LARRY SLADE IN THE LIGHT OF THE WORSHIP
OF DIONYSUS IN EUGENE O’NEILL’S
IRONIC TRAGEDY, THE ICEMAN COMETH

by

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Title of Thesis/Project/Extended Essay

Larry Slade in the Light of the Worship of Dionysus in Eugene O'Neill's Ironic Tragedy, The Iceman Cometh

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This essay on Eugene O’Neill’s *The Iceman Cometh* arises from an attempt to understand why Larry Slade refuses to help Don Parritt express and accept the guilt he feels for betraying his mother. Most critics assume or argue that Larry knows exactly what Parritt, Hickey and the rest think and feel—a point this essay disputes. Not only does Larry not fully understand Parritt and Hickey but he does not understand himself as fully as he believes. Even when he assents to Parritt’s decision to kill himself it is far from clear how fully Larry understands the necessity of the act. O’Neill’s audience, however, may feel the necessity of Parritt’s death as an ancient Greek may have felt necessity in witnessing the punishment of Oedipus.

The analogy between Parritt’s death and the punishment of Oedipus is not incidental. O’Neill’s interest in Greek tragedy did not end in 1931 with *Mourning Becomes Electra*, but is more deeply internalized in the late plays. This essay considers *The Iceman Cometh* as an expression of O’Neill’s sense of the Dionysian. In a Dionysian context we can understand Larry and Parritt better than they have been previously understood. The Dionysian context exposes the dramatic irony behind Larry’s consciously ironic words of
wisdom and defensive behavior. Part One is an examination of parallels between Euripides' Bacchae and The Iceman Cometh. It analyses the limits that Judeo-Christian dualism imposes on Larry's thinking. This mind-set affects not only Larry but Hickey and the regulars of the bar.

Part Two returns to Larry's relation with Parritt. It asks how Larry understands Parritt's suicide and how much he can learn from it about himself and about death. It concludes that Larry's understanding of both Parritt and himself is inhibited by the Judeo-Christian dualism that controls his mind. O'Neill escapes the dualism by using his theatre to return to an older mythos, that of the theatre of Dionysus.
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INTRODUCTION

This essay looks at Eugene O’Neill’s *The Iceman Cometh* from the point of view of the myth and cult of Dionysus and ancient Greek tragedy. The comparison between Euripides’ Dionysian tragedy, *The Bacchae*, and *The Iceman* exposes the limits of Judeo-Christian dualism which O’Neill transcends. In *The Iceman* O’Neill attains a level of ironic tragedy which creates a link between the modern theater and the theater of Euripides and Sophocles. Looking at O’Neill’s play from this perspective establishes a context in which to understand why Larry Slade refuses to help Don Parritt express and accept the guilt he feels for betraying his mother.

Most critics assume or argue that Larry knows exactly what Parritt, the salesman Hickey and the regulars of Hope’s saloon think and feel—a point this essay disputes. Not only does Larry not fully understand Parritt and Hickey but he does not understand himself as fully as he believes. Even when he assents to Parritt’s decision to kill himself it is far from clear how fully Larry understands the necessity of the act.

O’Neill’s audience, however, may feel the necessity of Parritt’s death as an ancient Greek may have felt necessity in witnessing the punishment of Oedipus. O’Neill’s audience experiences Parritt’s necessity within a modern theater descended from the first theater of the worship of Dionysus.
On the other hand, Larry and the rest of O’Neill’s characters lack any communal network or forum in which to experience tragedy in the Greek sense. O’Neill and his audience may transcend the limits of Judeo-Christian dualism through the theater but the broken down men of "The End of the Line Café" cannot.

O’Neill’s interest in Greek tragedy did not end in 1931 with *Mourning Becomes Electra*, but is more deeply internalized in the late plays. This continued interest is reflected in the way in which O’Neill uses the Dionysian in relation with Judeo-Christian dualism. In a Dionysian context we can understand Larry and Parritt better than they have been previously understood. The Dionysian context exposes the dramatic irony behind Larry’s consciously ironic words of wisdom and defensive behavior. In Part One of this essay, an examination of parallels between Euripides’ *Bacchae* and *The Iceman* leads into an analysis of the limits that Judeo-Christian dualism imposes on Larry’s thinking.

Part One establishes the connection between Hickey’s guilt-ridden state and the suffering, mad god, Dionysus. Driven by overwhelming ambivalence Hickey murders his wife Evelyn. He arrives at Hope’s saloon like a pseudo-Dionysian priest selling Death. The salesman manages to shatter the fragile illusory network of pipe dreams established in the asylum from loss and guilt provided by Hope’s saloon.

