper Christ, raising his cup, told his disciples he would not drink wine

again "until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Mat. 26:29). Hickey, whose soberness has shocked everybody, who is soon to be arrested and, presumably, executed, similarly drinks for "the beginning of a new life of peace and contentment" (659). A specific comparison, however, is made between the party and the feast of Belshazzar (644). Clearly no direct analogy to either meal is intended. The references are there but are too infrequent and indirect to suggest any more than an ironic and rather vague parallel.

In fact Hickey is no more a Christ figure than are Evelyn or Rosa. Rosa, for instance, in her attitude towards the Movement is like "a revivalist preacher about religion", and Parritt is her Judas (589). Only in so far as the motives of all three Christ figures are seen as selfish, is an indirect reflection made on the motives of Christ himself.

A firmer connection between the Christ figures lies in what they represent. Almost the first reference to the Tomorrow Movement links it to religion. Larry comments with his usual brand of sardonic humour:

It'll be a great day for them, tomorrow -- the
Feast of All Fools, with brass bands playing!
Their ships will come in, loaded to the gunwales
with cancelled regrets and promises fulfilled
and clean slates and new leases!

ROCKY. Yeah, and a ton of hop!

LARRY. Don't mock the faith! Have you no respect
for religion, you unregenerate wop! (578)

In a similar mood Larry describes the Anarchist Movement as the one "One True Faith" (589). And, of course, Hickey's Salvation Today Movement is described all the time in religious terms.

The other quality the Movements all share is a common basis in illusion. The illusion of the Tomorrow Movement has been described. Hickey believes in his love for Evelyn and in his desire to share his new found "peace" with his fellow men. His wish to spread the gospel is a way of strengthening his own conviction in it. The corrupted need to corrupt others to make their own degradation more acceptable. A nice parallel is drawn, in this respect, between Hickey and Rocky. The latter, forced to acknowledge that he is a pimp, tries to enlist both Parritt and Larry into the game: "Yuh wouldn't have to worry where de next drink's comin' from, or wear doity clothes...Well, don't it look good to yuh?" To which Larry replies: "No, it doesn't look good, Rocky. I mean, the peace Hickey's brought you. It isn't contented enough, if you have to make everyone else a pimp, too " (702). Hickey's peace is not enough even for himself. When he realises he hated Evelyn his whole illusion is shattered, until he grasps the final one of insanity (716). And finally, the Anarchist Movement is described several times as a pipe dream (589, 643, 647).

The point O'Neill is making with these elaborate parallels is that no Movement, religious or political, can succeed

in freeing mankind from the circle within which he is trapped.³² The reality of man's situation is that yesterday, today, and tomorrow are meaningless terms describing a progression which never in fact occurs. Christianity decrees that man's past is one of wickedness and folly, accepts that man will continue to repeat the faults of the past, but offers a tomorrow with a difference as long as man will accept forgiveness from a source of unlimited love. Hickey demonstrates the impossibility of accepting any such offer. Such is man's nature that the burden of guilt he must assume becomes intolerable. Any gratitude or reciprocal love turns to hate and results in destruction of the lover and the loved. It is a vicious circle.

Political movements have hopes which are equally illusory. As Larry says: "The material the ideal free society must be constructed from is men themselves and you can't build a marble temple out of a mixture of mud and manure" (590). Extreme as Larry's viewpoint is, O'Neill shows no character in his microcosmic world who firmly contradicts this description of man. He is helpless, selfish, and weak. Because this is so, then there is no meaning in life, no meaning in time. This is the reality that Hickey brings, and which Larry alone recognises:

Be God, there's no hope! I'll never be a success in the grandstand -- or anywhere else! Life is too much for me! I'll be a weak fool looking with pity at the two sides of everything till the day I die! ...May that day soon come! ...Be God, I'm the only real convert to death Hickey made here. (726-27).

To be aware of the meaninglessness of life is to face death, and is clearly intolerable to the majority.

Hence the value of the Tomorrow Movement. It may be an illusion supported by the bottle, but it is necessary to life. The down and outs have given up the struggle against time and in the very act of submission have found a way to live. It is hardly a dignified or heroic existence but there is no point in heroics when the result is merely an earlier death. When the truth is intolerable there is no point in facing the truth. Far better to drink deeply, pray for oblivion, and have a hopeless hope in tomorrow.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER THREE .

