Ironically enough, the dozen years that O'Neill remained unheard of on the Broadway was the period when he wrote his greatest masterpieces. Thus even as the critics were busy disputing his stature or convincing one another that his artistic fountain had dried up, O'Neill was scaling the highest peaks of his career. But to attain these heights, he had to give up the quest that had marked his plays in the last two decades because he came to realise that tragedy and modernism being almost incompatible, he must abandon his pipedream of yoking the two. What clinched the process of this divorce from the twin obsessions was perhaps the Cycle which, growing larger and still larger, became something beyond the declining physical power of the playwright, and thus when he left the Cycle, he left all that was associated with it.

Even otherwise too things had changed considerably. Failure of the promise of the red 'decade', the 1930s, and hovering of War clouds, led to a total disenchantment in the 1940s. Shocked by the ghastly acts of man, and sharing the collective neurosis of the time, the writers could at best pose questions. All illusions shattered, the values lost all meanings, and in the vacuum of values, the existence came to be given greater importance than the essence of life. A sensitive man like O'Neill could not but be influenced by the events which led to existentialism and later to the Absurd Movement. In such a situation, it dawned on him that the sickness of today is not psychological but spiritual. Now Nietzschean yea-saying also appeared shallow and thus giving up at once Nietzschean philosophy and Freudian
psychology, O'Neill decided to present the modern man's anguish—no longer the roots of it, but the sickness itself. In fact, the last plays reflect not only this mood but also the mood of the anti-intellectual 1950s and the anti-culture 60s. Each decade marked a still further remotion from rationalism. No wonder Joseph Wood Krutch prophesied that man's ingenuity having outrun his intellect, he was riding towards a spectacular death.

Although O'Neill never reached the stage when he could say with Nell in *Endgame*, "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness," but he did talk about his return to ironic tragedy and about his acquiring the concept of "Kismet, the negative fate, not in the Greek sense."

This new vision he defined in his statements in the Press-interview on the eve of *The Iceman Cometh* and in other statements he made around this time, some of which we quoted in Chapter I. Most characteristically, he wrote to Barrett Clark:

"For, noting the way the world wags, 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!"

Surely, this is by no means tragic affirmation of life, but seen closely, it is not a piece of misanthropy either. What O'Neill means is that since the despiritualized growth of our civilization has turned life-sustaining illusions into paralyzing delusions, perhaps the only hope for mankind lies in undoing the work of the current civilization. For the restoration of the spiritual values, man must demechanize life and reshape it along different lines. Since in the next attempt, he might, after all, meet better luck and lead a richer life, therefore any suicidal step that undoes the present civilisation would be welcome.
This ironic optimism is the core of the themes of his last plays. No wonder, in all these plays at the moment of climax, under the influence of dope or drink, such confessions are made as induce in the audience "right kind of pity" which is born of deeper understanding of life and its ironies. Aesthetically speaking, this is surely different from the tragic catharsis: it is something new, something truly authentic and something that fuses life and drama into one. These are plays in which the core of O'Neill's genius is to be had at its most authentic because in this phase, O'Neill went back from theatre to drama, from philosophy to life, from psyche to the soul, and from tragedy to irony. No wonder these are the plays that mark O'Neill's aesthetic triumph as against the philosophical, psychological, religious or theatrical triumphs of the earlier phases. No wonder, too, with these plays in mind, Leonard Chabrowe felt that O'Neill succeeded in making the American theatre equivalent to what the theatre of Dionysus had been 2400 years ago.

Thanks to the long silence of over a dozen years (1934-'46), O'Neill all but faded from the theatre-scene so much so that for the new generation he became no more than a mere name in the history of drama. Thus whereas in the 1920s and the early 30s, an occasional O'Neill play was awaited most enthusiastically, the production of The Iceman Cometh was treated as a big occasion, indeed. But despite much fanfare, the play got at best mild praise, the general verdict being rather hostile. Those who had seen the signs of decay in Dynamo and Days Without End, or questioned his stature as a Nobel laureate, felt vindicated. Here, they asserted, was a sprawling, long-winded play that not only lacked depth to match its length, but was also marred by,
unrelieved despair, profanity, lack of metaphysical direction and confused repetitions. "Action draggeth, dialogue reeketh, play stinketh" was the typical verdict of New York Post (10 October 1946). But when this very play was revived by Jose Quintero in 1956, the Circle-in-the-Square production effected a swing of the pendulum, thus spearheading general revival of O'Neillatry. It was now found to be the maturest of his works, magnificent in plan, in size, and in scope—a powerful, moving, even terrifying play that afforded a memorable experience. The change of wind so phenomenally reversed the assessment that in its alleged sordidness, repetitiveness, and lack of humour came to be discerned its deliberately worked virtues.®

Of course, The Iceman Cometh is by no means a flawless work; still most of his hostile critics have been rather uncharitable, especially Eric Bentley in his recording his efforts to like O'Neill and the failure of his production of the play in 1952. Perhaps the best answers to all his points he received in Quintero's production,* in which no cuts were made by a presumptuous director to cover up the alleged faults of the playwright. Hirschfeld and Bentley might have been very sincere in their efforts to tone certain things down and play others full blast, but perhaps so was Kahn Tate when he thought he could improve upon Shakespeare's King Lear! In fact, Bentley and his colleagues were indulging in a pipedream of their own when they decided to forego much "O'Neillism" in order to find the essential O'Neill. No wonder they found expressionism in this patently realistic

*Perhaps success of Jose Quinters lay in what Leigh Connel described as his double vision—seeing of two realities simultaneously, though never in competition with each other. (Quoted by Quintero in his If You Don't Dance, They Beat You, Boston, 1974, 150)
play and tried to cut it out as "inessential excredescence." They abridged the text by cutting an hour of the play which, they thought, let the comic element emerge in a crisper way as also helped "lay bare the main story and release its suspense." But the question is: did O'Neill's real intention lie in the story, the suspense or the humour? Again, his cutting down the speeches of Hugo, since they were too long and too pretentious, was a fantastic proposition, for these occasional speeches, far from being too long, are mostly too short. Only twice does this blinking and giggling old man come out with a speech that has more than five short sentences in it! Similarly, cutting down Larry's speeches on the plea that it was rephrasing of a pessimistic credo was preposterous. What purpose these repetitions were to serve was suitably illustrated by the Quintero-production in which they helped to create the effect of a musical composition.

If everything appeared contrived in Bentley's production, his own cuts were to blame as also his mistaken notion that the order of the speeches could be juggled without loss. It was like juggling the order of notes in an orchestra. Bentley puts the blame for everything, including his own ill-advised changes on the playwright. If in the German translation, irony is lost and the dialogue loses its salt, should the playwright be blamed for having used dialects that are untranslatable? Bentley quotes O'Neill's statements to show by contrast that the critics have taken the will for the deed, whereas it is he himself who is attaching so much importance to the statements that he refuses to see the play. He quotes O'Neill's famous letter to Quinn and rhetorically asks: "What is interpreting 'Life in terms of lives' and what is 'mystical' about it? What does it mean to be 'expressed' by a Force—as against being an incident in 'its expression'?"
What an inexcusable hypocrisy on the part of a critic who had interpreted so well the evolutionary philosophy of G.B. Shaw! Certainly, it is not O'Neill but Bentley who is comforting himself with verbiage.

As regards Bonamy Dobree's charge that O'Neill has brought life on the stage, whereas the business of the dramatist should be to make the theatre live, well might one ask if the two processes are mutually exclusive. In fact, O'Neill's excellence lies in the fact that he has evolved a technique which makes life and theatre blend into one and thus he has made the theatre live precisely by bringing life into the theatre. O'Neill's earliest naturalistic plays certainly gave precedence to life and the later ones to theatre; consequently, the former were good drama but poor theatre, and the latter good theatre but poor drama. Now O'Neill wanted to write a play that must be a good drama as well as a good theatre. He was specially irked by the fact that his theatrical devices, which had fascinated the audience and earned him fortune, had tended to betray him as a dramatist. The masks of The Great God Brown, 'asides' in Strange Interlude and double appearance in Days Without End were theatrical masterstrokes, but he could see that they were not going to ensure his immortality as a dramatist. After all, far from being his end, theatrical poetry was only a means to the effecting of tragic catharsis. Naturally, in The Iceman Cometh, when he knew he was writing one of his last plays, O'Neill wanted to concentrate on the dramatic aspect, but experimental instinct helped him to draw from his experience such lessons as ultimately led to the evolution of a medium that was an unusual experiment in itself—experiment in untheatrical theatre. It is a form of realism in which attempt is made not to present a slice of life naturalistically but to transcribe life itself—a realism that
makes all realists, including Ibsen, look mannered, crude and sterile.

Robert Brustein calls it thematic realism as against the usual atmospheric realism.  

In the dynamic realism of *The Iceman Cometh*, symbols and myths are so inalienably blended at the subterranean layer of the realistic pattern that what appears at surface a local experience has in fact universal dimension. Thus the locale of the play, the bar, despite its realistic entity, becomes such a complete symbol of the state of the End of the Line, that its doors appear to separate the world of reality outside from the one of delusions and dreams within.

Similarly, time, too, serves the symbolic function unobtrusively: day represents reality; night, dreams and illusions. Characters too are at once individualized and yet universal; the dialogues are in the varied dialects of the commonest currency, yet this linguistic medley is worked into a sort of symphony. How O'Neill used something so ordinary as drinking for most dramatic purposes has been highlighted by Driver's rejoinder to Mary McCarthy's naive objections to the ineffectiveness of wine.

