The Iceman Cometh Study Guide

The Iceman Cometh by Eugene O'Neill

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Introduction

Written in 1939, Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* was not produced until seven years later, largely because O'Neill was concerned that America was not ready for the play's dark vision. When it was staged in 1946, the play received mixed reviews. By that time, O'Neill was already an internationally-known playwright. In addition, the 1946 production marked the end, for O'Neill, of a twelve year absence from Broadway. Critics praised the play's passion, suspense, and well-drawn characters but complained about its prosaic language, redundancy, and excessive length□the play runs for almost four hours. In 1956, *The Iceman Comethwas* revived and this time, widely acclaimed as a masterpiece that would ensure for O'Neill a place among the greatest of modern dramatists. There have been numerous revivals of the play since.

The Iceman Cometh is noted for its dark realism; its setting and characters closely resemble real life. The world of the play is a cruel place. Despair is a constant presence, love only an illusion, and death something to which one looks forward. Relief comes in alcohol and pipe dreams□groundless hopes for a future that will never arrive. Some critics find hope in the characters' camaraderie and endurance. Others consider such a reading too optimistic, believing O'Neill's vision to be unremittingly dark.

In spite of critical disagreement, however, the importance of *The Iceman Cometh* to twentieth-century theater is undisputed. It is truly a modern classic, considered by many to be the greatest play by one of America's greatest playwrights.

Author Biography

On October 16,1888, Eugene O'Neill was born in a hotel on Broadway in New York City. His father was a professional actor, and O'Neill lived on the road with his parents until he began attending boarding school at the age of eight. O'Neill's mother, born into an affluent family, was unhappy with the nomadic theatre life, which she considered less than respectable. In part because of O'Neill's difficult birth, she became addicted to drugs. In 1903, she attempted suicide, and O'Neill, at the age of fifteen, learned for the first time of her addiction. That same year, he himself began drinking heavily in a pattern that would persist for most of his life.

O'Neill attended Princeton University, but a drunken prank resulted in his expulsion in 1907 after only nine months of study. Two years later, O'Neill married Kathleen Jenkins. The two had one child, a son, Eugene, Jr. O'Neill and Jenkins did not officially divorce until 1912, but within days of the marriage, O'Neill went to sea, traveling to Honduras and Buenos Aires, where he experienced first-hand the life of a penniless drifter. In 1911, O'Neill returned to New York, where he lived at Jimmy the Priest's, a saloon populated by drunkards, has-beens, and outcasts. Later in his life, O'Neill called Jimmy the Priest's "a hell hole" and said of the establishment, "One couldn't go any lower." It was Jimmy the Priest's, with its atmosphere of failure, hopelessness, dashed dreams, and despair that, together with its miserable clientele, eventually became the model for Harry Hope's saloon in O'Neill's 1946 play, *The Iceman Cometh.*

In 1912, O'Neill developed tuberculosis, an event that became a turning point in his life. During the five months he spent in a sanatorium, he decided to become a playwright. He began reading modern dramatists and was particularly affected by the dark work of August Strindberg *(Miss Julie),* whom he later cited as one of his greatest influences. O'Neill studied play writing at Harvard for one year. He then moved to Greenwich Village, New York, where he became involved with an avant-garde group of artists and radicals. A number of these people later formed the Provincetown Players, the first group to produce aplay of O'Neill's, *Bound East for Cardiff*, in 1916.

In 1918, O'Neill married Agnes Boulton, with whom he had two children, Shane, in 1919, and Oona, in 1925; the marriage ended in divorce in 1929. In 1920, O'Neill's first full commercial success, *Beyond the Horizon,* was produced, resulting in the first of four Pulitzer Prizes for its author. That year also saw the production of *The Emperor Jones,* which focuses on the violence in human nature. In 1924, *Desire under the Elms,* which reflected O'Neill's interest in Freudian psychology, was produced. Other important plays in the O'Neill canon include the trilogy *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), modeled on the ancient Greek playwright Aeschylus's *Oresteia;* the autobiographical *Long Day's Journey into Night,* probably written around 1939 but produced and published after O'Neill's death (per his decree, given the intensely personal nature of the play); and *The Iceman Cometh,* written in 1939, produced in 1946, and considered by many to be O'Neill's greatest work. In 1936, O'Neill won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

During the last ten years of his life, O'Neill was in ill health, suffering from tremors in his hands, which eventually rendered him unable to write. He died of pneumonia November 27, 1953. He is considered by many to be America's greatest playwright.

Plot Summary

Act I

The first act of *The Iceman Cometh* opens in Harry Hope's saloon in the early morning of the day before Hope's annual birthday party. The room is occupied by an assortment of disheveled ne'er-do-wells□most in their fifties and sixties. Also present are Rocky, the night bartender, and Harry Hope himself. All of the men sleep except for Larry Slade, a former anarchist. As the curtain opens, Rocky sneaks Larry a free drink. Larry says he'll pay "tomorrow," then remarks that all of the men have great plans for a tomorrow that will never come, that all are given hope only by "the lie of the pipe dream." Larry claims to be the exception; he believes he has no pipe dream. He only waits for death.

Rocky and Larry then speak of Hickey, who comes in every year for Hope's birthday on one of his two annual drinking binges. He's known for buying everyone drinks but also for the joking and laughter he brings to Hope's saloon, particularly his running gag about finding his wife, Evelyn, in bed with the iceman. As Larry and Rocky talk, the others awaken from their drunken slumber. All lead existences built on drunkenness, poverty, and despair, but they also speak continually of their grand pasts and their ambitions for tomorrow.

Parritt, a young man who claims to be a friend of Larry's, enters. Larry continually stresses that Parritt means nothing to him. He was only a friend of the boy's mother when he was still a committed anarchist, dedicated to what he and Parritt now call "the Movement." Now Parritt's mother has been arrested in the wake of a political bombing. Parritt escaped arrest, and as the young man talks, indications that he betrayed his mother to the police become evident.

One by one, the men in the bar talk about their plans for the future, but all are equally obsessed with getting their next drink. The prostitutes Margie and Pearl enter followed by Cora, another prostitute, and Chuck, the day bartender. These characters reveal their own pipe dreams of respectability. The much-anticipated Hickey arrives, jovial and generous to everyone. He soon reveals, however, that he has stopped drinking. As he explains, he no longer needs alcohol because he has given up his pipe dream and found peace. He wants Hope's roomers to do the same, including Larry, who is offended by Hickey's suggestion that the ex-anarchist has a pipe dream. Hickey falls asleep, and the roomers express their disappointment at the change in his personality.

Act II

The saloon is now decorated for Hope's birthday festivities. The time is around midnight of the same day. Chuck, Rocky, and the three prostitutes are making further preparations for the party, while complaining about Hickey trying to control not only the party but also the roomers' lives, insisting that each give up his or her pipe dream.

Hickey enters and renews his attempts to bring the others the peace he's found. Hickey tells Larry that once he gives up his view of himself as a man who merely observes life, waiting for death, he'll also find peace. The others enter, all determined to prove to Hickey that their plans for the future are not pipe dreams. Parritt enters and tries to speak to Larry about his mother, but Larry does not want to listen, even when Parritt admits that he betrayed his mother to the police for a reward.

As the roomers speak among themselves, it becomes clear that the camaraderie that once existed is unraveling. Where they had once supported each other's pipe dreams, fights now break out as they see each other through Hickey's eyes. The party begins, but the celebration is dampened by Hickey's continual appraisals regarding the dark truth of each person's situation. As anger at Hickey grows, Larry asks Hickey if this time he really did find his wife in bed with the iceman. Hickey tells them Evelyn is dead. All are immediately sorry for their anger, but Hickey says he is not sad. His wife is finally rid of him, and she is at peace.

Act III

Hope's saloon, the next morning. Larry, Rocky, Parritt, and a number of the roomers are present. Rocky and Larry discuss the previous night's party, which broke up early because of Hickey's constant badgering. Parritt persists in his attempt to forge a relationship with Larry. While he had previously told Larry that he ratted his mother out for ideological reasons, he now admits that he did it so he could use the reward money on a prostitute. Larry hints that if Parritt has any sense of honor he should end his life. As some of the regulars arrive, it becomes clear that Hickey has turned former friends against each other. Each, while still hanging onto the promise of his own pipe dream, now accuses the others of fooling themselves. Some of the regulars come in with clean clothes, ready to go out into the world, proving to Hickey that their dreams can come true. Most turn in the keys to their rooms, proclaiming that they will never return to Hope's saloon.

Hickey enters and says that all will return when they realize that nothing will ever come of their pipe dreams. And Hickey says that Larry will finally face the fact that he is also kidding himself. Hickey characterizes Larry as an old man afraid to die. Hope, who has not left the saloon since the death of his wife twenty years earlier, now walks outside to prove that he can go out into the world again, but he soon returns, depressed and miserable, just as Hickey claims that Hope can now be at peace. Larry tells Hickey that all that he's brought Hope is the peace of death, then confronts Hickey with his own belief that Hickey drove his wife to suicide. Hickey tells Larry that his wife was murdered, that the police don't know who did it but that they soon will. Parritt, meanwhile, becomes agitated at the talk of murder and proclaims that he did not kill his mother. The act ends with Hickey expressing concern that the death of Hope's pipe dream has not made him happy.

Act IV

Hope's saloon at 1:30 a.m. All of the roomers are sitting at tables, drinking. They have returned from their failed attempts to realize their pipe dreams. Parritt claims that while Larry now realizes that he does not have the courage to die, Larry believes that Parritt should kill himself. Hickey has left to make a phone call but returns and hears Larry contending that Hickey now realizes that the peace he proclaims is false. Hickey denies this but then says he doesn't understand why the roomers, now that their dreams are dashed, have not found contentment. Larry accuses Hickey of killing his wife because he found her in bed with the iceman. Hickey admits that he killed his wife, that he had to because he loved her. If he had killed himself, it would have broken her heart; she would have believed she was to blame. Larry tells Hickey to be quiet, that he does not want to know; he doesn't want to be responsible for Hickey going to the electric chair.

Two policeman, Moran and Lieb, enter, asking for Hickey; they received a call that Evelyn's murderer could be found in Hope's saloon. Hickey then tells the others why he killed Evelyn. As a young man, he was considered wild, reviled by his hometown. Only Evelyn believed in him and loved her, and she was the only person he loved. During their marriage, he drank and went to prostitutes, but Evelyn continued to believe his pipe dream□that he would someday straighten up and become a good husband to her. Because of her continuing belief in him, he felt intensely guilty. One night while she was asleep, he concluded that the only way to bring her peace was to keep her from ever waking up, and so he shot her. Hickey's confession brings Parritt to admit that he turned his mother in because he hated her.

Remembering his last words to Evelyn, "Well, you know what you can do with your pipe dream now, you damned bitch," Hickey denies that he could ever have hated Evelyn and concludes that he must have been insane to kill her and call her a bitch. The roomers seize on that statement, claiming that they knew Hickey must have been crazy but acted otherwise to humor him. The police take Hickey away.

Parritt sees his situation as a parallel to Hickey's, except that he cannot claim his mother is at peace; for someone who loves freedom as she does, prison is worse than death. Larry finally tells Parritt that the only thing he can do is to kill himself. Parritt leaves as the roomers continue to claim prior knowledge of Hickey's insanity. As they gradually resume their good-natured banter, Larry becomes more and more disturbed. He finally hears Parritt jump off of the fire escape and is horrified. He realizes that Hickey converted him. He is no longer just an observer; by telling Parritt to kill himself, Larry has become an active participant in life. As the others, who do not know of Parritt's death, begin to sing, celebrating Hope's birthday in earnest, Larry stares out of the window, oblivious to the noise.

Act 1, Part 1

Act 1, Part 1 Summary

The drunken and happily deluded peace of a group of regulars at a low-end bar is interrupted by the irregular behavior of a regular visitor, who pushes them to change the way they look at themselves and the world. The story of their painful, aborted attempts to change themselves makes thematic points about the nature of dreams, the power of false illusions, and the difficulties of life without them.

As the play begins, it's another routine night for the regulars at Harry Hope's saloon and bar. Larry, Hugo, Wetjoen, Jimmy, Lewis, Joe, McGloin, Mosher, Willie, and Harry Hope have all had too much to drink and are close to passing out. Rocky comes in, and an extended conversation with Larry reveals that almost all the regulars are running tabs, always promising to pay tomorrow. Larry cynically comments on how they all have a touching faith in tomorrow, even though the truth of what they're facing and what tomorrow will probably be is nothing like what they believe it will be. "As the history of the world proves," he says, "the truth has no bearing on anything." Rocky jokingly comments that Larry doesn't have "pipe dreams" in the way the others do. Larry says all his dreams are dead and buried. Rocky suggests he's just hanging around waiting to die, and Larry jokingly comments that it'll take a while, since even Harry's bad booze can't make a dent in his "iron constitution."

Conversation also reveals that Larry was once an active member of the Anarchist Movement, but became disillusioned and left. He teasingly rouses Hugo from his drunken stupor, Hugo wakes up enough to spout a few leftover slogans from his own days as a leader of the Anarchist Movement and make a joke about Rocky's "slave girls," and then passes out again. Rocky says he's fed up with such comments and says he's not a pimp, adding that all he does is handle the money for a couple of tarts. He and Larry discuss how the regulars are all waiting for Hickey to show up. They reminisce about a routine he does about getting sentimental over his wife and then suddenly revealing his anger at discovering her in bed with the iceman.

Willie cries out in his sleep, and conversation reveals he's a down on his luck law student. As he cries out again, Rocky shouts for him to keep quiet. Harry wakes up, tells him to keep the noise down, protests that no one is ever going to take advantage of him again and passes out. Willie wakes up enough to beg for another drink, Rocky gives it to him, and he too passes out. Joe wakes up, having dreamed about Hickey and wondering whom he can get to buy him a drink. This leads him to remember the young man who arrived the night before, Parritt, and who Larry says rented a room upstairs and is still up there sleeping. He also refers to how he and Parritt's mother were both active in the Movement on the West Coast several years ago, and how Parritt's mother has just been arrested for being involved in a bombing that killed several people. Rocky wonders why Parritt isn't still on the coast supporting her, and Larry says he doesn't know. Joe speaks at length about how useless anarchists and their Movement are.

Parritt comes in, looking for Larry and eager for a drink, but worried, because he has no money and no job. He buys Joe a drink, refuses one for himself, and pays for it out of his roll of one-dollar bills. Rocky goes into the back room, sits and naps. Joe tells Larry to wake him up when Hickey comes and goes to sleep.

Act 1, Part 1 Analysis

This opening section performs several key functions. The first is to establish atmosphere and context by creating a vivid sense of the world in which these characters inhabit, a world of down-and-outers roused from their alcohol-soaked sleep by the alternately frightening and hopeful remnants of their various pasts. This short section indicates that the characters drink to escape those pasts. This sense becomes increasingly strong, as other characters later in the act repeat patterns of behavior exhibited here by Harry, Joe and Willie. This section also serves, therefore, as foreshadowing of action repeated throughout the play, as all the characters reveal both the pasts they're running away from and the hopeful futures they're clinging to. As such, it sets the stage for the conflict triggered by the eventual appearance of Hickey, whose key purpose is to get the characters to face what they continually avoid.

There is another aspect to this sense of repeated avoidance, an aspect hinted at in the comments made by Larry about the irrelevance of the truth and about pipe dreams. These comments are at the core of the second key function of this section, to introduce the play's central theme relating to the nature and necessity of illusion in people's lives. As the action of the play reveals, each of the characters is not only avoiding facing truths about their pasts, but also avoiding truths about their dreams of the future. All those dreams, as Larry says, are "pipe dreams," or hopes and goals that people persist in holding onto but never actually do anything about. The irony of the play is that events of the play suggest that acting to confront false truths about both the past and the future is futile. Holding on to pipe dreams is the only way in which these characters, and by thematic extension humanity as a whole, can survive.

The repeated references to Hickey, as well as Rocky's reference to his story about the iceman, both serve as foreshadowing of Hickey's entrance and his effect on the lives of the down-and-outers. Meanwhile, the hoped for joy in Joe's comments is ironic, in that Hickey actually brings discomfort and unease with him even though he himself believes he's bringing even greater joy than the regulars hope for. The reference to the iceman is the first of several references that function on several symbolic levels, which will be explored and defined as they occur.

