

Closing Deals and Killing Lives: Eugene O’Neill’s The Iceman Cometh and the Genesis of American Traveling Salesmanship of 1940s

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Abstract

Eugene O’Neill’s The Iceman Cometh (published 1940, produced 1946) projects on stage for the first time the American cultural-political archetype of the traveling salesman in the post-World War II era, exactly on the eve of America’s emergence as the richest and the most powerful country on planet. This particular cult of salesmanship, germinated as a derivative of American brand of democracy and capitalism, reappears in Tennessee Williams’ A Streetcar Named Desire (1947) and Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman (1949), which invites an interesting speculation as to what these salesmen are *in actu* selling. In fact, the audience members are never apprised of or introduced with the product or the article these salespersons are canvassing for. This paper tries to probe that all three of these American dramatists used their protagonists’ profession—traveling salesmanship—as an *abstraction* to promote a significant point of view, latent at the very crux of America’s success saga inside or outside its territory, that each leading role of these plays is selling death to their customers, revealing and establishing the contemporary image which America has been masquerading from the Other world.

Professor Julia White, in her “The Iceman Cometh as Infertility Myth,” contends that through Hickey, O’Neill for the first time “presents us with a uniquely American mythic figure—the salesman” which immediately in a few years helped revolutionize salesman as an American everyman, particularly referring to two of America’s most famous salespersons seen on stage during the same decade: flinty Stanley Kowalski in Tennessee Williams’ A Streetcar Named Desire (1947) and awful Willy Loman in Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman (1949).¹ Indeed, Hickey emerges as the first American sales agent of the capitalistic era who, interestingly, leaves a stage-legacy for Stanley and Willy by never apprising the audience of his selling product since, like his successors, he sells death through selling American brand of realism.

Set in an American “melting-pot” situation of 1912, the action in The Iceman Cometh revolves around Harry Hope’s Bar of false-hope-center where characters live as though in “morgue” and although their expression tells “there’s no hope,” they cling to the “philosophy of ‘tomorrowism’” (Shaughnessy) i.e., the “pipe dream”—the epitome as well as the apex body of varied dreams from which the American Dream derived. These derelicts-in-drinking-spree are the homeless and home-forsaken outcasts of society, “the down and outers” men and women who have lately run out of luck since they have failed in their relationships and occupations in life for which they are now branded as misfits by their society and hence have taken refuge in the saloon and the upstairs rooming house, both belonging to Harry Hope, the proprietor. Usually considered an American “saloon play” (Murphy) or a “memory play” (Floyd The Plays 512), the drama is deeply rooted upon the absurdist and existential theme of the outsider, a genre later made famous in Europe by Samuel Beckett, and a genre both Arthur Miller and Saul Bellow denounced and resisted in America “as an abnegation of human responsibility” (Bigsby 161). In the battle royal between the classical terminologies of illusion versus reality or “pipedream versus unmasking,” employing “the pop-psychologists’ depth” (Pfister 102), the play rationalizes a modernist political predicament as “discourses on anarchism and the corruption of capitalism summarize O’Neill’s solid statements: neither ‘ism’ is able to provide followers with sufficient hope for the present,” and hence “they retreat into a world of ‘tomorrow’ pipedreams” (Floyd O’Neill at Work 268) where the African-American Joe Mott, and the Irishman Larry corroborate O’Neill’s political view with a rare comic yet succinct dexterity.

In fact, among the contemporary authors of existential thinkers (Camus, Sartre and Beckett) whose works dealt with “the bedrock reality of human existence” in portraying “terrifying prospect that there are no firm values, no ultimate meanings,” O’Neill, according to both Normand Berlin and David Krasner, was able to place directly the choice whether it is better to live with a lie that sustains dignity and self-respect—however false—or face reality head-on, requiring desertion of hope (Berlin 85-86; Krasner 35). In fact, this idea of conflict has been carried along the plotline through Larry’s declaration at the outset that “The lie of the pipe dream is what gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot us, drunk or sober” (1.569-70) versus Hickey’s “Reform Wave” (3.652). O’Neill endorses Larry’s Nietzschean philosophical viewpoint, as in a letter to Kenneth Macgowan, he provides reasons for the barflies’ endless pipe-dreaming as such that “They must tell these lies as a first step in taking up life again” (Bryer and Alvarez 257). The resolution, thus, seems to corroborate, as poet Wallace Stevens sees, that we live by “necessary fictions” while striving for “a new knowledge of reality” (Stevens 166).