*In "Eugene O'Neill - Dry Ice" (Partisan Review, November-December 1946, 81-85), Mary McCarthy came out with the charge that even after so much of drinking, the characters do not betray the effect of drunkenness; their thoughts are unobscured; they don't fall into fits of rancour; nor is their character destroyed by the hang-over, shakes, etc. Tom F. Driver ("On the Late Plays of Eugene O'Neill" reproduced O'Neill: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views, ed. John Gassner, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1964, 110-23) countered by pointing out that "drinking has been used in the last plays for numerous purposes—to seek oblivion; to cancel inhibitions and let the characters speak out their minds so candidly as to render redundant all of O'Neill's old innovations like masks, asides, etc.; to invoke nostalgia that would help to recall the past; to exhilarate so as to make them hilarious; to put characters to sleep so that the awkward business of effecting exits and entrances may be conveniently dispensed with; to show the same character in contrasted moods depending on whether they are sober or drunk; and lastly to show the reverse of it, i.e. wine having contrasted effects on the moods and attitudes of the same persons.*
Indeed, this dynamic realism alone could enable O'Neill to perform the impossible task of observing classical unities in this marathon drama. The plot is not built up in the usual way; it is allowed to grow organically. "I didn't need plot: the people are enough," O'Neill asserted. However, what is important here is not what the people do, but how their lives are interlocked and made interdependent. Instead of spinning the traditional type of action around a central character, O'Neill has created intersecting circles of action. Instead of tension and conflict, O'Neill offers drama in parallelism and contrast, in counterpointing and reiteration. There is so much of rippling but no stormy tide; conversely, nothing eventful ever happens, and yet the activity is always there. It has been suggested that instead of the usual stages of the dramatic development, the play progresses like an orchestral composition, in which the same theme is played in turn on different instruments, separately or collectively in various permutations. Maybe, an after analogy would be one of a stagnant pool in which, despite the apparent calm, there is incessant interplay of undercurrents caused by the fish whose normal dormancy may be disturbed by the arrival of some outsider. Here belongs the "croaking" Larry; Hickey is a crocodile who comes from outside. Hickey's arrival causes a stir but as he leaves, things come back to normal. Curiously enough, this crocodile was recommending to the fish here the life outside their little pool!

The suggestion that, instead of a linear plot, here are eddies of action, is by no means an endorsement of Tom P. Driver's view that the action has three concentric circles, for his arrangement gives the central role to Hickey, a credit that has been denied to him by other critics in favour of Larry. We feel, however, that The Iceman
Cometh is not only a play without a plot but also one without a hero. Whoever tries to follow the traditional habit of picking one character as the hero—Larry, Hickey or Parritt—naturally raises unanswerable questions that are related to that habit-criterion. Now Parritt may be very important in his own subplot, but taken as a whole, The Iceman Cometh is too vast for him. Hickey's shadow does loom large enough, but then is this homicidal monomaniac a villain or a hero? Of course, to begin with, he is a kind of keenly awaited Godot, and later he assumes the role of a saviour; but, then, the way this fallen creature tempts others, he appears a brother to Satan.* He is, in fact, neither a saviour nor Satan, for none of the traditional caps fits him. Larry's claims to heroic mantle are based on the fact that he is the one who ultimately gains anagnorisis and learns to face reality. But the trouble is that he never says or does anything that may earn him the title of a hero. At best, he is the chorus who echoes our sentiments, raises questions, and makes occasional comments upon the action. He is more the object than the subject of the little activity that is there. In fact, for a proper evaluation of the play, it is necessary not to raise the question of heroship, for not the passion of any one individual but the pipedreams of all of them spin the plot. It is more properly a group play—about a group of fascinating lost souls who, though broken, are strongly lovable people. They have all been endowed with individuality; but they have also a Pirandellian touch that makes them symbols, too.

In fact, by depicting a group of human wrecks in the most accurate

*Dennis M. Welch in "Hickey as Satanic Force in The Iceman Cometh" (Arizona Quarterly, XXXIV, Autumn 1978, 219-29) presents Hickey as a tempter who comes to the paradise of Harry Hope's secure utopia with the false promise of "knowledge" in place of what Christ would recommend, viz. Faith.
milieu, O'Neill has transcended his earlier limitations and saved the play from becoming yet another record of a case-history. Deluded by illusions, and later stripped of them, these people may be pitiable creatures without nobility, but they are human to the core—the epitome of mankind. In fact, here is a stark, existentialistic picture of life, the vision of which O'Neill came to share with Sartre and Camus, being the inevitable outcome of the changed *zeitgeist*. The febrile despair generated by the Great War was intensified by the lengthening shadows of the World War II so much so that *angst*, alienation, and *nausea* became more than literary concepts. With the existential problems looming large in life, O'Neill found the Nietzschean affirmation a mockery of the existential absurdity. The roomers in Harry Hope's saloon are alienated people, because, instead of facing the reality and accepting the intrinsic insignificance of their lives, they are seeking to circumvent it through the pursuit of illusory glory. Indeed, life's absurdity can be overcome by man by creating such values of his own as take into account the Nothingness of life; on the other hand, inventing of illusions only makes it worse than death! This existentialistic view is the key to *The Iceman Cometh*.

Of course, there have been some attempts to read in the play psychological, sociological, or theological meanings; but they are, at best, overtones. For example, references to the Wobblies, syndicalists and anarchists have induced the critics to regard the play as a piece of social criticism. It has been suggested that O'Neill is expressing here despair over the fact that the leadership of the socialist movement is suspect. Of course, O'Neill had secret sympathy for the anarchist movement and he did read Hippolyte Havel's
Flame along with much of the old anarchist literature* before he wrote
The Iceman Cometh; but his real concern is no mere social here than
it was in The Hairy Ape. He is far more bothered about the eternal
problems of human existence itself. Indeed, The Iceman Cometh is not
an outburst of an angry old man of America disgusted with society,**
but an anguished cry of a soul that has lost faith in man who appears
to have taken a suicidal path. This bitter disenchantment of O'Neill's
found expression in the interview at the Theatre Guild Office, on
2 September 1946, when he asserted that if the human race was so stupid,
it was time the ants were given a chance in the evolutionary process.†
In such a frame of mind, obviously, he could have no longer affirmed
life mystically as he had been doing earlier, so he presented it as
he knew it without idealizing or distorting it.

In fact, O'Neill has so objectively portrayed life that we cannot
decide whether he is affirming pipedreaming or refuting it, whether
Hickey is a saviour or a Satan,*** whether Larry is converted to

* Winifred L. Fraser in his monograph, EQ and EGO: Emma Goldman
and The Iceman Cometh (Dainsville, Florida, 1974), suggests that Emma
Goldman was imprinted on the Ego of EGO (O'Neill's initials in full)
because of the fact that he knew so many people who had lived with her,
e.g. Saxe Commins, Terry Carlin, Louise Bryant, Hl. polyte Havel. As
for his position vis-a-vis the Movement, he remarked, "I am a philo­
sophical anarchist, which means, 'So to it, but leave me out of it'"
(Quoted fromwell Bowen, Curse of the Misbegotten, New York, 1959, 318)

** By Kahn compares Iceman with the Death of a Salesman and Glass
Menagerie (plays with salesmen-protagonists) to assert that O'Neill
also felt that the American dream has become a trap that kills us all.
(O'Neill's Legion of Losers in The Iceman Cometh, The Forties, ed.
David Madden) contains Carpenter's article in which the title is
interpreted to mean that the Iceman has come to America. He traces
America's spiritual paralysis to pragmatism. In this connection, he
suggests that Hickey is a spiritual carbuncle because in 1912, in the
adolescent slang, Hickey meant Carbuncle.

*** Delma E. Prestley suggested in an article ("O'Neill's Iceman :
Another Meaning," American Literature, XLII, 387-88) that in the language
of the under-world, Iceman means one whose promises are not to be relied
upon, and one who makes ostentations gifts of worthless or trivial things.
Thus perhaps O'Neill was suggesting that here is a Messiah that is phony.
In a rejoinder to this, (American Literature, XLIV, 677-88), Winifred L.
Fraser countered that here it is Iceman, not Iceman, not Iceman. According to him,
the ribald joke about the Iceman is the key to the title and to the theme
--love as Death. Rolf Schieble in the monograph, The Late Plays of
commitment or to suicide. At the end, as Larry sits tensely awaiting Parritt's fall and the roomers start their drunken singing, the audience, seeing both sides of life, raise unanswerable questions. Here is indeed a juxtaposition of the paradoxes of life in which dream is reality and reality dream, in which despair becomes hope and hope despair, in which self-fulfillment can be had only through self-annihilation. In such a dialectical situation, pipedreams do sustain life but the only hope for man today lies in his being manly enough to break them. To deprive man of his illusions is to make him a mere animal and yet, when these illusions develop into delusions, they lead to spiritual putrefaction. So the modern man is placed in an unenviable position when he can neither affirm nor break his illusions, for the choice boils down to one between unauthentic existence and death.

Eugene O'Neill (Frank Verlagbern, 1976) seeks to establish that Hickey's in the case of a possessive idealist who treats his dream as something absolute and wants to impose his will on the world.

