Chapter Five

Identity, Recognition, and the Paradigm of Inclusion: *The Iceman Cometh*

In the American "melting-pot" backdrop of *The Iceman Cometh* (1939), O'Neill converges upon a group of derelicts or down-and-outers to demonstrate how under a common brotherhood humane bond can be forged to enable everyone to "belong" which stands in total contrast with *All God's Chillun Got Wings* where the "Oneness of mankind" was virtually shattered by Ella for her incapacity to understand the "togetherness" (Gelbs *O'Neill* 535). In *The Iceman Cometh*, the playwright presents some portraits of society's homeless and home-forsaken outcasts, most of whom were actual people O'Neill had known during his riotous and drifting years in New York City between 1911 and 1916. Once successful, these men and women have run out of luck since they have, in recent past, failed in their relationships and occupations in life for which they are now branded as misfits by their society, and hence have taken refuge in the saloon and upstairs rooming house, both belonging to Harry Hope, the proprietor. Usually considered an American "saloon play" (Murphy) or a "memory play" (Floyd *The Plays* 512), the drama is deeply rooted upon the absurdist and existential theme of the outsider, a genre later made famous by Samuel Beckett, a genre both Arthur Miller and Saul Bellow denounced and resisted in America "as an abnegation of human responsibility" (Bigsby "O'Neill's Endgame" 161). Set in 1912, like another of O'Neill's autobiographical play *Long Day's Journey into Night*, the action in *The Iceman Cometh* revolves around Harry Hope's Bar of false-hope-center where characters live as though in "morgue" and although their expression tells "there's no hope," they cling to the "philosophy of 'tomorrowism'"

(Shaughnessy "The Iceman Melteth") i.e., the "pipe dream"—the epitome as well as the apex body of varied-dreams from which the American Dream derived. In this Hope's bar, these derelicts-in-drinking-spree comprise people of different nationalities who sustain their pipedreams and their fantasies with "five cent whiskey—cyanide cut with carbolic acid to give it a mellow flavor" (Gilder 684). In the battle royal between the classical terminologies of illusion and reality or pipedream and unmasking, employing "the pop-psychologists' depth" (Pfister 102), the play rationalizes a modernist political predicament as "discourses on anarchism and the corruption of capitalism summarize O'Neill's solid statements: neither 'ism' is able to provide followers with sufficient hope for the present" and hence "[the derelicts] retreat into a world of 'tomorrow' pipedreams" (Floyd *O'Neill at Work* 268) where Joe Mott, the only black in the play, corroborates O'Neill's political view with a rare comic yet succinct dexterity.

These misfits do essentially have what give true meaning to life—love, compassion for each other, and bond of friendship. They sit motionless and use "drink to deny the consciousness which is the source of their pain, the origin of those aspiration which, invoked to sustain life, become the embodiment of that discrepancy between aspiration and fulfillment which makes them such ironic figures" (Bigsby *A Critical Introduction* 88). Nonetheless, their sole comfort giver is the verity of their "shared situation, a consolation seemingly out of all proportion to their sense of loss" (88). In fact, *The Iceman Cometh* underscores and gives more credibility to O'Neill's dramatic gospel message of racial justice and the need of brotherhood. Here, for the first time O'Neill not only accords to the black, Joe Mott, equality and dignity like the rest of his white comrades in Hope's bar (named for Harry Hope, its owner), but also shows him as casting off, by overcoming or unmasking, the internalized racism that

previously troubled white-wannabes like Jones and Jim. However, for the first time in this play everybody, Black or White, "belongs." Like the early Christians in the *Acts of Apostles* "who shared everything in common and were of one heart and soul" ("Acts" 4.32), all the inmates of Harry Hope's saloon are of one heart; they have compassion, understanding, and they sustain and console one another in their hopeless hope, in their dream for a better tomorrow.

Life Changed into Landscape

O'Neill's scholars and biographers view that while in *Long Day's Journey into Night* the playwright pays tribute to his parents and their children—"The Four Haunted Tyrones," in *The Iceman Cometh* he does so to his old friends and acquaintances. In these two late monumental dramas written at the fag end of his career that share a setting of 1912, and for which the "original idea" was conceived on the same day of June 06, 1939 (Floyd *The Plays* 512), the playwright not only made known his personal, social, political, philosophical, and religious standings, but also was able to show how with all those historical bearings he could still write to successfully infuse ideas from his own lived-out experience. In an interview with Karl Schriftgriesser of *New York Times*, O'Neill declared that he knew all these characters in *Iceman*:

> All these people I have written about, I once knew … The man who owns this saloon, Harry Hope, and all the others—the anarchists and the Woblies and French Syndicalists, the tarts, the broken men, the bartenders and even the saloon itself—are real. It's not just one place,

> perhaps, but it is several places that I lived in at one time or another—places I once knew put together in one. (Wilson, John 18)

The places that the playwright lived with these derelicts were: Jimmy-the-Priest's, between October 1911 and January 1912 where "O'Neill spent hours, sometimes days, sitting in Jimmy's back room listening to the life stories, the maudlin dreams, the shattered hopes of his friends … The habituates of Jimmy's, O'Neill once said, 'were a hard lot, at first glance, every type—sailors on the shore leave or stranded; longshoremen, waterfront riff-raff, gangsters, down-and-outers, drifters, from the ends of the earth" (Gelbs *O'Neill* 170-71).[1] Although O'Neill was twenty-three at that time, he seems to have "belonged." Another place the playwright lived was the Hell Hole, a Greenwich Village barroom-hotel in between 1915-16, and the taproom of the Garden Hotel, located across the street from Madison Square Garden (Floyd 512). O'Neill had met all these cherished friends during his drifting years and he later recalled them as he walked past this significantly important memory-lane: "I lived with them, I got to know them. In some queer way they carried on. I learned at Jimmy-the-Priest's not to sit in judgment on people" (Gelbs 171).

The Iceman Cometh is set in 1912, the year the playwright attempted suicide, and like the bums, the "down-and-outers" of Harry Hope's bar, O'Neill at this period in his life saw no meaning in existence, and so he tried clumsily to take his own life but without success—an act whose non-consummation he occasionally regretted: "His early, unanalytical sense of identification with the pipe dreamers of Jimmy-the-Priest's and the Hell Hole, was now—as he saw the end of his life approaching—transmuted into a final and explicit expression of his philosophy of hopeless hope" (Gelbs 831). Written in 1939, *The Iceman Cometh* was the last O'Neill play to be produced on Broadway during his lifetime. It opened at 4:30 on 9 October 1946, a

Thursday afternoon and with a long intermission continued until 10:00 at night, "an opening for which the theatrically knowing and those who like to be seen at important events turned out in force" (Gilder 684). Indeed, it was a suspenseful and "strange hour for a Broadway stage" where critics from all over the world—Australia, England, Italy, Greece, South Africa, the Scandinavian countries—came to see the literary event (Sheaffer *Son and Playwright* 581; Diggins xi), what *Time* on 21 October 1946 dubbed as "mysterious play mysteriously titled" since people knew nothing of the play for the rehearsals were carried out behind the locked door ("The Ordeal of Eugene O'Neill" 71-72). Under the direction of Eddie Dowling, the play was initially presented by the House of O'Neill, the Theatre Guild.

However, O'Neill critics over the years have tended to agree either explicitly or implicitly that the overriding theme in this play is illusion versus truth, and that the major conflicts are between love and hate in close human relationships and between self understanding and hidden guilt. O'Neill wrote to his friend Lawrence Langner on 11 August 1940:

> There are moments in [*Iceman*] that suddenly strip the secret of the soul of a man stark naked, not in cruelty or moral superiority, but with an understanding compassion which sees him as a victim of the ironies of life and of himself. Those moments are for me the depth of tragedy, with nothing more that can possibly be said. (Bogard and Bryer 511)

In fact, among the contemporary authors of existential thinking (Camus, Sartre, and Beckett) whose works dealt with "the bedrock reality of human existence" in portraying "terrifying prospect that there are no firm values, no ultimate meanings," O'Neill, according to both Normand Berlin and David Krasner, was able to place directly the choice whether it is better to live with a lie that sustains dignity and self-

respect—however false—or face reality head-on, requiring desertion of hope (Berlin "The Late Plays" 85-86; Krasner *American Drama 1945-2000* 35). In fact, this idea of conflict has been carried along the plotline through Larry's declaration at the outset that "The lie of the pipe dream is what gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot us, drunk or sober" (1.569-70) versus Hickey's "Reform Wave" (3.652). O'Neill endorses Larry's Nietzschian philosophical viewpoint, as in a letter to Kenneth Macgowan, he gives reasons for the barflies' endless pipe-dreaming as such that "They must tell these lies as a first step in taking up life again" (Bryer and Alvarez 257). The resolution, thus, seems to corroborate, as poet Wallace Stevens sees, that we live by "necessary fictions" while striving for "a new knowledge of reality" (Stevens 166).

Here Hickey, the central character of the play, is an embodiment of O'Neill's darkest vision of humanity. Indeed, before, during, and after the completion of *Iceman* in 1939, the playwright's outlook was frequently pessimistic since World War II with all its treachery hung over him. He was often bitterly despondent about the viewpoint of things. In a letter written to Barrett Clark in September 1937, O'Neill declared: "I am sure that man has definitely decided to destroy himself, and this seems to me the only truly wise decision he has ever made" (Clark 145). In 1939, O'Neill's letters were negative, particularly those of September 11 (to Lawrence Langner), and September 14 (to Richard Madden) as World War II seemed to diminish both the playwright and his work; hence *The Iceman Cometh* has a pessimistic outlook. In his letter to Langner, his long time friend, O'Neill revealed his despair: "This new world war makes everything to do with theatre and plays seem too damned futile and meaningless." Nearly in despair, the playwright added: "I foresee a world in which any lover of liberty will continue to live with reluctance and be relieved to die" (qtd.

in Welch, Dennis 220). After the completion of the play, O'Neill's feelings were even more somber. In another letter to Langner, he wrote: "I have been absolutely sunk by this damned world debacle … I cannot foresee any future in this country or anywhere else to which it could spiritually belong" (Langner 398). As these letters reveal, a reader can easily understand the glum disposition of the playwright before he began to write *The Iceman Cometh*.