However, a crucial event in the life of these derelicts is the arrival once or twice a year of Theodore Hickman, nicknamed as Hickey, a traveling hardware salesman. The playwright describes him: “*He is about fifty, a little under medium height ... His expression is fixed in a salesman’s winning smile of self-confident affability and hearty good fellowship ... He exudes a friendly, generous personality that makes everyone like him on sight. ... There is an efficient, business-like approach in his manner ... He has the salesman’s mannerisms of speech, an easy flow of glib, persuasive convincingness*” (1.607). As it happens in a pagan wake, Hickey’s arrival gives saloon the look of a “morgue” where abundant whiskey flows free. Here Hickey can be considered an outsider. He lives in the outside business world and comes only once in a while to Harry Hope’s bar to lavish drinks and jokes to the delight of the jaded inmates.

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

Quite in tune with the famous maxim, *Always Be Closing*, Hickey turns up in Hope’s bar to market such newly-reached viewpoint so as to complete a sale. Yet, in his attempt to sell salvation to his comrades, to challenge them to face the truth about themselves and to go out into the world and earn their living, Hickey rather sows the seed of confusion, hatred and even death amongst these bar inmates. Confronting these “hope-forsaken” inmates, he says:

I meant [to] save you from pipe dreams. I know now, from my experience, they’re the things that really poison and ruin a guy’s life and keep him from finding any peace. If you knew how free and contented I feel now. I’m like a new man. And the cure for them is so damned simple, once you have the nerve. Just the old dope of honesty is the best policy—honesty with yourself, I mean. Just stop lying about yourself and kidding yourself about tomorrows. (1.610)

Hickey’s such biblical uttering, as though coming from a savior, sounds political rhetoric at worst and sophistry at best—he comes here to bring his crazy gospel of truth and salvation to his fellow brothers who, until now, are afraid and scared to face the truth about themselves. Unfortunately, this false gospel of salvation precipitates disaster, death and damnation to those it is intended to save. Henceforth Hickey is synonymous with “death”—the two names are used interchangeably by the inmates to describe him:

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

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

Furthermore, only after his arrival and his fault-finding mission about the inmates do bigotry or discrimination set in. An atmosphere of gloom and unfriendliness pervades the entire Hope's bar; according to stage direction: "*There is an atmosphere of oppressive stagnation in the room, and a quality of insensibility about all the people in this group at right. They are like wax figures, set stiffly on their chairs, carrying out mechanically the motions of getting drunk but sunk in a numb stupor which is impervious to stimulation. ... Joe's ... head rolls forward in a sodden slumber. Rocky is standing behind the chair, regarding him with dull hostility*" (4.681-82).

Understandably thus, the title of Eugene O'Neill's canonical play has stressed critics and scholars out from time to time as they oscillated between, while trying to decipher, the biblical and the vernacular connotations it carries with it. Both CP Sinha (125) and Normand Berlin (84) contend that it has been drawn from the story of the wise and foolish virgins in Mathew's gospel, parodying the description of the coming Savior: "While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh" (25.5-6). But this ironical comparison seems to be a forced one since the bridegroom here is sinless Christ who is coming to reward the good to those who are anxiously waiting and preparing for his arrival. On the other hand, Hickey is a murderer, a dishonest man who is not only unfaithful to his wife but who kills her also. Thus, haunted by his guilt, and because he has no peace of mind (even though he claims he has), he comes to Harry Hope's bar to destroy the fragile harmony of the inmates under the guise of bringing salvation to them. In fact, Hickey may be referred to as a limb of the devil, and hence he is the dangerous agent St. Peter warns all to refrain from: "Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith" (1Pt. 5.8-9). Hickey, therefore, poses as a strange and bogus messiah.