At this point, some explanation of what an iceman actually is illuminates the image's first layers of symbolism. Before the invention of refrigeration, food was kept cold in iceboxes, a cabinet constructed with a shelf on the bottom, in which a large block of ice was placed. The cold it generated penetrated the rest of the cabinet and kept the food inside relatively fresh. The ice, of course, melted, and had to be frequently replaced. It was delivered by the iceman, whose visits were regular in the same way, as Hickey's visits to the bar appear to be. On one level, then, Hickey's joke about the iceman is

similar to other jokes about wives having affairs with milkmen, mail carriers, etc. On another level, the joke as described by Rocky starts out going in one direction but then suddenly goes in another. This is essentially the format of Hickey's visit. His friends expect him to behave one way, but he behaves in another. Finally, at the end of the play, it turns out that his behavior comes from yet another source. Finally, the fact that the iceman delivers ice, which eventually melts, symbolizes the way things repeatedly melt away throughout the play. This includes the pipe dreams of the regulars, Hickey's mask of jollity and sanity, and ultimately, the resolve of all the characters to allow their pipe dreams to keep melting.

Another important metaphor of the Anarchist Movement is also introduced in this section. The question of the Movement's moral, social and philosophical values is actually less relevant than the fact that several of the characters indicate that they believe in those values but don't actually do anything to live by them. The one character that does live by those values, Parritt's mother, ends up in jail. The result of both these circumstances is another example of a pipe dream, with the Movement coming across as being empty of truth and real commitment on the part of those who believe in it. This echoes the lack of true faith in the pipe dreams held by the other characters, dreams revealed in detail as the action of the act and the play progresses.

Act 1, Part 2

Act 1, Part 2 Summary

Conversation between Parritt and Larry reveals that Hickey is a friend of Harry's, who comes into the bar twice a year, the same time every year, and treats the regulars to as many drinks as they want. Larry refers to the bar as, among other things, "The End Of The Line Cafy." He says that there's no farther that any of the regulars can go, but also says that they all still have a few pipe dreams left. Parritt asks what Larry's are, and Larry says he's the exception and has none. Parritt talks about how glad he is to have found Larry, saying he was the only friend of his mother's from the Movement he could relate to and adding that there were times he felt Larry had taken the place of his absent father. Parritt and Larry discuss how the police caught up with Parritt's mother, and Parritt says someone turned them in, but doesn't know who. Larry says whoever did it deserves to be punished. Parritt agrees, revealing that he found out where Larry was, because his mother kept all the letters he ever sent her. He adds that that was a strange thing for her to do, saying she always and very quickly let go of people who left the Movement.

Parritt asks why Larry left, and Larry says he realized that the Movement's socialist ideals were a big pipe dream. When Parritt asks what he's been doing since he left, Larry angrily reveals his belief that Parritt has come expecting something of him and warns him to expect nothing. Parritt, with unexpected intensity, says he wants nothing from him and reveals that he became disillusioned with the Movement in the same way Larry did. He explains that the last straw came when he found out that someone, who had apparently believed passionately in the Movement, acted against its ideals and turned his mother in to the police. Parritt's own passion rouses Hugo from his stupor. He makes a joking comment about Parritt being a "stool pigeon," which Parritt takes seriously. After demanding Parritt buy him a drink, Hugo retreats into unconsciousness.

Feeling uncomfortable as the result of his reaction to Hugo, Parritt asks Larry to tell him about the other regulars. Larry explains that Lewis and Wetjoen were former enemies fighting in South Africa, that Jimmy was a journalist reporting on the war, and that they all live off Harry's generosity. He also explains that Harry hasn't set foot outside the bar since his wife died twenty years ago, and that he used to be a small time politician. He then tells Parritt that Mosher is Harry's brother-in-law and used to be a circus performer. He also says that McGloin used to be a policeman but was thrown off the force for taking bribes, and that Joe used to run a gambling house. Finally, he tells Parritt about the prostitutes who live upstairs. This triggers an outburst of temper from Parritt, who says he never wants to have anything to do with a prostitute again.

Willie rouses himself from his stupor and complains about being left out of Larry's descriptions. He explains that he's the son of a wealthy man who was sent to prison and died there without leaving him anything. He, himself, was also a brilliant law student. He asks Parritt to buy him a drink. When Parritt protests that he's a member of the

Movement and has no money, Willie tells him Hugo's the only one allowed to practice the philosophies of the Movement. He then drunkenly sings to fill the time, until Hickey arrives. Willie's singing awakens all the regulars, whose protests lead Rocky and Harry to grab Willie in an attempt to take him up to his room. Willie, suddenly filled with terror at the thought of being alone, refuses to go and promises to be quiet. Harry and Rocky let him stay, and Willie sinks back into his coma.

Act 1, Part 2 Analysis

This section of the act serves principally as foreshadowing and exposition. The conversation between Parritt and Larry defines their relationship as being based on their respective relationships with Parritt's mother, with Parritt's over-reactions to Larry's suggestion that he wants something from him, to being called a stool pigeon and to Larry's comments about prostitutes foreshadowing later revelations. These revelations, in turn, function as yet another dramatization of the play's theme, in that Parritt's reactions are pipe dreams, his efforts to convince himself that nothing is wrong. Later, this layer of illusion is removed and Parritt's true intentions and attitudes are revealed. Meanwhile, Larry's descriptions of the other characters and establishment their basic identities and relationships lays the groundwork for the action of the next section. There, pipe dreams of the other characters are revealed and defined.

Act 1, Part 3

Act 1, Part 3 Summary

Now awake as the result of Willie's song, Lewis and Wetjoen relive their rivalry from the war with drunken amiability. Equally drunk and amiable, Jimmy mediates their argument, teases Larry about his cynicism, and comments that he's got to make himself presentable when he gets down to business. Meanwhile, Joe recalls the days when he lived well off the proceeds of his successful gambling house. He was treated well by several, important officials, just as if he were white. He also recalls how generous Harry was with free drinks back then. This leads Harry to complain about how the down-and-outers only ever think about booze. They never pay their rent, always talk about the past, and keep him from sleeping the night before in the hopes that Hickey will show up, as he usually does, and buy them drinks.

McGloin and Mosher manipulate Harry into reminiscing about his wife Bessie, and Harry's mood immediately becomes grieving and sentimental. Larry comments to Parritt that Harry's remembrance of Bessie is another pipe dream, referring to how much of a nag she was. Harry's reminiscences of Bessie continue at length. He refers to how his desire to advance in politics died when she did, how he's stayed indoors since her funeral, and how he's made up his mind to go out for a walk. He'll go soon, maybe even tomorrow, on his birthday.

This leads the other regulars to comment on their plans for the future. Jimmy refers to sprucing himself up and his absolute belief that he'll get a job in a newspaper. Wetjoen and Lewis talk about the trips they'll take together, to South Africa and to England respectively. Joe talks about his dreams for opening a new gambling house. Harry cynically comments on how they're all off in their pipe dreams, and Larry laughs with equal cynicism at Harry's hypocrisy. Harry angrily turns his attention to McGloin, whom he says Bessie couldn't stand. McGloin says Bessie was only angry at him, because Harry repeatedly got him drunk, and that she knew he was innocent of all the charges of taking bribes.

This reminiscence leads Willie to fulfill his lawyerly pipe dream and also start to sing. He stops quickly, though, when Harry seems about to take him upstairs again. He and McGloin reassure each other that they'll both get what they've dreamed of, as Mosher urges Harry to give Willie a drink. This leads Harry to go after Mosher, whom he accuses of taking unfair advantage of his sister, Bessie. Mosher reminisces about how good he was at sleight-of-hand tricks, including giving incorrect change and keeping the remainder. He talks about his plans for going back to the circus where he worked and getting his old job back. Harry tells him he'd better hurry up and get going and then wonders where Hickey is, recalling with laughter the joke about the iceman.

When Harry hears someone approaching, Rocky comments that it's not Hickey, but the two prostitutes he manages. Margie and Pearl come in, make innuendo-loaded

comments to Larry and Parritt, and then sit down with Rocky to hand over the proceeds of their night's work. Pearl makes a joking comment about how Rocky is a pimp, and Rocky becomes angry, saying there's a big difference between him and a pimp. Margie, sensing trouble, agrees with him, saying he's really a bartender, because he doesn't make his living off the girl's earnings. As he counts the money, Margie reminds Pearl that Rocky isn't their pimp, because they're not really prostitutes. Rocky then refers to Cora, a third prostitute involved with Chuck. He and the two prostitutes talk angrily about how sick they are of Cora and Chuck talking about their pipe dream of living in the country, and Rocky refers to how sick he is of everybody in the bar talking about their pipe dreams.

Cora and Chuck come in, with Cora making the same kind of jokes about Larry, as Pearl and Margie did. Parritt comments that if he knew the bar was a place where prostitutes hung out, he never would have come. He tries to get Larry to understand how a fight over a prostitute triggered his fight with his mother, but Larry ignores him. Meanwhile, Pearl and Margie tease Cora about life on the farm, but Cora says she wants to live in the city. This leads Chuck to comment that he's leaving city life behind. If they stayed in the city, he'd never be sure she wasn't cheating with the iceman.

Cora tells a story of how she robbed a drunken customer. As she's buying a round of drinks, she says Chuck's comment about the iceman reminded her of Hickey, saying she saw him earlier. Harry and the other regulars begin to wake up, as Cora reveals that Hickey is on his way but has stopped to figure out "the best way to save them and bring them peace." This leads Harry to joke that Hickey must have found religion, and Cora agrees that he seemed different. Chuck tells her he was just sober, and Harry agrees, saying Hickey will be as drunk as the rest of them as soon as his birthday party begins. At that moment, Hickey comes in.

Act 1, Part 3 Analysis

The essential purpose of this section is to reveal the various pipe dreams of the characters. These include dreams of action, like the travel dreams of Lewis and Wetjoen, the employment dreams of Willie, Jimmy and Mosher, Joe's gambling house dream, and McGloin's dream of being reinstated on the police force. Other pipe dreams include Cora and Chuck's dream of living in the country, which is more about life as a whole. It would be a way of life, as opposed to a particular component of life. There is also a different kind of dream, which is actually more of an illusion or false perception than it is a hope or a wish. Such illusions include Lewis and Wetjoen's belief that they're friends, Rocky's belief that he's not a pimp, Pearl and Margie's belief that they're not prostitutes, Parritt's belief that Larry will be able to help him, McGloin's belief that Bessie forgave him, and Harry's belief that he truly loved Bessie.

In short, all these characters are clinging to ideals and goals that in some cases, like those of the pimp and prostitutes, are patently false, and in other cases prove to be false. The point made by the action of the play is that all of these illusions are somehow necessary to enable the characters to survive. If they didn't have them, they'd be forced

to face the truth about themselves, a circumstance, which, as the action of the play also reveals, leads to unhappiness. In the case of Hickey, who is also confronted with the truth, it leads to insanity.

All of this refers back to the point first made by Larry in Act 1 Part 1 - that the truth is irrelevant. These characters all lead lives of avoidance of the truth, and as such are able to survive. Over the course of the play, therefore, it becomes clear that the play's theme is not what it first appears to be. With the entrance of Hickey, the focus of the play's action shifts. It seems as though the play's about the necessity of living free of pipe dreams and illusions. By the end of the play, however, it becomes clear that its thematic point is exactly the opposite. Having dreams and illusions is the true necessity.

The amount of drinking that goes on in this play symbolizes that necessity. When the characters are drunk, they have their dreams and live safe, hazy lives within them. When they become sober, they're confronted with the truth, become angry and fearful, and soon hurry back to the sanctuary of the bottle. At first, it seems that Hickey's sobriety, in the following scene and for much of the rest of the action, is a symbol of the power of the truth. As the action progresses, however, it becomes clear that sobriety actually represents fear, in that in his sobriety Hickey is as much afraid of facing the truth as the other characters do, when they're sober. All of this becomes clear, as the relationships between Hickey and the other characters develop. It's a process that begins with Hickey's entrance, the climactic moment of the act in the section that follows.

Act 1, Part 4

Act 1, Part 4 Summary

As Hickey greets the regulars, Rocky pours him a drink. When Hickey reveals he's stopped drinking everyone thinks he's joking, but he explains that when he finally found the courage to throw away his old pipe dream and do what was right for "the happiness of all concerned," he realized he didn't need to drink anymore. He then says that that doesn't mean that nobody else can drink, takes out a roll of money, and buys drinks for everyone. As Rocky pours, and the regulars drink, Hickey reveals he's not just there to celebrate Harry's birthday the way he usually does. He says he's also there to save them all from their pipe dreams, to convince them to live honestly and stop lying to themselves. He apologizes for sounding like he's delivering a sermon, saying his father was a minister and he must have inherited some of the genes. He then begins to list the regulars' various pipe dreams, starting with Harry's going for a walk and Jimmy's applying for a job.

When Larry comments that Hickey's got the perspective on the others and their dreams right, Hickey comments that Larry's attitude is just another pipe dream. Parritt agrees, and then when Hickey doesn't recognize him, introduces himself. Hickey says Parritt is familiar to him, but can't say from where. After he tries to puzzle it out, he encourages everyone to enjoy their drinks, but then talks again about how great they'll feel once they realize what a burden a "lying pipe dream" is. He talks about how tired he is and dozes off, saying sleepily how peaceful it is to have no nagging dreams.

Harry urges the others to drink, and then comments that he can't figure Hickey out. After arguing with Larry over whether Hickey was telling the truth, Mosher says Hickey is temporarily insane as the result of overwork. He then makes a joke about how a doctor told him it was necessary for a man's sanity to drink every day. As the others laugh, Hugo revives momentarily, makes his usual Socialist comments, and passes out again. Mosher tells another joke about the doctor, the others laugh loudly again, and Hickey wakes up. As he goes up to his room, he says he's glad to see the others laughing, and adds that all he wants is to see them all truly happy.

Act 1, Part 4 Analysis

The two key purposes of this brief section are to introduce the character of Hickey, and to foreshadow the action of the rest of the play. The repeated references to Hickey throughout the first part of the act, as well as to pipe dreams and illusions, have created a sense of anticipation that is effectively satisfied by his larger than life, enthusiastic nature. The wait for him has been worth it. His entrance is the climax of the act, the longest of the four acts as the result of its in-depth development of character, situation and context. There is the sense, however, that in spite of the enthusiasm of the other characters, their relationships with him are not going to be the same. They are going to

be challenged and changed. The act ends with the very clear sense that the audience and the characters alike are in for an exciting ride.

There are two other important pieces of foreshadowing here, one fairly obvious and the other more subtle. The former is the conversation between Parritt and Hickey, with Hickey's conviction that he knows Parritt from somewhere foreshadowing both characters' repeated references to their mutual familiarity, and also their parallel ends. The less obvious piece of foreshadowing can be found in Mosher's passing, joking comment that Hickey is insane. This foreshadows the climactic moment at the end of the play in which it's revealed that this is, in fact the case. Hickey is mad, and everything he's said and done has been the result of his insanity.

Another piece of subtlety in this section occurs as the result of Hickey's references to his minister father, to his speech sounding like a sermon, and his comment that he just wants to see everyone happy. There is the sense here that he is on a mission, that he sees himself as almost a Christ-like messianic figure, here in the bar to show his former companions in the illusory life the true way. His fervor and enthusiasm throughout the second and third acts in particular reinforce this perception. There is no overt reference to God or to Christ anywhere in Hickey's dialogue, but he very clearly sees himself as a kind of prophet or teacher, a self-perception that proves to be just as much of a pipe dream as the similarly mistaken self-perceptions of almost all the other characters.

Act 2, Part 1

Act 2, Part 1 Summary

Later that night, preparations are nearing completion for Harry's birthday party. Cora arranges flowers, Margie and Pearl prepare the cake, and Rocky complains about how Hickey is being so bossy about the party and irritating with all his talk about everybody being honest with themselves and letting go of pipe dreams. He talks about how he has no pipe dreams, and reacts angrily, when Pearl and Margie look meaningfully at each other. Their look can be seen as an indication that they believe he does have a pipe dream, that being the belief that he's not a pimp.