In *The Iceman Cometh*, O'Neill demonstrates what he sees as the vital importance of illusion, and here he seems to decipher what Dr. Relling observed about Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* that to "rob the average man of his life-lie" is to "rob him of his happiness" (Manheim *New Language of Kinship* 131). While the inclination towards the need for people's illusion that leads to "salvation through confession" in "Christian" or "Freudian" terms (Manheim 131) may seem arguable, it is indeed the illusion or pipedream which makes life worth living. There is planted in the heart of all men that intense desire, the hope that the future will heal the wounds inflicted by fate and that tomorrow will be better than the present. When every effort has failed, when one seems to have reached the end of the line, the nadir of one's life, according to O'Neill, illusion or the pipedream is the only alternative left to sustain one's sanity, one's effort to hope for a better tomorrow even though it is a "hopeless hope"; thus Larry Slade pours out:

> To hell with the truth! As the history of the world proves, the truth has no bearing on anything. It's irrelevant and immaterial, as the lawyers say. The lie of a pipedream is what gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of us, drunk or sober. (1.569-70)

This is the feeling that reverberates among the inmates of Harry Hope's saloon. All the characters have reached the point of no return even before the play opens: "Each

has lived through an experience from which he has emerged in defeat. It would appear at first that these men, all, of course, alcoholics, turned to alcohol as the result of their personal failures … Did [alcohol] result from the failure or did it cause the failure? All we know with certainty is that they have all been alcoholics for a long time" (Manheim "The Transcendence of Melodrama" 146).

Although these "down-and-outers" are of different nationalities and professions, they share some common plights: they all are alcoholic and fate has failed them all. While lavishing upon the generosity of the proprietor, they await the Bacchanal ceremony, i.e., the arrival of salesman Theodore Hickman or Hickey upon which free drinks will flow in the bar with cheers and laughter. The waiting life-discards include, among others, former radical activists, a police captain fired for corruption, veteran military officers of the Boer War, a public relations man dismissed for drinking on the job, a circus performer, a black man who once lived lofty as a gambling house proprietor, and a Harvard law school graduate and son of a wealthy criminal. Each of them, having crossed all possible boundaries of normal life, is now living on the edge of starvation and spiritual death where he dreams of a recuperating day when the ideals and standards of a social status long since lost would be restored.

Because these people have failed society, or as some of them feel, the society has failed them, and especially because they have failed the people they have loved, or the people that loved them, they all withdraw from society and cling to each other in this Hope's bar, described by one of them, Larry Slade, as the "No chance saloon. It's Bedrock Bar, the End of the Line Café, The Bottom of the Sea Rathskeller!" He further adds, "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 there they keep up the appearances of life with a few harmless pipe dreams about their yesterdays and

tomorrows" (1.577-578). Only in this dungeon does everyone "belong" as when people, White and Black, are victims of the same fate, they tend to bury their ethnic or racial differences and regard one another as brothers and sisters, partners in misfortune. Thus, there is no racial injustice or discrimination, no superiority and inferiority complex, no disdainful or insouciant disposition; each one of the underdogs boasts of his past failures and the confident assurance of a better position in the immediate future.

However, albeit each member knows that the others' wishes are merely a hoax, an unrealizable dream, he agrees and supports these claims so that in turn his own claim and fantasies will be supported. In this way then each person is encouraged and sustained in his own illusion, thus making life more livable and bearable: "Each is able to see the lie of the other without being able to admit his own, but in this community the price of mutual toleration is mutual silence. Actually the community is almost Utopia … The men live in relative harmony together by adhering to a single doctrine—the doctrine of tomorrow—keeping hope alive through the anticipation of significant action on a day which never comes" (Brustein "The Iceman Cometh" 96). Sophus Winther comments further about the pipedreams of these hope-forsaken inmates of Hope's bar:

> Each in his turn has developed a pipe dream by which he clings to such shreds of self-respect as are necessary to life. All wait for the turning of the "new leaf" for the "Tomorrow" that never comes … For them the crows have already made wing to the rooky wood. Night's black angels are approaching for the ultimate feast. Yet they are the symbol of man's humanity. ("Study in Technique" 296)

The inmates cling to their pipedreams which have become part and parcel of their existence although they know very well that there is hardly any better tomorrow to come.

The Iceman Cometh is an autobiographical play and more than any other play of O'Neill it dramatizes the reckless, carefree life of the playwright with his old comrades. This was the time when he did not know what to make of life. His father, James O'Neill stopped giving him money and had told him to find a job and earn his own living. Besides, O'Neill's drinking sprees had damaged any hope of a career and success his parents had for him. Deprived of any means of financial support and parental love, and feeling a great sense of loss, hopelessness, and alienation, O'Neill wandered from one place to the next until he met other "down-and-outers" like him. According to numerous O'Neill critics and biographers, the portraits of *Iceman* are not only straightjackets from friends and acquaintances of his trouble-ridden time, but also are from his own family members including himself. The prototype for Hickey was Charles Chapin—a "prominent newspaper executive" who in 1918 shot his wife dead, while she was sleeping, out of love and concern for her wellbeing (Sheaffer *Son and Artist* 494); Terry Carlin, O'Neill's close friend of the teens, a former Syndicalist-Anarchist, was a model for Larry Slade (Sheaffer 62 and 428; Alexander *The Tempering* 211; Carpenter *Eugene O'Neill* 153; Floyd *The Plays* 514); Harry Hope was for Tom Wallace, the proprietor of the Hell Hole when O'Neill frequented it (Floyd 513); Ed Mosher, his brother-in-law, a one-time circus man, was modeled on another friend of O'Neill, Jack Croak; Mosher and his friend Pat McGloin are parasitic "life-time guests" at Harry Hope's; McGloin has "his old occupation of policeman stamped all over him (Floyd 514). Similarly, other real-life models for the figures who appear or are referred to in this play have been identified: Hyppolyte

Havel for Hugo Kalmar (Alexander "Hugo of the *Iceman Cometh*: Realism and O'Neill" 357-66; Floyd 515); Emma Goldman for Rosa Parritt (Floyd 516); James Findlater Byth, O'Neill's alcoholic press agent, for Jimmy "Tomorrow," Major Adams for Cecil Lewis (Sheaffer 490-91; Floyd 514) who were former habitués of Jimmy-the Priest's; the "tarts," Pearl, Margie, and Cora are composite portraits of prostitutes O'Neill had met during his years of dissolution in New York (Floyd 516), and a combination of the big-time (Irish) Tammany politicians of the early twentieth century for Willie Oban's father (Raleigh *The Plays* 67)

Importantly enough, O'Neill's "two close drinking companions" between 1915-16 were Terry Carlin (Larry Slade) and Joe Smith (Joe Mott). In fact, Joe Smith was the real-life prototype for Joe Mott—the only African American in the play, a one-time proprietor of a black gambling house and a very close friend of O'Neill (Floyd 514). According to O'Neill's biographers, O'Neill's friendship with Joe was "palpable." Many a time when O'Neill had drunk himself insensible, Joe took the playwright home to his sister's house and ensured that he was nursed back to health. It was a proven fact that "more than once Joe fed [O'Neill] during a lean period" and that "O'Neill loved to go to Joe's place or join Joe in the Hell Hole" (Gelbs 347). Again, according to George Nathan, "in all the world," O'Neill did not have "more than five men at the very most whom [he] really [regarded] as friends." Nathan adds, "with a pot-companion named Joe Smith, he shared a room—which they always referred to as 'the garbage flat'—for the fine sum of $3.00 a month." Further, not only Joe Smith, but his "particular comrades" at Jimmy's included "a number of odiferous colored gentlemen" ("Portrait of O'Neill" 59). All these go far to show how O'Neill, as discussed in previous chapters, was able to have close friendship or comradeship with colored men which proves that as a playwright, besides showing serious

concerns about the plight of the blacks in America, he was forging a close tie with them in real-life to establish the fact that color-complex is an abhorrent matter that only exists in racist psyche.

Besides, Michael Manheim finds similarities between O'Neill's father and Willie Oban's father and Hickey's father: Oban's father betrayed his son by his fraudulence and corruption, and the latter sold salvation like pre-Protestant era's crooked Catholic practices. He also found parallels between O'Neill's dead brother Jamie with Willie Oban and "Dionysian" Hickey, and between Rosa Parritt and O'Neill's mother (*New Language of Kinship* 132-136). Like Carpenter (*Eugene O'Neill* 157-88) and Alexander (*The Tempering* 211), Manheim acknowledges Larry as embodying "O'Neill's personal hell," "philosophical despair" or "rational despair" (*New Language of Kinship* 132 and 137), while Sheaffer sees parallels between O'Neill and both Hickey and Parritt (*Son and Artist* 499). Therefore, O'Neill's immediate family members may be seen beneath the real-life models in almost every case, thus forging a hovering landscape in the play's background.

Hickey: The Cultural Archetype of American Salesman

The title of this canonical play has stressed critics and scholars out from time to time as they oscillated between, while trying to decipher, the biblical and the vernacular connotations it carries with it. Both CP Sinha (125) and Normand Berlin ("The Late Plays" 84) contend that it has been drawn from the story of the wise and foolish virgins in Mathew's gospel, parodying the description of the coming Savior: "While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh" (25.5-6). But this ironical

comparison seems to be a forced one since the bridegroom here is sinless Christ who is coming to reward the good to those who are anxiously waiting and preparing for his arrival. On the other hand, Hickey is a murderer, a dishonest man who is not only unfaithful to his wife but who kills her also. Thus, haunted by his guilt, and because he has no peace of mind (even though he claims he has), he comes to Harry Hope's bar to destroy the fragile harmony of the inmates under the guise of bringing salvation to them. In fact, Hickey may be referred to as a limb of the devil, and hence he is the dangerous agent St. Peter warns all to refrain from: "Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith" (IPt. 5.8-9). Hickey, therefore, poses as a strange and bogus messiah.

It seems that O'Neill, who always paid special attention to his titles, here merges an archaic word "cometh" with the "iceman" of a sex joke that is never actually told in the play. Yet, as per Dudley Nicholas, O'Neill's friend and an acclaimed writer, when Evelyn married Hickey she took "Death" to her bosom, and her "insistence on her great love for Hickey and his undying love for her and her deathlike grip on his conscience … is making Death breathe hard on her breast as he approaches ever nearer—as he is about to 'come' in the vernacular sense" (Gelbs 831). In fact, iceman is a salesman who beds another man's wife and who sells ice—a symbol of coldness, stiffness, and death; he is a clear-eyed realist, purveyor of the cold, hard truth. In popular US slang, to ice someone is to kill him, and thus Hickey is an iceman too, icing his wife, trying to sell American brand of reality to the Hope's inmates to ice them, and finally icing himself in the end. Thus the title not only provides us with a composite key of the Biblical and the vulgar, but also refers to a socio-political dimension which must not be overlooked.

Julia White, in her "*The Iceman Cometh* as Infertility Myth," rightly contends that through Hickey O'Neill for the first time "presents us with a uniquely American mythic figure—the salesman" which immediately in few years helped revolutionize salesman as American everyman particularly taking into account two of America's most famous salesmen: flinty Stanley Kowalski in Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and awful Willy Loman in Arthur Miler's *Death of a Salesman* (1949).[2] Indeed, Hickey emerges as the first American sales agent of the capitalistic era who, interestingly, leaves a stage-legacy for Stanley and Willy by never apprising the audience of his selling product since, like his successors, he sells death through selling American brand of realism.