According to Leonard Chabrowe (Ritual and Pathos - The Theatre of O'Neill, Lewisburg, 1976, 86-99) The Iceman Cometh is Lazarus Lauged rewritten: Hickey is another Lazarus on his evangelical mission of preaching a newly acquired faith; Larry is a new Caligula; and Parritt, another version of Tiberius. But the whole thesis of his is unconvincing. If anything, the two plays are studies in contrast. Lazarus sees life before and after death, while the vision of Iceman is that there is death before, after and even during life, for, thanks to their illusions, the moderns are as good as dead even when alive. Here the choice is between the physical and the spiritual deaths—at the close of life or even before that. Hickey goes to the electric chair, Parritt falls to death, and Larry awaits it passionately. The modes may be different, but they all die. Likewise, pipedreams maybe different, but there is basic similarity in the quality of the moderns' existence—life-in-death. Perhaps the death-dance of Wars made O'Neill wonder if death was really worse than such meaningless existence.

Now Shakespeare's tragedies end in multiple deaths, but the diversity in the modes of death is a means to convey the tragic view of life—that death comes to all, but how one dies depends on how one has lived. That is to say, one must live nobly so that when death comes, others may see in it a measure of spiritual triumph rather than routine ceasing of breath. O'Neill's Iceman, on the other hand, seems to say that life being essentially absurd, it does not matter how we live or how we die: it is all the same!
That is the case because either his aspirations are unrelated to reality, or else he faces the absurd without attempting to make it meaningful. Instead of accepting reality and trying to transcend it, the modern man seeks to escape it like the roomers at the Harry Hope's; or else, like Hickey, he insists on facts and has no aspirations beyond them. Hickey's creed—Truth is God!—is dangerous because the truth alone would kill the human in man; the life-sustaining illusions have to be evolved but not in such a way as to pervert reality.

Thus seen, even the hope that disillusionment can save man is in itself an illusion. No wonder Hickey comes as a saviour but cannot save; he brings death instead of life. Although against Cyrus Day's contention that Harry Hope's birthday-party is a modern counterpart of the Last Supper, Tiusanen has raised some valid objections,* yet we believe that the title, reminiscent of the Biblical Bridgroom as it is, shows that O'Neill did have Black Mass in his mind when he wrote the play. But certainly Hickey is not, therefore, to be treated seriously as a saviour, for having become Iceman, instead of the Bridgroom, he is anti-Christ.** Possibly like Dion implanting blasphemies in his designs of the cathedrals, O'Neill has fitted into the Christian parable something that is, in the words of Raghavacharyulu,

*According to Cyrus Day ("The Iceman and the Bridgroom," reproduced TCI, pp.79-86), the twelve derelicts represent 12 disciples of Christ; three whores correspond to three Marys, the whores of Samaria; Parrit is the counterpart of Judas, and so on. To these Robert Brustein adds another parallel: like St. Peter, Larry is a sole convert (TCI, p.98). But Timo Tiusanen points out (O'Neill's Scenic Images, Princeton, 1968, pp.281n-2n), that the parallels are more apparent than real; for three are 17 such characters, not 12 at the party; Hickey leaves to be executed much later and not soon after the Party; and Parrit betrays his mother, not Hickey.

**Reiteration of the betrayal theme in Larry, Parritt, Hickey Hugo, etc. clearly indicates that they all stand for Judas rather than for Christ.
antipodean version of the Lord's Supper. Thus seen, The Iceman Cometh becomes a morality play about an anti-Christ modern saviour who asks his disciples to give up hope and insists on eschewing pity. However, that does not mean preaching another version of Nietzscheanism; on the contrary, Hickey, the Organisation Man, is antithesis of Dionysus. That is why, only in the failure of his mission lies the affirmation of Dionysian spirit; only when he is taken away, wine and life have kick again. Is it any wonder that in this handy-dandy, it is Larry who is a sort of cynical Zarathustra? Understandably, therefore, Robert Brustein regards Hickey an anti-Nietzschean hero. To put all this differently, the play is at once Nietzschean and anti-Nietzschean. Perhaps O'Neill implies that Nietzsche, as an existentialist, saw the essence of life, but since he did not pursue his thought to its logical end, in affirming life mystically he took an unexistentialistic turn!

If Nietzsche is not a perfect saviour, nor is the other modern saviour, Dr. Freud, dependable enough. If we substitute the word ego-defense for pipedream, the play becomes a psychological drama based, as it were, on the Freudian forces. Like Hickey, Freud as Saviour claimed to cure others of their psychological troubles, but he was himself a psychotic. No wonder, while preaching acceptance of the truth, Hickey is trying to escape reality!

Thus, in The Iceman Cometh, O'Neill has seen man's position from the psychological, philosophical, sociological and theological angles and woven the religious, Freudian and socialistic strands in the main warp of existentialism. One of the usual objections against the play is that he has gathered an unnecessarily huge crowd of pipedreamers and
hammered the same theme repeatedly. But perhaps that was necessary because only thus could O'Neill create a complete microcosm of modern existence representing all aspects of life. No wonder here we have political, racial, domestic, intellectual, philosophical, and social illusions. The total picture that emerges brings home to us the idea that the modern angst is an existential predicament, and it cannot be cured by merely bringing about political or social reform; the modern saviour, whether a sociologist, a scientist, a psychologist or a philosopher, is an Iceman, whose insistence on harsh reality and cold facts takes the kick out of life. It is this covering of diverse fields of existence that makes The Iceman Cometh something more comprehensive than the study of illusion-mongering in The Wild Duck, or that of the failure of social order in The Lower Depths—the two plays—with which it has been compared quite often. Perhaps it is closer to Beckett's Waiting for Godot, which it anticipates in many ways.

Responding to the existentialistic phase of modernism, O'Neill is no longer concerned with tragic posturing and shallow yea-saying. Rather he is content to present the existence itself—utterly naked, insignificant, and absurd. Like the peeling of an onion, O'Neill takes off the sham-layers of human nobility one by one to reveal nothingness as its core. At the end, we stand beholding fascinatedly the grotesqueness of life with innumerable unanswerable questions echoing in our minds. The shouting, quarrelling, fusing, jeering,

*As Travis Bogard points out, in the stage directions, the word "type" recurs (Contour in Time, 411); indeed, the roomers have type-illusions rather than individual weaknesses.*
alcoholic laughing, uneventful teasing, insult-laden kidding—all are so interspersed that though we feel in them a sort of rhythm corresponding to the tenor of pulsating life, we fail to see any key to the method behind this madness. When the curtain rings down finally, we find one of the roomers waiting passionately for death, another meeting it outside, while the rest sing drunkenly, each his own favourite song. Indeed, such is the quality of human existence—each man following his own values, taking pride in assumed nobility, and leading a life that is amalgam of the pathetic and the comic, the perverse and the noble, the ironic and the absurd. This picture is fascinating, thrilling, on occasions even overwhelming, but neither tragic nor comic. A tragedy leads to self-knowledge, here the roomers are led to self-deception. We may view these people with compassion and understanding, but that only leads to an anguish without hope. Here comedy is used to build up a tragic edifice, while the tragic vision is straitjacketed into a comic mould. It delights us, but it is a rueful delight; it holds us but does not involve us.

Maybe, the play could be a tragedy if Larry had been made the central character rather than a mere commentator. This American Hamlet raises in modern terms the old problem—"to be or not to be"; but unlike a tragic hero, he chooses not to choose. Instead of fighting and willing, he spurns all values and at the end prefers death in a spirit of despair and spiritual vacuum. This, because O'Neill was no longer interested in creating the traditional type of tragic hero or evoking the conventional response. There is, of course, an element of the tragic in it; but it is, as it were, a new genre that seeks to "suddenly strip 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." In other words, here man is to be seen not involved in a tragic conflict but facing an ironic deadlock when no choice is possible. He can neither act, nor escape for all action is futile. Indeed, caught in this impasse, he cannot will either to live or to die. As in a tragedy, the situation is hopeless, but here, in addition, it is worthless, too. As in a tragedy, the values are not absolute, but here ironically they are meaningless as well. This ironic state, when self and ideal-images are equally worthless, is termed Fatal Balance by Doris Falk. Through parallels, contrasts and counterpointing, O'Neill shows man shifting from one level of existence to another—from pride to pity, from longing to loathing, from illusion to reality, from torturing to kidding, and, of course, vice-versa. Here is life in its entirety with all its comic, tragic, melodramatic, and ironic levels still intact. Insisting on a uni-dimensional response in such a case would not be fair to the author, nor perhaps humanly possible. For example, laughing at the comic here would require the sensibility of the gods for whom human life is a joke and who laugh heartily when men shed bitter tears.

On the whole, we may say that The Iceman Cometh is a sombre, terrifying masterpiece—perhaps O'Neill's greatest work. Mourning may be more terrifying, Desire more tragic, The Hairy Ape more experimental, Long Day's Journey more authentic as an autobiography, but The Iceman Cometh is the maturest achievement of O'Neill's genius.