At the same time, Cora comments that Hickey has been hinting to her and Chuck that they have no real intention of getting married. They have decided that, the next day, they're making arrangements not only to get married but also to buy their farm. As Rocky and Chuck argue about whether Chuck and Cora should be listening to Hickey, Pearl and Margie jeer at Cora for planning to be married. Cora calls Pearl a whore, and they come close to blows. However, Rocky comes between them, commenting that Pearl has no right to be angry, because she isn't a virgin. She angrily suggests that she and Margie should do as Hickey suggests, come out and admit that they're prostitutes. When Rocky agrees, they tell him that that makes him a pimp. Rocky slaps them. Chuck tells him to calm down, Rocky tells him to mind his own business, and they all begin to argue with each other.

The argument is interrupted by laughter from Larry, who jokes to the comatose Hugo that Hickey has started a real revolution. Hugo wakes for a moment, calls Hickey a liar, and passes out again. The interruption has calmed the others, and Pearl asks Larry what he thinks has happened to Hickey. Larry comments that, in spite of having talked so much, Hickey has kept pretty much to himself. Rocky says threateningly that Hickey had better watch what he says, and Cora comments that Hickey hasn't told his iceman story, wondering whether he really did catch his wife fooling around. Rocky tells her the only reason Hickey hasn't told the story is that he's not drunk.

Joe comes in, announces that he's told everyone who's tried to come into the bar that it's closed for a party, and demands a drink. Chuck says he can have all the booze he wants, because Hickey's paying, and even though Joe takes the drink, he says he won't drink with Hickey ever again and challenges the others (all white people) to respect him for being who he is and not living any pipe dreams. As the others react with hostility, Joe apologizes, blaming his changed attitude on his anger at Hickey. Larry comments musingly that he believes Hickey really wants to tell them all what happened to him, but is afraid to. He finds similarities between Hickey and Parritt, who seems to be in a similar situation. At that moment, Hickey comes in with an armful of packages.

Act 2, Part 1 Analysis

The essential purpose of this section is to introduce and define the conflict between the various characters resulting from Hickey's appearance and comments about facing the truth. At this point, all the characters have listened to him and are beginning to take his comments to heart, to varying degrees and with varying degrees of resentment. At the same time, their illusions about themselves are starting to erode. They're coming face to face with truths that both their pipe dreams and their reliance on alcohol have kept them from facing. This process continues throughout the act for these and the other characters, the second stage in a process of aborted transformation that continues throughout the play. The third stage occurs in Act 3, when the various characters try to transform their pipe dreams into reality, attempting to create new truths for themselves. The fourth stage comes in Act 4, when they realize that life without illusions is unbearable. They return to a life of booze soaked pipe dreams in which they're unhappy, but safe and relatively content.

For now, though, the arrival of Hickey continues and intensifies the second stage of the process. His role in the transformation is both symbolized and foreshadowed by his role in setting up the party, with the moment of his arrival foreshadowed by Cora's reference to the iceman story. This, in turn, reinforces the previously discussed idea that, on one level, the iceman represents Hickey.

Act 2, Part 2

Act 2, Part 2 Summary

As Cora, Margie and Pearl take Hickey's parcels and place them with other birthday presents, Hickey reveals that he heard Larry's comments about him being afraid, and says Larry has all wrong, repeating that all he wants to do is help Larry and the others find peace. The others seem resentful, leading him to apologize again for sounding like a preacher and to ask them to help him prepare for the party. Rocky and Chuck go out to collect a package he left in the hall, and he shows the prostitutes the champagne he brought them, referring to them casually as "whores." This seems to upset them, but Hickey tells them he's just calling things, as they are without any intention to hurt. Rocky and Chuck come back in, revealing that Hickey's package contains several bottles of champagne. Everyone reacts excitedly. Joe, in particular, talks about how he's going to drink champagne by the bottle once he gets back on top. He refers to how that's not a pipe dream.

As Rocky, Chuck and the prostitutes ice the champagne, Hickey tells Larry that he knows everyone resents him, but that they'll all be grateful to him once they see the truth behind what he's saying. Larry accuses him of being insane and of being a liar, but Hickey tells him calmly he's perfectly sane, and what's more he's better able than ever to read a person's character. He talks at length about Parritt, his belief that he's finished with life, and that he's turned to Larry for help in taking the final step. It can be understood here that he's referring to committing suicide. Hickey talks about how Parritt believes he has to be punished, about how he feels an unknown affinity for him, how he hopes Parritt will help Larry wake up to himself, and how he wants to help Larry more than any of the other regulars. He leaves Larry to himself and takes control of the party preparations.

Responding to Hickey's instructions, Cora sits at a piano and starts practicing. Willie comes in, desperate for a drink. He confesses he's been going crazy alone in his room, reveals his determination to go and apply for a job, and says he owes his determination to Hickey. Larry urges him to go back to drinking, but Willie refuses. As Joe instructs Cora at the piano, Parritt comes in and asks Larry to tell Hickey to mind his own business, saying that Hickey visited him, and told him that Larry would help him face the truth. Larry calls Parritt a fool, Parritt says that what he wants most is to be Larry's friend, adding that he knows what was between Larry and his mother, when they were younger.

In spite of Larry's angry attempts to make him be quiet, Parritt talks at frustrated length about how he can't go on. He subtly reveals in a lengthy speech that he was the one who turned his mother and her comrades into the authorities. When he says it was his duty to his country, Larry calls him a hypocrite and angrily tells him to go away, threatening to tell his mother about the betrayal. Parritt accuses him of being as full of pipe dreams as everyone else, dreams of moral superiority and of the peace of death.

Their argument is about to become heated, but is interrupted by the return of Pearl and Margie, who tease Parritt about his reluctance to enjoy their company. In turn, their teasing is interrupted by a noise from the hallway.

Rocky and Chuck go out to see what the noise is and return with Wetjoen and Lewis, who tell how they had a disagreement triggered by comments made by Hickey. Rocky tells them to calm down, because the party's going to start soon, and they reluctantly apologize to each other. Mosher and McGloin come in, talking about how Hickey has Harry convinced to go out for a walk around the ward he used to represent when he was a politician. They talk about how Bessie's family is very controlling, and how, once they regain their influence over Harry, the good times at the bar will come to an end. Mosher says there's no hope of Harry even going out, since he's been saying he'll do it for the past twenty years. However, McGloin says that all those other times, Harry didn't have Hickey by his side to urge him on. Mosher comments that Hickey has inspired him to try his luck with the circus again. McGloin tries to go one better, saying that he plans to go down to police headquarters and try to get a job on the force. Mosher mocks him, and McGloin mocks him back. Like Lewis and Wetjoen, they come close to blows. Rocky separates them. At that moment, Hickey comes in, telling everyone to behave. Harry's on his way downstairs, and the party's about to start.

Act 2, Part 2 Analysis

This section continues developments initiated at the beginning of the act. Formerly amicable relationships, like those between McGloin and Mosher and between Lewis and Wetjoen, break down under the pressures of Hickey's insistence on honesty and a lack of alcohol. In addition, the pattern of uncomfortable truths being encountered is repeated in the relationship between Lewis and Wetjoen. In the same way as Rocky and the prostitutes are being made uncomfortable by coming face to face with who they really are, Lewis and Wetjoen become uncomfortable as their true mistrust for each other comes to the surface, uninhibited by alcohol.

The pattern of attempting to turn pipe dreams into reality also continues, as Mosher, McGloin, and apparently Harry have all become determined that now's the time to do the things they've always talked about doing in the same way as Willie and Joe have done. This completes the setting of the stage for the confrontation in the next section between illusion, as represented by Harry, and truth, as represented by Hickey. The irony, as previously discussed, is that Hickey's truth is itself an illusion, as will be revealed at the end of the play.

In the middle of all this is the conversation between Parritt and Larry, which appears to be functioning on the same level as the other relationships. Like so many others who have been listening to Hickey and taking his words to heart, Parritt is being forced to confront truths about himself, truths he confesses to the man he believes is a true kindred spirit, Larry. He, in turn, tries to do the same for Larry in forcing him to face his pipe dreams and admit the truth. What makes this relationship different from the others is that, from this point on, Parritt takes a different journey, a parallel journey to Hickey's.

Instead of returning to the world of illusions, the world of pipe dreams and booze in the way the others do, Parritt goes deep into his own truth, his guilt and remorse over what he did to his mother, and ends up killing himself. He faces his truth, and it destroys him. This can be interpreted as the mysterious connection between Parritt and Hickey that Hickey repeatedly refers to. It's never explicitly pointed out as such in the text. However, it can be inferred, because when faced with his own truth of being a bad husband, who killed his wife as a result, Hickey also ends up destroyed. As a result of these parallel situations, the play's thematic point can be clearly interpreted. Life without illusions is impossible.

The question is where Larry fits in. Are the others correct, and is he just as much a believer in pipe dreams as they are? Is his cynicism and belief that death is the only real end as much a false illusion as theirs, and is he as much of a spiritual down and outer as they are? The answer would appear to be yes, an answer apparent in his angry resistance to anyone who tries to get him to face the truth. He retreats into booze, cynicism and morbidity in the same way as the others retreat into booze, pipe dreams and false friendships. It seems that illusion is everywhere, an aspect of the play that raises a second important question, a paradox at the core of its story and themes. If life is impossible without illusions, and illusions make facing life a lie, where is the truth and how can it be faced? The answer to that comes at the end of the play. It's dramatized through Hickey's arrest and Parritt's suicide, and can be taken to be an important aspect of the play's theme. The truth is inevitable and violent, and no illusion will provide protection from it.

The play's second important symbol (aside from the iceman) appears in this scene, Cora's playing of the piano. This represents the way the characters attempt to turn their pipe dreams into reality. In the same way as Cora's playing turns out to be pretty feeble and ends in failure, so do the various attempts to live according to old, empty, dreams. Meanwhile, a third key symbol is about to be developed in the form of the party. This also represents the characters' attempts to live their dreams, attempts initiated and controlled in the same way as the party, and by the same person in the happy-go-lucky and deluded, Hickey.

Act 2, Part 3

Act 2, Part 3 Summary

Candles on the cake are lit, champagne is poured, and Cora starts to play, as Harry and Jimmy appear. Harry angrily tells them all to be quiet so they don't attract the police for being open after hours, and tells Cora she should stop playing since she doesn't even know the tune. Hickey tries to calm him down, Harry immediately apologizes, and just as immediately everyone forgives him. Margie shows him the cake, saying he's got one candle for every ten years of life. As Harry comments he hasn't had a cake since Bessie died, Margie tells him it was Hickey's idea. Harry immediately rejects the cake. Pearl shows him his presents, including a watch from Hickey, which Harry rejects. Margie tells Cora to start playing so the party can have some life and, as she does, he tearfully comments that the song she's playing was Bessie's favorite. Hickey makes pointed comments about how only Harry can know the truth about his relationship with Bessie.

Meanwhile, Jimmy recalls his wife's favorite song. This leads Hickey to make more pointed comments about how Jimmy's downward spiral was triggered by his coming home and discovering his wife with another man. Hickey then becomes confused for a moment, leading Larry to jeer that that's what happened to Hickey to trigger his change in perspective. The iceman story came true, and he found his wife with another man. Hickey immediately becomes joyful again, tells Rocky to pour champagne, and says he'll have a glass himself in order to prove that he can still be sociable. He wakes up Hugo, who refuses to drink the champagne, because it hasn't been properly chilled. Hickey laughs and proposes a toast to Harry. As everyone drinks, Hickey proposes a second toast to living without pipe dreams. No one else drinks to this one.

Harry responds to the toast by saying that he's tired of being taken advantage of, that from now on no hooker or down and outer or "pipe dreaming faker" is going to get a free ride from him. He says he's going to show Hickey that he's not what he thinks he is. However, when Hickey says that's exactly what he wants, Harry immediately apologizes to the others and says they'll always be welcome. This leads Hickey into a long speech in which he explains that what he's doing, forcing people to see past their pipe dreams, has to be done for their own good. He says he's felt the benefits of it himself, and vows that, by the end of the day, everyone else will also see the benefits. Larry demands to know what triggered the transformation, referring to how Hickey never denied what Larry suggested about finding his wife with the iceman. The others jeer at Hickey who remains unmoved. He says he had hoped to avoid telling them about his wife, Evelyn, until after the party, but adds that he now sees he's got no choice and announces Evelyn is dead. After a moment of shocked silence, Larry apologizes, and the others join in. Hickey tells them to feel no grief, saying that now Evelyn is at peace. She is free of the pain and suffering he brought to her. All she ever wanted was to make him happy.

Act 2, Part 3 Analysis

One of the patterns established through the first part of the act is repeated in Harry's rejection of the birthday gifts, the music, and of Hickey's affection. This is a larger scale version of the arguments between Rocky and the prostitutes and later between Lewis and Wetjoen, with all three disputes defining how illusions are being peeled away and uncomfortable truths are being revealed. At the same time, a variation on the pattern of illusion peeling appears as Hickey points out that Harry's and Jimmy's memories of the past are false, suggesting they're telling themselves truths that in fact don't exist. This pattern is repeated in Hugo's refusal of the champagne, his comment that it hasn't been chilled enough suggesting that he's not as much of a worker as he professes to be, and that he's got more aristocrat in him than he would like to admit. All these confrontations between illusion and reality develop the process begun at the start of the act, with Harry's explosion of anger serving as the climax of both the act and this particular stage of the process. Said confrontations also serve to increase dramatic tension, explore the play's thematic premise about the relationship between illusion and reality, and heighten the down-and-outers resentment of Hickey, a point of conflict throughout the rest of the play.

Hickey's momentary confusion foreshadows two things. First, it highlights his descent into insanity at the end of the play, and more immediately the end of the act, when he unexpectedly reveals Evelyn's fate. This revelation, in turn, is triggered by Larry's accusation that Hickey caught her with the iceman, endowing the iceman image with another layer of symbolic meaning. In Larry's attack, the image comes to represent an unavoidable truth of the same kind Hickey is accusing the down-and-outers of avoiding. Meanwhile, the vulture-like pounce of Larry and the others on Hickey's supposed lie and apparent vulnerability illustrates how afraid they are of facing their own truths. The irony here is that they got it right. The truth they're referring to is the same kind as the truth referenced in the Analysis of Act 2 Part 2, the kind that Hickey and Parritt fall victim to at the end of the play and the other characters avoid. This is the core meaning to the symbol that the iceman will "cometh," no matter how many attempts are made to avoid him.

Act 3, Part 1

Act 3, Part 1 Summary

Rocky and Joe work behind the bar. The only regulars present are Larry and Parritt, who sit some distance apart from each other. Rocky complains about how Chuck talked into working for him, about how Hickey kept talking about peace all night and has continued into the morning, and mocks Larry for being scared of him. Parritt joins in the mockery and Rocky threatens to throw him out, but Larry says he doesn't mind.

As Rocky collapses into sleep, Parritt speaks at length to Larry about how he feels connected to Hickey even more, since Hickey revealed his wife's death. He adds that he feels as though his mother is dead. He Hh1hE He confesses to thinking sometimes that Larry is his father, but then admits that he realizes Larry knew his mother only after he was born. He then says his mother might as well be dead if she ever found out it was he who turned her in, and confesses that the only reason he did it was, because he needed the money to pay for a prostitute he was infatuated with. This can be interpreted as the reason why he's so resentful of the prostitutes in the bar.

Larry becomes angry with him, and then explains to the re-awakened Rocky that Parritt was being as annoying as Hickey. This leads into a conversation about whether Hickey is hiding the truth from them, as Larry refers to how he never really explained what happened to Evelyn and comments that he believes Hickey has brought death with him. Rocky wonders whether Evelyn committed suicide, but then suggests that if she did Hickey wouldn't be happy that she's dead. This leads Parritt to comment that Evelyn is probably like Larry, too attached to life to commit suicide, even though s/he talks about death. Larry suggests that if Parritt had any guts - and stops himself. Parritt completes the sentence, and says that he'd kill himself. Rocky separates them, and then complains at length about how Margie and Pearl got drunk, called him a pimp, threatened to find a man who would and could really look after them, said they were going on strike, and went to an amusement park for the day.