Part One then makes the case that Parritt’s arrival also marks the intrusion of a mad Dionysian energy. He has
betrayed his mother by acting upon his intense ambivalent feelings for her. Parritt's actions result in his anarchist mother's imprisonment and he feels as if he has killed her in taking away her freedom. Parritt and Hickey are shown to have been driven by the elemental desires which the worship of Dionysus traditionally unleashes. Working together and apart, Hickey and Parritt manage to penetrate Larry's ironic armor.

In Part Two, the effect of Parritt's demands on Larry to feel are exposed. The tortured young man seduces the cynical old man into confronting the memory of the past. Evidence for the appearance of Larry's repressed desires is found in the frequency and vehemence of the old man's denials. Larry, a rationalist priest, must live with the irrationality of Parritt's guilt and the mad rightness of his suicide. In Parritt, Larry is confronted with the irrational, Dionysian forces he has spent his later years detaching himself from.

Part Two asks how Larry understands Parritt's suicide and how much he can learn from it about himself and about death. It concludes that Larry's understanding of both Parritt and himself is inhibited by the Judeo-Christian dualism that controls his mind. At the end of The Iceman Larry sits poised between the devastating reality of Parritt's dead body, which lies just outside the bar's window, and the clan in which the old man once served as an active member. In his anesthetized state Larry is isolated
from "The Palace of Pipe Dreams" where he once found asylum. He is caught between what he sees as two polarities. In The Iceman O'Neill escapes the Judeo-Christian dualism which plagues his characters by using the theater to return to an older mythos, that of the theater of Dionysus.
PART ONE

Critics have tended to use Nietzsche's version of the Dionysian in The Birth of Tragedy to illuminate the Dionysian sensibility operating in O'Neill's play, The Iceman Cometh. However, the revealing parallels between O'Neill's play, the particulars of the myth and cult of Dionysus, and its various early Greek literary adaptations remain more or less untouched. In examining such parallels using Euripides' Bacchae for the purposes of elucidation, the poetic and ironic coherence of O'Neill's ritualistic and symbolic drama, particularly the coherence embodied in the final moments of the play, becomes evident. This essay will explore O'Neill's ironic tragedy, The Iceman Cometh, in the light of Dionysian worship in an attempt to come to a more comprehensive understanding of the fate of O'Neill's enigmatic character, Larry Slade.  

In a letter written to George Jean Nathan in 1940, O'Neill refers to The Iceman as his "opus," stating that he feels "there are moments in it that hit as deeply and truly into the farce and humour and pity and ironic tragedy of life as anything in modern drama" [my italics] (Selected Letters 501). The overlap of the ironic and tragic is manifest throughout The Iceman, culminating in the final images of the play and especially in Slade's final ambiguous words. The dramatic effect of these final moments finds its
source in the tension between a modern, ineffectual Christian sentiment which struggles to keep life's fundamental dualities from merging so that they remain containable and distinct and a chaotic, inexorable Dionysian energy which undercuts such human efforts—the same energy which formed the inspiration for ancient Greek drama. In his book, *Dionysus Myth and Cult*, Walter Otto speaks of the primeval forces evoked in Greek myth and cult as they are revealed in the figure of Dionysus:

...the polarities of that which has being appear... in all their colossal proportions, in mutual confrontation. No arbitrary concept, no desire for salvation reconciles them.... Oneness itself is revealed to Greek myth and cult as the deity who is mad—as Dionysus.

His duality has manifested itself to us in the antitheses of ecstasy and horror, infinite vitality and savage destruction; in the pandemonium in which deathly silence is inherent; in the immediate presence which is at the same time absolute remoteness. All of his gifts and attendant phenomena give evidence of the sheer madness of his dual essence: prophecy, music, and finally wine, the flamelike herald of the god, which has in it both bliss and brutality. At the height of ecstasy all of these paradoxes suddenly unmask themselves and reveal their names to be Life and Death. (120-21)

Beyond good and evil this relentless energy functions as the source of both the ironic and the tragic in O'Neill's "opus." The energy underlines mankind's tragic, pathetic and, at times, humorous attempts to resist and repress the "Force behind" (O'Neill *Selected Letters* 195).
O'Neill seems able to penetrate this inscrutable "Force behind" in the process of creating a psychological drama. O'Neill makes his characters experience this intangible Dionysian force. Characters struggle (often in their interaction with one another) to make sense of, or resist, the unavoidable presence of the elemental forces which drive them. These forces are irrational and characters suffer because they are handicapped by the limits of their rational, dualistic minds. O'Neill creates a drama where the paradoxical, elemental forces of Life and Death become comprehensible to an audience as the characters on the stage repeatedly come up against the limits of their minds. The recurrent psychological dramatic patterns enable the audience to move beyond the limits of the psychological and rational into the realm of the Dionysian, Greek tragic experience.