¹O'Neill, p. 875. Also the source (pp. 864, 874-77) of details about the 1946 production.

²See Rosamund Gilder's review, "Each in His Own Way", Theatre Arts, XXX (December 1946), 687-88. Reprinted in Cargill et al., pp. 203-8.

³Gelbs, O'Neill, p. 877. Nichols' remarks reprinted in John Henry Raleigh, ed., Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Iceman Cometh, pp. 34-36.

⁴Reprinted in Cargill et al., pp. 369-76.

⁵"Eugene O'Neill -- Dry Ice", Sights and Spectacles (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1956), pp. 81-85. Reprinted in Raleigh, ed., Twentieth Century Interpretations, pp. 50-53.

⁶"Trying to Like O'Neill", In Search of Theater (New York: Knopf, 1952), pp. 331-45. Reprinted in Cargill et al., pp. 331-45.

⁷The New York Times, May 9, 1956. Reprinted in Cargill et al., pp. 212-13.

⁸"Postscript to a Journey", Theatre Arts, XLI (April 1957), 27-29, 88. Reprinted in Raleigh, ed., Twentieth Century Interpretations, pp. 31-33.

⁹The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill, p. 286.

¹⁰"Dionysus in The Iceman Cometh", Modern Drama, IV (Spring 1962), 377-88.

¹¹"The Iceman and The Bridegroom", Modern Drama, I (May 1958), 3-9. Reprinted in Raleigh, ed., Twentieth Century Interpretations, pp. 79-86.

¹²Eugene O'Neill and The Tragic Tension, p. 158.

¹³The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill, p. 280.

¹⁴See Cargill et al., p. 203.

¹⁵Falk, p. 163.

¹⁶The Theatre of Revolt, p. 348.

¹⁷Gelbs, O'Neill, p. 877.

¹⁸More Stately Mansions, although spanning a period of nine years, has a concise unity of time for two of the three acts. A Touch of the Poet and A Long Days Journey Into Night confine the action to within eighteen hour periods; A Moon for the Misbegotten to twenty-four.

¹⁹Both Hughie and A Touch of The Poet have saloon settings.

²⁰James Tyrone's antipathy towards light in Journey exemplifies his persistent refusal to face his own responsibility for his family's misfortunes.

²¹Louis Sheaffer is the most recent biography-oriented critic to identify the models on whom the Iceman characters are based. See O'Neill: Son and Playwright, pp. 130-31.

²²Edmund Tyrone has the same philosophy and quotes Baudelaire: "If you would not feel the horrible burden of Time weighing on your shoulders and crushing you to earth, be drunken continually" (LDJ 343).

²³Brustein comments that "Hickey's entrance is delayed so long that -- like another long-awaited figure, Beckett's Godot -- he beings to accumulate supernatural qualities" (Theatre of Revolt, p. 199).

²⁴In O'Neill's late plays, the final disclosures are "hinted at almost from the beginning of the play...As a result there is set up almost immediately a continuous tension between the present and the past" (Raleigh, The Plays of Eugene O'Neill, p. 199).

²⁵Tom F. Driver offers an interesting Freudian analysis of Hickey's actions: "Hickey (Ego) desires death unconsciously. His sensual nature (Id) desires unbridled life and convinces Hickey he could live more successfully if his wife Evelyn (Super-Ego) were removed. Hickey yields, ostensibly to find peace, but actually because he knows that this peace will be the prelude to permanent peace (death). The Ego-instincts, said Freud, are death instincts." See "On The Late Plays of Eugene O'Neill", Tulane Drama Review, III (Dec. 1958), 15.

²⁶Robert Lee finds it a "great, ironical touch of O'Neill's to have the desparately driven oedipal son come to enlist the father's aid in punishing him for revenging himself against their mutual rival." See "Evangelism and Anarchy in The Iceman Cometh", Modern Drama, XII (September 1969), 177.