Chuck comes in, asking for a fancy drink for Cora. Conversation reveals that he and Cora are preparing to get married, that Rocky thinks it will never last, and that they're already fighting. Rocky and Chuck argue, Rocky pulls out a gun, Joe comes between them, they use the term "nigger," as they tell him to mind his own business, and Joe takes up a knife and threatens to stab them. The tension is broken by the ironic laughter of Larry, who reminds them that he told them Hickey brought death with him. Joe and Rocky put away their weapons, as Hugo wakes from a coma, calls Hickey a liar, and complains about the champagne. He suddenly stops talking, when he realizes how drunk and foolish he is. He puts his head down and passes out again. Joe agrees that Hickey has brought bad luck with him, demands the payment of a drink for the work he's done. When he's finished it, he shatters the glass on the floor and announces he's not coming back. He says that he's going out to find a game, where he can gamble himself into both a fortune and the opportunity to remind the white men he's buying drinks for

that he's black. He comments that it's no pipe dream and goes out, saying he'll get his first few dollars if he has to hold up a white man for it.

Willie comes in, dressed and groomed well, but extremely nervous and upset. He refuses Rocky's offer for a drink, saying he'll never get a job if he applies smelling like liquor and adding that he's determined to show Hickey that he's not living a pipe dream. Lewis comes in, also well dressed and groomed. He says that he can't imagine how he let himself be friends with Wetjoen for so long and hands in his key. Wetjoen comes in, also well dressed and groomed. He mocks Lewis for planning to get a job and for planning to sail back to England, revealing that he has plans himself for getting a job and doesn't have conditions like Lewis does. He says he'll do anything, even manual labor. He responds angrily when the others mock him for being physically weak, and also says he's going to prove to Hickey he's no dreamer. He and Lewis argue over who's the better soldier, and Rocky has to separate them. Lewis starts to leave, and Wetjoen prepares to follow. However, neither can actually go out the door. They both say they can't leave without saying goodbye to Harry, and come back into the bar to sit.

Chuck runs out, suddenly remembering Cora. Meanwhile, Willie starts giving Parritt legal advice, saying it'll be good for his career to find and win a couple of cases on his own before trying to get a job. After an argument between Larry and Parritt over who's a liar and who's got honor, Willie realizes that Parritt doesn't need legal advice and backs off. Parritt confesses that he still loves his mother, suggests that Larry does too, and pleads for Larry's understanding about why he did what he did. Larry tells him to leave him alone and moves away, telling Rocky to pour him more booze and saying that it doesn't matter that Hickey's paying, he'd get drunk "if it was the Iceman of Death himself" paying the bill.

Mosher comes in, dressed as well as the others, refusing a drink like the others, and like the others complaining about Hickey and promising to show him he's not a dreamer. McGloin comes in, also dressed well, also not drinking, also complaining, and also promising to act. Just as he and Mosher are arguing about who's better off leaving, Cora comes in, drunk, overdressed, and over made up. Chuck comes in behind her, as she talks about how upset she is with Hickey, and how she and Chuck are about to prove him wrong. They argue over money, and then Cora invites everyone to the wedding, becoming upset, when Rocky doesn't say anything more than hoping they don't kill each other. Chuck hears Hickey coming, and he and Cora clear out.

Act 3, Part 1 Analysis

This section of the play performs two functions. The first is to increase the suspicion, established late in the previous act, that everything is not what it seems with Hickey - that he is perhaps filling the minds of the down-and-outers with as many lies as they've been filling their own lives. This is done through Larry's observant, caustic comments and Rocky's dull-witted suspicions, and creates a sense of ongoing tension that simmers underneath the following action, quietly building to the point of climactic revelation in Act 4, when Hickey reveals the truth.

The second primary function of this section is to move the characters along on the next stage of confrontation with their pipe dreams. Chuck and Cora are the first, taking action to do as Hickey suggests and live honestly, while turning their pipe dreams into reality. Rocky's story about Margie and Pearl indicates that the two prostitutes are continuing the process, accepting their lives as prostitutes and making efforts to actually live life as it is as opposed to what they think it is. Joe is the next to make the attempt, followed by the other down-and-outers. This sets the stage for their respective appearances in Act 4, as they struggle to free themselves from their illusions, come face to face with reality, and ultimately discover they can't handle it.

The discussions/arguments between Parritt and Larry again foreshadow Parritt's actions later in the play, when he, as previously discussed, faces his truth head on, gives in, and kills himself. Meanwhile, two aspects of Larry's reaction to Parritt's comments offer key insights into his character and the play. The first is his intense emotional reaction to Parritt's hints that he loved his mother. It's a classic case of over-reaction indicating truth. In other words, he reacts as violently as he does, in order to cover up the fact that Parritt is right. He did love his mother. The second insight comes through Larry's reference to "the Iceman of Death," which reinforces several previously discussed aspects of the symbolic value of the iceman representing truth. The iceman and death are both inevitable, are both aspects of life that are generally avoided, and the appearance of both causes life to suddenly and drastically take a different course.

Act 3, Part 2

Act 3, Part 2 Summary

Harry comes in, followed by Jimmy and Hickey. Conversation reveals that Hickey has had to make considerable effort to get Jimmy and Hickey up, dressed, downstairs, and prepared to make their attempts to face the world. As Harry angrily asks what everyone is looking for, Hickey jokes about how he hoped they'd all have found the courage to get up and go before now. He says he knows how hard it is to face down the pipe dreams and live honestly. However, he then says it's got to be done and encourages the down-and-outers to take their first steps out the door. His words have the effect of a dare, and Lewis, Wetjoen, Mosher and McGloin all go out. He then turns his attention to Jimmy, who in fearful frustration throws a drink at him and runs out.

Hickey wipes away the drink with good humor, and then tells Harry it's his turn to change his life. Larry tells him to leave Harry alone, Hickey politely tells him to mind his own business, and Harry angrily tells them both he'll do whatever he pleases. He reaches the door, complaining that he'll have to watch carefully in spite of his bad eyesight to make sure he isn't hit by the automobiles that weren't around, when he was first a politician twenty years ago. He asks Hickey if he's coming and Hickey refuses, saying he's got to go for his walk himself. At first, Harry is angry with him for letting him down and then says he doesn't need any help, but then starts reminiscing about Bessie, saying it still doesn't feel right for him to go. Hickey tells him he can't keep thinking like that, cutting through his sentimental memories with pointed observations about how things really were. Harry loses his temper and furiously goes out the door, saying he'd rather be anywhere than in the same room with him.

Rocky watches Harry go, and then says he's coming right back. Hickey says they'll all be back sooner rather than later, but Rocky then says Harry is going on and watches what happens. Larry and Hickey, meanwhile, argue over whether Larry is afraid to live in the same way as the others, with Larry drunkenly admitting that he's too afraid to let go of the precious gift of life to die in the way he says he wants to. Parritt jeers at him and Hickey comments that he's got to face the truth just as Rocky excitedly announces that Harry is attempting to cross the street. He narrates what happens, as Harry stops in the middle of the street, paralyzed with fear, and then turns and runs back.

A moment later, Harry rushes in, terrified and begging for a drink. Rocky reacts disgustedly, saying he always thought Harry had more guts than that. Hickey tries to calm Harry down, and Harry asks for understanding from Larry. When Larry tells Harry reassuringly that he had a narrow escape, Hickey angrily tells him to leave Harry alone, saying all he wants is for Harry to be at peace and urging Harry to admit that it wasn't the automobile that drove him back into the bar, it was his own fear. Harry admits that that's the truth, takes a bottle and a glass and sits next to Hugo. He pours himself a drink, as Hugo rouses himself, and complains about champagne. Hickey, reacts with fear to the fear in Harry's eyes, and runs to another table.

Larry comments sharply to Hickey about how Hickey's plans have again misfired, but Hickey says it's all part of the process, that even fear like Harry's can and will fade away. As he and Larry argue, Harry tells him to be quiet, because he's worse "than that nagging bitch, Bessie." As Rocky reacts with amazement, Harry complains that the booze has no kick to it. Hickey tries to cheer him up, Harry says he wants to pass out, and Larry tells Hickey the peace he's bought is actually the peace of death. Hickey loses his temper completely for a moment and calls what Larry said a lie. He then recovers his joking nature and says again that Harry will be fine, adding that, when he confronted his own fears, it was a similar shock. However, it soon went away. Larry demands to know when and how that happened, suggesting it had something to do with Evelyn's death. Hickey accuses him of not being very considerate, but then admits that Evelyn was shot. Larry assumes Evelyn killed herself, and then apologizes for saying such an awful thing. Hickey says Evelyn was killed, and the drunken Parritt mishears, assuming he's referring to his (Parritt's) mother. The others ignore him, more interested in who killed Evelyn. Hickey says the police don't know who killed her, but that they'll find out soon. He then turns his attention back to Harry, who says he figures Evelyn was killed by the iceman.

Parritt suddenly begs Larry to understand that he didn't betray his mother for any reason other than money. Hugo just as suddenly stands, begs for a drink, hallucinates about "blood beneath the willow trees," and whimpers in fear. Hickey pays no attention to either of them, focused as he is on Harry. He says something's holding him back, that he shouldn't still be so frightened and that it's time he began to feel happy.

Act 3, Part 2 Analysis

This section contains the climax of the act - Harry's trip out the door, the ultimate confrontation so far between illusion and reality. One point to note here is that Harry's confrontation with reality parallels the confrontation Larry faces in his argument with Parritt. Harry's bravado about being outside is the equivalent of Larry's bravado about being eager for death. They're both pipe dreams, and both men encounter the truth that they're both terrified of what they claimed to be eager to meet. The key difference between the two confrontations is that Harry chooses to confront his pipe dream, whereas Larry has the confrontation forced upon him. This makes Larry even more of a coward than he claims Hickey is being for not revealing the truth about Evelyn.

Harry's attempt to leave is foreshadowed and perhaps even inspired by the exits of the other characters, whose various departures nonetheless carry less dramatic weight than Harry's, because their relationships with Hickey are much less substantial. As Hickey is such an old friend, Harry has much more to gain than the others, and just as much more to lose, by showing him he's both wrong (that he's a pipe dreamer) and right (that life can be lived truly). His failure to cross the street, therefore, functions not only as a dramatization of the play's theme that life is impossible to face without illusions. It also serves to propel Hickey into the tailspin that eventually results in his complete madness and his admission of guilt in relation to Evelyn's death.

This key incident in the play's back-story, or history, is given additional dramatic weight by Hickey's admission that she was shot. The previously developed sense of suspense surrounding the circumstances of her death is heightened even more, with the result that narrative tension as the play moves into the final act is very effectively heightened both by this revelation and Hickey's previous sudden explosion of temper. At the point the explosion occurs, there's no clear reason for it. However, examined within the context of Hickey's later explanation of her death (that he killed her to bring her peace,) the explosion makes perfect sense.

The explosion comes after Larry's comment that Hickey has brought the peace of death to the bar. It must be noted in this context that Hickey killed Evelyn, because he wanted to give her the peace of death, and having done that he has a strong opinion about what the peace of death looks like. His explosion of temper happens, therefore, because Harry doesn't look that way. Meanwhile, Larry's joking reference to Evelyn having been killed by the iceman adds yet another layer of meaning to the iceman symbol, when also taken in context with the fact that Hickey fired the gun. The iceman as a concept represents inevitable truth. The iceman reference at this point, therefore, suggests that when he killed Evelyn, Hickey was expressing some kind of inevitable truth. This idea is reinforced in Act 4, when Hickey reveals that he killed Evelyn as the result of coming face to face with the truth that he's a lousy husband and Evelyn was in emotional pain. His story about giving her peace, on the other hand, is HIS pipe dream.

Parritt's and Hugo's sudden outbursts immediately following Larry's reference to the iceman reinforce the idea of the iceman representing sudden confrontations with truth, as both Parritt and Hugo face their truths. One betrayed his mother and can't forgive himself, and the Movement-based dreams of the other are all empty. The iceman cometh to them, as well. The difference between them is that Parritt gives in to his truth and dies, while Hugo, foreshadowing the actions of the others, returns to the safely drunken oblivion into which no truth can penetrate.

Act 4, Part 1

Act 4, Part 1 Summary

Most of the regular down-and-outers sit in their usual positions, drunk and insensible, including Larry, Hugo, Parritt, Cora, Lewis, McGloin, Wertjoen, Willie, Harry, Mosher, Jimmy and Joe, who is passed out at the bar. Rocky tries to get him to leave, but he's too drunk to move. Chuck comes in, disheveled and drunk. Rocky tries to get him to start his regular shift, but Chuck says he's quitting. Rocky says he's quitting as well, they both complain about how their women are making things difficult for them, and then Chuck talks at length about how he realized Hickey was right, that his and Cora's dreams of marriage were just that, dreams.

Chuck talks about how he realized marriage wasn't going to work, how women are always cheating, and then says he wants to have just one shot at Hickey to take revenge on him for souring his dreams. Rocky says Hickey's gone out to make a phone call, and hints that Hickey killed his wife. He then says if it's true, he won't do anything to keep Hickey from being executed for his crime. He adds that, because of Hickey, he and all the others have been destroyed. In crudely poetic language, he describes at length how they all came in one by one, having failed in their attempts to realize their dreams and how they were all mad at Hickey.

Joe suddenly gets to his feet and moves away from the bar to join the others. Chuck goes to get money from Cora. Meanwhile, Rocky taunts Parritt, who tells him Larry spent the day in his room trying to get drunk and how he is trying to avoid both him and the truth of how he feels about Parritt's mother. He again asks Larry to help him decide what to do, and accuses Larry of believing that he should kill himself. Rocky asks rhetorically what difference it would make, and the others mumble, "what difference it would make," almost as though they were an echo.

Rocky then suggests that Parritt is good looking enough and smart enough to start and run his own stable of prostitutes, but Parritt says he's through with that kind of woman. Rocky comments on how stupid Parritt is, and then suggests the same option to Larry. Larry comments that the peace and self-honesty Hickey brought into Rocky's life can't be worth much if he's trying to bring other people into the life. He and Rocky comment on how Hickey both deserves to be executed and would probably be glad to be executed and argue over whether he'll be back. Larry says he has to come back, because he has to keep trying to prove the peace and self-honesty he's been preaching are still the right way to go.

Act 4, Part 1 Analysis

Rather than repeating the pattern of Acts 2 and 3, showing how each of the down-and-outers make the attempt to get past their pipe dreams, this act begins showing all of

them having reached the same end - having failed at their attempts. Rocky defines the situation in sketchy terms, when he describes how they each came back to the bar, while Chuck sums up all the individual experiences, when he talks about his experience with Cora. He, like the others, has realized that all their dreams and illusions were exactly that, and the only reality they have left is that which they find at the bottom of their bottles of liquor. This is the final stage in the characters' aborted process of transformation, having returned to the place where they started with even less to live for than they left with.

The down-and-outers take on a new function in this section, serving as a kind of Greek chorus, as they comment with one voice and one attitude on comments made by other characters. The first example of this is the group's reaction to Rocky's comment that nothing matters, with other examples occurring throughout the scene. The technique reinforces the idea, again without going into the same kind of detail as was explored in the first three acts, that the members of the group are united in despair and in resentment of Hickey. Another kind of voice is given to this resentment by Larry, whose comment that the "peace" Hickey brought to Rocky's life can't be worth much could apply equally to the others, as well.

Act 4, Part 2

Act 4, Part 2 Summary

Hickey comes in, saying he doesn't need to prove anything. Rocky and the other down-and outers shy away from him, as he asks how they're all doing. Harry accuses Hickey of watering the booze, saying it's not helping them get drunk and that he promised them peace. Hickey shouts that he's fed up with hearing the same complaint over and over, that he's had all he can stand. He suddenly calms down and talks at length about how the others should all be well on the way to peace and better lives by now. He says they'd better figure out what's wrong, because he's got a two o'clock appointment. He talks about how they should feel happy that they have no more pipe dreams, and how they can now just live freely.

Chuck and the others tell him to be quiet, but Hickey goes on as though he hasn't heard, explaining that the only way he could make up to her for being such a lousy husband and give her peace was to kill her. Larry urges him to be quiet, and Parritt urges Larry to be quiet. Hickey tells Larry to get rid of Parritt, saying he no longer feels they have anything in common, since there was love in his heart when he did what he did. He implies that Parritt betrayed his mother, because he hated her. Parritt shouts that he's lying and appeals to Larry for help. Larry angrily says to leave him alone.