In a 1925 letter to Arthur Hobson Quinn, O'Neill describes himself as a "melting pot" for the multitude of modern literary "methods" ascribed to his work by the critics, pointing out that his efforts to transfigure modern values in a tragic theater descended from the Greeks are often neglected:

But where I feel myself most neglected is where I set most store by myself - as a bit of a poet who has labored with the spoken word to evolve original rhythms of beauty where beauty apparently isn't... and to see the transfiguring nobility of tragedy, in as near the Greek sense as one can grasp it, in seemingly the most ignoble, debased lives.... I'm always acutely conscious of the Force behind - (Fate,
God, our biological past creating our present, whatever one calls it - Mystery, certainly) - and of the one eternal tragedy of Man in his glorious, self-destructive struggle to make the Force express him instead of being, as an animal is, an infinitesimal incident in its expression. And my profound conviction is that this is the only subject worth writing about and that it is possible - or can be! - to develop a tragic expression in terms of transfigured modern values and symbols in the theatre which may to some degree bring home to members of a modern audience their ennobling identity with the tragic figures on the stage. Of course, this is very much of a dream, but where the theatre is concerned, one must have a dream, and the Greek dream in tragedy is the noblest ever! (Selected Letters 195)

O'Neill's dream, "the Greek dream," comes true in an ironic tragedy in which "seemingly the most ignoble, debased lives" of the bums of Harry Hope's saloon are ennobled.

O'Neill's Iceman is a modern adaptation of a very ancient cult to be enacted in dramatic form as was Euripides' Bacchae in his day. Although O'Neill was an avid reader of Nietzsche's The Birth of Tragedy, a seminal study of Greek Tragedy which marks Euripides as the prime force behind the death of Tragedy altogether--not to mention Poetry--I doubt very much that O'Neill would have agreed with Nietzsche's assessment of Euripides. Nietzsche sees Euripides as the agent through which "everyday man forced his way from the spectators' seats onto the stage" (77) and as the first "to reconstruct tragedy purely on the basis of an un-Dionysian art, morality, and world view" (81).

Euripides, like O'Neill, brings the "everyday man...onto the stage" not as a substitute for the awe-inspiring God as Nietzsche suggests, but as one of the men
(godless in O'Neill's case) whose terrifying suffering at the hands of Dionysus inspires awe and enlists the audience's participation while inundating (often ironically) any one "morality" or "world view." In his introduction to Euripides' *Bacchae*, E.R. Dodds undermines the common question, "was Euripides 'for' Dionysis or 'against' him?" (xiv), posed by nineteenth-century critics such as Nietzsche:

The nineteenth-century question rested in fact on the assumption, common to the rationalist school and their opponents, and still too often made, that Euripides was, like some of his critics, more interested in propaganda than in the dramatist's proper business. This assumption I believe to be false. What is true is that in many of his plays he sought to inject contemporary content - recognizing in the heroes of old stories the counterparts of fifth-century types, and restating mythical situations in terms of fifth-century conflicts.... Euripides used these conflicts not to make propaganda but as a dramatist should, to make tragedy out of their tension. There was never a writer who more conspicuously lacked the propagandist's faith in easy and complete solutions. His favourite method is to take a one-sided point of view, a noble half-truth, to exhibit its nobility, and then to exhibit the disaster to which it leads its blind adherents - because it is after all only part of the truth. (xlvi)

Like Euripides, O'Neill uses "contemporary content - recognizing in the heroes of old stories the counterparts of" modern man. Hickey, the pseudo-Dionysian preacher selling death, blows into Hope's saloon using salesman psychology to manipulate his fellow man. Larry, the more metaphysically complex sceptic of this new religion is a self-proclaimed nihilist and defender of the religion of
pipe dreams tormented by a residual Christian faith. Both modern characters suffer for their adherence to the "half-truths" of O'Neill's day.