²⁷Delma Eugene Presley notes that Goldin's Dictionary of American Underworld Lingo defines "Ice-man" as "any official or inmate whose promises are not to be relied upon." The secondary meaning is: "One who makes ostentatious gifts of worthless or trivial things." See "O'Neill's Iceman: Another Meaning", American Literature, XLII (1970), 387-88.

²⁸See Raleigh ed., Twentieth Century Interpretations, p.81.

²⁹"Eugene O'Neill and His Plays", Critical Quarterly, III (Winter 1961), 340-41.

³⁰Tornqvist notes that "Hick" is slang for "corpse, cadaver". He suggests also that the two detectives who comes to arrest Hickey "are actually symbolic figures as their names suggest: Moran (like Lat. mors 'death') and Lieb (love). As in the iceman symbol, love and death are brought together." See "Personal Nomenclature in the plays of O'Neill", Modern Drama, VIII (February 1966), 371.

³¹Day thinks the positioning of characters at the table is "reminiscent of Leonardo da Vinci's painting of the Last Supper". (See Twentieth Century Interpretations, p. 83). Tiisanen (O'Neill's Scenic Images, pp. 28-82) notes the distortion of evidence in Day's analysis of the biblical references.

³²A psychiatrist, William V. Silverburg, offers an interesting interpretation, deduced from the play, of O'Neill's beliefs: "Mankind, O'Neill says, is not yet ready for disillusionment; it is very far as yet from being mature enough to be set adrift from its moorings in religion and religions handmaiden, a coercive morality. And -- even more important -- whoever attempts in this day and age to emancipate mankind from its illusions with haste, with impatience, with violence, is motivated not by love of man nor by uncompromising devotion to reality, but by hatred and scorn of man, by bitterness, by a sadistic kind of mischief - making which has its basis on inability to love anybody... When men and women have truly learned to love one another, then they will be mature enough to dispense with religion and all coercive morality." See "Notes on The Iceman Cometh", Psychiatry, X (February 1947), 27-29.

CONCLUSION

An attempt to deduce a distinct philosophy from O'Neill's views of man, illusion, and time is not worthwhile. He was primarily a dramatist, not a philosopher. The ideas contained in each play may add up to some kind of statement on the larger themes, but there is surely no reason to expect a high degree of consistency from play to play. O'Neill was neither a systematic nor a profound thinker, but he was a dramatic one in the sense that all his ideas, at least in the early plays, were worked out primarily in terms of their dramatic potential.

We have seen, in the plays written prior to The Iceman, how any concepts of time are to be found for the most part in the dramaturgy rather than in thematic concerns or in characterization. To be sure many characters have an awareness of the past and its control of their actions, but the emphasis is always on a struggle of individuals to assert their independence and free will. O'Neill's characters make their gesture of defiance and are treated as heroic, tragic figures. The gesture is always futile, but that only enhances the tragic possibilities. Dramatic priority is on the struggle rather than its consequences.

There is a similar order of priorities in the mask plays.

Frequently, as we have seen, O'Neill indicates the adoption of a mask-expression as the last resort of characters unable to tolerate the harshness of reality. In the mask plays proper, however, the focus is on the efforts of characters to tear off masks and assert their independence of them. The result may be self-destructive, but the compulsion to destroy illusion is paramount. In Days Without End, however, John Loving destroys his haunted, masked, other self, yet lives by embracing religion. There is no indication in the play that religion itself is an illusion, but in the light of the preceeding plays, the resolution of Days is extraordinary. The optimism may be unconvincing, but it is clearly intended.

The twelve years that intervened before the production of The Iceman Cometh seem to have afforded O'Neill an opportunity to consider the implications of his new found optimism. The result is a play which combines and gives explicit treatment to many of the ideas only implicitly suggested in the earlier drama. The characters no longer struggle against anything except whatever threatens to disrupt their passivity. The Force is Time itself, characterized as static and meaningless. The horror of this reality makes nonsense of any heroic gesture, and indeed no character is called upon by O'Neill to make one. Rather, we are shown the value of illusion. The roomers at Hope's saloon know that if faced with the reality of time they cannot live. They adopt a be-

lief in progressive time and, as long as that illusion is unchallenged, find strength enough to live.

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