Hickey says he feels the only way he can clear things up for the down-and-outers, make them see the value of what he's trying to get them to do and stop hating him, is tell them the truth about what happened to Evelyn. Harry says, "Who the hell cares," the others echo him, and Harry says all they want is to pass out and have a little peace. As an uneasy silence settles over the group, two men appear and ask Rocky where Hickey is. At first Rocky pretends to not know, but then they indicate they're police officers there to arrest Hickey after he called them to meet him there around two. Rocky points them in Hickey's direction and says if they want a confession all they have to do is wait, since Hickey seems all set to talk. The policemen settle in.

Hickey starts a long, rambling speech explaining the situation between he and Evelyn. He talks about his restless childhood, about being the rough-edged son of a minister, about how he and Evelyn loved each other, and how she always forgave him every time he did something she didn't like, even when they were kids. He tells how he got some money to go to the city and start to make his way, how he told Evelyn to forget him, how she said she'd wait, and how he loved her so much that he kept promising to change his ways and kept trying. Harry suddenly shouts out that he's talking too much, that he killed Evelyn, because she was fooling around with the iceman, and that all anyone there wants to do is pass out.

The others echo Harry, but Hickey continues as though he hadn't heard anything. He talks about how he became a good salesman, how he kept telling Evelyn he loved her but also warned her he was a bad egg, and how they married anyway. He says that

after they were married the pattern kept repeating - he'd get drunk or cheat on her or steal, she'd make him promise to never do it again, he'd promise, and then do it again and start the whole cycle afresh. He talks about how Evelyn always knew what he'd done, how she always forgave him, how she knew he loved only her, and how no matter what she kept on believing he was a good man and a good husband. He becomes angry, as he talked about how guilty she made him feel, how he hated himself, how he urged her to leave him, and how he always pretended after he said that that he was joking in the same way he joked about her being with the iceman. He reaches for her picture to show them, but realizes that he tore it up after he killed her.

After a moment of silence, Hickey tells how his hatred of himself kept getting deeper and darker, while Evelyn kept on believing in him. He got angry at her pipe dreams for him, and he started imagining that she was loving him and forgiving him in order to humiliate him. He hated himself for imagining it. He then says that when it came close to the time for him to come to town for his annual drunk to celebrate Harry's birthday, he was torn between really making the effort to be faithful to Evelyn's dream for him and the drunken joy and peace he knew he would feel when he came to the party. After nights of torturing himself with all his thoughts, he realized he didn't have the guts to go through being forgiven again. He says that Evelyn deserved to not be hurt again and that the only way for her to feel the peace she deserved was to kill her in her sleep. As he begins to tell how he took out the gun he gave her for her protection, Harry and the others shout in chorus that nobody cares, that all they want to do is get drunk and pass out in peace. Meanwhile, the police get ready to move.

Hickey simply says that he killed Evelyn. After a moment, Parritt says simply that he betrayed his mother, because he hated her. Without paying any attention to him, Hickey tells how he realized that in giving Evelyn peace he'd given himself peace as well and then suddenly had to laugh at the uselessness of her pipe dream. He suddenly and tearfully says he never did such a thing, saying he loved Evelyn too much to laugh at her death for any reason. Harry suddenly comes to, and asks Hickey whether he truly went insane. The others look at Hickey eagerly, and Hickey happily agrees that he must have been insane.

At that moment, the police come forward and arrest Hickey, who pleads for a few more minutes. Harry, however, is still focused on Hickey's comment about insanity, asking whether he (Hickey) said what he said the whole time he's been there, because he was insane. At first, Hickey teases him about trying to talk his way out of failure, but when he sees the disgust in Harry's eyes, he changes his mind and confesses that yes, everything he said was as insane as he is. The police accuse Hickey of lying and suggest the down-and-outers pay no attention, but Harry says they knew exactly what was going on and went along with what Hickey was saying in order to humor him. The others echo what he's saying in chorus, convincing themselves what they did was done to help Hickey, their old friend. Harry urges Hickey to stand up for himself, talking how he (Harry) still has influence at city hall. Hickey speaks with "a strange mad earnestness" about how he wants to die, saying he needs to explain to Evelyn why he did what he did. As the police take him out, Hickey shouts that he wants to be executed,

because he has no pipe dreams left, that Evelyn was the only thing he ever loved, and that he must have been insane, because that's the only way he would have killed her.

The down-and outers watch him go, shouting that they'll all testify he's crazy. A door slams, and Hickey's gone. Harry suggests that now Hickey's left, the booze might have its desired effect. He and the others settle down to get drunk as Parritt goes to Larry.

Act 4, Part 2 Analysis

At the core of Hickey's long and repetitively detailed story, the climax of the act and of the play, is a simple, thematically important truth. He like the down-and-outers he's been trying to convert to a life of honesty, is actually living a life of pipe dreams and illusions. His story clearly indicates that he's convinced himself that killing Evelyn was a good and loving thing to do to her, and that freeing them both from the power and domination of HER pipe dreams was an admirable thing. Also in the same way as the down-and-outers, he has attempted to live as though his pipe dreams were true. In the same way as Cora, for example, who tried to bring her pipe dream of marriage into reality, Hickey tried to bring his pipe dream about being free from pipe dreams into reality. Now, in the same way as Cora and the others have had to face the truth about the nature of her dreams, Hickey is being forced to face the truth that his dream of freedom from pipe dreams is itself a pipe dream. His illusions exist in complicated layers, but ultimately like those of all the other characters, they're completely empty. In the metaphoric language of the play, the iceman (representing inevitable and undeniable truth) has come.

It's interesting to note is that both Hickey and the down-and-outers take one last step in their previously discussed attempted journey towards freedom. Having failed to live honestly, they all take refuge in pipe dreams yet again. The difference is that the down-and-outers return to their old pipe dreams, while Hickey develops a new one, convincing himself that being executed is a good thing in that he'll be able to explain to Evelyn the truth of why he did what he did. There can be little doubt, however, that Hickey is insane, and this lends a final irony to his exit. He probably won't be executed, because he is insane, meaning that he's going to end his life doing exactly the same thing as the others have done throughout the play. He'll talk about his desire face Evelyn in exactly the same way as Harry talked about his plans to go for a walk, Cora talked about her plans to marry, and the others have talked about their plans to re-start their careers.

Act 4, Part 3

Act 4, Part 3 Summary

Rocky, Harry and the others start to drink in earnest, sitting and waiting to feel what effect the booze is going to have on them. Larry drinks a private toast to Hickey, hoping that he finds some kind of peace. Parritt tells him Hickey's not the only one who needs peace, talking at length about how tortured by guilt he feels for what he did to his mother. Larry furiously tells him to get the hell out of life. Parritt suddenly seems transformed by this comment, saying he now knows there's only one way to be free of both his mother's influence and his own guilt. Hugo rouses himself and asks Parritt one last time to buy him a drink. Parritt says he will one day and goes out. Hugo comments to Larry that he's glad Hickey was taken away, saying he (Hickey) made him feel like he was telling lies to himself. He then starts drinking as Harry shouts happily that the booze is having its old effect, saying that listening to Hickey made the booze lose its impact. He talks about how he knew all along that what Hickey was talking about was actually complete foolishness, leading Rocky, Cora and the others to drunkenly agree that they were all being sucked into Hickey's pipe dream.

Larry sits as though listening for something as Margie and Pearl come in, pointedly calling themselves whores and demanding drinks. Rocky greets them happily, they about Hickey, and Rocky explains what happened. He tells them to stop calling themselves whores and go back to believing they're just tarts. Margie and Pearl laugh happily, and the implication is that Rocky no longer has to face the truth that he's a pimp. Meanwhile, Harry announces that this is his real birthday party. As they all start drinking, there is the sound of something heavy falling and landing outside. The down-and-outers think it was just somebody throwing something off a fire escape, but Larry realizes it was Parritt killing himself, hopes he's finally found peace, prays for his own death, and then suddenly realizes that for the first time in his life he means it. He then realizes that he's the only real convert to Hickey's belief system, that he's truly living what had once been a pipe dream. Harry calls him to come over and join the party, but Larry remains where he is. The down-and-outers drunkenly sing their favorite songs, and Larry sits staring into space.

Act 4, Part 3 Analysis

The previously discussed parallels between Parritt and Hickey, parallels Hickey himself refers to in Act 4 Part 2, are more clearly defined than ever in this scene, as Parritt is faced with the inevitable truth of what he's done and the consequences of that truth in the same way as Hickey was in the previous section. In the metaphoric language of the play, they each come face to face with the iceman, each confront him, and each react to that encounter with an inability to live with what they've seen.

Parritt's self destruction is counter-pointed in two ways. The first is by the return of the down-and-outers to their pipe dreams, all of which now have a new wrinkle, as they convince themselves that what their attempts to do as Hickey suggested failed because of Hickey, not themselves. The down-and-outers' peace, defined by the falseness which might be described as a spiritual death, and Parritt's peace, defined by physical death, reinforces the play's thematic point that life without illusions and pipe-dreams is unlivable. The second counterpoint to Parritt's self-destruction is Larry's apparent realization that, for the first time, he truly does want death, as opposed to just talking about wanting it in the same way, as he's done in the past.

The question is whether Larry is going to do what Parritt did and aggressively seek death, or whether he's going to sit at the bar and passively wait for it to come. The question isn't answered at the end of the play. Either response can be read into Larry's apparent paralysis. However, there is another question of whether or not he has really changed at all. Is he again, or still, pipe dreaming? Is his belief that he truly wants death at its core any different from his talking about wanting death? In the context of the play as a whole, the answer would appear to be negative, meaning that Larry's position at the end of the play, staring and waiting, is no different from that of the others, drinking themselves into an artificial peace.

Characters

James Cameron

See Jimmy Tomorrow

The Captain

*See*Cecil Lewis

Cora

Cora is a prostitute. Chuck Morello is her pimp, but the two of them fantasize about someday getting married and moving to the country. After Hickey's arrival, she and Chuck leave to get married but are ultimately unable to do so. She believes that Chuck will hold her past against her, and he wonders why he should marry her when he can get her money anyway. At the end of the play, she and Chuck return to their pipe dream of a future marriage.

The General

See Piet Wetjoen

Hickey

Hickey is a hardware salesman who comes *Hickey* to Harry's Hope's saloon twice a year for a drinking binge. The roomers look forward to his arrival. He buys them drinks, tells them jokes, and allows them to forget the bleakness of their lives. They especially like the running gag in which he says he has left his wife, Evelyn, in bed with the iceman. When Hickey arrives this time, however, he has changed. He claims to have finally found peace, having let go of his pipe dream. He wants the roomers to find peace the same way. To that end, he harasses the roomers, endlessly nagging them, eventually persuading them to realize their pipe dreams. His belief is that they will recognize that they can never achieve these dreams, give them up, and be happier.

The roomers do as Hickey advises, but to his surprise, they become even more miserable. After prodding from Larry to reveal the reason for his change, Hickey first says only that his wife has died. Finally, however, he admits that he has killed his wife, whom he describes as the perfect loving and forgiving woman. She believed that he would one day be a good and faithful husband to her. He initially claims he killed her to end her pipe dream and bring her peace. While describing the murder, however, Hickey calls her a bitch and is horrified at his words. His real pipe dream, unbeknownst to him,

is that he truly loved his wife. Rather than face his hatred of Evelyn, however, Hickey says that he must have been insane to call her a bitch and that everything he has said to the roomers since he arrived was the result of his insanity. Thus Hickey, who tried so hard to force the roomers to face their illusions, cannot face his own. Like the others, he returns to the safety of his pipe dream.

Theodore Hickman

See Hickey

Harry Hope

Harry Hope is the proprietor of Harry Hope's Saloon, the setting for *The Iceman Cometh.* Although he has a gruff manner and tries to act tough, he is a softhearted sort, and the roomers depend on his kindness when they can't pay their bills or afford another drink. He has not left the bar since the death of his wife, Bessie, whom he idealizes as the perfect wife. The truth is that she was a terrible nag. Hope's pipe dream is that he will one day leave the safety of the bar and go out into the world again, but his effort to do so ends in failure.

Hugo Kalmar

Kalmar was once the editor of anarchist periodicals. He knew Parritt's mother and recognizes Parritt when he sees him. Kalmar spent ten years in prison for the Movement, but he is now lost in an alcoholic haze.

Cecil Lewis

Lewis was once a Captain in the British Army. He fought in the Boer War, in which the Boers, South Africans of Dutch ancestry, fought for an end to British occupation.

Lieb

Lieb is one of the two policemen who come for Hickey at the end of the play.

Margie

Margie is a prostitute, with Rocky as her pimp, but she calls herself a "tart," not a whore, before Hickey's arrival. Hickey initially convinces her that she is indeed a whore, but at the end of the play, she returns to her pipe dream.

PatMcGloin span>

McGloin is a former Police Lieutenant who was thrown off the force for corruption. His pipe dream is to return to his old position with the force, but his efforts to be reinstated are met with rejection.

Moran

Moran is one of the two policemen who come for Hickey at the end of the play.

Chuck Morello

Morello is the day bartender at Harry Hope's. He is actually Cora's pimp, but the two of them dream of someday marrying and moving to the country. After Hickey's arrival, the two leave to get married, though they soon realize that their plans to marry are a pipe dream. When Hickey leaves, the two return to their whimsical wedding plans.

Ed Mosher

Mosher is the brother of Harry Hope's deceased wife, Bessie. He is a former circus man and petty swindler. His pipe dream is that he will someday return to his position with the circus, but his attempt to return to that occupation fails.

Joe Mott

Mott, the only Black character in the play, was once the proprietor of a Negro gambling house. Before Hickey's appearance, he continually refers to himself as someone who is "white," meaning he has risen above the other members of his race. After Hickey comes, he justly accuses the white roomers of looking down on him because of his color. He no longer believes he can be one of them.

Willie Oban

Born to a wealthy but corrupt businessman, Oban graduated from Harvard Law School but is now a hopeless alcoholic whose family has rejected him. Oban's pipe dream is that he will some day quit drinking and practice law, but he will never be able to do either.

Don Parritt

A stranger at Harry Hope's saloon, Parritt arrives looking for Larry Slade, whom he remembers as his mother's friend□the only one of her friends that ever paid attention to him. Although he initially claims that he is running from the law following his anarchist mother's arrest□and his own involvement with radical politics□it soon becomes clear

that Parritt is hiding something. Eventually he reveals that he betrayed his mother and her friends to the police, though he initially claims to have done so because of his own ideological beliefs. He then claims that he betrayed her for money, which he wanted to spend on a prostitute. Finally, however, Parritt admits that he betrayed his mother simply because he hated her. Throughout the play, Parritt attempts to convince Larry to help him, but Larry rejects his entreaties. After Parritt admits the true reason for his betrayal, however, Larry tells him what he wants to hear—that suicide is the only solution for him. Parritt jumps from the fire escape as the roomers, having returned to their pipe dreams, celebrate Harry Hope's birthday.

Pearl

Pearl is one of the three prostitutes in the play. Rocky is her pimp, but she says he is not, and, like Margie, she is careful to refer to herself as a "tart," not a "whore." After Hickey arrives, she finally sees herself as a whore, but returns to her pipe dream by the end of the play.

Rocky Pioggi

Rocky is the good-natured night bartender. Although he is clearly a pimp for the prostitutes Margie and Pearl, he deludes himself into thinking he is above such a lowly profession. He refers to himself instead as the women's "manager." He claims that a pimp would not have a job and that he takes the women's money because they wouldn't know what to do with it anyway. After Hickey arrives, Rocky briefly admits to being a pimp, but once Hickey is considered to be insane, Rocky returns to his pipe dream.

Larry Slade

Slade is considered by many to be the protagonist in *The Iceman Cometh*. He is a former anarchist who became disillusioned with the Movement and abandoned it after years of involvement. He sees himself as having no pipe dreams. He simply sits in the grandstand, observing life and waiting for death. Parritt and Hickey, however, prove him wrong. He was once friends with Parritt's mother and may be the young man's father, but when Parritt arrives, Larry insists that the troubled man means nothing to him. As Parritt exposes more and more about himself, slowly revealing that he betrayed his mother, Larry's continued insistence in his lack of interest in Parritt seems more and more desperate, suggesting that Larry is involved in spite of himself.