In *Iceman*, O'Neill describes Hickey only as "*a hardware salesman*" (562), "*a successful drummer whose territory consists of minor cities and small towns*" (1.607), but we get no further details about his hardware, which seems to have to do more with sex or death ("hardware" being a slang term for, among other things, that archetypal phallic symbol, a gun) than with any real product. In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the only piece of information we gather about Stanley's selling product is through Stella. While conversing with Blanche, she says, "[Mitch] works on the precision bench in the spare parts department. At the plant Stanley travels for" (2027). Stanley thus travels for an unnamed firm that apparently manufactures and markets some kind of machinery. In *Death of a Salesman*, the most well-known salesman play on American stage, we never get a least idea as to what *in actu* Willy is selling—neither the stage description nor his travel-log nor through dialogue in any form are we apprised of the world famous salesman's name of the selling product. All three dramatists', among whom O'Neill was the pioneer, not mentioning the selling merchandise of their salesman-protagonists must not be comprehended as a mere coincidence, and hence it

gives an indication that the triumvirate of American playwrights has done it on purpose.

All these three salesmen consider themselves as winning personalities and see themselves as clear-eyed realists, as clear as the water running under the Brooklyn Bridge. Stanley hates the get-up and guts of Blanche; he utterly dislikes the "feathers and furs" with which she tries to "preen herself in," and is over the moon to be able to pull Stella "down off the columns" of Belle Reve (2059). He now endeavors to do the same to a broken Blanche to whom the illusion and memory of Belle Reve, like the past tale of derring-dos of the fallen barflies of *Iceman*, is the only remaining subsistence for survival. Stanley here is a dark version of the salesman, selling the idealistic Blanche a harsh reality on the specious ground that it is somehow good for her; and thus he uses force (through rape) as it was necessary for him to make the sale.

However, Willy is less destructive than Stanley as his vision of reality is pretty simple: being "well-liked"—the recipe for all worldly success which, according to him, is the "wonder of this country" (i.e., America) with which "a man can end with diamonds here on the basis of being liked" (2.1517). Scorning cynical Charley's traditional example of JP Morgan which collides with his viewpoint of accomplishment through contacts and being liked, and putting aside traditional values of education and hard work, his forced sales based on his ultra-realistic philosophy destroys the careers of his sons Biff and Happy. Neither the audience members nor his sons seem to be taken in by his ethics and he finally ends up lonely as well as not "well-liked" by anybody. The words of the perceptive Woman in the hotel room, who mockingly calls him "drummer boy," best suits his epitaph: "You are the saddest, self-centeredest soul I ever did seesaw" (3.1534). All three salesmen seemed to have

the typical modern man's on-job bliss of extra-marital fling: Hickey carries venereal diseases to his wife after having travel-sex and is always forgiven by her after confessions; Stanley had long been sizing up Blanche and finally rapes her when his wife is away in the hospital for the childbirth; and Willy's sex-in-the-city type of act is caught in completely un-voyeuristic term by his son that virtually shattered the career of the latter.

The Woman's take on Willy reverberates in O'Neill's "theory" on newly-emerged superpower America, expounded on 2 September 1946, three years before Miller's *Death* was staged and just a month before *Iceman*'s first staging. In his famous interview with JS Wilson, O'Neill said, "United States, instead of being the most successful in the world, is the greatest failure … [for] its main idea is that everlasting game of trying to possess your own soul by the possession of something outside of it, thereby losing your own soul and the thing outside of it, too … We are the greatest example of 'For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul'" (18)? To prove O'Neill's citation of biblical parable right and applicable to profit-mongering, war-loving, racist, neo-colonial, and stern-realist image of America, Willy buys his own warped reality for good by killing himself, foolishly convinced that Biff will benefit materially from his death. In fact, Willy's American fate was sealed long before with O'Neill caution: "we squandered our soul by trying to possess something outside of it, and we'll end up as that game usually does, by losing our soul and the thing outside it too" (Wilson, JS 18).

O'Neill's "hero" or "anti-hero" (Black "Tragic Anagnorisis in *The Iceman Cometh*") Hickey is another realist like Stanley and Willy, preaching and strongly sticking to his own ideal. Like Willy, he believes that the key to success is in being well liked: "I'd met a lot of drummers around the hotel and liked 'em. They were

always telling jokes. They were sports. They kept moving. I liked their life. And I knew I could kid people and sell things" (4.695). Yet it is implied that the greatest inspiration he drew for the profession of a salesman was not from these drummers, but from his father. As usual, O'Neill digs at the bottom of "sickness" by letting Hickey spell out that his "Minister"-father's acts of selling salvation which he closely monitored as a kid, the likes which existed in Martin Luther's time amongst corrupt Catholic preachers, as the prime-motif behind Hickey's belief that he "could kid people and sell things." He reminisces, "Listening to my old man whooping up hell fire and scaring those Hoosier suckers into shelling out their dough only handed me a laugh, although I had to hand it to him, the way he sold them nothing for something. I guess I take after him, and that's what made me a good salesman" (4.693). Hickey understood even as a kid that like religion, economics plays upon the hopes and fears of the human race where, seduced by the seller, the buyer acquires objects to prove his spiritual and social status. Thus, like his two successors, he goes all out to sell the illusion-struck barflies at Hope's a harsh reality after killing his wife Evelyn. David Krasner, however, contends that O'Neill presents Hickey to simultaneously showcase two positions: "realism" and "theatricality" with which Hickey would try to force his sale and thus achieve his personal-philosophical purposes:

> In Hickey [O'Neill] creates a character who is an "actor" in a role. Hickey is both feigning madness and going mad. In this way Hickey is similar to Shakespeare's Hamlet, who also feigns madness and is likely bereft of his senses. Hamlet "acts" mad in order to discover certainty about his father's murderer; but he is simultaneously losing his mind. Hickey too dons an "act" of madness and is losing his bearing. Like a good actor (and good salesman), he must convince the bar patrons to

> "buy into" his madness so that they may testify on his behalf. This is his ploy to avoid execution, as well as his "role" to play as an actor. (*American Drama 1945-2000* 37)

Banking on his con game of manipulative performance, Hickey uses emotion and trust of his buyers to make the sale; he proudly puts forward how he traps his victims:

> I got a job easy, and it was a cinch for me to make good, I had the knack. It was like a game, sizing people up quick, spotting what their pet pipe dreams were, and then kidding 'em along that line, pretending you believed what they wanted to believe about themselves. Then they liked you, they trusted you, they wanted to buy something to show their gratitude. It was fun. (4.696)

Hickey brings the (Max) Weberian credit-credibility scheme to a new dimension and the salesmanship profession a new air. But Hickey, with all his smart demeanor and trickery, fails to puncture the pipedream of the bar people who, albeit stay perplexed and confused for some moments, return to their own pipedreams that sustain them instead of buying Hickey's philosophy.

Nonetheless, unlike Willy and even Stanley, Hickey has been a successful salesman: is well liked by customers and peers, has pockets full of money, and obviously has not lost his job. Hickey makes more profound impact as a cultural archetype of the salesman in the 1940s than Miller's Willy since O'Neill realized the inherent "sickness" of American psyche better than any author—that the tragedy of the United States is not of failure but rather one of success. Willy holds on to his foolish ideal until the end in spite of its certain failure in his life whereas Hickey rejects the ideal of fitting in, being liked, and of easy accumulation of money, because it has succeeded for him too effortlessly and too well—the way America, after

emerging as one of the richest and the most powerful countries on earth in immediate post-World War II years when the entire Europe was reeling under debris, found its success as hollow and frustrating.

The *Time* Magazine on 21 October 1946 claimed that in this play O'Neill failed to explore the depths of despair of common people: "As drama, for all its brooding, *The Iceman* was scarcely deeper than a puddle" ("The Ordeal" 72). JP Diggins, in his recent study, views that *Time*'s such "disappointment" over O'Neill was merely a defense of its editor Henry Luce who had few days back claimed that the remnants of the twentieth century would entirely belong to America. Having coined the term "The American Century," Luce reminded the Americans of the "historical mission" of "manifest destiny"; that the Americans must prepare themselves up to "do their mysterious work of lifting the life of mankind." Diggins feels that *Time*'s celebrated editor Luce's reckoning on America proved absolutely wrong as was wrong or immature the magazine's review on *Iceman*, and argues that O'Neill was able to perceive as well as foresee the tragedy looming large on America as instead of being "The American Century," it became "The Communist Century" where Eastern Europe and most of Asia fell to communist dictatorship within a few years of the end of World War II (xiii). The crusade against Hitler and the evil's fall saw the rise of Stalin, and until the fag end of the twentieth century and throughout the whole Cold War era, America had to stomach its paranoid and irrational fear of Russian Soviet communist government and KGB. Diggins further elaborates how within a couple of years of *Iceman*'s first staging and the ending of World War II, the whole American-success scenario changed and chanting subsided, the like of which O'Neill long before predicted and left notes for the dilapidated-would-be Americans:

> Two years after [*Iceman*] opened, *Time* featured Reinhold Niebuhr on its cover with a long essay that had been composed by Agee and the ex-communist Whittaker Chambers. Under the cover photo of Niebuhr the headline read: "Man's Story Is Not a Success Story." Niebuhr sought to warn America that human nature is fallen, cursed with original sin, and susceptible to the Christian sin of pride. Years earlier O'Neill had cautioned [in *The Great God Brown*]: "Man is born broken. He lives by mending. The grace of God is glue." America's greatest modern theologian and its greatest playwright saw history as tragic, ironic, full of pathos and sorrow … Both thinkers saw that attempts to relieve the human condition by communist political means would only lead to catastrophe. (Diggins xiii-xiv)

The Iceman Cometh's allusions to political topics have given rise to interesting speculations over the years.

Joe Mott: Answer to O'Neill's Personal and Political Equations

The Iceman Cometh apprises us of the playwright's political conviction which has long been shrouded in mystery. Although the playwright saw vicious materialism creeping into America's professed ideals of liberty and thereby pulverizing the humane sense of equality and fraternity, he never adhered to the political philosophies of anarchism and socialism that sometimes critics and scholars misconstrue. In other words, like French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville who saw American "desires inspired by equality" as turning out to be the "tyranny of majority" since it was breeding more inequality (Tocqueville 536-38), the playwright saw in American soul

liberty being synonymous to feeling free to desire—in the forms of self-interest of grabbing and possessing, from oil and land to woman and all material entities—the themes of majority O'Neill's plays.