The dramatic process to which O'Neill's audience is subject during The Iceman resembles the one to which the audience of The Bacchae must have been subject: Dodds states that the poet of The Bacchae "has neither belittled the joyful release of vitality which Dionysiac experience brings nor softened the animal horror of 'black' maenadism; deliberately he leads his audience through the whole gamut of emotions, from sympathy with the persecuted god, through the excitement of the palace miracles and the gruesome tragi-comedy of the toilet scene, to share in the end the revulsion of Cadmus against that inhuman injustice" (xlvi-xlvii). In The Bacchae the audience is subject to sudden emotional shifts which parallel those of the everyday men who people the stage, and in The Iceman the shifts are less dependent on action than they are on shifting emotional alliances between characters. The journey is psychological, and whatever the "Force behind" may be it is experienced internally and not as some objectified outside force--no matter how strongly O'Neill's characters wish to externalize it or "make the Force express him instead of being, as an animal is, an infinitesimal incident in its expression." In his introduction to Euripides' Heracles, William Arrowsmith describes the nature of a Euripidean hero's tragic conflict and in so doing reminds one of the inner drama exhibited in
O’Neill’s tortured characters: "Euripides...preserves the disorder of actual experience, measuring its horror against the unrequited illusion of order which sustains human beings. His image of tragic humanity is earned less in the conflict between the individual’s nature and the necessities imposed by a higher order than in the conflict between the individual and his own internalized necessities" (278). Essential to Euripidean tragedy and that of O’Neill is the futility and irony of mankind’s attempts to resist the overwhelming forces embodied in the figure of Dionysus. Moreover, what is most beautiful and horrible about O’Neill’s drama is the degree to which characters’ struggles mirror one another while remaining unique and tragic in their own right.

As descendants of early forms of Dionysian worship, these characters must participate in a ritual enactment of the traumatic life of a paradoxical god. How individuals respond to this process will vary, but no one is exempt from its devastating effect. As Otto says, Dionysus "is the suffering and dying god, the god of tragic contrast. And the inner force of this dual reality is so great that he appears among men like a storm, he staggers them, and he tames their opposition with the whip of madness. All tradition, all order must be shattered. Life becomes suddenly an ecstasy - an ecstasy of blessedness, but an ecstasy, no less, of terror" (78). In The Bacchae Dionysus enters as "a god incognito, disguised as a man" (155)
offering a brief sketch of his own supernatural birth and journeys on earth for the purpose of establishing his mysteries and rites so that he might be revealed on earth as a god—a god who returns to the place of his conception and the home of his earthly mother's grave determined to redeem his and his mother's name by inciting the women of Thebes to madness and the abandonment of their homes. All domestic order is shattered. With the exit of this determined god the audience is suddenly struck by the noise produced by the devotees of Dionysus, the Chorus of Asian Bacchae who announce and summon through their song and dance and wild drumming the presence of the god whose mysteries and rites they celebrate. However, as Otto states: "There is nothing which reveals the supernatural meaning of the incredible noise-making, which announces the god and accompanies him, so well as its counterpart of deathlike silence into which it suddenly changes. A wild uproar and a numbed silence—these are only different forms of the Nameless, of that which shatters all composure" (93) in The Bacchae—and The Iceman.

O'Neill's play begins with the bums of "The End of the Line Café,"3 "de Morgue" (604), asleep in a deathlike atmosphere, except of course for Larry Slade, who "stares in front of him, an expression of tired tolerance giving his face the quality of a pitying but weary old priest's" (566). This scattered group of comatose bums await and begin to summon up the appearance of Hickey, "hardware drummer"
"a great one to make a joke of everything and cheer you up" (571) as the blues-stricken Larry relates to Rocky, the bartender, in the opening dialogue of the play. It is the spirit of this long-awaited Dionysian figure which prompts Willie Oban to invoke a prayer and break into song: "Let us join in prayer that Hickey, the Great Salesman, will soon arrive bringing the blessed bourgeois long green! Would that Hickey or Death would come! Meanwhile, I will sing a song" (586). When Hickey finally arrives, the once half-dead bums come alive and unify in their mutual religious ecstasy. "Start the service! Sing a God-damned hymn if you like. We'll all join in the chorus" (609) says the Chorus leader, Harry Hope. Hickey, like Dionysus, brings on music and of course, wine! William Arrowsmith adds a stage direction to The Bacchae which states that "Throughout the play he [Dionysus] wears a smiling mask" (155) and the stage directions which accompany Hickey's appearance indicate that "His expression is fixed in a salesman's winning smile" (607). An ancient god-like figure appears in the form of the modern, materialistic success story.