Even as we oper the play, the title, reminding us of the Biblical

*No wonder Leech called Iceman Cometh "a comedy with tragic overtones" (O'Neill, Edinburgh, 1963, 108), for Tiunanen it is a tragedy with comic overtones" (O'Neill's Scenic Images, p.283). O'Neill himself called it "a big kind of comedy that doesn't stay funny very long," for "the comedy breaks up and tragedy comes on" (Gelbs, p.871)
bridegroom, sounds rather ironic—a note that is enhanced by the introduction to the dramatis personae in the stage-directions. Reading about the one-timers, we see right away juxtaposition of the then and the now, of the past and the present, and thus get ready to see them in dual roles of bums and one-time heroes. Still more layers of irony would be added when we see these people later involved in the Tomorrow Movement led by Jimmy, and the counter-movement monopolized by Hickey. In the six-page opening stage-directions, the use of "yet," "but," and "still" has the touch of a naughty man playing the master of ceremonies. The different poses in which the roomers sleep offer a masterpiece in grotesque word-painting, for there is a touch of Hogarth about it. On the tables lie property-sandwiches—an old desiccated ruin of dustladen bread and mummified ham or cheese serving as noisome decoration! In fact, since such is the quality of the roomers themselves, the stage prop becomes, as it were, a visual symbol of the characters' life-in-death.

True to the theme of delusion in illusions, the play starts on a pantomime and "cheating". Larry, we find, is a "fellowosopher": there is "fool"-like comical intensity in his wise-cracks. His grand-stand attitude of superiority and detachment in seeing the cannibals do their death dance is not only contradicted by the way he relishes his own words, but also contrasted with the bullying and the giggling of the bleary Hugo who immediately afterwards passes out again. Much of the conversation is expository but it is enlivened by Willie's blustering in sleep, Hope's interludes, Joe's waking up on the mention of the word "booze" and going into his distinctions between an anarchist and a socialist (a masterpiece in drunken logic!)
activities reminiscent of the comical touches in a puppet-show. Larry's introduction has a punch comparable to the irony of the opening stage-directions. This continues till Willie, omitted from Larry's Who's-Who-in-Dypsomania, starts introducing himself. The pompous self-praise, mixed with affected quotations and application of legal terms on routine situations, ends up with an ironic deflation when this son of the king of Bucket Shop adds, "Speaking of whisky, Sir, reminds me—and, I hope, reminds you—that when meeting a Prince the customary salutation is 'What'll you have?'" (Plays, III, 595).

What a way for a Prince to play the beggar! And soon, this prince starts singing, rapping and tapping.

The introduction over, most of the sleeping bums open their eyes. We can, from this moment onwards, smile when they open their mouths because we know already the nature of their individual pipedreams. The irony is that a pipedreamer can see lies in others' pipedreams but not in his own. We are amused at the contrasts among their yesterdays, todays, and tomorrows, among their aspirations, potential and realized reality. We like these innocent creatures and yet they are so ridiculous. Ironically enough, these people boast of their criminal and corrupt acts in the past, and the tarts talk about their tricks with the customers. It is at once terrible and funny. Things brighten up and become dull by turns. The moment it is learnt that the long-awaited Hickey is around, there is a commotion. But though they expect a jolly good fellow, the man who comes is a wet blanket. They all feel the cold touch of death. In this comical handling of a sombre scene, at the most serious moments, Hugo starts giggling, while at the most jocular ones he starts singing revolutionary songs and threatening.
No wonder, despite the spate of jokes, anecdotes, taunts and kidding, this act is never mirthful. Here is comicality most teasing to the mind.

"All I want is to see you happy---” declares Larry at the close of Act I; but what happiness he has brought we see in Act II—strained gaiety in the conduct of everyone. In a variety of situations, characters lose tempers, shout, threaten, accuse one another, and say hard and bitter things; but when they are reminded that they are preparing for Hope’s birthday-party, they guiltily return to the normal. These anecdotes have the quality of the "games" in Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Indeed, forcing someone to break an illusion and to face the reality is a tragic experience for the party concerned, even though it may be a sort of game for the ones outside it. The audience participating in the pain of one and the pleasure of the other naturally feel in the grip of an ironic mixture of contrasted feelings. This exercise in torture is as terrible as the one in Sartre’s No Exit, but it has also a lighter side to it. We feel at once depressed and amused; but when to this is added the silly giggling of Hugo, the whole thing appears grotesque. Like the party lacking the spirit of a feast, here is something tensely gay—a comedy with a core of tragedy. For example, when Harry comes, contrary to the normal code, he starts shouting at the greeting friends. It is so revolting, and yet we know that he is angry not with others but with himself. Thanks to Hickey’s mission, he is only too upset about himself. Soon, realising his folly, when he tells the friends that he was just kidding, they forgive him and smile affectionately; but here Hickey buts in with a grinning joke:
"Sure, Harry's the greatest kidder in this dump and that's saying something! Look how he's kidded himself for twenty years!" (Plays, III, 655).

Instead of raising a laugh, this joke makes Hope give him a bitter, angry glance. Later, when Hickey announces that "Tomorrow" has come, Jimmy, the leader of the Tomorrow Movement, is dazed by this realization. Margie voices our sentiments when she says, "Dis is all wrong. We gotta put some life in dis party or I'll go nuts." (Plays, III, 656). But O'Neill wants us to realize that life is an absurd game in which celebrations are depressing like funerals. The toast is duly proposed, but the joviality is choked immediately when Hickey again refers to their pipedreams. No wonder he drinks alone. All others turn against him, laugh jeeringly at him, and ask him questions about his wife and the iceman. Amidst Willie's rapping song that provokes dirty laughter, Hickey announces that his beloved wife is dead. Everyone feels the cold touch of death; the audience too may feel the presence of a ghost in their midst!

The neurotic, near-fighting quarrelsomeness of Act II is accentuated in Act III, in which one by one practically all the roomers leave Harry Hope's to face the "today". All of them have lost their jolly selves; they are so nervous that even "Friends" fall out. At stages it appears as if each pair were heading for a bloody scene, but the tension is punctured by Larry's sardonic laugh or Hugo's giggling. The extent of their nervousness is concretized in Jimmy's throwing wine in Hickey's face before he leaves. Hope's exit is less melodramatic but more terribly revealing: the way he grabs one excuse after another is almost an epitome of man's inventing defence-mechanisms to cover up his weak-willedness. That Larry, too, is facing facts about himself
is shown in the logical way he puts the argument against himself even though he puts it sneeringly. The more he seems to deny it, the more convinced he is growing about its veracity. Hugo too realizes that his professed love of the proletariat is an inverted image of his aristocratic sense of superiority; consequently, he cannot sleep or pass out now, whereas earlier he would not wake up! In fact, life has lost its kick for every one; no wonder Hope complains again and again about the inefficacy of wine.

Indeed, life without a dream is like wine without a kick. It means that modern life, in which faith and life-sustaining lies have been shattered by the rationality of man, is intolerably meaningless. And just as these characters, losing dreams, behave neurotically, the modern man, without his illusions of ideals, has also a neurotic sensibility. He too cannot stand the stark and maddening reality. In this way, the Harry Hope's becomes a microcosmic version of the modern world. The verbosity without action that characterizes modern life is suggested in the barking, laughing and fighting of these characters as if they were animals in a zoo. It is worth noting that in this scene, the various plots, and not merely one plot, have moved ahead. Indeed, such is the pace of life too, for things do not suddenly precipitate into a climax.

In Act IV, the roomers sit like wax-figures sunk in numb stupor; they are filled with self-loathing. As Hickey speaks, his audience sit mumbling occasionally, "Who cares?" This pouring of one's soul against dead indifference of the audience is terrible. Only a tortured soul like Parritt's responds—and that, too, in the form of
confessions. We hear only Hickey, but we know Parritt's mind and by extension what is passing in the roomers'. Our response is a blend of compassion and contempt rather than the tragic complex of pity and fear. And just as Hickey's confessions had prompted Parritt's, Hickey's re-entering a pipedream facilitates the roomers' creeping again into the shells of their self-deluding illusions. The tide ebbs, but not all the shingles return with it. Realising that life is intrinsically insignificant, and that there is no hope, Larry steps down from the grandstand of "foolosopher", throws off the non-judging pity, and administers to Parritt an advice born of a new kind of pity for mankind. As for himself, he sits passionately awaiting death, clear-eyed. The rest of the company start cacophonous singing—everybody singing his own song, which epitomizes, as it were, the quality of human existence. Absurd intrinsically, this has something fascinating about it. Anyway, we do not hate these people; nor do we approve of Larry and Parritt's suicidal options.

Here is a close that leaves open the choice between escapist pipedreaming and suicide, since both of them are of the same quality. Perhaps O'Neill implies that the right way to live is to evolve such illusions as are founded on existentialistic acceptance of life's intrinsic insignificance. Only then can life can be authentic, heroic and tragic. Without such a synthesis of illusion and reality, life would be a grotesque mixture of ironically contrasted and polarized ingredients. In other words, The Iceman Cometh is not a tragedy, but a play that proves that tragedy is impossible in modern times in which Freudian psychology, rationalist philosophy, dehumanizing science, and anarchical socialism have stripped human existence of the life-
sustaining illusions and forced man to face the absurd. That is as good as saying that tragedy must wait until man discovers new ideals to restore to his life the touch of spiritual glory.