Diggins contends that American Declaration of Independence seems to be "a series of broken trust" since in reality, as Tocqueville perceived, it was used to serve the self-interest of a group; he continues, "Abraham Lincoln, who urged Americans to live up to 'the mystic chords of memory,' accused Southern slaveholders of betraying the Declaration's affirmation of equality, and they accused him of betraying the Constitution's protection of slavery as a species of property" (243). To O'Neill, Southerners' proclivity towards accumulating wealth through slave trade, the "original sin" as well as the birth of capitalistic desire, is what unsettles and punishes the soul, as seen in *The Emperor Jones*. Although Richard in *Ah, Wilderness*, Hogan in *Moon for the Misbegotten*, and Yank and Long in *The Hairy Ape* are among many a character who express their anger over capitalistic system, the playwright however corroborates through Irishman Larry in *The Iceman Cometh* that radical politics of anarchism and socialism can offer nothing better than capitalism since the leaders are putting their personal desires ahead of people, church, or state. Thus anarchism and socialism are doomed to failure, like capitalist democracy; Larry says, "I know they [anarchists and socialists]'re damned fools, most of them, as stupidly greedy for power as the worst capitalist they attack" (1.579). Thus O'Neill, although was critical of democracy, was nevertheless the "only major writer" in Europe and America of his time not to have given in to socialist or communist philosophy as a possible alternative to democracy. According to Diggins,

> Yet O'Neill was one of the few American writers who knew that communism would not work, that indeed it would turn out to be the

> cruelest of illusions, the "pipe dream" of the Left, the "opium of the intellectuals" that would later overtake China and much of Southeast Asia … Moreover, O'Neill was the only major writer, in Europe as well as America, who identified with the left and yet remained profoundly skeptical of communism even before the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917 … American playwrights were sympathetic to Soviet Russia (Clifford Odets, John Howard Lawson, Arthur Miller); their European counterparts wildly enthusiastic (Bertolt Brecht, Sean O'Casey, George Bernard Shaw). O'Neill alone realized that the promise of politics had simply replaced the promise of religion in claiming to save the world from sin and redemption. (Diggins xiv)

In fact, O'Neill's close radical friends, anarchists Emma Goldman and Terry Carlin, and communist John Reed, failed to leave a mark of political faith upon him. In *The Iceman Cometh*, O'Neill chooses Joe Mott to funnily lay bare and cap it once and for all, the lesson of the Movement-years—immediately after World War I, when America was confronting with the European waves of anarchism and socialism that swept inside its own boundary. Joe Mott here, under drunken stupor, portraying "dichotomy in man between his 'mask'—his sober façade—and his face," implying that the characters speak the truth when intoxicated (Tornqvist 149), calls the Movement "de sucker game" of intellectuals and differentiates between an anarchist and a socialist to reach to a conclusion that both are "no-good bastards" for America ideologically:

> If dere's one ting more'n anudder I cares nothin' about, it's de sucker game you and Hugo call de Movement. (*He chuckles—reminiscently*) Reminds me of damn fool argument me and Mose Porter has de udder

> night. He's drunk and I'm drunker. He says, "Socialists and Anarchists, we ought to shoot dem dead. Dey's all no-good sons of bitches." I says, "Hold on, you talk 's if Anarchists and Socialists was de same." "Dey is," he says. "Dey's both no-good bastards." "No dey ain't," I says. "I'll explain the difference. De Anarchist he never works. He drinks but he never buys, and if he do ever get a nickel, he blows it on bombs, and he wouldn't give you nothin'. So go ahead and shoot him, But de socialist, sometimes, he's got a job, and if he gets ten bucks, he's bound by his religion to split fifty-fifty wid you. You say—how about my cut, Comrade? And you gets the five. So you don't shoot no socialist while I'm around. Dat is, not if dey got anything. Of course, if dey's broke, den dey's no-good bastards, too." (*He laughs, immensely tickled*.) (1.575)

Here, O'Neill prefers black Joe to communicate his political thought to the audience where Joe's such eloquent "parable" is considered "the practical wisdom of the world" by the "de on'y wise guy" in the bar, Larry—a formerly dedicated anarchist who lost his total faith with the Movement. O'Neill's choice of Joe for conveying such serious message at the very beginning of the play shows the playwright's intention not only to make the play "antipolitical" as Diggins views (235), but also to make the audience understand that the downtrodden or minority groups have the needed intellectual acumen to decipher and then laugh out the sham political philosophies that posed threat at the end of the thirties and on the eve of World War II. The playwright here expresses his political view, if any, through Joe that the problem with America and its democracy is that it refuses to implement truly the

doctrine of natural rights and the equal opportunity as well as protection of laws as found in its Constitution, drafted by its visionary Forefathers.

Besides, both Edward Shaughnessy and Michael Manheim contend that Joe's reaction and rage against racist slurs and behaviors represent similar feeling of all bullied minorities in the US (Manheim *New Language of Kinship* 228; Shaughnessy "African and Irish Americans" 153). Manheim even goes far to delineate that Joe's last name "Mott" calls to mind the Mott Street in New York's Chinatown, signifying that by using the name the playwright seems to be linking Joe not merely to Black America but to America's racial minorities in general. In fact, O'Neill's and his family's undergoing racial treatments for being Irish immigrants in the hands of Yankee Londoners has been discussed in previous chapters, and here, as his biographers and scholars indicate, through black Joe's such deportment, the playwright wears the inside out of his inner feelings of discontentment against the racist Americans. In *The Iceman Cometh*, Joe's annoyance and resentment reflect O'Neill's bitter feelings against the Yankee New Londoners who rejected his Irish family and made them feel unwanted and inferior. In fact, just as Joe Mott dreams of the time when he can make enough money so as to "throw a twenty-dollar bill on de bar and say [to the whites], 'Drink it up'" (3.660), O'Neill truly planned to throw money on the street in order to put to shame those who looked down on him and his family. Talking to an old friend, Dr. Ganey, in New York, the playwright once said, "I hate this town like poison. I always have and always will. I left New London because I wanted to make enough money to hire a four-in-hand, fill it up with obvious blond whores, and drive down Main Street scattering a bushel of dimes for the peasants to scramble after" (qtd. in Bowen 58). The Playwright did not shy away from addressing his disgust towards the racist New Londoners, and through Joe Mott, he doles out his

too personal, tormenting anguish against them. This, although not comprehensively, partly supports Normand Berlin's viewpoint that O'Neill as "a white playwright ... used black characters to explore his own sense of alienation" ("The Late Plays" 85). The encoded identities of his parents in *All God's Chillun Got wings*, as discussed in the previous chapter, justify Berlin's such claim.

Life of Pipedream, Living in Equality

When *The Iceman Cometh* opens, almost all the derelicts of Hope's bar are asleep, day-dreaming that is induced by alcohol, where Irishman Larry Slade is the only character who is awake. He reiterates again and again to his other roommates that he has no more pipedreams: "I don't, no. Mine are all dead and buried behind me. What's before me is the comforting fact that death is a fine long sleep, and I'm damn tired, and it can't come too soon for me" (1.570). Larry holds himself aloof from all human affairs, "in the grandstand of philosophical detachment," but he feels for the hope-forsaken inmates: "He cannot help responding to the suffering of 'the breed of swine called men' with a sensitiveness and passion he would gladly suppress" (Muchnic 434). Most of the characters talk randomly of everyday concerns without really caring about what happens. It is during these random talks that bartender Rocky mentions Harry Hope's threat to eject all those derelicts who do not want to pay their bills. The inmates do not take him quite seriously because they know very well that Hope's bar is the end of the road and that there is no crossing over or coming back. The fact that everyone here "belongs" is their consolation.

Tellingly, as long as there is no contact with the outside world, no person to confront them with the truth about themselves, they are contended. This is why they

are constantly drinking and day-dreaming. Liquor robs them of consciousness, the potency to reflect: "the realities which inform man's existence are so profoundly contradictory that consciousness must either pass them by, or deal with them in falsehoods, or obliterate itself." Therefore, "the poor, harmless souls at Harry Hope's—good-natured, easy-going, and rather appealing with their vague beliefs in love and honor so long as they remain in their drunken stupor—exhibit, as soon as they are forced to consciousness, unsuspected, deep-seated, murderous hatred" (Cargill 440). Thus, peace, harmony, love, and understanding seem to reign in Hope's bar. According to Travis Bogard, "What lies outside is a world without value, a hostile society to which no man can possibly belong, and from which they must take refuge" (414-15). They bridge contact between them through shared illusions in order for life to continue. Although the outside world is reprehensible to each of them, each one is planning, or at least dreaming to go out soon, tomorrow perhaps, to reclaim his lost job and to begin a new, better life:

> Harry Hope, the proprietor of the bar who has not stepped outside since his wife's death twenty years ago, plans to do so "tomorrow"; Jimmy dreams to have back his old job on the newspaper; Joe Mott will start a new gambling house; The Boer War foes will have enough money to go back to their native countries; Pat, who was dismissed from the police force for accepting bribes, will be vindicated and reinstated; Willie will work for the district attorney; and Cora and Chuck marry and settle down on a farm in "Jousey"; Margie and Pearl's pipe dream is that they are "tarts," not whores; Rocky's pretense is that he is their manager, not a pimp; Hugo's dream is to lead a revolutionary anarchist "mob to the sack of Babylon"—modern

> capitalist society; Larry, the "old Folosopher," deludes himself by believing that he welcomes the "dine sleep" of death. He alone realizes both the futility and the need of the dream. (Floyd *The Plays* 518)

Therefore, in the world of *The Iceman Cometh*, there are assembled people of different nationalities, professions, and creeds—all cemented together as one, in the brotherhood of those who have run out of their luck. Indeed, "there are men of various ages and men who are aware of having been sons, husbands, lovers, not only nationality but class, education, and therefore, degrees of articulacy" (Chothia 117). Yet despite these differences and backgrounds of the inmates, the atmosphere in Hope's bar is one of unquestioning tolerance, love, and compassion. With "hopeless hope" only, these downtrodden characters go on living from day to day sustained in their life's lie.

A crucial event in the life of these derelicts is the arrival once or twice a year of Theodore Hickman, nicknamed as Hickey, a traveling hardware salesman. As the playwright describes him:

> *He is about fifty, a little under medium height ... His expression is fixed in a salesman's winning smile of self-confident affability and hearty good fellowship ... He exudes a friendly, generous personality that makes everyone like him on sight ... There is an efficient, business-like approach in his manner ... He has the salesman's mannerisms of speech, an easy flow of glib, persuasive convincingness*. (1.607)

Hickey's visit is always an excitement for the habitués, for his arrival means abundant whiskey for the satisfaction of all. They enjoy listening to his jokes, "particularly that one about his loving wife [Evelyn], whom he has treated so badly but who is alright

now because he left her safely at home in bed—'with the iceman'" (Gilder 687). Hickey is considered as outsider. He lives in the outside business world and comes only once in a while to Harry Hope's bar to lavish drinks and jokes to the delight of the jaded inmates.