Hickey arrives at Hope's saloon possessed by an enthusiasm like that of the priest of Dionysus who seduces the king in Euripides' Bacchae and shatters all social order. Hickey has already brought about the destruction of his own illusory existence by murdering the principal source of security and stability in his life--a female figure who
also represents the source of his feelings of suffocation and guilt. Like Parritt, who manages to bring about the incarceration of his dominating, anarchist mother, Hickey has shattered the foundation of his illusory, repetitive existence in murdering his idealized, angelic, worshipped wife Evelyn. He has acted on his guilt and pain. Of course, this act is an act of madness as he murders the only stable source of self-affirmation and security in his life—no matter how illusory the security it is something he believes in. Hickey measures himself against what he perceives as Evelyn’s purity and goodness. Without her he is left godless. His vision of himself is so intimately tied to his belief in Evelyn’s purity and his own wretchedness that he is left without either belief or a sense of self. In Act Four, while relating the repeated cycle of his own debauchery and Evelyn’s guilt-producing forgiveness, Hickey says: "I hated myself more and more, thinking of all the wrong I’d done to the sweetest woman in the world who loved me so much" (699). It seems as if Evelyn loves the idea of a reformed man and not the living sinful form of the one who eventually appears after a periodical drunk brought on by the guilt attached to an adulterous act. In murdering Evelyn, Hickey murders his externalized conscience. He is left to face his internal conscience which has been at the root of his guilt all along. Unlike the priest of Dionysus in The Bacchae, who speaks of the rites and mysteries of a god, Hickey is a
false prophet who is incapable of handling the Dionysian forces which have released his ambivalent feelings toward his wife. He is simply a destructive force. Hickey now has no way of structuring his responses to the ongoing struggle to live, suffer and deal with loss, except of course through denial.

The fixed expression of Hickey's smiling mug is a direct descendant of the masks worn by Dionysus in early Greek drama which are the descendant of ancient cultic practices in the worship of this god of confrontation. In his discussion of the symbolic significance of the Dionysian mask Otto states that "it acts as the strongest symbol of presence. Its eyes, which stare straight ahead, cannot be avoided; its face, with its inexorable immobility, is quite different from other images which seem ready to move, to turn around, to step aside. Here there is nothing but encounter, from which there is no withdrawal - an immovable, spell-binding antipode...which was always a sacred object...[and] could be put on over a human face to depict the god or spirit who appears" (90). In the same vein, in an essay on masks published in three parts in the early 1930's while experimenting with masks on the stage, O'Neill writes in "Memoranda On Masks":

I hold more and more surely to the conviction that the use of masks will be discovered eventually to be the freest solution of the modern dramatist's problem as to how - with the greatest possible dramatic clarity and economy of means - he can express those profound hidden conflicts of the
mind which the probings of psychology continue
to disclose to us. He must find some method to
present this inner drama in his work, or confess
himself incapable of portraying one of the most
characteristic preoccupations and uniquely
significant, spiritual impulses of his time. (3)

By the time he comes to write The Iceman, O'Neill has
abandoned the use of the physical mask itself but remains
loyal to the symbolic principles behind the mask's presence.
Hickey's fixed smile, and the overwhelming and mesmerizing
effect of the often transfixed stares of all those who
people the stage in O'Neill's Dionysian drama, testify to
this legacy.

Of course, the Dionysian "Force behind" is "Nameless"
and uncontainable. It induces "deathlike silence" and death
longing or a mad appetite for action. Moreover, the
symbolic use of the facial expression and its ability to
present the "inner drama" is complemented by O'Neill's
unique use of the ambiguities, ironies and overall
suggestiveness of language—the medium of communication
through which we attempt to translate our experience
purposefully. Hickey's intoxicating "bustling energy" (670)
incites the inmates of the bar to uproarious laughter as
easily as to "deathlike silence." Hickey's expression of
the "Force behind" reduces "Jimmy Tomorrow" to "a dazed
dread" (642). He forces Jimmy to face the fact that it is
time for action. In Act Two, Hickey says to Jimmy, "We'll
soon know, eh? Tomorrow morning. No, by God, it's this
morning now!" (642), and Jimmy responds, "(with a dazed
dread) This morning?" (642). The immediacy of Hickey's presence and the overwhelming effect of the word, "this," combine to shatter whatever illusions of self-assurance Jimmy has managed to preserve in Hope's asylum. Jimmy will soon take to the streets of the outside world in pursuit of success only to find himself incapable of living up to this pipe dream. Parritt's comment to Larry, "There's something not human behind his [Hickey's] damned grinning and kidding" (635), aptly describes Hickey's effect on Jimmy.

The make-up of each character's "inner drama" is unique, but the forces which drive them emanate from the fact of their human condition as it is revealed in the mask of Dionysus. As Willie now understands after being hounded by Hickey overnight: "It isn't what he [Hickey] says. It's what you feel behind - what he hints" (632) which drives him mad and into action or as Willie sees it at the moment, to "wake up to" (632) himself. This same indefinable force which Parritt characterizes as "not human" makes people recognize the essence of our humanity, binding us in our suffering and enabling us to feel compassion. It eludes the limits of rational discourse and is most comfortable in the ambiguities and resonances of the ritualistic, poetic and symbolic. In The Iceman O'Neill finds a way to present the "inner drama" in the same vein as the "one true theatre" he so admired throughout his career and spoke about in 1933 in the last part of his three-part essay on masks, "A
Dramatist's Notebook," where he describes what he means by an "imaginative" theatre:

I mean the one true theatre, the age-old theatre, the theatre of the Greeks and Elizabethans, a theatre that could dare to boast...that it is a legitimate descendant of the first theatre that sprang, by virtue of man's imaginative interpretations of life, out of his worship of Dionysus. I mean a theatre returned to its highest and sole significant function as a Temple where the religion of a poetical interpretation and symbolical celebration of life is communicated to human beings, starved in spirit by their soul-stifling daily struggle to exist as masks among the masks of living! (2)

In "The End of the Line Café" the "masks of living" have been damaged to the extent that they can no longer withstand the "soul-stifling daily struggle." The bums have chosen to insulate themselves in a communal network or mask of pipe dreams. The raw guilt and self-loathing which Hickey and Parritt bring to the bar is enough to upset this fragile network of illusion based on a denial of the threatening forces emanating from these two outsiders. Prior to their entrance, however, O'Neill's Dionysian drama is taking shape. Behind the surface pipe dreams lie the losses of the past and the disabling feelings which go along with them—feelings driven by the "inhuman" forces excited and experienced during the "worship of Dionysus."

At the outset of O'Neill's play, the frozen, idealized, selectively remembered past and the alcoholic stupor which perpetuates it, function so as to keep the forces of Life and Death at bay. Up until the appearance of Parritt, and
then Hickey, Larry Slade was probably most successful at maintaining a distance between himself and that which has driven him to Harry’s asylum. In the opening dialogue of the play he professes to be a man without desire whose pipe dreams "are all dead and buried behind" (570) him. However, the threat of Life, and thus Death, permeate his most profound moments. After denying any feelings of attachment toward the anarchist Movement to which he had devoted his life, Larry says to Rocky, "So I said to the world, God bless all here, and may the best man win and die of gluttony! And I took a seat in the grandstand of philosophical detachment to fall asleep observing the cannibals do their death dance. (He chuckles at his own fancy - reaches over and shakes Hugo’s shoulder.) Ain’t I telling him the truth, Comrade Hugo?" (570). Larry finds his analogy disturbing and the fact that he immediately reaches over to his "Comrade Hugo" to confirm his version of the "truth" suggests that he is not as secure in his "philosophical detachment" as he would like others to believe.

Unless one is aware of the parallels between O’Neill’s drama and that of the worship of Dionysus, the source of Larry’s insecurity and the ironies behind his sharp wit and "cloak of irony" (Black 21) are never fully evident. In the back of Larry’s mind on this early morning is the sudden and unannounced appearance of Don Parritt—a ghost from the past come alive. Parritt’s association with the destabilizing
forces embodied in Dionysus is established gradually as the connection between himself and Hickey develops alongside the intensification of O’Neill’s drama. The spirit of Parritt is first evoked in connection with Hickey. In the absence of Hickey and his overflowing "bankroll," Joe Mott suddenly thinks of the "young guy" who "Had a roll": "...I was dreamin’ Hickey come in de door, crackin’ one of dem drummer’s jokes, wavin’ a big bankroll and we was all goin’ be drunk for two weeks.... Wait a minute, dough. I got an idea. Say, Larry, how ‘bout dat young guy, Parritt, come to look you up last night and rented a room?..." (574).

At this point in the play the one thing which Parritt and Hickey seem to have in common is the fact that they possess a "big bankroll" or, as Willie states in his celebratory fashion, they "arrive bringing the blessed bourgeois long green!" However, like the Dionysian wine which it buys, the "long green" carries with it both the bliss and the brutality manifest in the high of intoxication and the low of much more than a hangover--the low of crippled lives based on addiction and denial--thus enacting a life and death ritual. In a previously cited passage in which Willie invokes his prayer, he follows his statement about the "bourgeois long green!" with the words: "Would that Hickey or Death would come!" The tenuousness of life and the threat of its merging with death and the greed and desire which this green stuff inspires--as well as the other signs of success from the outside world--are the very thing
the regulars of Hope's saloon look to avoid. The wave of the "bankroll" and the paradoxical forces it unleashes function very much like the Dionysian thyrsus which when struck against the ground unlocks such elemental liquids of the earth as milk, honey and wine.