Eventually it is Larry who tells Parritt that suicide is his only choice and thus becomes Parritt's executioner. Hickey's belief that Larry's vision of himself as an observer, no longer involved in life, is a pipe dream is shown to be true. At the end of the play, Larry is the only one of the roomers who is truly changed by Hickey's anti-pipe dream campaign. Larry calls himself "the only real convert to death Hickey made." Deprived of his illusion as a mere observer, for the first time, Larry truly does wait for death.

Jimmy Tomorrow

Jimmy Tomorrow is a former Boer War correspondent. He was dismissed from his position as a reporter because of his heavy drinking. He claims that he began drinking because his wife, Marjorie, was unfaithful to him. The truth is that he began drinking long before that, however, and was grateful to his wife for giving him an excuse to drink. He is called Jimmy Tomorrow because he repeatedly speaks of how he will return to the newspaper and get his job back "tomorrow." This is his pipe dream. After he leaves the bar in his attempt to return to his job, a policeman finds him by the river. Other characters conclude that he wanted to jump in the river but didn't have the nerve.

Piet Wetjoen

Wetjoen is the former leader of a Boer commando. The Boers, now called Afrikaners, are South Africans of Dutch ancestry. They fought against British occupation in the Boer War. Wetjoen is friends with Cecil Lewis, who fought on the British side in that war.

Themes

Hope and the America

The promise of the American Dream, a goal of material prosperity and success, has long been regarded as a crucial element of American culture. For many, it is the possibility of this dream that separates America from other nations. It is the hope of the downtrodden. The faith Americans have in the dream, that, given enough ambition and determination, absolutely anyone can "make it" is almost religious in nature.

For the inhabitants of Harry Hope's Saloon, however, faith has led to despair; the dream has soured. O'Neill populates Hope's with characters from diverse backgrounds. Some, such as Willie Oban, a Harvard Law School graduate, and Jimmy Tomorrow, a former war correspondent, have come close to success□though it ultimately eluded their grasp. Others, such as Joe Mott, the former proprietor of a Negro gambling house, and Ed Mosher, a former circus man, have lived on the edge of respectability. Still others, such as the prostitutes, have always lived lives of petty crime. What unites all but Larry and Parritt, however, is a need to retain their dream, for if the dream is attainable, there is no hope for them. Each sees their failure as a personal issue, not a deficiency in the system. Jimmy Tomorrow rationalizes that as long as he *believes* that he can quit drinking, get his job back, and resume his former place in society, he can live with his despair.

The former anarchists, however, represent a different perspective. For anarchists, the American Dream is a lie and good can only come when all government is eliminated. Although this too is a dream, it flies in the face of the traditional American belief of individual success within the system. In the early decades of this century, anarchy and socialism were regarded as viable alternatives to an American social system many viewed as flawed. Alternative political beliefs were seen by many as a new hope for America. But in *The Iceman Cometh,* O'Neill shows that this hope is no more attainable than the roomers' elusive dreams. Even those who believe that the American dream is an illusion have nothing to offer in its stead.

Death

Harry Hope's saloon, Larry notes at the beginning of the play, is "harmless as a graveyard." In a sense, however, Hope's saloon is a graveyard□ "The End of the Line Café," as Larry calls it. The saloon's inhabitants cling to their pipe dreams, but their lives are essentially over. Death is the next stop. Larry claims to hope for death. He welcomes it as "a fine long sleep, and I'm damned tired, and it can't come too soon for me."

As long as the roomers have their pipe dreams, they believe they can hold death at bay, but Hickey's arrival brings the reality of death. Hickey first brings a spiritual death, telling

the roomers that their pipe dreams are empty. Later, Hickey brings literal death into the world of Hope's Saloon; not only is the news of Evelyn's murder shattering, it ultimately paves the way for Parritt's death. Larry, who tells Parritt that his only solution is suicide, becomes Larry's executioner. After Parritt's death, Larry says, "By God, I'm the only real convert to death Hickey made here." No longer a mere observer, Larry's desire for death is now a reality.

Numerous critics have pointed out that the "iceman" of O'Neill's title is in fact Death, the Grim Reaper. It is Death that has come to Evelyn, sent by Hickey into the arms of the iceman at last. And it is Death that Hickey brings to Hope's saloon. However, as the play ends, the roomers are able to resume their pipe dreams, denying Death access. Even Parritt's suicide is unnoticed by all but Larry. Hickey is able to return to his own pipe dream, to deny his hatred of Evelyn as well as his responsibility for her death. He believes that he must have been insane. Only Larry realizes that Death has truly come to Hope's. For him, that has changed everything.

Isolation

The characters in *The Icema Cometh* are isolated from mainstream society. This is evident from the beginning, when the curtain opens on the drunken, sleeping men alone in the literal world of their dreams. As the play progresses, the essential isolation of the characters becomes clear. Even awake, each character remains caught in his or her own dream. There is a sort of camaraderie among O'Neill's roomers, but this small sense of community is revealed as a thin veneer following Hickey's arrival; his proclamations of false dreams reveal an underlying animosity. Forced to face their hopeless realities, the roomers fight among themselves until Hickey's departure allows them to return to their pipe dreams.

Parritt arrives at Hope's bar searching for Larry, hoping to end his own isolation. He comes to the ex-anarchist because he recalls Larry being kind to him. Larry, however, rejects Parritt's appeal for friendship. He believes himself to be in the grandstand, an isolated observer rather than a participant in life, and he intends to remain, isolated, uninvolved.

Hickey also seeks an end to his isolation. In past visits, he was satisfied with his superficial friendship with the roomers. Now, however, he claims to have given up on his pipe dream and is not content with just changing his own life. In his search for relief from isolation, Hickey wants the roomers to come to his realization. His story about murdering Evelyn is an attempt to understand his pain he has felt, but the roomers make it clear that they don't want to hear him. Only when he declares that he must have been insane, when he is willing to return to superficial relationships, is he once more accepted by the roomers.

Larry, despite his efforts, develops a brief but real connection with Parritt. That connection, however, only brings him pain. As the play closes, the roomers return to their thin sense of camaraderie, but O'Neill reveals the depth of their isolation. When the

roomers begin to sing in celebration of Hope's birthday, each sings a completely different song. Larry, meanwhile, is spiritually as well as physically isolated from the group. Each of the characters ends the play alone.

Style

Setting

The Iceman Cometh is set in the summer of 1912 in Harry Hope's saloon, a seedy establishment on the downtown West Side of New York. All of the play's action takes place either in the bar or the back room of the saloon, visually affirming O'Neill's intention that the bar is a world unto itself. The condition of the bar reflects the hopeless squalor of the roomers' lives. O'Neill describes the walls and ceiling as once white but "now so splotched, peeled, stained and dusty that their color can best be described as dirty." Adding to the play's themes of alienation and isolation, the windows are so filthy that it is impossible to see the outside world through them. The bar is crowded with tables and chairs "so close together that it is a difficult squeeze to pass between them." This crowded condition adds to the suffocating nature of the bar, its atmosphere of hopelessness and despair. Because the setting changes little throughout the play, the audience gains a gradual sense of the saloon's oppressiveness.

The only major change in the setting occurs in Act II, when the saloon is decorated for Hope's birthday party. The room has been cleaned, and a space has been cleared for dancing. Added props, such as a piano, presents, and the birthday cake, contribute to the festive atmosphere. But this lighter setting stands in sharp contrast to the anger and accusations that evolve later in the act, as the camaraderie is destroyed by Hickey's proselytizing. In this case, the party setting heightens the effect of the stage action with a visual contrast to the dark emotions that present themselves. In the final two acts, the saloon resumes its atmosphere of dirt and despair. In fact, in the final act, when the roomers have come full circle and returned to their pipe dreams, the set is once more as it appeared in Act I, heightening the sense that□save Larry's situation□ little has really changed.

Time and the Theater

A recurring criticism of *The Iceman Cometh* is that, at nearly four hours running time, the play is simply too long. This begs the question: Is it proper to fault a play for its length? Such a criticism may seem petty and is rarely leveled at novels or poems. It is this sort of criticism, in fact, that brings into relief an important difference between drama and other forms of literature. Unlike other genres, a written drama is not the play's finished form. The final work is the production (resulting from the work of actors, directors, set dressers, and others involved with the staging) that emerges from the text. A play exists *in time* in a way that other forms of literature do not. A production of *The Iceman Cometh* cannot be set aside like a paperback novel, to be picked up later at the viewer's leisure. An audience's ability to focus on the play over a continuous time period is a factor that must be taken into consideration.

Directors do consider attention spans. It is not at all uncommon for a director to provide his own "criticism" by cutting the playwright's dialogue. One director, in fact, managed to shave the running time of *The Iceman Cometh* by one hour through extensive script edits. It is important, however, that the student of drama not arbitrarily set an "ideal" length for a play. It is more useful to consider the ultimate effect of the play's length. Does that length serve a useful purpose? In *The Iceman Cometh* the length of the play adds to the feeling of oppressiveness and hopelessness. The continued repetition in O'Neill's dialogue, which is sometimes cut by directors who fail to grasp the meaning in its iterations, emphasizes the redundant, looping quality of the characters' lives. The extreme length of the play contributes to the suffocating atmosphere of Hope's saloon.

Symbolism

A symbol is something that stands for or suggests something other than itself. In *The Iceman Cometh* the iceman is a symbol of death. In the time period of the play, before there were electric refrigerators, people owned iceboxes which kept food cold by keeping it in an enclosed space with large blocks of ice. The ice was delivered by the iceman, who traveled from door to door.

From the beginning of the play, the roomers look forward to Hickey' s running gag about leaving his wife in bed with the iceman. When they discover how much Hickey has changed, some begin to suspect that he did find his wife with the iceman. The figure of the iceman is easily associated with death. In western culture, death is traditionally associated with cold. In addition, it was once customary to use ice to preserve corpses until they could be buried. From this practice comes the slang expressions "to put someone on ice" or "to ice someone," both of which mean "to kill" that " someone." The iceman Hickey left Evelyn with is Death. When used in the title with the word "com-eth," the implication is that Death comes in the present tense□it is always arriving for someone. At the end of the play, Death comes for Parritt. Larry expresses a longing for Death, the iceman, who will eventually come for everyone in the bar.

The Unities

The unities are the three rules that govern classical drama. They are unity of time, unity of place, and unity of action. Unity of time generally means that the action of a play should take place within a twenty-four-hour period. Unity of place means that the action of the play should take place in one location. Unity of action means that events must follow logically from one another.

The concept of the unities originated in the writings of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, in his treatise *Poetics*. Many, however, consider Aristotle's discussion of the unities descriptive; he is simply describing the dramatic style of his own time. During the Renaissance, however, the unities became prescriptive□rules for playwrights to follow□particularly in Italy and France. Following the rule of the unities was supposed to make a play more believable for the audience.

In *The Iceman Cometh* O'Neill adheres to the three unities. The play takes place in one location, within a relatively short period of time, and with events following logically from one another. O'Neill, greatly influenced by classical drama, may have used the unities in order to create an association between *The Iceman Cometh* and classic Greek tragedy. The unities can contribute to a sense of realism. The audience lives the events as the characters live them and thus experiences the stagnation and despair of Hope's saloon as if it were real.

Historical Context

Anarchy in the U.S.

During the late-1800s, anarchy, the belief that all systems of government are immoral and unnecessary, was a serious political movement in the United States. Following the assassination of President William McKinley by an anarchist in 1901, anarchists were banned from entering the country; nonetheless, the movement remained viable. Emma Goldman, perhaps the best remembered of the anarchists of this period, may have served as a model for Parritt's mother. Goldman was still quite active in 1912, the year in which *The Iceman Comet* is set. But by the time O'Neill wrote *The Iceman Cometh* in 1939, Goldman had been deported to the Soviet Union and, in 1938, the House of Representatives had set up a committee to investigate so-called un-American activities. The major movements of the radical left□anarchism, socialism, and communism□were not as strong as they had been in previous years.

During the early-1930s, the first years of the Depression, with its worsening economic conditions, led many to turn to the radical left for solutions. But by the 1939, when O'Neill wrote *The Iceman Cometh*, the increasing success of labor unions, the reforms of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal, and the 1938 passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act (which set a minimum wage of forty cents an hour and a maximum workweek of 44 hours) made radical change seem less necessary. In addition, increasing military tension in Europe had begun to command the time and attention of Americans. German leader Adolf Hitler's 1939 invasion of Poland marked the beginning of World WarII.

Although Americans now tend to romanticize World War II as a justifiable war that enjoyed popular support from the beginning, this was not the case in 1939. The radical left opposed U.S. involvement in what they considered an imperialist war. But it was not only the left that had qualms about American involvement. Shortly after Hitler's invasion of Poland, President Roosevelt announced in a radio broadcast, "This nation remains a neutral nation." It was not until the United States itself was attacked by Japan two years later□the December 7, 1941, bombing of Pearl Harbor□that America entered the war.

Civil Rights in the Early-Twentieth Century

In 1912, the primary issue for women's groups was that of suffrage, the right to vote. Women were actively engaged in social issues, particularly in assisting the poor and fighting for temperance, the prohibition of alcoholism. In order to achieve the reforms they desired, however, women realized that they needed to be able to vote. Another important issue for women was birth control. In 1912, the distribution of birth control information was illegal in the United States. The anarchist Emma Goldman was active in the fight for birth control, which had the potential of giving women the same sexual freedom allowed to men. In 1920, women won the right to vote, and in the decade

following that victory, doctors were legally allowed to dispense birth control information. With these successes, many women assumed that their movement was no longer necessary. That and the economic troubles of the Depression made women's rights much less of an issue by 1939.

In 1912, discrimination against African Americans was widespread. In every southern state, African Americans were denied the right of suffrage. In some states, blacks were prohibited from opening businesses of any kind. In 1909, white northerners and blacks joined together and formed the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which fought for racial equality. Nonetheless, tremendous discrimination continued, especially in the South. Many southern African Americans moved North but could often only work as laborers or servants, if they could find work at all. In addition, many whites in the North and South continued to consider blacks as their intellectual and social inferiors. Joe Mott, the only black character in *The Iceman Cometh,* has himself absorbed this attitude and continually speaks of himself as being white or acting white. He and the other roomers consider this high praise and a superior social position than that afforded to blacks.

By 1939, many blacks had benefited from the reforms of the New Deal. Employment and social discrimination continued, however. In 1939, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) denied the singer Marian Anderson permission to sing in Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C., solely because she was black. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt resigned from the DAR in protest, then assisted in making arrangements for Anderson to sing at the Lincoln Memorial instead. This incident helped to cement African American support for the president and first lady, which translated into support for the Democratic Party.

1930s Culture

While Americans of the late-1930s were dealing with the harsh realities of the Depression and the approaching war, much of the popular culture of the time provided a means of escape from the bleak reality of daily life. This is perhaps best exemplified by the films of the era. Light entertainers such as Shirley Temple, the Marx Brothers, W. C. Fields, and Mae West were all popular in the 1930s. In 1937, the first full-length animated film, Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,* was produced. The year 1939 saw the production of the fantasy film *The Wizard of Oz.* The movie version of Margaret Mitchell's romantic *Gone with the Wind,* the most popular novel of the decade, was also produced in 1939. At first, this focus on escapism seems quite at odds with the bleak world of *The Iceman Cometh.* But the pipe dreams of the roomers in O'Neill's dark world reflect nothing so much as the decade's need for an escape from reality.

Critical Overview

Although *The Iceman Cometh* is now considered a masterpiece of twentieth-century drama, when the play first appeared on Broadway in 1946, its critical reception was mixed. By the time of the play's production, O'Neill was a well-established playwright, a recipient of the Nobel Prize, and *The Iceman Cometh* marked the end of his twelve-year absence from Broadway. Rosamond Gilder, whose review for *Theatre Arts* is reprinted in *O'Neill and his Plays: Four Decades of Criticism,* noted "O'Neill's return has done more than give the new season a fillip of interest; it has restored to the theatre something of its intrinsic stature." Of the play itself, Gilder wrote, *"The Iceman Cometh* is made of good theatre substance□meaty material for actors, racy dialogue, variety of character, suspense and passion." In his book *Eugene O'Neill,* Normand Berlin quoted George Jean Nathan, who remarked in his review of this production that *The Iceman Cometh* made other American plays seem "like so much damp tissue paper."