In fact, the habitués are awaiting Hickey's arrival to celebrate *en masse* the birthday anniversary of his dear friend, and the proprietor of the saloon, Harry Hope. Hickey, however, has changed a lot and has killed, as he thinks he has, his pipedream in order to face reality and be true to himself. Furthermore, he has given up drinking because as he declares to his comrades: "The only reason I've quit is—Well, I finally had the guts to face myself and throw overboard the damned lying pipe dream that'd been making me miserable, and do what I had to do for the happiness of all concerned—and then all at once I found I was at peace with myself and I didn't need booze anymore" (1.609).

It is important to note that before Hickey's coming, an atmosphere of harmony, near optimism, self-respect, tolerance, and unity prevailed in the bar. Usually when one of these inmates boastfully talks about his achievements, even though it is mere exaggeration, he receives support and approval from the others just to sustain his self-worth. For example, Hope, who did not really love his wife, claims that since her death twenty years ago he has lost interest in everything and that "the boys was going to nominate me for Alderman. It was all fixed. Bessie [his wife] wanted it and she was so proud. But when she was taken, I told them, 'No boys, I can't do it. I simply haven't the heart. I'm through.' I would have won the election easy, too." Without wasting time, McGloin and Mosher, to whom he is addressing, agree: "You would, Harry. It was a sure thing … A dead cinch, Harry. Everyone knows that" (1.593).

Each of these characters, then, knows the unwritten code—help sustain the pipedream of your comrades! Never pass judgment on anyone, nor be a conscious vehicle to the denigration and inferiority of anyone in this Hope's bar:

> The pipe dreams of O'Neill's characters … make life tolerable while the dreamers wait for Hickey or Death. As much as each of the dreamers permits himself to understand anything, he knows that the pipe dreams, his own included, are a game, that they are not real. Each man mocks the dreams of the others as insubstantial and illusory, but the mockery is a defensive irony, an essential element of the self-identification the individual's dreams provide. What cannot be admitted is pity, for pity would acknowledge the truth each speaks to conceal from himself. (Bogard 415)

Albeit there are moments of misunderstanding and unfriendly taunting among the derelicts, these are easily resolved, dismissed, and forgotten. Cecil Lewis, the "one-time Captain of British infantry," for instance, makes a racial remark against Joe Mott, telling that he is drinking "at the same table with a bloody kaffir." Joe reacts very angrily against the racial insult by Lewis, and he is pacified only when Wetjoen excuses Lewis of the racial remark saying that Lewis does not know who Joe really is and that he is drunk and inattentive: "He don't know you," Wetjoen remarks, "he's still plind drunk, the ploody Limey chentleman! … (*He chuckles and slaps Lewis on his bare shoulder*) Hey, wake up, Cecil, you ploody fool! Don't you know your old friend, Joe? He's no damned Kaffir! He's white, Joe is! Lewis apologizes by saying, "My profound apologies, Joseph, old chum. Eyesight a trifle blurry, I'm afraid, Whitest colored man I ever knew. Proud to call you my friend. No hard feelings …

(*He holds out his hand*)" (1.588). Joe, however, does not hesitate to assert his rights and to warn him or anybody against future racial insults:

> No, Captain, I know it's mistake … (*then his face hardening*) But I don't stand for "nigger" from nobody. Never did. In de old days, people calls me "nigger" wakes up in de hospital. I was de leader ob de Dirty Half-Dozen Gang. All six of us colored boys, we was tough and I was de toughest. (1.589)

Thus, in *The Iceman Cometh*, more than any of his black plays, O'Neill makes the African American, Joe Mott, assert his dignity and equality with the rest of the white inmates.

Before Hickey's arrival, this kind of calm atmosphere in Hope's bar would exist where everyone is considerate and shows equal respect to each other, and hence, the distinctions and differences in nationality, profession, language, color, and religion are hardly noticeable and taken into account: "*The Iceman Cometh* depicts a wide social spectrum: people from various walks of life and of different nationalities—British, Czechoslovakian, South African, Italian, Irish. Hope's saloon symbolizes the American melting pot where all men are equal (the word "brother" is frequently used). Alcohol is the great leveler of social distinctions" (Floyd 521). Everyone—man or woman feels a sense of "belonging," a confident hope of a better tomorrow. The sense of unity and friendliness is amazing in Hope's bar until the destroyer of peace and harmony comes, proclaims to have quit the "booze" and thus tells everyone to give up alcohol—"the great leveler of social distinctions." Thus, "before Hickman enters it, the bar is a place of security. It offers protection from the world's harsh realities. In Hope's place the derelicts find 'peace,' they are 'contended' men. Here no one needing a drink, which is equated with life by one character, is ever

turned down … The bar is a 'curious Utopia,' where good will is nurtured with cheap whisky and where each citizen is … tolerant of his neighbor's illusions" (Welch 225).

It is interesting to note that the inmates here are not at all obsessed with lustful passions as both in speech and action they seem to be anything but sexually promiscuous. Although there are whores in the bar, their professional activities are performed outside of the bar. Cora, Pearl, and Margie see themselves as "tarts" and not as "whores." They consider themselves "protagonists in a world where lustful men and pimps are the antagonists, while they flee the label 'whore,' which turns them into antagonists in the melodrama of the wicked woman. As tarts and girls can be simply flirtatious, while the whores they are cheats, thieves, and debasers of men" (Manheim "The Transcendence of Melodrama" 152). As tarts, Cora, Pearl, and Margie practice their flirtations outside the saloon and none of the inmates harasses them sexually nor make them guilty of their profession. It is a world that "exists beyond desire. Whiskey alone sustains physical life. Hunger for food is not expressed, and notably no movement of sexual desire disturbs the quiet. The three whores arouse no one to lust, nor do they try to become objects of desire among the dreamers. Even the proposed marriage of Chuck and Cora is based on other dreams than that of sexual gratification" (Bogard 417).

Here, these bemused inmates are free from any serious disreputable conduct; they struggle as far as possible to maintain their dignity and optimism. They are not against society and they do not plan to attack it. They have all come here in search of love, in search of brotherly compassion and understanding. Their consolation is that for the first time in their broken lives they feel a sense of belonging, a sense of pride in themselves. O'Neill, more than any other subject, stressed on the need to "belong," the need to love and be loved: "Character after character in his plays struggles against

an unfriendly world, not for economic security, nor for wealth, nor power, but for peace, happiness, and above all, understanding" (Winther 109). These down-and-outers in Hope's bar were fed up with being rejected. They were tired of dealing with the guilt of their failures. Joe Mott, the only black among them, too, was fed up with being branded a "nigger" today when unsuccessful and down in his luck, and a "white man" another day when successful and prosperous; hence all of them left society. In addressing the problems and situations of these bums, the playwright draws our attention to the love, the compassion, and the tolerance which they practice among themselves and which, in addition to their daily drinks and their pipedreams help them to cope with their disappointments and failures. Love, then, is the antidote to alienation, racial prejudice, and discrimination. Edwin Engel views: "Prior to *The Iceman Cometh* O'Neill had often felt that love was the prime component of faith. He had his characters plead for love, profess it, pursue it, but seldom experience it in any but the most elemental or immature way. His heroes, at odds with the world, sought the remoteness of the Cosmos, the protection of the womb, the anonymity of the grave" (223).

Because the characters plead for love in an indifferent society, a society unwilling to give it to them, they seek for death as an alternative. Yank, in *The Hairy Ape*, wanted, above all desires, to "belong." To be part of the system, and because he would not be accepted, he sought for death in the hands of the gorilla. The need for basic sustenance for survival has been the cardinal factor in O'Neill's canvass where many characters "walk up and down the world looking for work only to be turned away with a brutal word … as they shiver from cold, and see their loved ones die from want, consoled only by the fact that they, too, will soon be dead, they come to the realization that they do not belong … They stand on the sidewalks of the world,

desolate, abandoned, even heated and despised for being something they did not ask to be" (Winther 192). These groups of people fill the plots from time to time in his dramas, and in *Iceman*, he brings them together to show them whiling away in frustrations by "stripping" their "secret soul … stark naked," the mores of which varies from person to person. In fact, O'Neill's intense feelings for these unfortunate and alienated souls are expressed in one of his letters to Lawrence Langner, a playwright, an author, and the founder of the Theater Guild:

> I have a confident hunch that [*The Iceman Cometh*], as drama, is one of the best things I've ever done. In some ways, perhaps the best. What I mean is there are moments in it that suddenly strip the strip secret soul of a man stark naked, not in cruelty or moral superiority, but with an understanding compassion which sees him as a victim of the ironies of life and of himself. Those moments are for me the depth of tragedy, with nothing more that can be possibly said. (qtd. in Raleigh "Twentieth Century Interpretation" 19)

Many critics and scholars see *The Iceman Cometh* as a pessimistic play since the characters here are pitiable; yet these derelicts obviously are not pleading for sympathy, but more for love and understanding. In fact, the play ends in a kind of hope and positive affirmation. According to John Raleigh, "despite its somber themes, [*The Iceman Cometh*] was written in joy, in the pure pleasure of recapturing a past that [O'Neill] had himself once known but that was not concocted with his family. According to his own testimony, the play flowed from his pen" (4). The most striking observation in the play is that almost all the inmates have the determination to live and go on living, hence their constant inclination to drinking and pipe-dreaming to sustain their hope. What Arthur Miller described in his essay "Tragedy and the

Common Man" in *The New York Times* in 1949 that "the pathetic is achieved" by the "commonest of man" when he is "incapable of grappling with a much superior force" in society (Kennedy and Gioia 1728), O'Neill seems to have well perceived it a decade ago by showing the Harry Hope's inmates groveling under their severe pathetic lots as the society spat them out for not fitting into, appreciating, and complying with its all-devouring structure.

"*Always Be Closing*"*: Bigotry's Stepping In*

In *The Iceman Cometh*, upon Hickey's arrival, the aura of friendliness, love, understanding, and tolerance are shattered. Quite in tune with the famous maxim, "Always Be Closing," Hickey turns up in Hope's bar to complete a sale. Yet, in his attempt to sell salvation to his comrades, to challenge them to face the truth about themselves and to go out into the world and earn their living, Hickey rather sows the seed of confusion, hatred, and even death. Confronting these "hope-forsaken" inmates, he says:

> I meant [to] save you from 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 contended 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. (1.610)

Hickey's such biblical uttering, as though coming from a savior, sounds like political rhetoric at worst and sophistry at best. He comes here to bring his crazy gospel of

truth and salvation to his fellow brothers who, until now, are afraid and scared to face the truth about themselves. Unfortunately, this false gospel of salvation precipitates disaster, death, and damnation to those it is intended to save. Henceforth Hickey is synonymous with "death"—the two names are used interchangeably by the inmates:

> The fruits that Hickey brings are not love and peace but strife and disruption. Before his arrival at Hope's place, there is calm … After [his] arrival characters sneer, curse, and make accusations at one another. Friends like Lewis and Wetjoen, Mosher and McGloin, the pimps and the tarts, become enemies. Like Adam and Eve, who experience shame, anger, hatred, and discord after Satan's new knowledge … the drunks feel guilty and outraged when Hickey reveals their weaknesses. As a result of his questioning and cajoling, everyone is uneasy and resentful. Mutual antagonism reigns during the preparations for Hope's birthday party. (Welch 225)

Thus, as Dennis Welch asserts, Hickey himself is a "Satanic force" in the guise of a messiah that eventually wrecks havoc in the peaceful lives of the bar inmates and destroys the atmosphere where respect, fellow-feeling, and a sense of equality prevailed.