Still another off-Cycle "memory" play about O'Neill's youthful days, written during the War years, was Long Day's Journey Into Night; but it is distinctly different. Whereas The Iceman Cometh was non-personal, Long Day's Journey is openly autobiographical. Dope-dreaming replaces pipedreaming and, as such, whereas illusions were powerless against reality in Harry Hope's Saloon, in the Tyrone House, it is the reality that is powerless against illusions. No longer masking dread, illusion is now a mask of anguish. In The Iceman, the inmates of a rooming house lived as a family and thus the bar was a sort of home; in Journey, the home appears more like a boarding-house, and it is no mere coincidence that the action of the play is related to meal-timings—after breakfast, before and after lunch, before dinner, midnight drinks or dope. If The Iceman Cometh is a bitter cry of a disillusioned cynic, Long Day's Journey is a tribute to the faith in the redemptive power of love which enables one to acquire deep pity, understanding and forgiveness even for the worst offenders. No suicide is committed or contemplated, no one is taken to the electric Chair, no absurd cacophony marks the end. It is, of course, not a reiterated affirmation of the middle period either. In fact, in Long Day's Journey, O'Neill recreates life as he had seen it, objectively and without either glamorizing it romantically or gloating on its sordidness like a naturalist. It offers not a story but an experience. Since a plot usually betrays an author's moral intentions, O'Neill dispenses with the plot altogether. He only welds sentiment, sorrow and pathos into
character and action and leaves it at that, without giving it any philosophical slant whatsoever. No wonder, Frederic I. Carpenter observed, Journey is "most remarkable for what it is not. It is not a drama of action." Indeed, there is no progress or change in the initial situation, for changes have already taken place and what we see is the reaction of the characters to these changes. Action is over; the despair accruing from that action is the theme of the play. But this despair had tragic recompense to offer: out of this grew O'Neill, the playwright. Family was the microcosm through which the artist had his first look at the macrocosm.

In the traditional tragedies, the tragic hero embodies in him the existential dichotomies, and thus in his sufferings, the audience see the fate of the whole mankind. O'Neill gave this position of the tragic individual to the family* and we see in the Tyrones not four individuals but a precariously intact universe gradually going to pieces beyond redemption. That is why the play, although manifestly a merciless autobiography, is not about O'Neill himself. Neither is Edmund the hero, nor is his disease the central concern of ours. Our sole interest is in the quality of life lived by all of them. The family here is a universe in itself and their relationships epitomize the existential forces which at once unite and tear asunder the human groups. Just as the trio in Sartre's No Exit make the hell, the foursome

*For a playwright concerned with man and his fate, the sociological and the metaphysical were inseparable, family being the link interlocking them. No wonder, in most of O'Neill's plays, family is the centre of action. Family-fate was his concern in Mourning whereas in the Cycle, the Harford family was to capsule the entire history of the American civilisation. Journey is a family-play in the sense in which Iceman is a group-play. Here family is the hero; or perhaps it will be apter to talk about family as the villain as does, Albert Berme in Contradictory Characters (New York, 1973, pp.105-21)
in *Long Day's Journey* represent the human existence on the earth. The same facts are viewed from various angles through the prismatic lenses of the memories of different persons and step by step, we come ever nearer acquiring a painful understanding of life's ironies which form the basis of a tragic view of life. In Edmund's physical doom, Mary's dope-addiction, Jamie's cynicism and James's artistic failure, we encounter nothingness and realize that none can help things in this world because life is a hostile necessity thrust upon man by the inevitable ambivalence of things. The only alternative to disillusionment and death is living by illusion!

*Long Day's Journey* offers a more truthful account of human reality than the yea-saying plays of the middle-period. In this play, O'Neill shows that, in this world, all of us are guilty, all of us are victims, all values are illusive and worthless, and all meanings false before the terror of ambiguity. Perhaps the only way we can brighten somewhat this bleak picture of human existence is by accepting the position of

*In the classical tragedy, a myth used to be a powerful vehicle of the tragic action because, like a kaleidoscope, it could instantly change colours and patterns. O'Neill lends such mythical quality to the family insofar as it affords several angles from which the same events look so different. For example, one way of looking at the Tyrones would be to treat them as fops—cases of artistic failure, spiritual atrophy, moral degeneration, physical devastating. But from another angle, they are all guilty; guilt is in Tyrone home what illusion was in Harry Hope's bar. Another shake to the kaleidoscope and they all appear escapists from reality seeking refuge severally in art, religion, dream and drunkenness. Seen thus, the play becomes illustration of Shakespeare's truism with regard to the similarity of imagination in poets, lovers and lunatics, the fourth possible company being drunkards. Or, else, treat Mary as the hub of the play and it appears to be a fable about the way a woman's spiritual infection may ruin every one around. If James is placed at the Centre, it is his materialism that has made a dope-fiend of the wife, a bohemian of one son and a tubercular of another. Viewed as the story of Edmund, *Journey* seems to illustrate the fact that the family environments which led to Mary's dope-addiction, Jamie's alcoholism and James's inhuman miserliness produced also a genius—a dramatist, O'Neill himself.*
man with compassion and understanding. If we cannot love him for what he is, at least we should not hate him for it, for he is not to blame. Mary voices this philosophy of life when she urges Tyrone not to try to understand "the things life has done to us. He cannot excuse or explain" (Long Days' Journey Into Night, London, 1966, 73) The whole play is devoted to this view of life. Some critics have tried to prove that in this play O'Neill has created an orchestra of his old themes* and that Edmund is a replica of all the O'Neill heroes.** It is argued that being only quasi-autobiographical, the earlier heroes had only certain aspects common with O'Neill, but in this open self-portrait*** we have all those strains. However significant and perceptive these studies might be, these must not be allowed to bias our minds when we assess the worth of the play. In evaluating the play, Edmund Tyrone should be more important for us than the playwright, and the central theme of the play should be more important than its relationship with the author's life. Of course, he identified the two and wrote this play of old sorrows in tears; but, for us, more important than O'Neill's owr catharsis is the catharsis of the audience. In

*For example, Falk sees in the four Tyrones representative of all the themes: Mother is "Searcher," Father is "Extremist," Edmund a "Finder" and Jamie a symbol of "Fatal Balance" and so on (See Tragic Tension, pp.182-93). Bogard goes to the extent of saying that the entire O'Neill opus was only a preparation for this masterpiece (Contour, 422).

** Indeed, he is a stranger at home, a little in love with death--like the balmy heroes, sharing, at the same time, melancholy self-pity with Smitty, tubercular constitution with Robert and Murray, ironic tongue with Dion, religious skepticism with John Loving, and so on. However, Bogard discusses at length how O'Neill has fictionalized the self-portraits by mixing the traits of Jamie--say in Eben, Reuben, Orin, Simon etc. Or is it that Eugene O'Neill himself had another fixation?

*** It is worth remembering that vital facts are not chronologically or autobiographically correct. On no one particular day did all these things happen in the O'Neill house. O'Neill developed cold in October 1912, and not in August as Journey has it; Jamie was not at home during that period. And O'Neill was sent to the State Farm!
fact, by looking at the Tyrones as a replica of the O'Neills, we shall be reducin9 them to the level of just a family, whereas, taken indepen­
dently, they represent the human situation in general and modern civiliza
tion in particular. Here, indeed, we have an epitome of America in which young men are sick because of their elders' materialistic attitudes, women are losing faith for the sake of romance, while competitive jealousy marks the relationship of the compatriot-brethren. Treated as an auto­biographical play,* its action would appear to have lasted for one day, but seen without such blinkers, the action appears to have something eternal about it--like the torments of the hell!

As a play, *Long Day's Journey* is gripping, spiritually moving, and vitally alive. Instead of explaining the symbolical celebration of life, as O'Neill did in the middle period, here he has dramatized it.** He no longer dons the mantle of a crusader out to convince us of our ennobling identity; instead, he concerns himself completely with the reality of the inner state that too in terms of spiritual anguish rather than psychoanalytic complexes.*** Without bothering

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*John H. Raleigh, in his article, "O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night* and New England Irish Catholicism" (reproduced in TCV, pp. 124-41), asserts that the play owes its peculiar power to its autobiographical sources; but as Grant H. Redford rightly pleads in "Dramatic Art vs. Autobiography: A Look at *Long Day's Journey Into Night*" (College English, XXV, April 1964, 527-35), we must always distinguish between the art of biography and the dramatic art, and assess the play only as a drama! As for the motives for dramatizing his experiences, Sheaffer hints that O'Neill had been trying with the idea since 1926 when his first biographer interviewed him and when his psychoanalysis by Dr. Gilbert Hamilton made him face his past (Son and Artist, 191)

**Kenneth Lawrence found on analysis that the substructure of *Journey* resembles the rite of Dionysus which contained five elements: "Auron, Pathos, Messenger, Threnos, Theophany (Dionysus and O'Neill," University Review: Kansas City, XXIII, Autumn 1966, 67-70.

***Of course, this does not mean that the presentation and the "Theor would he at cross-purpose. Rather, as Albert Rottenberg and Eugene D. Shapiro have pointed out, all but one of the eleven classical defenses as manifested by the characters of *Journey*: Projection, Regression, Isolation, Denial, Nationalization, Undoing, Identification, Interception, Displace
tment, Repression, Reaction Formation etc. ("The Defense of Psychoanalysis in literature: *Long Day's Journey Into Night* and A View From the Bridge," Comparative Drama, VII, 61-67)
about the usual tragic prerequisites, such as hamartia, hubris, peripeteia, and catharsis, and instead of seeking affirmation of life through an individual's noble struggle, O'Neill seeks to communicate the quality of tragic existence in the four Tyrones who become protagonists turn by turn, reducing the rest to the status of the chorus. Thus we realize that caught in a cold and impersonal cosmic trap, they are all victims. Getting lost in the cosmic fog, they are struggling to find a pathway that is simply not there. They realize the hopelessness of their search after a lot of groping and stumbling; and thus, at the end, though the situation is in no way more hopeful than at the start, there is a greater understanding of the condition and forces of life.