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

O'Neill's "hero" or "anti-hero" (Black) Hickey is another realist like Stanley and Willy, preaching and strongly sticking to his own ideal. Like Willy, he believes that the key to success is in being well liked: "I'd met a lot of drummers around the hotel and liked 'em. They were always telling jokes. They were sports. They kept moving. I liked their life. And I knew I could kid people and sell things" (4.695). Yet it is implied that the greatest inspiration he has drawn for the profession of a salesman was not from these drummers, but from his father. As usual, O'Neill digs at the bottom of "sickness" in "American soul" by letting Hickey spell out that his Minister-father's acts of selling salvation which he closely monitored as a kid, the likes which existed in Martin Luther's time amongst corrupt Catholic preachers, as the prime-motif behind Hickey's belief that he "could kid people and sell things." He reminisces,

Listening to my old man whooping up hell fire and scaring those Hoosier suckers into shelling out their dough only handed me a laugh, although I had to hand it to him, the way he sold them nothing for something. I guess I take after him, and that's what made me a good salesman.
(4.693)

Hickey understood even as a kid that like religion, economics plays upon the hopes and fears of the human race where, seduced by the seller, the buyer acquires objects to prove his spiritual as well as social status. Thus, like his two successors, he goes all out to sell the illusion-struck barflies at Hope's a harsh reality after killing his wife Evelyn.

Besides, Professor David Krasner contends that with such development O'Neill presents Hickey to simultaneously showcase two positions: "realism" and "theatricality" with which Hickey would try to force his sale and thus achieve his personal-philosophical purposes:

Ahmed

In Hickey [O'Neill] creates a character who is an "actor" in a role. Hickey is both feigning madness and going mad. In this way Hickey is similar to Shakespeare's Hamlet, who also feigns madness and is likely bereft of his senses. Hamlet "acts" mad in order to discover certainty about his father's murderer; but he is simultaneously losing his mind. Hickey too dons an "act" of madness and is losing his bearing. Like a good actor (and good salesman), he must convince the bar patrons to "buy into" his madness so that they may testify on his behalf. This is his ploy to avoid execution, as well as his "role" to play as an actor. (37)

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

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

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

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

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

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

Interestingly, all three salesmen seemed to have the typical modern man's on-job bliss of extra-marital fling: Hickey carries venereal diseases to his wife after having travel-sex and is always forgiven by her after confessions; Stanley had long been sizing up Blanche and finally rapes her when his wife is away in the hospital

for the childbirth; and Willy's sex-in-the-city type of act is caught in completely un-voyeuristic term by his son that virtually shattered the career of the latter.

But importantly, the woman's take on Willy reverberates O'Neill's "theory" on newly-emerged superpower America, expounded on September 02, 1946, just three years before Miller's Death of a Salesman was staged and a month before The Iceman Cometh's first staging. In his famous interview with JS Wilson, O'Neill told that "United States, instead of being the most successful in the world, is the greatest failure ... [for] its main idea is that everlasting game of trying to possess your own soul by the possession of something outside of it, thereby losing your own soul and the thing outside of it, too. ... We are the greatest example of 'For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?'" (Wilson PM 18). To prove O'Neill's citation of biblical parable right and applicable to profit-mongering, war-loving, neo-colonial, and stern-realist America, Willy buys his own warped reality for good by killing himself, foolishly convinced that Biff would benefit materially from his death. In fact, Willy's American fate was sealed long before with O'Neill caution: "we squandered our soul by trying to possess something outside of it, and we'll end up as that game usually does, by losing our soul and the thing outside it too" (Wilson 18).

Nonetheless, unlike Willy and even Stanley, Hickey has been a successful salesman: is well liked by customers and peers, has pockets full of money, and obviously has not lost his job. Hickey makes more profound impact as a cultural archetype of the salesman in the 1940s than Miller's Willy since O'Neill realized the inherent "sickness" of American psyche better than any author of twentieth century—that the tragedy of the United States is not of failure but rather one of success. Willy holds on to his foolish ideal until the end in spite of its certain failure in his life, whereas Hickey rejects the ideal of fitting in, being liked, and of easy accumulation of money, because it has succeeded for him too effortlessly and too well—the way America, after emerging as the richest and the most powerful country on earth in immediate post-World War II years when the entire Europe was reeling under debris, found its success as hollow and frustrating.