Yet the play was not free from negative commentary. As Berlin noted, "Those who faulted the play mentioned its prosaic language, its schematic arrangements and, most often, its excessive length." It is the latter criticism that has continued to haunt the play even as it has received greater and greater acclaim in the decades since its debut. Repeatedly, critics have complained that a full production of *The Iceman Cometh,* which takes nearly five hours, is simply too long.

Gilder noted in her review that the play "could readily be compressed into a more reasonable running time." A shorter version, she wrote, "would have brought into sharper focus the conflicting and merging elements of the three chief figures of the fable. The subsidiary characters are not sufficiently important or rounded to demand the time and attention they absorb." Critic Brooks Atkinson, whose review of the 1956 revival is also reprinted in Cargill' s book, disagreed. Atkinson allowed that the play "could be cut and compressed without destroying anything essential." "But," he continued, "as a creative work by a powerful writer, it is entitled to its excesses, which, in fact, may account for the monumental feeling of doom that it pulls down over the heads of the audience."

As director of the German-language premiere, Eric Bentley, whose writing on the matter also appears in Cargill's book, clarified his own position on the matter of length. By cutting O'Neill's dialogue, Bentley managed to shave one hour off the length of his production. "Not wishing to cut out whole characters," he wrote, "we mutilated some till they had, I'm afraid, no effective existence." The result, Bentley claimed, was a "shortened, crisper version." In his book *O'Neill's Scenic Images,* however, Timo Tiusanen wrote that Bentley in his production "apparently cut away part of the spontaneity of the play." Tiusanen suggested that "It is conceivable that the criterion of those most eager to shorten O'Neill has been a play with a tightly knit plot. *The Iceman Cometh* is a play of another kind."

Berlin agreed that extensive cutting does a disservice to the play. In *O'Neill's Shakespeare,* he wrote of O'Neill's roomers, "We live with them for four hours; a long

time□a time that is necessary because O'Neill wants us to feel the sheer survival quality of these creatures who have come to the 'last harbor.'" The play is long, according to Berlin and many other critics, because it needs to be long. Its length is intrinsic to O'Neill's purpose.

Another important issue that arises in the play's criticism is the question of which character in the play is O'Neill's protagonist. Bentley argued that "Larry is ... the center of the play." But that is so because the stories of Parritt and Hickey "are brought together through Larry Slade whose destiny ... is to extract the secret of both protagonists." In other words, Larry is central only because he serves the purpose of drawing together the primary characters. Berlin remarked in *O'Neill's Shakespeare* that he saw Larry as "the play's central character, certainly the most haunting character."

Though he is central, however, for Berlin, Larry functions as the Fool, a traditional character, particularly in Renaissance comedy and tragedy, described by Berlin as "seemingly set apart, looking at the others in the play, commenting on them, allowing us to see the world through his eyes, which are clear and awake and contain a gleam of sardonic humor." For Berlin, Larry, like the Fool in William Shakespeare's King Lear, provides a crucial commentary on what happens onstage but is not really a part of the play's action. In *The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O 'Neill,* Edwin A. Engel described Larry as the protagonist but noted that Larry serves "a choral function as he comments upon the action and interprets the motives of the numerous other characters." Although Engel compared Larry to the chorus of ancient Greek drama, rather than the Fool, he too saw Larry's centrality as related to his commentary, not his participation in the action.

Tiusanen also believed that *The Iceman Cometh* functions with what is essentially a Greek chorus, but for him, that chorus was not Larry but the roomers at Hope's saloon. For Tiusanen, Larry was "a pivotal character," but the play's protagonist is Hickey. Tiusanen quoted Tom F. Driver, who wrote that "The play might be diagrammed with three concentric circles." For Driver, the outermost circle is occupied by Harry and the roomers, the second by Larry and Parritt. Hickey, however, "occupies the play's innermost circle." The story Hickey tells "is virtually a play within the play and ... the core of the entire business."

A more uncommon view of the protagonist's identity was expressed by Rolf Scheibler in his book *The Late Plays of Eugene O'Neill*. For Scheibler, Harry Hope "is the centre of this little world, and if we are to speak of a protagonist at all, it is he who is the main character." It is Hope who "enables the outcasts to lead the kind of life they want." He gives them "food, drink, and rooms, and thus grants them the shelter they need." Hope's name is also significant for Scheibler. "The only hope for man to gain his soul lies in adopting the tolerant attitude of the saloon owner." For Scheibler, the "simple message" of *The Iceman Cometh* is that "if we are tolerant, we shall not lose our spirituality even if we are subject to the laws of nature. And then, by doing what is possible to-day, perhaps there will be a better tomorrow." Because Hope embodies this attitude, Scheibler saw him as the play's protagonist. It should be noted, however, that Scheibler

remains in the minority in this view. Most critics see either Larry or Hickey as the play's central figure.

The question of the identity of the play's protagonist, or whether the play even has a real protagonist, will doubtless remain a subject of disagreement among critics. In spite of differences of interpretation, however, and consideration of possible flaws, such as the play's length, most critics now agree on one point: *The Iceman Cometh* is a play of major importance among O'Neill's work as well as in the history of twentieth-century American drama.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Cross is a Ph.D. candidate specializing in modern drama. In this essay she discusses Hickey's wife and Parritt's mother in terms of sexual stereotypes.

In Eugene O'Neill's play *The Iceman Cometh,* the two most significant female characters never appear onstage. These women, Parritt's mother, Rosa, and Hickey's wife, Evelyn, although physically absent throughout the play, are nonetheless powerfully present in the lives of the men who know them. Indeed, Rosa and Evelyn are absolutely essential to the action of the play. Yet O'Neill chose to give these women no voices of their own; the audience sees them exclusively through the eyes of the men who hated and ultimately destroyed them. The result is an incomplete picture of who Rosa and Evelyn really are. An examination of these women and their places in the play must therefore take into consideration the distortion of the lens through which the audience views them.

Edwin A. Engel wrote in his book *The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill:* "Hickey's wife and Parritt's other represent antithetical aspects of love the former an excess of love and forgiveness, the latter a deficiency. Both generate hate in the men who are closely associated with them." By framing the love of Evelyn and Rosa in terms of "excess" and "deficiency," Engel essentially faults them for not adhering to some sort of ideal degree of love. His comment that the women "generate hate" suggests that they are to blame for the hatred the men feel, and by extension, are at least partly responsible for their own downfall. The women are essentially destroyed, however, because they are not what the men want or expect them to be. While this can certainly be framed in terms of how much love Evelyn and Rosa are supposed to have for Hickey and Parritt, perhaps a clearer and more telling way to consider this issue is in terms of sexual stereotypes.

In the time in which O'Neill was writing, the ideal, traditional woman was absolutely selfless and, although willing to accommodate her husband's sexual needs, was without any sexual desire of her own. If married, she put her husband's needs before her own. If a mother, she sacrificed everything for her children. Published in *The Conscious Reader,* Virginia Woolf described such an ideal in her 1942 essay, "The Angel in the House," named for the heroine of a Victorian poem:

She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above I need not say it she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty her blushes, her great grace.

The life of Rosa Parritt is antithetical to that of this "ideal" woman, the angel in the house. Rosa is therefore seen as a selfish and unloving mother, and her son hates her. Evelyn, on the other hand, is an angel in the house in every way. Still, because of her

selflessness and love, Hickey grows to hate her as much as Parritt hates his mother. In *The Iceman Cometh,* these women are, as the saying goes, damned if they do/damned if they don't. Whether or not they fix themselves to the model of the angel in the house, Rosa Parritt and Evelyn Hickman are condemned, hated, and ultimately destroyed by the primary men in their lives.

Rosa is a political activist, a sexual being, and a parent. In all three roles she rejects traditional femininity and is, in turn, rejected by her son, who finds her mothering skills lacking. The first time the audience hears of Rosa it is in regard to her political actions. Larry reports that she has been arrested for her participation in an anarchist bombing that resulted in several deaths. The action of the play occurs in 1912, eight years before women even had the right to vote. In a time when women have no political voice at all and are expected to accept the system run by men, Rosa is dedicated not simply to a change in government but to the abolition of government itself; where women are supposed to be passive, the "gentle sex," Rosa takes violent action; when women are supposed to live for their families, Rosa is dedicated to the Movement.

Even in radical political movements, women have often been expected to stand on the sidelines, supporting the men. The American women's movement of the 1970s, in fact, partly grew out of women's frustration with the way they were treated within the radical student movements of the late-1960s and early-1970s. Female students felt that they were expected to subordinate themselves to men. But Rosa takes a back seat to no one. In essence, Rosa acts like a man, and her dedication to her lifestyle, which would probably be acceptable, even admirable, in a man, is part of the reason for Parritt' s hatred.

Speaking to Larry of his mother, Parritt says, "To hear her go on sometimes, you'd think she was the Movement." Larry immediately recognizes the hostility of this comment. He is "puzzled and repelled" and tells Parritt, "That's a hell of a way for you to talk, after what happened to her!" Parritt quickly backtracks: "Don't get me wrong. I wasn't sneering Larry, only kidding." It is clear, however, that even if said in jest, Parritt's comment is still hostile. Elsewhere Parritt shows that his hostility regarding his mother's political involvement stems from his own feeling that, largely because of Rosa's dedication to the Movement, she was not the good mother for which he longed. He tells Larry, "You were the only friend of Mother's who ever paid attention to me.... All the others were too busy with the Movement. Even Mother."

Parritt recognizes that, for Rosa, the Movement took precedence over all personal relationships and is therefore puzzled that Rosa continued to write Larry after he left the Movement. Parritt says that, in regard to the Movement, his mother is "Like a revivalist preacher about religion. Anyone who loses faith in it is more than dead to her; he's a Judas who ought to be boiled in oil." Parritt knows that the bond between mother and child is not as sacred to Rosa as her political beliefs. Just before he commits suicide at the end of the play, Parritt anticipates Rosa's reaction to his death. "It'll give her the chance to play the great incorruptible Mother of the Revolution, whose only child is the Proletariat. She'll be able to say: 'Justice is done! So may all traitors die!.. .Iam glad he's dead! Long live the Revolution!'" While very few would admire this level of fanaticism in

men or women, such sentiment is especially intolerable in a mother, who, by stereotypical definition, is supposed to be selfless and forgiving, to always put her children's needs before her own.

The angel in the house does not allow herself sexual freedom□or even sexual feeling. Rosa Parritt, however, does. "You've always acted the free woman," Parritt tells her when she complains about his keeping company with prostitutes. The word "free" in this context means sexually free. Rosa does not play the part of the ideal wife, who has sex to please her husband, or the prostitute, who at first glance may seem more free. In fact, the prostitute is not free at all. She too has sex to please men; the sex act is not gratifying to her. When Hickey talks about joking with prostitutes, making them laugh, Cora responds, "Jees, all de lousy jokes I've had to listen to and pretend was funny!" Rosa's sexual relationships are for her own pleasure. She even uses men in the way men have traditionally used women.

Parritt tells Larry that Rosa still respected Larry because he left her before she left him. "She got sick of the others before they did of her. I don't think she ever cared about them anyway. She just had to keep on having lovers to prove to herself how free she was." The possibility that Rosa had sexual relations for her own pleasure is unthinkable to Parritt. Rosa's sexual freedom is offensive to her son. "Living at home," he says, "was like living in a whorehouse□only worse, because she didn't have to make her living." As Parritt recalls, even the tolerant Larry objected to Rosa's sexual freedom. "I remember her putting on her high-and-mighty free-woman stuff, saying you were still a slave to bourgeois morality and jealousy and you thought a woman you loved was a piece of private property you owned. I remember that you got mad and told her, 'I don't like living with a whore, if that's what you mean!'" Rosa's sexual freedom would be more acceptable in a man, but because she is a woman who has sex without being a wife or a prostitute she is condemnable. To Parritt and, if Parritt's story is accurate, to Larry, Rosa is even worse than a whore, fit neither to be a good wife nor a good mother, unwilling to sacrifice her own feelings to the desires of men.

If Rosa Parritt's life is a repudiation of the "traditional woman" concept, Evelyn Hickman is the angel in the house. She is so selfless, loving, and forgiving that she seems to be more of a fantasy ideal than a real woman. When Hickey drinks or goes to prostitutes, Evelyn forgives him. When he gives her venereal disease, she pretends to believe he got it from sharing drinking cups on trains and again forgives her husband. When Hickey doesn't come home from a drinking binge for more than a month, she neve expresses anger when he returns. When he promises to change, she believes him. And when he inevitably returns to his old ways, Evelyn, as always, forgives him.

In his book *The Late Plays of Eugene O 'Neill,* Rolf Scheibler called Evelyn "an unattainable ideal," but she is an ideal only when seen in terms of her adherence to the role of the angel in the house. A man who behaved the same way would be considered a "sucker," a "pushover," a "sap." Scheibler also stated that Evelyn "finds that happiness can be achieved by giving and forgiving." In reality, however, the audience never knows whether or not Evelyn is happy, whether or not she believes her husband's empty promises, and whether or not she ever truly forgives his trespasses. She is, after all,

seen only through Hickey's eyes, and it is convenient for him to believe in her happiness. For the angel in the house, however, the question of personal happiness does not even arise; she is required to always place others' needs and feelings above her own. Acceptance of such a duty, however, should not be construed as happiness.

Evelyn completely embraces the role of the angel in the house, yet Hickey is no more satisfied with her than Parritt is with Rosa. Hickey cannot tolerate the guilt he feels at Evelyn's love and forgiveness. "That's what made me feel such a rotten skunk," Hickey tells the roomers, "her always forgiving me." According to Hickey, it is not his own actions that make him feel guilty; Evelyn's forgiveness is to blame. "Sometimes," he says, "I couldn't forgive her for forgiving me. I even caught myself hating her for making me hate myself so much." In contrast to Parritt, Hickey wants Evelyn to act less like a traditional woman and more like a man. He believes it would be better if she committed adultery as he had.

Hickey's belief is reinforced by Jimmy Tomorrow, whose wife did respond to his drinking by sleeping with other men. "I was glad to be free," Jimmy says, "even grateful to her, I think, for giving me such a good tragic excuse to drink as much as I damned well pleased." Evelyn, however, gives Hickey no such excuse. So he turns his disgust with himself into hatred for Evelyn. He finally murders her because, in comparison to himself, she is too perfect, too good.

Hickey kills Evelyn for her attainment of the feminine ideal, while Parritt betrays his mother to a fate he says is worse than death for her rejection of that ideal. Both women are ultimately destroyed because of the way they choose to live. Rosa's scorn for the role of the traditional female displeases her son; Evelyn's acceptance of that role□and her perfection of its ideals□confronts her husband with his own inadequacies. Both women pay with their lives.

Source: Clare Cross, for *Drama for Students*, Gale, 1999.

Critical Essay #2

Brustein is a noted literary critic as well as a respected director of drama. In this essay he reviews a 1985 revival of The Iceman Cometh *that features the 1956 Circle in the Square production's star and director Jason Robards and Jose Quintero. The critic finds that both the play and the creative talents behind its staging have aged well.*

When *The Iceman Cometh* was first produced by the Theater Guild in the mid-1940s, hostile intellectual critics invidiously compared it with Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* and Gorky's *The Lower Depths*. After it was successfully revived ten years later by Circle in the Square, commentators began to recognize that, for all its clumsy dialogue, repetitiveness, and schematic plotting, the play was a great work that surpassed even those distinguished influences in depth and power. Today, almost 40 years after its initial appearance with James Barton and Dudley Digges, *The Iceman Cometh* has been restaged at the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre by the original director of the Circle in the Square revival (Jose Quintero) with the same Hickey (Jason Robards) and, despite arthritic moments in the production, emerges not only richer than ever but as the inspiration for much that has been written for the stage since.