If the theme alone were to determine the tragic quality of a play, Long Day's Journey has every right to be called a tragedy; but if we go by the impact on the audience, the play is a category apart. In a tragedy, through empathy with the protagonist, we experience first the depths of human depravity and then the exalted moments of human nobility, sharing thus the glory that is rooted in perversity. Instead of driving us to the boundary situation and then suggesting an affirmation, O'Neill presents the two aspects in the form of a see-saw. The power of the play lies in the interplay of the orgy of resentment, recrimination, and accusation on the one hand, and a network of confessions, excuses, self-accusations on the other. As the characters shift from self-pity to burning blame, as the accusations recoil on the accusers, as rancour is fused into affection and bickering into kidding, as the guilty withdrawals follow bitter tirades, as the wounding and healing interact in a circle of punishment and reconciliation, we fail to respond empathically with every change.
in the mood of the character. Pity gagged, a compassionate understanding dawns and we see in the intricate patterns of these recoils and reactions poignant rhythm of life, which, when viewed with a slightly greater detachment, could appear amusing, ridiculous, maybe even comic. That is what made Tiisanen observe: "... if ever deep tragedy is in the next moment followed by tragicomedy, this is the case." Thus as the characters swing on the planes of impulse, of contemplation, of compromise, of escape and of dreams, we behold a grim dance of life in which the past, the present and the future are so inextricably blended that it is difficult to distinguish between a villain and a victim, between damnation and salvation, between dream and reality, between Pan and Morgan, between love and hate, between absurd and sublime. We view things from different angles and come not to the conclusion that life is black-and-white, but that intrinsically all is colourless. Thus, at a certain level, the play is shattering, at another, it is elevating.

Such a fusion was possible because O'Neill followed faithful realism instead of trying some technical experiment. In fact, even things used earlier for theatrical effects are employed here for purely dramatic purposes. For example, his favourite device of sound-repetition figures in the form of foghorn, and the word fog has been repeated as many as 30 times; but the foghorn has been made essential thematically while the fog has become multiple symbol of peace, of man's destiny and of a refuge for the escapist. Similarly, the simple realistic device of drinking is used dramatically for the subtle purpose of evolving a new form of modified monologue. Even the quotations that litter the play prepare the way for confession, accentuate the tragic, and give ironic twists whenever the situation
tends to get sentimental. Thus O'Neill fused method and vision, made scenic means yield emotional power, packed inner action in such a manner as not to let the audience feel the want of the outer action, and, finally, played with the orchestra of human memories in such a way as to fuse the past, the present and the future. Here intensity is not marred by the prosiness of the dialogue, nor does austerity suffer on account of its psychopathology. Here was, indeed, a befitting finale for the variegated career of O'Neill. But its being a great drama does not necessarily imply its being a great tragedy. On the contrary its greatness lies in the fact that O'Neill has dared to rise above the delimiting demands of tragedy, modernism and theatre, and presented life that he knew exactly as he had known it.

Even as the curtain goes up, the books in bookcases highlight the contrast between modernism and romanticism, philosophy and literature. This contrast is reinforced by the two characters on the stage—the all-nerve Mary making a graceful figure and the all-too-healthy James in threadbare suit and shineless shoes. Even in Mary herself we have contrasted juxtaposition of unusual beauty and warped fingers. They enter smiling affectionately, but soon their conversation acquires acidity and suffness. However, the arrival of the sons, yet another pair of contrasts, changes the tone of the play. It all starts with a practical joke about Harker’s estate and Shaughnessy’s pigs, which, true to O’Neill’s brand of humour tickles as well as pains. From impersonal neighbour’s prank we move to something very personal—Edmund’s cough. Here, Jamie, Mary and Tyrone react so differently: the brother is sincerely concerned, the father acts guiltily, and the mother indulges in self-delusion. The two Jameses, left alone, come out with
charges and counter-charges and create a terrific scene that shows how in the complex process of life it is difficult to trace a straight and simple cause-effect sequence. But their mutual hostility changes into understanding sympathy when Mary's dope-addition is brought in. This change from one level to another creates an atmosphere in which it is difficult to tell who is to blame, how much blame falls on whom, and consequently whether one should be pitied or hated. Tyrone at one stage cries, "No one was to blame" (Journey, 34); but as the scene proceeds we learn that everybody concerned contributed to the situation, and thus none in particular, but all of them were to blame.

When Mary returns, we know why she is so self-conscious, and how desperately she is trying to shut out reality from her mind. Hers is a game of deception that deceives none but herself. The more she tries to forget, the more guilty she feels; by insisting on knowing why they were suspicious, she betrays herself. By the close of the Act, we know for certain. This gradual understanding is like the vanishing of fog: drop by drop the information trickles, and one by one the masks are removed. Ironic are the contrasts between what is said and what is meant or done, between the apparent or professed reason and the real motive!

Exposition over, Act II is O'Neill's version of No Exit, in which the past memories torture the present. Mary still plays her game: she does know, but cannot believe, that others know her secret. Terribly hopeless is the situation when one has to deceive oneself so desperately.

In Scene ii, the thematic note is struck in the very opening speech when Mary laments that theirs is no regular home. The whole family is there, but there is no home-feeling. Taunting, teasing,
carping, lying, defending and pretending, they make up a home that is more like an inn. Turn by turn, they brutally hit and torture one another: Tyrone is grieved and angry, Jamie is cynical and caustic, Edmund is scornful and blasphemous, Mary is detached and self-deluding. The scene is terribly revealing. No wonder in such a house, O'Neill, the playwright, came to treat the world as a neurotic asylum.

In the next Act, Mary has taken dope enough to obliterate the physical environment from her consciousness. No wonder, on Edmund's return, she does not enquire about what Dr. Hardy had said. Even when Edmund starts telling, she evades by declaring that she does not care to hear Hardy's ignorant lies. Shocked, Edmund speaks bitterly. But though he is justified in being so bitter, it shows that he lacks understanding still. How this understanding is gained by him is the theme of the next Act.

Ironically, that moment of lucidity comes in drunkenness. As Shakespeare put the profoundest wisdom in Lear's mad speeches, it is in drunkenness that O'Neill's characters mouth the profoundest insights. The father and the son talk about the past and the present. Of course, we know already Mary's version of the past, but now we see it through Tyrone's eyes. We have, so to say, contrasted versions of what the family thinks of Tyrone and what Tyrone thinks of himself. Part of it is very moving—especially, when James talks about his mother's poverty. This opens Edmund's eyes; he understands. Understanding is O'Neill's aim with respect to the response of the audience as well. Not just pity and fear, but understanding! The tension between the father and the son gone, Edmund must understand the brothers too. So
in comes Jamie /Swaying and stinking. How the serious and the humorous can be mixed into the grotesque is epitomized in Jamie's narrative about his visit to the fat Violet. In the same speech he indulges in maudlin humour, arrogant disdain, quotations and sudden melancholy. His smutty song and referring to mother as hophead makes Edmund push him a blow and that triggers a series of reactions. He starts by blaming Edmund for being worthless; in the next breath, he claims credit for having made him what he is; and after another drink, he vomits the real motive that he would not own even to himself—that corrupt as he was, he had corrupted Edmund deliberately and out of sheer jealousy. How perverse and yet lovably noble a man can be! Like Tyrone, we look at Jamie with disgust as well as with pity.

But since the enlightenment of Edmund and the audience is not yet complete, at this stage Mary enters walking somnambulistically like mad Ophelia. She has so completely moved back to her convent days that even Edmund's declaring that he has caught consumption cannot shock her back to the realm of reality. Not that she does not care for her son: rather, the irony of all this is that it was her excessive worry about this illness which drove her back to dope and psychosis! The action of the play has the quality of the process of psychoanalysis: the patient is induced to go back to the past so that the stumbling-block that diverted the once-normal person to the path of psychopathy may be discovered. We have such a moment at the end when Mary says, "Yes, I remember I fell in love with James Tyrone and was so happy for a time." (Journey, 156) No further probing is necessary. We know the cause of her undoing: the convent-bred, religious-minded girl, on the verge of becoming a nun, fell in love. She hoped to get happiness
in love and home; instead of home, she got inns, instead of love, ambivalence. Hence, obsessions, fixations and schizoid. She sacrificed, as it were, her soul for home; and that is what she is continually looking for. Ironic, indeed, is the fact that her quest for happiness led to her misery, just as James's search for commercial success led to artistic failure! Indeed, in this world of human affairs, it is difficult to tell happiness from sorrow, and success from failure. Similarly, Jamie's love and jealousy get so mixed that it is difficult to tell one from the other. Things are mixed; all is so foggy. As this fog grows, things become darker, oblivion becomes more overpowering, and madness overtakes Mary.