Furthermore, only after his arrival and his fault-finding mission about the inmates, bigotry or discrimination become entrenched. An atmosphere of gloom and unfriendliness pervades the entire Hope's bar; according to the stage direction:

> *There is an atmosphere of oppressive stagnation in the room, and a quality of insensibility about all the people in this group at right. They are like wax figures, set stiffly on their chairs, carrying out mechanically the motions of getting drunk but sunk in a numb stupor*

> *which is impervious to stimulation … Joe's … head rolls forward in a sodden slumber. Rocky is standing behind the chair, regarding him with dull hostility.* (4.681-82)

Henceforth the inmates become conscious of the fact that Joe Mott is not white but a "nigger," and from time to time racial slurs are hurled at him. In his concerned and brotherly effort to separate two good friends, Chuck and Rocky, who are about to fight with murdering mania, Joe is called a "black bastard." Both Rocky and Chuck turn against him, and regarding him with contempt, they caution him: "Keep outa our business, yuh black bastard! … (*Ricky like Chuck, turns on Joe, as if their own quarrel was forgotten and they became natural allies against an alien*.) Stay where yuh belong, yuh doity nigger" (3.658)! As a result of Hickey's visit and the medicine he brings to cure the derelicts of their pipedreams, racial uneasiness, spite, and discrimination inundate Hope's bar: "The ambiguities of various appellations of Joe Mott, the 'black' man who is morally 'white,' likewise run throughout the play. A 'dinge,' a 'black bastard,' a 'doity nigger' when the others are enraged at him, [but] he is a 'white' man in the stretches of peace" (Raleigh 167).

The racial intolerance which for long has lurked in the unconscious of some of the white inmates, becomes apparent as soon as Hickey brings his own gospel of truth, his gospel of rousing the inmates to face reality and the truth about themselves, as one critic rightly argues: "The grace of Hickey unglues man, unleashes the destructive forces in man and separates close friends from one another. As despair takes over their consciousness, these characters begin to squabble among themselves. The hatred which had been hidden in the depths of the subconscious comes to the surface" (Scrimgeour 45). In fact, like the inveighing against the "life-lie" which Dr. Reilling of Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* evokes, Hickey gives the sense to the barflies that

they had better accept the "truth" about themselves. He singles out each character's pipedream, and after exposing his fault, persuades like a good salesman to go out and reclaim the past middle-class respectability knowing very well that it is next to impossible for each of them. But a charismatic maestro Hickey has a hidden agenda: although he tries to unmask the illusion of the inmates by exposing their lies, thus orchestrating a wholesale act of redemption, he hides his own homicidal act of killing his wife Evelyn. With an atmosphere of intolerance and fighting among themselves, the inmates also notice that the "kick" in the "booze" is gone. Only when Hickey is taken by police, they are able to get back to their usual life and retrieve the old booze, hence proving the fact that illusion or pipedream or "life-lie" is all they have in life.

On another note, the activities and the visit of Hickey, the man who fouled the atmosphere of friendship, unity, harmony, and brotherly love among the inmates of Hope's bar, can be compared with the activities of the parents and adults in *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, who poisoned the innocent minds of their developing children by ingraining a doctrine of racial prejudice, discrimination, and snobbery. Black and white children played freely and happily together on the streets of the lower East side in Manhattan. They admired one another's color without really knowing the consequences of difference in color. It was only through contact with their racially intolerant parents that they became aware of prejudice and bigotry. Consequently, the white children began to disassociate themselves from their black friends, regarding them as inferior and dangerous. In the same vein, the down-trodden men and women in the world of *The Iceman Cometh* are like children—they think of only the good thongs ahead, the world of Utopia that will soon be theirs. Among them there is no room for envy, greed, and viciousness. Since they are living outside the society characterized by rat-race mania, there is no competitiveness or struggle among them,

in the likes of Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross*, which may precipitates greed, spite, and grabbing propensity. At Harry Hope's, everybody has put their hands up; everybody has lost interest to improve and be better than the others. Although from time to time they quarrel and make annoying or insulting remarks to one another as children do, they almost immediately make up and become friends again.

This innocent state, this fragile harmony is destroyed as soon as Hickey arrives with his gospel of redemption and truth. In other words, then, Hickey is the destroyer of harmony, peace, and racial brotherhood; commenting on his destructive gospel, Virginia Floyd writes, "Hickey is the outsider, the spoiler. At the onset of the play, before his arrival, harmony reigns at Harry Hope's. Bonds of deep friendship link all the characters. While these misfits might have been forced by fate to seek refuge at Hope's … each is consoled in his misery by the other … O'Neill explained the need to build up the complete picture of the group as it now is in the first part—the atmosphere of the place, the humor of friendship and human warmth and *deep inner contentment* at the bottom" (517).

In the world of *The Iceman Cometh*, morality seems to be the watch word. It is hardly a place where evil is planned against any segment of the society. Almost none of these misfits is bitter against anybody, or anyone who seemed to have wronged him in the past. Albeit "what lies outside is a world without value, a hostile society to which no man can possibly belong, and from which they must take refuge" (Bogard 414), they refrain from venting their anger and frustration against the "hostile society." When some of them, poisoned and made to feel guilty by Hickey's confrontation and begin to express spite and hostility toward each other, Larry Slade, an exception to this ongoing fiasco and the only one without a pipedream, cautions them sternly against Hickey, whose devastating gospel is succeeding to extirpate that

brotherly love and harmony they have always exercised among themselves. All the inmates are aware of Hickey's sown seed of discord and death. Noticing that Chuck, Rocky, and Joe are fighting, and that Rocky is about to fire "a short barreled, nickel-plated revolver" at Joe, Larry bursts into a sardonic laugh: "That's it! Murder each other you damned loons, with Hickey's blessing! Didn't I tell you he's brought death with him?" Joe then retorts, "You's right, Larry. Bad luck come in de door when Hickey come. I's an old gamblin' man and I knows bad luck feels it! (*then defiantly*) But it's white man's bad luck" (3.659).

Evolved and Equated "*Darker Brother*" *in State-Center*

However, Cecil Lewis' insulting statement, marking the first racial remark among the inmates since the beginning of the play, and Joe's reaction against such discriminating comment is crucial to the understanding of O'Neill's improvement in this late play of black characterization, especially given the fact that *The Iceman Cometh* is one of his last plays. Peter Gillette observes, "In [his] five [black] plays and in *The Iceman Cometh* … O'Neill may perhaps be the most interesting of all white authors. [He] met various difficulties of presenting black characters with ever greater assurance, awareness, and success. As we move from *Thirst* through *The Iceman* we can watch America's most influential playwright more and more understanding blackness as part of the black man's humanity, and in the process sloughing off the influence of the traditional American racial myths (111). However, it can be argued whether O'Neill had any problem at all in "understanding blackness as a part of black man's humanity" as Gillette claims. JP Diggins contends that O'Neill's concerns and portrayals of blacks from the beginning of his career conformed to black intellectual

Du Bois' "idea *élan* of Harlem Renaissance that emerged in the post-World War I years and flowered through the twenties"—to "redefine" a "New Nero" since, according him, O'Neill well-deciphered the fact that "the crisis of the black American is the crisis of recognition" (Diggins 142-43).

This also explains why Joel Pfister, who has similar take on O'Neill's projection of Du Boisian contradictions and complexities in his plays, proves that O'Neill, on the one hand intentionally borrows images from the "cultural swamp" mainly with his portrayal of Dreamy and Brutus Jones, and on the other hand, shows rare "moral commitment to staging controversial racial issues" (through Jim and Ella) like "internalized racism" that poisons an interracial marriage (123-34). Taking lead from both Diggins and Pfister, it can be said that O'Neill well-understood the plight of blacks in the twenties and was able to characterize them, sometimes maneuvering "racial myths" as an *avant-garde* modern playwright would, and most of the times successfully showing blacks' demanding equity explicitly (Dreamy, Hattie, Joe) or implicitly (Jones, Jim) against a racist white society, characterized by its scientific, institutional, structural, and cultural mores of racism where "blackness" and "back man's humanity" were constantly topping O'Neill's agenda. Yet, Gillett's point that O'Neill had made a remarkable progress in black characterization through Joe Mott in *Iceman* can nonetheless be agreed upon and be considered as continuation of the male traffic of *All God Chillun*'s Hattie—a highly educated figure to whom blackness was a matter of sheer pride.

As we read the early plays about Blacks, from *Thirst* (1913) to *The Emperor Jones* (1920), we become aware of O'Neill's somewhat racial stereotypes of the Black—as primitive, superstitious, a man of the jungle obsessed with atavistic fear, etc. But in *All God's Chillun Got Wings* (1923), although both Blacks and Whites felt

insulted about the play, racial myths are gradually overtaken by the Black man's and woman's progress in education and profession (Jim and Hattie) which shows the race's intense desire to compete with White. The establishment of a prestigious private college exclusively for Blacks signifies future advancement and even the Congo mask, typically African, is considered a sign of Black power, a treasured painting equal to those of Michael Angelo. In *The Iceman Cometh* (1939), there is hardly any "traditional racial myth" where Joe Mott, the only Black character in the play, asserts his rights and equality with his White comrades as he behaves and pipedreams as the rest. This shows that O'Neill is making considerable progress in eking out the use of "the American racial myth" or the "cultural swamp" for experimentation.

It is important here to bear in mind that although Joe has been eating, drinking, and sleeping together with the other white derelicts before the arrival of Hickey and has hardly experienced any racial attack or discrimination against him, he is fully aware of the racial discrimination against blacks outside of the Hope's bar. Hence he is planning "tomorrow" to open a gambling house among his own people to be located in the black section of Lower Manhattan, New York, i.e., Harlem. Commenting on such racial discrimination against Joe Mott, Michael Manheim writes: "That Joe Mott has at one time been an independent entrepreneur, the owner of a successful Black gambling house, suggests a self-secure independence of restrictions placed upon Blacks in the early twentieth-century by White establishment" ("The Transcendence of Melodrama" 149).