However, no such mythical beverage is available to Hickey or Larry. The two are incapable of withstanding feelings of ambivalence as they can only experience their lives in polar terms. The fluid, sensual and ecstatic presence of the elemental only serves to paralyze those who have no ritual framework through which to experience it. Willie wants to see Hickey as Dionysus but the salesman is a false prophet. Hickey hates his own sexuality and carnal being. He never escapes the "Home [that] was like a jail" (693), where the "religious bunk" (693) of his minister father was an everyday presence. As Hickey himself says: "I take after him [his father], and that's what made me a good salesman" (693). In Evelyn, Hickey finds his morally authoritative substitute for his father. Typical of the Christian dualism which Hickey is raised on and believes himself to have reacted against, Evelyn is able to deny the significance of Hickey's promiscuity by separating what she sees as "only his [Hickey's] body" (697) from love. Hickey's conscience can do nothing but bow down to this authority and hate his sinful self.

Hickey's carnality maddens him, Larry's leads to paralysis. Larry's idealized vision of himself as a
bodiless mind perched in the grandstand analyzing everything it sees is tortured every time it is made to acknowledge the fact of his own mortality and "the dirty, stinking bit of withered old flesh which is...[his] beautiful life" (675). He is paralyzed not by "seeing all sides of a question" (580), but by the Christian tradition within which the question is framed. "To be a worldly success at anything, especially revolution, you have to wear blinders like a horse and see only straight in front of you. You have to see, too, that this is all black, and that is all white" (580-81), says the ex-anarchist from his presumed position of philosophical detachment in Act One. For Larry, and Western man in general, life is seen in terms of material, ideological or even spiritual success, as if the moment of living which shapes people were some malleable external object. Larry is incapable "of being, as an animal is, an infinitesimal incident," an expression of the "Force behind" (O’Neill, see p. 3). Here, O’Neill seems to echo Nietzsche’s view of Christianity expressed in The Birth of Tragedy:

Christianity was from the beginning, essentially and fundamentally, life’s nausea and disgust with life, merely concealed behind, masked by, dressed up as, faith in "another" or "better" life. Hatred of "the world," condemnations of the passions, fear of beauty and sensuality, a beyond invented the better to slander this life, at bottom a craving for the nothing, for the end...life must continually and inevitably be in the wrong, because life is something essentially amoral - and eventually, crushed by the weight of contempt and the eternal No, life must then be felt to be unworthy of desire and
altogether worthless. (23)

The religious instinct as it is expressed in the worship of Dionysus (an amoral god) is inconceivable. Larry must look to master the world or transcend it and the god, the "Beloved Christ" or "Almighty God" (675), to which he is constantly appealing (as an integral part of his vocabulary) in his most desperate moments is either dead or incapable of dealing with the need to express the most elemental of desires. In The Iceman the association of greed and desire stems from an underlying desire for life that once found its expression in the worship of Dionysus. In Act Three Larry responds to Hickey's pointed questions, inadvertently revealing his desire to live while in the process of denying it. No longer interested in the "greed of the human circus" (674) the old man calls life, his underlying religious impulse to live passionately chokes on itself as it has nowhere to go:

Larry - (with increasing bitter intensity, more as if he were fighting with himself than with Hickey) I'm afraid to live, am I? - and even more afraid to die! So I sit here, with my pride drowned on the bottom of a bottle, keeping drunk so I won't see myself shaking in my britches with fright, or hear myself whining and praying: Beloved Christ, let me live a little longer at any price! If it's only for a few days more, or a few hours even, have mercy, Almighty God, and let me still clutch greedily to my yellow heart this sweet treasure, this jewel beyond price, the dirty, stinking bit of withered old flesh which is my beautiful little life! (He laughs with a sneering, vindictive self-loathing, staring inward at himself with contempt and hatred. Then abruptly he makes Hickey again the antagonist.) You think you'll make me admit that to myself? (674-75)
The conflict is internal. The Dionysian energy emanating from Hickey is the catalyst for Larry’s turmoil. Sexuality, mortality and guilt surface in the wake of Hickey’s probing questions and the booze which once freed one from these realities is now ineffectual. Larry’s religious instinct (like Hickey’s) suffocates in a world where the materialistic and the Christian merge to pervert or deny the immediate and passionate. The truth of his mortality and the desire to live meet and eat away at the illusion of detachment. This man is in a state of nausea and pain and, as he experiences it, he can see no way out but the death which speaks through his rotting soul. His anachronistic Christian faith is useless, if not disabling, in the face of his most fundamental desires and he is left with no choice but to deny life. The "death dance" is a dance for life, and he can’t stand it. It obfuscates all objectivity and demands feeling, suffering and mourning. Larry senses and fears his own desires, but he cannot understand them. Nonetheless, he is gradually and inevitably seduced into participating in the forces which compel both Hickey and Parritt.