Of course, for Edmund the day is a journey into light; he becomes more and more enlightened about the nature of man. Even though just for a moment, life seems to have acquired some rationality. At that moment, besides the spiritual sickness of others, his own physical sickness appears a meaningless trifle. In fact, his illness has enabled him to view things as he could possibly never see otherwise in a healthier state. Now he sees the working of ironic ambivalence in his parents as well as in his brother—things, he might have felt all his life but never quite understood. The consideration that he receives as a physically doomed creature heightens the level of ambivalence and, step by step, he acquires a painful understanding of the ironies of life. This knowledge leads to understanding and forgiveness, rather than to pity and fear.

And that is the quality of the audience response, too. We learn to look at life with a new kind of pity, born of understanding and love. We realize that this world has neither perfect heroes nor utter villains,
all are to blame and yet none is really to be hated. Nothing is white or black, it is prejudice that gives it colour!

Thus, whereas a tragedy owes its cathartic impact to a gradually integrated passion, in *Long Day's Journey*, we have all along the shifting of levels which prevents tragic precipitation. Again, in a tragedy, suffering leads to the churning of good to extract something better, whereas all that we have here is an ironic realisation that the modern man, wearing masks, lives in solitude—haunted by the others' masks and hounded by his own. When the curtain comes down, Mary stands staring sadly; Tyrone is moved by her last words and stirs; Edmund and Jamie remain motionless. The audience would do perhaps all these things; they too would listlessly stare, and then stir restlessly. Of course, it is not a moment of cathartic cleaning. We cannot pity or admire; but we can understand and forgive!

Like *Long Day's Journey*, his passion play, "O'Neill's *Pieta*, *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, was also written in tears,* because it was a veritable personal elegy on the guilty anguish that brother Jamie carried around his neck like albatross in the last days of his life. But despite the agony and pain, neither its publication nor its production helped enhance O'Neill's status or reputation as a playwright. In fact, ironically enough, it was damned by O'Neill's admirers and extolled

*Indeed, as has been suggested by John J. Fitzgerald ("Guilt and Redemption in O'Neill's Last Play: A Study of *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, *Texas Quarterly*, IX, Spring 1966, 146-58), in this play O'Neill has succeeded in effecting triple purgation—Jamie's, his own and that of the audience.
by those who usually ran him down.* The critics' habit-criterion prompted them to assess it in the light of the earlier works of O'Neill without realizing that he had meanwhile given up the quest after tragedy, and had attempted here a drama of sensibility. This becomes clear when we compare *A Moon for the Misbegotten* with *Desire Under the Elms*—the two "peasant plays" that have similar beginnings, and deal with greed, sexual repression and Oedipal complexes. This later countersketch is no longer a study in passion; on the other hand, it is an exercise in unmasking. Instead of adultery and incest, O'Neill's concern now is the opening up of festering abscesses of guilt and self-hatred. The protagonist here is not a symbol of vital life but one who is spiritually dead. While the end of *Desire* implies a tragic acceptance of life, *Misbegotten* closes on a death-wish. Jamie is not a tragic hero like Eben; he is, instead, a modern man, lacking in will, suffering from self-loathing, and yet donning a mask of bohemian jollity. No wonder critics, who insisted on treating this play as yet another tragedy like *Desire*, were highly disappointed.

Far from being a tragedy, *A Moon for the Misbegotten* is almost a grotesque comedy—a "neurotic fantasy unorganised into art" that anticipates the existentialistic themes of the theatre of the Absurd. But not being an absurdist, O'Neill is not content only with the comical grotesque; rather, he uses it to afford an insight into Josie's soul! Complementing the Sartrean vision of *Long Day's Journey*, in which other people are the hell, *Misbegotten* shows how the way out of the existential absurd and infernal nothingness lies in man's projecting his own values.

*Thus Krutch condemned it, Falk called it a scratch in rat's alley (Tragic Tension, 171) Carlotta loathed it (Carpenter, 163), while Mary McCarthy felt in it mythic powers and elements of transcendence. (New York Times Book Review, August 31, 1952).*
Such a value is symbolized in Josie's redemptive love which is selfless and without sensuality—a love that gives without receiving. Of course, to begin with, being obsessed with sexual desire, this she-Hercules takes the initiative; but when she is rejected as a woman, she faces the existential truth and lets her sex-ridden love evolve into the tender love of a mother-substitute. Thus renouncing of sex when nearest realization is a glorious sacrifice which only a human being can make. As the romantic, elusive moonlight yields place to the dawn of reality, Josie and Jamie move beyond hope, and feel purified. In such a context, breaking of illusions is an act of heroism, and wishing the death of a lover a benediction.

The play induces a kind of pity born of understanding and forgiveness—a cerebral pity, at once ironic and sentimental, symbolized in the statuesque image of a Virgin Titaness holding a dead, mummified child. This absurd tableau is a grotesque version of the Christian Madonna—an attempt to reconcile the sentimental with the comic. Whereas Oedipal Jamie's schizophrenic split is tragic, Phil Hogan's salacious wit and raillery are simply farcical. Each of the three major characters tries to trick the other; but none being sure of the intentions of the others, their doings create a maze full of false clues and blind alleys until everything is discovered to have double bottoms. Just as Long Day's Journey had a dual process (one leading Mary to night and the other leading Edmund to light), in Misbegotten, too,* we have a double process that culminates in an anticlimactic point where Jamie's love is satisfied only in Josie's remaining unconsummated. Indeed, one pays the price of love for life, the other the price of life

*Frederic I. Carpenter calls A Moon for the Misbegotten as "Long Night's Vigil for the Dawn." (Eugene O'Neill, 80)
for love. There is a triumph in the frustration of Josie. The Hogans
who cheat are cheated by life, but the schemes of love-making end in
a genuine tenderness.

In this topsy-turvy world, the comic mask of life is stripped to
reveal tragedy, and what begins in laughter ends in tears. Here
wishing the death of the person you love is an act of charity. Josie
forgives and Jamie learns to communicate; but, at the same time, she
is frustrated and he passes beyond love and anybody's help. Jamie,
at once sad and relaxed, savage and sweet, expansive and submissive,
alternates between self-hatred and self-pity, torturing and kidding,
cynicism and sentimentality, the coarse cruelty of a lecher and the
simplicity of a child. Josie, too, is a paradoxical mixture of rough-
ness and tenderness, sweet virginity and abrasive vulgarity. She is,
indeed, true to her name—a female (chaste) Joseph born in the family
of the (sensual) Hogs. Viewed in detachment in Act I, she is a comic
character; but viewed from within later, she is pathetic. No wonder
O'Neill told Miss Welch, who played Josie, that the actress playing
the role should have range from farce to Greek tragedy. Naturally,
in viewing the action, our response alternates between the levels of
detachment and involvement, and the total effect is one of grotesqueness.
Truly, as Mennemeier points out, this play leaves O'Neill a short step
away from Anouilh, Beckett, Durrenmatt, and Pinter. Here is, indeed,
a peculiar type of comedy that evokes pity and terror—a comedy that
leaves a shattering emotional impact. Significantly enough, in the
midst of elegiac ending, we find the father and the daughter resuming
their farcical routine.

As the play starts, a grotesque, freak-like woman sails in and
gives a shockingly grotesque slap to her brother whose incensed
retorts make her say mockingly things which sound shocking on a woman's lips. However, this abhorrently rough vulgarity and blasphemy of hers is assuaged when, blinking back her tears, she offers the brother a tender farewell and a roll of bills adding, "It was the little boy you [Rike] used to be that I had to mother, and not you, I stole the money for." (A Moon for the Misbegotten, London, 1953; hereafter Misbegotten, 20) Indeed, we already sense the mother in her! However, she picks up broom to greet her stumpy-legged father who calls her a slut, talks chucklingly about her lovers, and suggests in a most unfatherly fashion, the hooking of Jamie. This game, we learn, has been their daily routine. Another kind of game we have soon when Hogan and Jamie play a tightwad host and an uninvited guest. The limit is reached in Hogan's verbal battle with Harder—at once scathing, sly, witty, vulgar and dramatic. It is in this atmosphere of kidding that Josie and Jamie fix a moonlight date. The whole thing is farcical; but what results from it is pathetic. Strange, indeed, is human life in which farcical situations breed tragedies, game of love changes into genuine pity, and vulgar creatures attain lyrical heights of human compassion and warmth.

In the terrible "date," her behaving coquettishly and playing the enticing tricks are so countered by his genuine affection and self-hatred that she is disarmed and bewildered. Their romance flops because her every effort at kidding leads to Jamie's misery. She prepares to let him go, but learning that the tortured soul had come to seek not sensual pleasure but understanding, love and forgiveness, her bitterness vanishes, and with fiercely possessive, maternal tenderness, she hugs him and allows him to rest on her ample breasts. This gesture enables
us to have a glimpse into the beautiful soul of this vulgar woman. Purified of all selfish passions and overflowing with genuine love, she allows him to sob on her breasts and encourages him to confess.