Most importantly, the playwright whose criticisms and denunciation of greed in the American society and indeed in the world are yet to be rivaled by any playwright, exposes in this play the corruption in America by which the people of the

underclass have to bribe their way through the White establishment if they are to succeed in their business at all. Consequently, Joe has to depend on his white friend Harry who knows the "big boss" before he is allowed to open a gambling house for his fellow blacks. As Joe informs us, "Yes, suh, white folks always said I was white … I'd saved my dough so I could start my own gamblin' house. Folks in de know tells me, see de man at de top, den you never has trouble. You git Harry Hope give you a letter to de Chief. And Harry does" (1.590).

Like Brutus in *The Emperor Jones* who became greedier, more tyrannical, and more corrupt after listening and learning the white man's way of success, Joe Mott learns to play the game of bribery and manipulation in order to succeed. He does succeed, but at the cost of lowering his pride and becoming sycophantic so as to impress the Chief boss. Joe narrates his encounter with the white boss:

> I went to see de Chief, shakin' in my boots and dere he is sittin' behind a big desk … He keeps me waitin' and waitin', after 'bout an hour … he says, … 'you want to open a gamblin' joint, does you, Joe?' … He jumps up, and he pounds his fist like a ham on de desk, and shouts, 'you black son of a bitch, Harry says you're white and you better be white or dere's a little iron room up de river waitin' for you! … All right. You can open. Git de hell outa here!' So I opens, and he finds out I's white, sure 'nuff, 'cause I run wide open for years and pays my sugar on de dot, and de cops and I is friends. (1.590)

Indeed, Joe has learned fast the way of the white-structured society in which he is the victim, but unlike Brutus Jones, who victimized and exploited his own black people as soon as he climbed to the echelon of power, Joe has the interest of his own people at heart. He will open a gambling business in the midst of his black folks: "Here is the

black protagonist, the defender of the honor his downtrodden people. Yet Joe tells us about his kow-towing to the party boss in order to obtain permission to operate the gambling house … He has not only been a sycophantic lackey of the very society he has been defying but also an emulator of its corruption" (Manheim 150).

However, Joe may be "a sycophantic lackey," as per Manheim's observation, but it should be borne in mind that he has no other choice if he wants to succeed in a greedy and corrupt society where he is a victim of structural racism. Although a white, McGloin was fired from his job in police because the charge of corruption was levied upon him to save the high-up bosses. Thus while he was made a scapegoat, his colleagues are still enjoying the heydays. In his pipedream, he still thinks that he would be found not guilty if the case is reopened now, and be reinstated in the Force: "Everyone knows there was no real evidence against me, and I took the fall of the ones higher up. I'll be found innocent this time and reinstated. (*Wistfully*) I'd like to have my old job on the Force back. The boys tell me there's fine pickings these days, and I'm not getting rich here, sitting with a parched throat waiting for Harry Hope to buy a drink" (1.596). This corrupt situation—the pertinacious avidity for power and material acquisition at the expense of others, especially the poor, is deeply-drenched into American structure, and this is what O'Neill unequivocally condemns during one of his interviews in 1946 with John Wilson that the United States, "instead of being the most successful country in the world, is the greatest failure" for "its main idea is that everlasting game of trying to possess your own soul by the possession of something outside of it, thereby losing your own soul and the thing outside of it, too" (Wilson 18).

Nevertheless, once Joe Mott has obtained what he humbled himself for—permission to open a gambling house for blacks, he becomes defiant, self-sufficient,

and even disdainful towards any white bigotry. Because he knows his rights, and has been successful as a proprietor of the gambling game, he will not tolerate any remarks, or any behavior that smacks of racial prejudice or snobbery. Thus when Chuck and Rocky are ready to attack him with a whiskey bottle and a revolver, Joe takes the bread knife and encounters them saying, "You white sons of bitches! I'll rip your guts out" (3.658)! Although Joe began to feel alienated in a changed circumstance after Hickey's arrival, he nonetheless is able to lash back at his opponents since the playwright has accorded a sense of equality, dignity, and self-confidence to him in the play. In fact, Joe does not shy away from what he is; he lets them know he understands white man's game and will not allow himself to be deceived into thinking he is white. Handing over the keys to his fellow inmates, he decides to go back to his black people where, according to him, he "belongs." He says, "I's finished wid dis dump for keeps. (*He takes a key from his pocket and slaps it on the bar*.) Here's de key to my room. I ain't coming back. I's goin' to my own folks where I belong. I don't stay where I's not wanted. I's sick and tired of messin' round wid white men" (3.659). Manheim views that although Joe moves boisterously and genially among the groups, he, at the same time, "evokes perhaps the greatest compassion of all in his outburst against white society in Act Three" for he essentially represents the "condition" of "the individual afflicted by a repressive society" (*New Language of Kinship* 149). In fact, Joe's such situation also symbolizes an American social "structure that itself is violent by being too repressive, exploitative or alienating" (Galtung).

Nonetheless, Joe's unique defiance is as daring as ever, especially in the next moment when he breaks his whiskey glass he has been drinking from, to Rocky's consternation. Reacting very angrily against the racial insults and innuendoes directed

against him, Joe Mott "*deliberately throws his whiskey Glasson the floor and smashes it*," and "*with a sneering dignity*" blurts out:

> I's on'y savin' you de trouble, White Boy. Now you don't have to break it, soon's my back's turned, so's no white man kick about drinkin' from de same glass. (He walks stiffly to the street door—then turns for a parting shot—boastfully) I's tired of loafin' 'round wid a lot of bums. I's a gamblin' man. I's gonna get in a big crap game and win me a big bankroll. Den I'll get de okay to open up my old gamblin' house for colored men. Den maybe I comes back here sometime to see de bums. Maybe I throw a twenty-dollar bill on de bar and say, "Drink it up," and listen when dey all pat me on de back and say, "Joe, you sure is white." But I'll say, "No, I'm black and my dough is black man's dough, and you's proud to drink wid me or you don't get no drink!" Or maybe I just says, "You can all go to hell. I don't lower myself drinkin' wid no white trash!" (3.659-60)

Joe's long statement is very crucial as it reflects his frustration and those of his own people in a society that neither takes them seriously nor regards them as real citizens. In this regard, Manheim's view can be endorsed when he says, "Joe's speech calls attention to precisely those attitudes on the part of White society that have hurt most, and which his story of the past never did call attention to. Despite its allusions to the past, Joe's speech is very much part of the present in that it makes us genuinely empathize with his defiance" ("The Transcendence of Melodrama" 150).

In *The Iceman Cometh*, Joe Mott, unlike Jim Harris, is a courageous fighter who claims equality and dignity with the rest of the inmates of Hope's bar. His personality, identity, and success through honest hard work are very much explored

and developed in the play by O'Neill more than in any of his other plays dealing with the black. As Lovell correctly says, Joe behaves no less differently than the rest of the bums and his reactions to any situation are not typical of his race but those of the derelicts of Hope's bar:

> Here the Negro's addiction to social depression, sleep, drink, shiftlessness is not a sign of his race: it is his union card in a general society. He eats, jokes, and pipe-dreams with the rest, and Hickey shakes his hand as he does the hand of everyone. Joe Mott belongs … When he 'don't stand for 'nigger' from nobody,' or vows to separate himself from 'white man's bad luck,' or raises a bread knife against Chuck and Rocky, he is doing nothing different in degree from the things done by the others when their feeling of impotence gets riled. (48)

Some black critics who sharply criticized O'Neill for his poor and often stereotypical treatment of the black in his works, beginning from *Thirst* (1913) to *All God's Chillun Got Wings* (1924), alleging the playwright of perpetuating the black racial myth and hence projecting blacks as primitive, superstitious, atavistic, cunning, lazy, and obsequious, were impressed generally about his treatment of Joe Mott. Like the rest of the seventeen habitués who take refuge in Hope's bar, Joe aspires and fails with them. In fact, when the past achievements or successes of any of his comrades are compared to his, he scores higher because he is very successful as a proprietor of the gambling house. According to him, the "white folks" used to say, "Joe Mott's de only colored man they allows in de white gamblin' houses." Joe adds, "[they] wouldn't let me play craps, dough. Dey know I could make dem dice behave" (1.590).

On the other hand, some of his inmates lost their jobs as a result of dishonesty, fraud, illegal, and anarchist or disreputable engagements. Assessing Joe's overall position with the rest of the lost souls, one can conclude that O'Neill accorded an equal recognition, dignity, and defiant disposition to him as the other members of the Hope's bar. John Lovell, an acclaimed black critic, corroborates this assessment of Joe's equality with the rest of his comrades:

> Like all others under Hickey's spell Joe Mott has aspired, and has died because his aspiration was not good enough. Thus Joe Mott is given equality of struggle, aspiration and failure, according to his constitutional rights. None of the equalities is more terribly important. The macabre stage at the end of the *Iceman* has meaning because in the throes of aspiration men have died. It has greater meaning than usual because here, for once in America, and still within the sociological art of the stage, a Negro has aspired and died on terms of equality. Such an end portends somewhere a bright beginning. (48)

O'Neill's projection of Joe Mott in *The Iceman Cometh* is indicative of the society's evolvement towards a better understanding and appreciation of the blacks as equal contributors to the nation's hopes, achievements, and frustrations.

Continued Quest for Racial Equity and Brotherhood

The fact that Joe Mott has claimed equality with the rest of the white counterparts portends a note of hope in the years ahead, a hope that the Black man, as Jot Mott who has stood for his right and dignity, will be treated with the same equality and dignity as his fellow White brothers and sisters. In this play O'Neill makes an

improvement not only through his characterization of the African American but also through further personalizing the black man by letting him carry his own personal and political terrains and viewpoints—thus making the black his near and dear soul-mate. For the first time all black and white critics alike endorsed O'Neill for such humane portrayal of the Black American in a melting-pot scenario and like Shaughnessy all felt O'Neill undoubtedly provided Joe Mott, "*a one-time proprietor of a Negro gambling house*," with "an equal footing with the other characters" ("African and Irish Americans" 153).

Nonetheless, the critics and scholars from time to time criticized the play particularly for its length and for the apparent inherent pessimism. Among the initial few critics who defended O'Neill over the controversy of play's length was Richard Watts of *The New York Post* who commented that there is "a wild, cascading power in O'Neill's dramas, which, if tamed, would destroy the freedom and scope of his fierce and brooding imagination, and the excessive length of a play [is] a small price to pay for keeping his essential quality intact. Editing might make *The Iceman* seem more efficient, but it would endanger the magnitude of its spirit" (qtd. in Sheaffer *Son and Artist* 583). On the other hand, Brooks Atkinson of *Times*, although commented the play as "one of [O'Neill's] best plays" and lauded the playwright as "as a man who writes with the wonder and heart of a poet," complained about the length: "But if that is the way O'Neill wants to afflict harmless play-goers, let us accept our fate with nothing more than a polite demure. For the only thing that matters is that he has plunged again into the black quagmire of man's illusions and composed a rigadoon of death as strange and elemental as his first works" (qtd. in Gelbs 874). But it was Robert Garland who, writing in the *Journal American*, came out more critically: "The play was neither first-rate Broadway, first-rate Theatre Guild, nor first-rate Eugene

O'Neill … you feel as if a revival of *The Lower Depths* and a revival of an old-time vaudeville show were being staged concurrently" (qtd. in Sheaffer 583).