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

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

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

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

Diggins contends that American Declaration of Independence seems to be “a series of broken trust” since in reality, as Tocqueville perceived, it was used to serve the self-interest of a group; he continues, “Abraham Lincoln, who urged Americans to live up to ‘the mystic chords of memory,’ accused Southern slaveholders of betraying the Declaration’s affirmation of equality, and they accused him of betraying the Constitution’s protection of slavery as a species of property” (243). To O’Neill, Southerners’ proclivity towards accumulating wealth through slave trade, the “original sin” as well as the birth of capitalistic desire, is what unsettles and punishes the soul, as seen in The Emperor Jones. Although Richard in Ah, Wilderness!, Hogan in Moon for the Misbegotten and Yank and Long in The Hairy Ape are among many a character who give vent to their anti-capitalistic feelings, quite complying with the playwright’s notion of America as “the greatest failure” for “los[ing] [its] own soul,” the playwright nonetheless corroborates through Irishman Larry in The Iceman Cometh that radical politics of anarchism and socialism fare the same way as capitalism since the leaders are putting their personal desires ahead of people, church, or state. Thus anarchism and socialism are doomed to failure, like capitalist democracy; Larry says, “I know they [anarchists and socialists]’re damned fools, most of them, as stupidly greedy for power as the worst capitalist they attack” (1.579).

Furthermore, O’Neill, essentially being a dramatist of ideas, although was critical of the desire-prone democracy and was cautioning America of the “perils of [its] pride,” the way Lincoln did (Diggins xv), was nevertheless the “only major writer” in Europe and America of his time not to have given in to socialist or communist philosophy as a possible alternative to democracy. Tellingly, he was one of the few American writers who knew that communism would not work, that indeed it would turn out to be the cruelest of illusions, the “pipe dream” of the Left, the “opium of the intellectuals” that would later overtake China and much of Southeast Asia. What is more, O’Neill was the only major writer, in Europe as well as America, who identified with the left and yet remained extremely cynical of communism even before the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917. While American playwrights were sympathetic to Soviet Russia (Clifford Odets, John Howard Lawson, Arthur Miller) and their European counterparts wildly enthusiastic (Bertolt Brecht, Sean O’Casey, George Bernard Shaw), O’Neill alone was able to comprehend that the promise of politics had simply replaced the promise of religion in claiming to save the world from sin and redemption (Diggins xiv).

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

If dere’s one ting more’n anudder I cares nothin’ about, it’s de sucker game you and Hugo call de Movement. (*He chuckles—reminiscently*) Reminds me of damn fool argument me and Mose Porter has de udder night. He’s drunk and I’m drunker. He says, “Socialists and Anarchists, we ought to shoot dem dead. Dey’s all no-good sons of bitches.” I says, “Hold on, you talk ’s if Anarchists and Socialists was de same.” “Dey is,” he says. “Dey’s both no-good bastards.” “No dey ain’t,” I says. “I’ll explain the difference. De Anarchist he never works. He drinks but he never buys, and if he do ever get a nickel, he blows it on bombs, and he wouldn’t give you nothin’. So go ahead and shoot him, But de socialist, sometimes, he’s got a job, and if he gets ten bucks, he’s bound by his religion to split fifty-fifty wid you. You say—how about my cut, Comrade? And you gets the five. So you don’t shoot no socialist while I’m around. Dat is, not if dey got anything. Of course, if dey’s broke, den dey’s no-good bastards, too.” (*He laughs, immensely tickled.*) (1.575)

The inevitable question is, then, why the American Dream of realism or capitalism failed Hickey and Willy when they were not at all threatened by the alien philosophy of communism? Why the pipe dreamers in The Iceman Cometh are whiling away on cheap wine and talking rubbish and are not in favor of the new capitalist American order where everyone was equal in his or her opportunity to maximize his or her gain, to double or triple the profit margin? The answer seems easy: the realism that ignores human suffering is not a genuine realism at all, the new-day tradition and culture that turns everyone into a seller or a buyer and teaches greed is

good is not an authentic one by any stretch of imagination. Thus the barflies at Hope's considered the world outside their saloon a wasteland, preferred Pruforkian inertia, and got engrossed into Buchanan booze.