The confession itself is a network of ironies: the man who gave up drinking for his mother's sake, resumes it when he is too worried about her health; the man who loves the mother so much cannot weep at her death; guilty in the knowledge that her closing eyes had seen him drunk, he accuses her of betrayal and seeks revenge by doing the most vulgar act in the train carrying her corpse! And the man who goes to pieces out of Oedipal love cannot attend her funeral because he is too drunk! It is a terrible story and its irony is so overwhelming that the sob-song that he has been singing assumes now a maddening impact. Now we can see the reason why Jamie was schizophrenically swinging between the levels of cynicism and sentimentalism. When Josie assures him that the mother, too, would understand and forgive him, after months of nightmarish restlessness, Jamie enjoys rest on Josie's breasts as she sits wearily crushed by his burden. A handsome young man looking dead but clinging clumsily to the ample bosom of an oversized woman is a grotesque sight, but there is behind it most human compassion. This anticlimactic progress of her scheming on the one hand, and redemptive transformation of her love on the other, are ironically counterpoised. No wonder, at the end, she forces a defensive, self-derisive smile and says: "God forgive me, it's a fine end to all my scheming, to sit here with the dead hugged to my breast, and the silly mug of the moon grinning down, enjoying the joke"

(Misbegotten, 137)

Perhaps, this could be a touching finale for the play; but that might have invited a controversy about its tragic impact. To prevent
that, O'Neill added another act. With the dawn, it dawns on her that her love and understanding may give him peace, but it cannot kill the guilt completely, and that his soul being dead, the only redemption for him lies in his physical death. With such new understanding, she has developed the right kind of pity. This experience has given something of an existential meaning to her life. When Jamie kisses her goodbye and leaves, it is a poignant parting of two souls. Of course, at the end, as usual, the daughter and the father start calling each other names, but she has passed through an existential experience, and lived authentically for a night. When Hogan curses Jim, she cries in anguish: "Don't, father! I love him!" (Misbegotten, 155) She means not the selfish, sensual craving but a sincere love that makes her wish sadly, tenderly and pityingly, "May you have your wish and die in your sleep soon, Jim, Darling. May you rest forever in forgiveness and peace," (Misbegotten, 156). Ironic, indeed, that she wishes death for the person she loves—and out of pure, selfless love, too. By implications, O'Neill has such a love for modern man, who, guilt-ridden and with dead soul, is a walking death. Perhaps the best wish for him, too, would be his death.

After a farcical start in Act I, drunker scheming in Act II, and poignant confession in Act III, Act IV is very weak and anticlimactic if we consider the play as a tragedy; but if we consider it as an experience-play, we can feel in it life resuming its old rhythm, though with a slight change. A tragedy closes a phase decisively; here nothing is changed; but, because of a greater understanding, for a moment life acquired some sort of meaning.
Brooding over the inhuman implications of the World War II, O'Neill's mind came to be so obsessed with the right kind of pity and with thoughts about death as well as about the need for human interdependence and communication, that even when he sought diversion from the long serious plays in the cycle of one-act plays, By Way of Obit, he found himself dealing with these very aspects of existence. These vignettes were to be related to the existence of such common people as gamblers, racketeers, barflies, street-walkers, etc. In each case, someone was to talk about a person recently deceased but in a manner that should reveal the characters of the narrator and the listener as well as of the person talked about. In this cycle, too, O'Neill wanted to continue the theme that we have to sustain illusions to sustain life. He enjoyed writing these lighter, little pieces, but even though he wrote scenarios of three or four of them, he could complete only one, viz. "Hughie."

As in the other last plays, here, too, the "moderns" are underdeveloped characters in an overdeveloped society living in virtual solitude because of their own masks or the masks of others. Their complete break in communication is beautifully suggested in the repeated silences. At the end, when the Night Clerk and Erie have established real contact, the implication is that in this human interdependence lies the essence of human existence because it transforms isolation into communication and bitterness into love. In this O'Neill was anticipating, as it were, Sartre that though life may be intrinsically dull,

*Of course, O'Neill had many other projects, too, which he could not accomplish. In 1943, he had made notes about Jugg's End, a Negro play, about Don Juan of Austria and Philip II, about the thirteenth Apostle, about Robespierre, about China, about Christ and Satan, etc. Although O'Neill wrote so much, he died with a painful awareness that so much of his work remained unaccomplished.*
In this play, the existentialist themes are so expressed in psychological terms that it appears like another experiment in the delineation of the stream of consciousness. In fact, in this play, the modern man's situation and his psychological state are woven into each other. The Night Clerk, a typical faceless man, is the product of civilization that gives no place of significance to man. The mixing of the red and the blue in his handkerchief as well as in his tie symbolizes his combining the red and the blue blood as evidenced in his sentimental softness and hardboiled exterior. This modern man lacks the power of feeling so much so that he cannot even feel the sting of despair! Since modern life offers no real thrills, he has no heroic dreams; rather, he thinks of (of all the things) garbage cans, shoes, fire-engines, ambulance cars, sirens, etc. The conversation between the Night Clerk and Erie Smith, the silences that punctuate it the diverse directions of their thoughts, Night Clerk's just guessing a yes-answer and smiling, and later, Erie's talking to himself—all these reflect the modern man's desire for companionship, his inability to communicate and the consequent feeling of alienation. At last, they establish a companionship which would forge pipedreams for both so as to cover up Night Clerk's adventurelessness and Erie's failure as a gambler. Of course, they would still lead meaningless life, yet they can console themselves with the illusive belief that they are having a kick out of it.
For the Night Clerk, the need is existential, for Erie Smith it is psychological. The latter is a small-time gambler but wants to be accepted as a great player—an image he wants bolstered up by some one looking up to him with a sense of hero-worship. Hughie, seeking vicariously the fulfilment of his unlived experiences, used to treat him as a big game and that would give Erie a sort of confidence. Hughie's death naturally created a void in Erie's life and he has been drinking for a week, being unable to face the reality. With the Night Clerk's getting interested in his stories, his self-image is restored and he is jubilant. Having found his pipedream, he can live again.

Writing one-act plays after the elephantine Cycle and trilogies might have been a fun otherwise, but from the point of view of the artistic discipline, it was a very exacting business. In any case, it does not imply a return to one-act plays of the earliest phase. "Hughie" is neither an "atmospheric" nor a case-study. It best, it is an experiment in a compassionate and shattering character-study. It does not have a traditional plot, nor does it have any dramatic situation. Whatever action it has is inward and expressed not so much in the speeches as in the stage-directions. The "thoughts" here are not asides but mumblings of a man to himself when he is too much lost in his own thoughts—sort of interior monologues. Erie's speeches, on the other hand, are monologues on the conscious level. So we may say that here two modified monologues cut across each other to form a sort of

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*How exactly these unvoiced stage directions, so important for the play's meaning, were to be conveyed was never spelled out by O'Neill for he never thought of production, though once he vaguely suggested that filmed background for city scenes and sound track for interior monologue and stage directions could be used to present the thoughts in Hughes's mind. In other words, the eternal experimentator was now attempting an unconscious experiment involving the mixing of the film and life-performance!*
modified dialogue that suggests itself as the quintessence of modern life in which communication is almost impossible.

Now, obviously, this beautiful and moving poetic play is a sensitive and powerful piece, but it is neither a comedy nor a tragedy. The strains of humour and melancholy are interlaced by alternating the levels of pathos and bravado. In fact, more often than not, the comic and the tragic mix in the grotesque, the absurd and the ironic.

Now, one may argue that since in these last plays there is some kind of tragedy, they may, therefore, be treated as "modern" tragedies. We believe, on the contrary, not only that they amount to a confession of the incompatibility of tragedy and modernism, but also that the very underlying theme of these plays is the impossibility of tragedy in modern times. Here, by dramatizing modern life without distorting or idealizing it, O'Neill has established that the moderns are incapable of attaining tragic heights, because, what was earlier heroic or tragic has become in modern times absurd and grotesque. Instead of daring to face the reality like a tragic hero, they prefer to escape in one way or the other. A tragic protagonist invites doom when he tries to get out of life more than what it would normally allow; he knows his limits, and yet he tries to live beyond the normal boundaries. The moderns, in Harry Hope's or in the Tyrone House, on the contrary, evade truth, put on masks, and lead unauthentic lives. They do not have character; theirs are, instead, levels of behaviour. A tragic hero risks his life for spiritual glory; the modern men choose to keep on living, although in this attempt they have to invent pipedreams, which
make them grotesque cases of psychopathology. Thus, in the life of the modern man, the absurd is not eclipsed by the sublime; rather, we perceive it peeping through all his efforts at projecting about himself the image of sublimity. That is to say, instead of viewing nobility sprouting from perversity, we see the absurd lurking behind the heroic self-image. That this is O'Neill's real meaning is reinforced by the fact that in *The Iceman Cometh* and *Long Day's Journey* we don't have any plot, nor do we have any protagonist; instead, we have groups of people, and the main concern is not what they do as individuals but what sort of life they lead as a whole.

In short, in the last phase, we have sort of experience-plays, but the experience thus presented is at once comic, tragic, ironic, grotesque, and melodramatic. Instead of the domineering passion of the hero spinning the plot, we find each man following his own pipe-dream or contributing to the general absurdity of existence. Since all of them live unauthentically, it makes life look a masquerade. Thus the existential absurd which is the usual basis of tragedy, and the incongruity between ideal and reality which is ordinarily the source of the comic, so mix together that we feel as if comedy here were being built out of the tragic, and vice-versa. At certain points, we may sense something terrifying and gripping as in a tragedy, but then the very next moment we encounter the absurd and the ironic in the interplay of the masks. Since in the process of unmasking we can see failure springing from success, hatred intertwined with love, torture lurking beneath joviality, and so on, we tend not to sit in judgement on these tortured souls. Thus, instead of pity and fear, these plays evoke understanding and compassion. And that is what makes these plays a new genre. Only a man given to servile worship of the traditions would insist on calling them tragedies; to us it appears that this new genre is a higher form of art than tragedy itself.