Looking in retrospect today, O'Neill scholars mark a number of reasons for the masterpiece's some unfavorable reviews in 1946. Barbara Gelb, in her article titled "O'Neill's 'Iceman' Sprang From the Ashes of His Youth" brought out on 29 September 1985 in *New York Times*, contends that although "like many works of art, it was ahead of its time," the play's premiere "suffered from a much-flawed production." She adds, "It was not until ten years later [i.e., 1956], in an Off Broadway revival, that the play came into its own and was widely acknowledged, at last, as the masterpiece it is" (Gelb). This time the *Iceman* had the longest run ever—565 performances, compared to its mere 136 performances in 1946. Normand Berlin marks out two important reasons for the play's such more acceptance in 1956; firstly, according to him, America [was] catching up to an O'Neill whose attitudes towards life now seemed more acceptable because the ideas of such modern thinkers as Camus and Sartre were being widely discussed"; and secondly, *Waiting for Godot* came to Broadway in the same year which shared a common vista with *Iceman*—to be exact, Godot opened on April 19, 1956 and Iceman's revival was on May 08 of the same year (Berlin *O'Neill's Shakespeare* 169-70). Berlin espouses *The New York Post*'s Richard Watts's view to further clarify his view:

> In those days [1946], there was a tendency to compare [*Iceman*] to Gorky, since its people are doomed misfits of the earth and its setting a saloon and lodging house of the lowest degree. Now [1956] the comparison is likely to be *Waiting for Godot*, because it deals with lost mankind's search for dreams and illusions. Indeed, it may be said that *The Iceman Cometh* shows sardonically what happens when Godot

> arrives, for Hickey, the salesman whose coming is so eagerly awaited by O'Neill's exiles, does get there, and brings, not happiness, but the destruction of their dreams. (Berlin 170)

In this twenty first century, Digging views, "[the play] enjoyed a spectacular success." He cites 1999's London production of *The Iceman Cometh* which was directed by Howard Davies where Kevin Spacey starred as Hickey that moved to New York in 2000 and was hailed as a "landmark" that "may be making theater history." Diggins further mentions that the "drama critics described audiences sitting in stunned silence, rived to every scene for more than four hours. 'When was the last time you heard that kind of hush in a theater?' asked critic Ben Brantley [in 'Bottom Up to Illusions,' *New York Times*, April 09, 1999]. How, then, can we account for the confused and negative receptions that *Iceman* suffered in its 1946 debut" (xii)? Diggins himself clarifies that because of the timing of the premiere, they play's message was misconstrued. He cites the historical-political facts that America in the same year underwent massive expansion after emerging victorious in the World War II, and Roosevelt subsequently claimed that "the only thing we have fear is fear itself"—all these factors were not conducive to play's staging. But now, when America had had successfully gone through patches of the Cold War and emerged as an unparallel superpower, the attack on it on 9/11 and Al-Qaeda's continuous threats have left the country in a high and dry state where its absolute freedom, authority, and overall prosperity have literally become a "pipedream." According to Diggins, under such circumstance, O'Neill's *Iceman* and other plays' acceptance have increased and the playwright's concerns have become desperate matters to delve deep into:

> In 2000, with the successful performance of the play, the country's relation to the rest of the world had grown wearisome, especially with

> the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism. Many of the subjects that O'Neill had dealt with in his plays (family, religion, youth, men and power, women and feminism, race and justice, non-Western cultures abroad, and political terrorism and the desperate delusions of anarchism) have become urgent matters in recent American life and in world history. (xiv)

The Iceman Cometh in 1946 ran into some censorship as the influential Bostonians regarded some of the dialogues in the play as "unclean." O'Neill, however, refused to change the dialogue and regarded such drive as "ignorant and stupid censorship" and asked the audience to "see it" in Quincy citing their similar experience with *Strange Interlude* some years back (Gelbs 885). As a result of this Bostonian censorship the Guild rerouted the *Iceman* to Baltimore. At this time also the National Theatre in Washington, DC, which had the racial policy of barring Blacks from the audience, was on "the *Iceman* itinerary." Already the National Theatre's discriminatory policy against Blacks had aroused ill-feelings and controversy among Blacks mainly, and some other minorities and well-meaning Whites. Consequently, a group known as the Washington Committee for Racial Democracy had been picketing the theatre for several months. O'Neill did not know that the National Theatre in Washington, DC excluded Blacks from the theatre. He confessed he would not have permitted his play to appear had he been aware of the National's policy. In a reply to a wire from Rev. Wilfred Parsons, SJ, a committee member, O'Neill stated: "I am and always have been opposed to racial discrimination of any kind. I assure you I will insert a non-discriminatory clause in all future contracts" (Gelbs 886). This reaction from the playwright is a befitting insight into his aversion towards racism and discrimination in the US.

Although *The Iceman Cometh* had been yielding about twenty-thousand dollars each week and "netted the playwright three-thousand dollars, his highest weekly income ever from a single production" (Sheaffer 585), O'Neill was concerned not so much about the money to be earned from his works as the public's inferring of the messages these plays convey. He was a moral preacher, distressed about some ethical and social issues going on not only in American society but in the world also. The playwright was fond of complaining that "It will take man a million years to grow up and obtain a soul" ("Interview with O'Neill" 3). In his mother country, O'Neill agonized over man's grabbing propensity, selfishness, lack of love, harmony, and compassionate understanding. America, he felt, was a prime example that these social evils exist, yet they exist everywhere in the world. Describing how O'Neill might have felt about the world, Sophus Winther once commented:

> The world revealed by Eugene O'Neill is tragic because it is without intelligent social organization. Ignorance, brutality, selfishness, greed and hatred are the dominant forces in this world of O'Neill. The multitude of men and women who pass by in the imagination … is a sorry lot. Here by the roadside lies a young man coughing his lungs out as he cries for the beauty which lies beyond the horizon, here is a girl tortured into committing a murder … a handsome Negro passes with the sorrow of hopeless despair furrowing every line of his face … It may be that in such protest against injustice as O'Neill reveals in his social dramas lies the hope for a better world. (207-09)

Time and time again O'Neill, in his plays, appeals to society to exercise some sympathy, love, and understanding for the God-forsaken, the down-trodden or the powerless ones among us: "O'Neill makes us sympathize with his characters,

repulsive though may be, by appealing to our emotions. His emotional appeal is strong and far reaching … The fault for [these people's] repulsiveness lies not in themselves, but in society. If they cannot be taught to understand society, society must be taught to understand them" (Quinby 11). O'Neill loved his country so deeply that he took its errors to heart, thinking that his bitter criticisms might rouse his country men and women from their moral lethargy.

One of these errors or faults O'Neill found in American society that distressed as well as disturbed him very much, was racial injustice and discrimination. Since he and his parents were bitter victims of such bigotry, he was acrimoniously opposed to all forms of it, especially when minorities, Blacks, and the powerless are sufferers of similar malice. In one of his conversations with Mary Welch during June 1946, an actress who played Josie in *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, O'Neill brought up the issue of the portrayals of blacks in his earlier plays. According to Welch, O'Neill "had felt deeply about them, and his face grew bitter and forceful as he recalled how some of the New York professional theatre crowd had accepted these works" without applying them for the benefit of Blacks in America. O'Neill viewed, "They really did not understand what I was writing. They merely said to themselves, 'oh look, the ape can talk'" (qtd. in Welch 82). This attitude worried him very much.

This interview with Mary Welch is very crucial as it reveals O'Neill's understanding of the importance of writing on American Blacks. His observation that many Americans didn't actually understand what he was writing impugn the contention of those critics who said O'Neill did not focus attention on the issue of race in America. In fact, this issue was deeply entrenched in his mind when in 1913 he debuted as a playwright at Provincetown and conceived his first black play *Thirst*. But the American audience neither paid much attention to this play nor did they

question his motive until 1924 when his provocative play *All God's Chillun Got Wings* alarmed them towards O'Neill's motives in his Black plays.

O'Neill was a pioneer for racial justice and brotherhood on the American stage. Since drama is a strong and impressive channel for presenting any serious social issues to the public, O'Neill did not miss the opportunity to stir the consciences of his countrymen and women to appreciate the plight of American Blacks and to correct the racial injustice and discrimination against them. Writing about O'Neill's concern for and interest in the Blacks, Van Wyck Brooks, author, historian, and literary critic, comments that besides the playwright's first black play, *Thirst*,

> The Negro was to reappear in *The Emperor Jones* and other plays,—for O'Neill was deeply concerned with the fate of this race,—he covered a great range of Negro life in several plays. … Later, tending more and more to deal with modern life in terms of classic tragedy, the somber O'Neill seemed rather to avoid the discussion of social questions … But in *All God's Chillun* he appeared to be arguing for race-equality while presenting a typical tragedy of miscegenation, and one felt in *The Dreamy Kid* the kind of compassion that filled so many contemporary stories of the slum. (540 and 550)

By preaching racial justice and brotherhood and denouncing any actions to the contrary, and by stirring the conscience of the American public to rise above bigotry and racial injustice, O'Neill seems to be making a simple demand to his countrymen. America, he appears to contend, cannot afford to act otherwise because to do so would be inconsistent with its vision and ideals. Thus, by checking its racial injustice, discrimination, and other forms of oppression against Blacks and other minorities,

America can give an authentic testimony of its basic democratic tenet—that all men are created equal and as such, should be treated with dignity and fairness.

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[1] Doris Alexander in the following book, which provides corrected and expanded autobiographical records of the playwright, latest as of today, contends that O'Neill discovered Jimmy-the-Priest's Saloon as early as the fall of 1907, after his debacle at Princeton. *Eugene O'Neill's Last Plays: Separating Art from Autobiography* 8.

[2] Though Julia White mentions David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1984) in the same vein with Miller's *Death* and O'Neill's *Iceman*, it can be argued that unlike the protagonists of the two modern playwrights, Mamet's Shelly Levene apprises the audience of his selling product (real estate property), and although all three plays' common motif emerges as *why-he-dunit*, Mamet's play has a different historical bearing altogether. Instead of O'Neill's and Miller's post-WWII portrayal of American success and economic boom, *Glengarry Glen Ross* deals with the rumbles of corporate culture under ideological manipulation, direct marketing, and strict management strategy of lying, bulling, and catching upon customers' negative emotions, from greed to feeling of inadequacy. Shelly Levene undoubtedly is an offshoot of O'Neill's Hickey and Miller's Willy, but essentially Mamet's technique is more prone to postmodern culture, situations, and impulses. "The Iceman Cometh as Infertility Myth" Web.