O'Neill's The Iceman Cometh speculates on theory of "forced sale" and scrutinizes the newly-formed American order that would govern the remaining of twentieth century where the brand of realism or capitalism would be sold to the outside world in the names of democracy, free enterprise, globalization, etc. which, according to cultural theorists of today, are nothing but "the names [of] the global dissemination of capitalism" (During 81). America sold these to the Vietnamese, Nicaraguans, Salvadorians, Iraqis, Afghans, etc., never realizing that—like Hickey, Stanley, and Willy—what it is actually selling is death. The term "salesman" thus can be perceived as an *abstraction* used by these three playwrights to carry a point of view, and hence they did not consider it necessary to mention what exactly their traveling salesman-protagonists were selling—for they were selling the product called *death*, traveling and covering distances and thus conforming to an American worldview that later would suit Anthony Giddens' famous explanation of globalization in latter's The Consequences of Modernity (64). Hickey sold it to his wife, one bar member, and finally to himself; Stanley to Blanche, and to some extent, Mitch; and Willy to himself and to his sons.

¹ Though Professor White mentions David Mamet's Glengarry Glen Ross (1984) in the same vein with Miller's Death of a Salesman and O'Neill's The Iceman Cometh, it can be argued that unlike the protagonists of the two modern playwrights, Mamet's Shelly Levene apprises audiences of his selling product (real estate property), and although all three plays' common motif emerges as why-he-dunit, Mamet's play has a different historical bearing altogether. Instead of O'Neill's and Miller's post-WWII portrayal of American success and economic boom, Glengarry Glen Ross deals with the rumbles of corporate culture under ideological manipulation, direct marketing and strict management strategy of lying, bulling, and catching upon customers' negative emotions, from greed to feeling of inadequacy. Shelly Levene undoubtedly is an offshoot of O'Neill's Hickey and Miller's Willy, but essentially Mamet's technique is more prone to postmodern culture, situations and impulses. "The Iceman Cometh as Infertility Myth." The Eugene O'Neill Review 24.1-2 (Spring/Fall 2000). 30 July 2007. <<http://www.eoneill.com/library/review/24-1.2/24-1.2k.htm>>.

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Eugene O'Neill, qtd. in Mullet (1922: 118, 120). There are several reasons for the preeminence of Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953) as the twentieth-century American dramatist. His greatest works, *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *The Iceman Cometh* (written between 1939 and 1941), continue to be performed to this day. During his lifetime he received three Pulitzer Prizes for Drama - *Beyond the Horizon* in 1920, *Anna Christie* in 1921, *Strange Interlude* in 1928 - and a fourth, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, posthumously in 1956. In 1936 he became the only twentieth-century American dramatist awarded t

The Iceman Cometh [Eugene O'Neill] on Amazon.com. *FREE* shipping on qualifying offers. The Place: Harry Hope's bar, a cheap gin-mill of the five-cent whiskey, last-resort variety situated downtown on the West Side of New York. The Time: Salesman Hickey's birthday celebration. Listen Playing Paused You're listening to a sample of the Audible audio edition. Learn more. See this image. Follow the Author. Eugene O'Neill. + Follow. Similar authors to follow. Eugene O'Neill mined the tragedies of his own life for this depiction of a seedy, skid row saloon in 1912, peopled by society's failures: worn-out anarchists, failed con artists, drifters, whores, pimps, and informers. The pipe-dreaming drunks of Harry Hope's bar numb themselves with rotgut gin and make grandiose plans, while waiting for the annual appearance of the big-spending, fast-talking salesman, Hickey. Considered by many to be the Nobel Prize-winning playwright's finest work, *The Iceman Cometh* exposes the human need for illusion as an antidote to despair. The recent gripping, critically acclaimed Broadway production, starring Kevin Spacey, has highlighted anew the subversive genius of O'Neill's play. *The Iceman Cometh* (published in 1940) and *Long Day's Journey into Night* (published in 1956 after O'Neill's death) are widely recognized to be two of Eugene O'Neill's best plays. Both belong to his late plays and apart from that bear a lot of similarities. *The Iceman Cometh* deals with the attempt of the hardware salesman Hickey to free his friends and former drinking pals in Harry's Bar from their "pipe dreams" (*The Iceman Cometh* 9). Monika Reif-Hälsler gives a very good definition of O'Neill's concept of pipe dreams in Eugene O'Neill 1988 : "œer [der pipe dream] hat die Funktion, die existenzbedrohende Erfahrung. Although even here they keep up the appearances of life with a few harmless pipe dreams about yesterday and tomorrows" (Ibid 19f.).