The play resonates. It is at the same time familiar and strange. One is caught in its potent grip as by a gnarled and crippled hand. Robards, with his past history of alcoholism and air of personal suffering, has always been the American actor who shows the greatest personal affinity with O'Neill's spiritual pain, and this blood kinship, coupled with a valiant heart, carries him through the handicaps of playing Hickey in his late 60s. Hair darkened, face rouged, mouth dentured, energy flagging, Robards would now appear to be too old for the part, and there are times when he seems less to be living his role than remembering it. Still, if the performance is a bit of an overpainting, Robards has belonged to Hickey for many years, and when this remarkable actor makes his first entrance in a boater and off-the-rack pin-striped suit, throwing his bankroll at Rocky the bartender and exhorting the inmates of Harry Hope's saloon in his slurred whiskey bass, there is a thrill of simultaneous immediacy and recognition.

The Iceman Cometh resonates. It is at the same time familiar and strange. One is caught in its potent grip as by a gnarled and crippled hand. Age has given Robards an extraordinary translucency□pallid skin, transparent eyes. His Hickey continually promises his drunken friends the reward of spiritual peace (each act but the last ends on the word "happy"), but for all his drummer's energy, finger snapping, vaudeville physicality, and carny shill delivery, he is a ghost from the moment he walks on stage. Robards is continually undermining his character's professed optimism, as when he gets "sleepy all of a sudden," trips over a chair, and falls into a faint; Robards's face goes slack as though he's had a minor stroke. For while Hickey has the remorseless cheeriness of an American evangelist (he was no doubt inspired by Billy Sunday or by Bruce Barton's characterization of Jesus as the world's greatest salesman), only Larry Slade looks as deeply into the abyss of life without hope or redemption.

Robards is surrounded by a fine cast, the one weakness being Paul McCrane' s rather flaccid Parritt. Barnard Hughes is a roistering Harry Hope, John Christopher Jones an intellectually degenerate Willie Oban, James Greene a gaunt Jimmy Tomorrow, and Donald Moffat a dignified Larry Slade, while most of the smaller roles are played with strength. Still, Robards's realism, even when unfulfilled, is of such intensity that it sometimes makes the others seem a little "classical." Take Barnard Hughes, so ingratiating and roguish when holding court in his saloon but not quite anguished enough when his "pipe dream" is exposed, or Donald Moffat, quietly eloquent and detached throughout the play, yet resorting to languorous legato cadences in his time of agonizing self-recognition.

And I wish that Quintero had been a little bolder in his approach. Ben Edwards' s bar setting is selectively seedy, and Jane Greenwood's costumes really look like secondhand clothes that have been rotting on the bodies of the characters. But apart from the opening scene, with the stubble-bearded living-dead derelicts sleeping open-mouthed under Thomas R. Skelton's pasty light, there has been little effort to suggest that this is a world at the bottom of the sea or that *The Iceman Cometh* has a reverberant symbolic interior as well as a naturalist facade. Quintero acknowledges O'Neill's hints (in his archaic title and elsewhere) that Hickey and his 12 companions bear a strong resemblance to Christ and his disciples□Parritt being Judas and Larry being Peter, the rock on which he builds his church□ and that Harry Hope's birthday party is based on the Last Supper (his actors fall into poses inspired by Leonardo da Vinci's painting, Hickey hovering over them with his palms outstretched).

But otherwise the production is a retread of the one staged in 1956, as if nothing had happened to the theater in 30 years. Even the exits and entrances seem designed for Broadway applause. I don't mean this version is old-fashioned□it has too much life for that□and I admit that a more imaginative interpretation might very well have obscured the play's intentions. Still, O'Neill was a very reluctant convert to Ibsenite realism ("holding the family Kodak up to ill-nature," as he called it) and never truly abandoned his devotion to symbolic substructures. A play as thickly faceted (and familiar) as this one deserves more audacious treatment.

Even conventionally staged, however, *The Iceman Cometh* has lost none of its consuming power. The play is long□it lasts almost five hours□and sometimes painfully repetitious, since each character is identified by a single obsession that he continually restates. Thus, each act offers a single variation on the theme of illusion. The action never bursts into spontaneous life; and the characters rarely escape O'Neill's rigid control, as, say, Fal-staff escapes Shakespeare's or Mother Courage escapes Brecht's. Still, one must recognize that the work consists not of one but of 13 plays, each with its own story; O'Neill has multiplied his antagonists in order to illuminate every possible aspect of his theme, and every rationalization, whether religious, racial, political, sexual, psychological, or philosophical, with which humankind labors to escape the truths of raw existence. And in some crazy inexplicable way, the very length of the play contributes to its impact, as if we had to be exposed to virtually every aspect of universal suffering in order to feel its full force.

This exhaustiveness of design probably accounts for the influence of *The Iceman Cometh* on so much subsequent work; seeing the play today is like reading the family tree of modern drama. Surely, *Death of a Salesman,* also recently revived (superbly) as a film for television, owes a strong debt to *The Iceman Cometh,* with its O'Neillian theme of an illusory tomorrow embodied in another philandering drummer cheating on another saintly wife in out-of-town hotels. (The name Willy Loman even unconsciously echoes O'Neill's character Willie Oban.) Hickey's long-delayed entrance ("Would that Hickey or Death would come") may have inspired a similar long-awaited figure, Beckett's Godot, who, like Hickey, stands in an almost supernatural punitive relationship to hapless derelicts. And there is no question that Jack Gelber's dazed junkies in *The Connection* owe a great deal to O'Neill's drunks in Harry Hope's "End of the Line Cafe," just as it is likely that if the play were written today, the characters would have been drug addicts.

I cite this partial list of influences not to swell the secondary reading list of the dramatic lit syllabus but to suggest how a great play over time becomes a seedbed of riches. And *The Iceman Cometh* is as great a play as the modern theater has produced. The current production brings no new insights. It is occasionally badly paced and laborious, especially in the overly schematic third act; and the actors, gifted as they are, sometimes draw back from the precipice. But by the conclusion of this long evening, this masterwork has managed to cut to the bone, and that makes the production a signal event in any Broadway season.

Source: Robert Brustein, "Souls on Ice" in the *New Republic,* Vol. 193, no. 18, October 28, 1985, pp. 41-43.

Critical Essay #3

In this review Stark appraises the 1946 Broadway production of O'Neill's play. In his positive assessment of the staging, the critic labels the work "beautiful, luminous, filled with the witty and the poetic together mingled."

"The Iceman Cometh" marks the return of Eugene O'Neill to Broadway after an absence of twelve years. The performance of the play runs into two sessions, of about an hour and a quarter before the dinner intermission, and two and three-quarters after. The Theatre Guild, by its own lights, has brought the highest intentions to its production, a large company mostly of experienced actors, plus the décor by Robert Edmond Jones and the directing by Eddie Dowling.

The scene of *"The Iceman Cometh "* is Harry Hope's, a saloon with a back room curtained off, which can pass as a restaurant and run Sundays as well as week days, and with lodgers upstairs, which turns it into a Raines Law hotel that can stay open night and day. Among the guests are a former Harvard man; a one-time editor of Anarchist periodicals; a one-time police lieutenant; a Negro, onetime proprietor of a Negro gambling house; a one-time leader of a Boer commando; a one-time Boer War correspondent; a one-time captain of British infantry; a onetime Anarchist; a one-time circus man; a young man from the West Coast, who has squealed on his Anarchist mother; a hardware salesman; the day and night bartenders; and three tarts. They have, the majority of them, fallen from what they once were and live in a kind of whiskey-sodden dream of getting back: tomorrow will make everything right. The first session of *"The Iceman Cometh"* □absorbing and in the early O'Neill manner□ is taken up with the revelation of the various characters as they wait for the arrival of Hickey, the hardware salesman, who joins them every year at this time to celebrate Harry's birthday with a big drunk. Hickey arrives, greets them with the old affection and surprises them with the announcement that he has left off drink and that he has come to save them not from booze but from pipe-dreams. It is these, he says, that poison and ruin a guy's life and keep him from finding any peace; he is free and contented now, like a new man, all you need is honesty with yourself, to stop lying about yourself and kidding yourself about tomorrow. He hands out a $10 bill to start the party and falls asleep from fatigue.

In the next act Hickey's effect is seen. Harry must go out on the street for the first time in twenty years and see his friends in the ward about the alderman's post they had once offered him; the short-change expert must go back to the circus; the various others back to their old positions in life; the day bartender and one of the tarts must go on and marry instead of always talking about it, et cetera. But now the friendly backwater of sots and wrecks and whores turns into hate, violent rows and imminent fights. Hickey gets them all out, one by one; he knows they will come back again, beaten but free of their pipe-dreams, and so will find peace. They all return, everything has gone wrong, even the whiskey has lost its kick. Hickey, who has confessed to killing his beloved and loving wife, to free her and free himself from a torturing pipe-dream of his reform, turns out to be insane, and this at last, and this only, frees them. All but two, for whom death is the end, go back to their dreams, somewhat gloriously, and the whiskey works again.

Eddie Dowling has directed *"The Iceman Cometh"* in his by now well known style. His is a method sure to be admired: it consists largely in a certain smooth security, an effect of competence, of keeping things professional and steady, and often of doing pretty much nothing at all. To this he adds in *"The Iceman Cometh"* a considerable degree of stylized performance, actors sitting motionless while another character or other groups take the stage. Since there is a good deal of stylization in the structure of' *'The Iceman Cometh"* this may well be justified. But in my opinion the usual Dowling method brought to the directing of this O'Neill play would gain greatly by more pressure, more intensity and a far darker and richer texture.

The same remark applies to the acting. It is a relief to see so many expert actors instead of the usual run of technically indifferent players we so often get on Broadway nowadays. The three actresses who have the tart roles belong, alas, to this latter indifferent rank; otherwise the acting is notable for its excellence, especially E.G. Marshall, Nicholas Joy, Frank Tweddel, Carl Benton Reid and Russell Collins, plus fair enough performances by Paul Crabtree, John Morriott and Tom Pedi. James Barton as Hickey, a most central character in the entire motivation and movement of the play, prays the part very much, I should imagine, as Eddie Dowling would have played it, judging from his performance in "The Glass Menagerie" and elsewhere, and from his directing. Which means a sort of playing that is competent, wholly at ease and with a something that appears to settle the matter, to close the subject as it were, so that for the moment at least you are prevented from thinking of anything else that could be done about it. Only afterward do you keep realizing what might have been there and was not. Russell Collins could have played the role of Hickey with much more inner concentration, depth, projection and unbroken emotional fluency.

It was these qualities that appeared in Dudley Digges's performance. His Harry, the proprietor, was on a different plane from every other to be seen on the stage at the Martin Beck. It was exact, with the exactness that belongs to all fine art; and full of the constant surprise that appears in all first-rate art whatever, as it does in whatever is alive in our life. It was beautiful, luminous, filled with the witty and the poetic together mingled. 'Twere to consider too curiously to consider so, as Horatio says, and most unfair, perhaps, to wonder what would happen to *"The Iceman Cometh"* if more of the players could do the same by it. But that would imply no doubt a condition equal to that of the Moscow Art Theatre in Gorky's *"The Lower Depths."* How much the play could be cut or not cut then would remain to be seen. As *"The Iceman Cometh"*now stands, it is a remarkable play but could certainly be cut.

Robert Edmond Jones's setting for *"The Iceman Cometh"*seems to me one of those impalpable evocations of his in the medium of décor, austere, elegant and elusively poetic, and uncannily right for the realistic-poetic quality of this O'Neill drama. It suggests, too, the same passionate undercurrent of feeling that lies within the play throughout.

Source: Stark Young, "O'Neill and Rostand" in the *New Republic,* Vol. 115, no. 16, October 21, 1946, pp. 517-18.

Adaptations

The Iceman Cometh was adapted as a film in 1973. This version was directed by John Frankenheimer *(The Manchurian Candidate)*. It stars Lee Marvin as Hickey, Robert Ryan as Larry, and Jeff Bridges as Parritt.

Topics for Further Study

Research the anarchist movement of the early-twentieth century, particularly the life of Emma Goldman. What do you feel might have led people like Larry Slade in *The Iceman Cometh* to first embrace and then abandon the anarchist movement?

Compare and contrast the roomers in *The Iceman Cometh* with the tramps Didi and Gogo in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot.* To what extent do the roomers and the tramps control their respective fates?

Research the physical and social effects of alcoholism. What part does alcohol play in the lives of O'Neill's roomers? What social circumstances contribute to their drinking?

Discuss the women in O'Neill's play, considering both those onstage and those who are only spoken of. Why are so few of the women onstage? What does the play suggest about relationships between women and men?

Compare and contrast *The Iceman Cometh* with Maxim Gorky's *The Lower Depths*. What differences do you think might be attributed to the fact that Gorky is a Russian writer while O'Neill is an American? How are the playwrights' views of dreams and illusions similar? How are they different?

Compare and Contrast

1912: Temperance groups work toward the goal of complete prohibition of the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages. Eight years later Prohibition becomes the law of the land.

1939: Six years after Prohibition ends in failure, alcoholism continues to be a major social problem. The fledgling group Alcoholics Anonymous, founded in 1935, works to help people overcome what is perceived as a personal failing.

Today: Alcoholism is now generally viewed as a disease that often has a strong genetic component, but the problem of alcoholism is far from solved. Approximately 18 million Americans are alcoholics and teen drinking is a serious problem.

1912: In spite of a 1901 law prohibiting anarchists from entering the country, the anarchist movement is close to the peak of its popularity in the United States. Socialism and communism are also considered by many to be serious alternatives to capitalism.

1939: The increasing success of labor unions, the reforms of the New Deal, and laws designed to protect workers make the radical left's criticism of government seem less potent.

Today: The dismantling of the Berlin Wall and the fall of the Soviet Union result in a general sense in America that what the radical left offers is no longer a viable alternative. The movements of the radical left still exist, but within the United States, anarchism, communism, and socialism have virtually no popular support.

1912: The women's movement fights for suffrage (the right to vote) and the right to birth control. Social discrimination and discrimination in employment and education remain strongly in force.

1939: Having won the right to vote and the right to birth control, many believe the women's movement is no longer necessary. National attention is focused on the economy and the war in Europe.

Today: Women have earned legal rights equal to those of men, but in actual practice, women still face discrimination. Feminists are particularly concerned about the rights of women in non-Western nations.

1912: Discrimination against African Americans is widespread. Many southern Blacks move North but continue to endure poverty and racism.

1939: Some of the reforms of the New Deal benefit African Americans but social and legal discrimination remain.

Today: Discrimination against African Americans is no longer legal or socially acceptable, but many more Blacks than whites suffer from poverty and a lack of

education. Affirmative action programs, which have aimed at providing more opportunities for non-whites, are under attack by conservative politicians.

What Do I Read Next?

The Lower Depths, a 1902 play by Maxim Gorky, is also concerned with the lives of a group of outcasts and their desire to use illusion to shield themselves from the pain of life.

Waiting for Godot, a play by Samuel Beckett written in 1952, focuses on two tramps who wait vainly for the arrival of the mysterious figure Godot to give meaning and purpose to their lives.

Living My Life is the 1934 autobiography of famed anarchist Emma Goldman, who may have served as a model for Parritt's mother Rosa. Goldman's story provides useful context for Larry and Parritt's discussions regarding the Movement.

The Lost Weekend is a 1944 novel by Charles Jackson. It is the story of an alcoholic who attempts to resist drinking but finds he is helpless before his addiction. The film version, which was produced in 1946, the year of the first production of *The Iceman Cometh,* adds an optimistic ending not warranted by Jackson's dark novel.

Long Day's Journey into Night, an O'Neill play produced in 1956, is an autobiographical domestic tragedy dealing with addiction and dysfunctional relationships. The play is widely considered to offer insight into O'Neill's personal life.

Further Study

Berlin, Normand. *Eugene O'Neill,* Macmillan, 1982. This book provides a brief biography of O' Neill and a general introduction to his plays.

Gelb, Arthur and Barbara Gelb. *O'Neill,* Harper, 1960. This is amore extensive, in-depth biography of O'Neill.

Scheibler, Rolf. *The Late Plays of Eugene O'Neill,* Francke Verlag, 1970.

This book provides a careful analysis of *The Iceman Cometh* as well several of O'Neill's later plays.

Zinn, Howard. *The Twentieth Century: A People's History,* Harper & Row, 1984.

This book presents a history of twentieth-century America from a leftist political perspective.

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Tiusanen, Timo. *O'Neill's Scenic Images,* Princeton University Press, 1968, pp. 265-73.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
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- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

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