Like Pentheus, the tragic young king of *The Bacchae*, Larry attempts to resist the seductive powers of the "god incognito," the "stranger" (*The Bacchae* 164). In *The Iceman* Larry is the first to name Parritt the "stranger" (581) and he does so in an effort to reassure himself and Parritt of
his self-control and distance from this prying young man from the past. "But the god appeared with such wildness and demanded such unheard-of things, so much that mocked all human order, that he first had to over-power the hearts of men before they could do him homage" (76), as Otto says of Dionysus. Hickey, and less conspicuously but more pointedly Parritt, have like effects on Larry. In the myth of Dionysus the god is the one who "hunts the wild goat" (The Bacchae 160) and Euripides' Bacchae remains true to this tradition, as does O'Neill's Dionysian drama. Larry is the only one of the bums referred to as "de old goat" (623), as he is one of three pipe dreamers whom Hickey wants most to "help" (631) or convert and the only soul Parritt can turn to for understanding. As Stephen Black states in his article, "Tragic Anagnorisis in The Iceman Cometh": "If Larry understands [what Parritt's done], as he understood that the child [Parritt] was serious and lonely, Parritt will be less isolated in his guilt, and his crime will seem at least human and comprehensible, no matter how noxious" (20). Parritt is like the "god incognito" of Euripides' play--referred to as the "stranger" by the stubborn young king who defends his social and religious order when he rejects Dionysus--suddenly appearing from a distant place (the West Coast) as the "stranger" with "a strange smile" (580) demanding "unheard-of things" from the stubborn "old goat."
Parritt challenges Larry's fixed, safe version of the past. Larry believes that he left the Coast because he had "become convinced the Movement was only a beautiful pipe dream" (580) and Parritt seems to believe it was "on account of Mother" (580), who "you'd think...was the Movement" (581). The implication seems to be that neither version is "the truth." Both characters are committed to their versions of the past and believe them to be real. Belief is what makes it real in O'Neill's "religious" drama. We construct our own reality. In refusing Parritt's demands on him to judge, Larry says: "I'd never let myself believe a word you told me" (637). "The lie of a pipe dream is what gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of us" (569-70), as Larry announces at the outset of the play. Up until Parritt's arrival, Larry is secure in his belief in himself as a detached philosopher and in his more or less black-and-white version of the past. Parritt's need to understand the reason for his betrayal of his mother and the source of his suffering force Larry to protect his own reality and social position as "De Old Foolosopher" (570). From their first exchange of words, Parritt is dealing with the breakdown of his own version of the past, which is grounded in the way he perceives his relationship with his mother. Parritt says, "(at once confused and guilty)...I keep forgetting she's in jail. It doesn't seem real. I can't believe it about her. She's always been so free. I - But I don't want to think of it" (581). The reality of his actions and his freedom seem
inconceivable in the light of his childhood conception of his mother and the consequences for her that follow from his pivotal actions. Larry reacts to this crisis of belief with "a puzzled pity in spite of himself" (581). Parritt continues on and asks: "What have you been doing all the years since you left - the Coast, Larry?" (581). Larry’s response reveals his unimpeachable desire to hold on to his illusory present and to resist the threat to this order which the stranger represents:

Larry - (sardonically) Nothing I could help doing. If I don’t believe in the Movement, I don’t believe in anything else either, especially not the State. I’ve refused to become a useful member of its society. I’ve been a philosophical drunken bum, and proud of it. (Abruptly his tone sharpens with resentful warning.) Listen to me. I hope you’ve deduced that I’ve my own reason for answering the impertinent questions of a stranger, for that’s all you are to me. I have a strong hunch you’ve come here expecting something of me...I’ll thank you to keep your life to yourself.... (581)

A moment earlier Larry insisted on his own reason for leaving the Movement and now he insists that he has his "own reason for answering the impertinent questions of a stranger." The more questions the kid asks and the more Larry feels, the more this disturbed old man feels the need to account for his behavior. But "Parritt asks Larry to feel, not think; that is why the old man so fears the youth" (Black 19). What Larry resists and what compels him to answer are embodied in the figure of Dionysus. The stranger and his plight pique Larry’s curiosity, drawing "de old
goat" out into the open. Larry is being seduced into a "death dance" from the start. The will not to believe is no match for the re-awakened desires triggered by Parritt's and Hickey's presence.

The two travellers, Parritt from the Coast, and Hickey, "All the way from the wilds of darkest Astoria" (610), work in conjunction with one another. Like the god of confrontation, Dionysus, the two seem to represent the forces of Life and Death. In Act One, after "sizing" (612) the youth up with an unrelenting stare, Hickey deduces that he and Parritt are "members of the same lodge" (612). In Act Two, confident that his feelings of guilt are behind him, Hickey spots in Parritt the hell that he once had inside himself (630). He is right in pointing out that "it's a woman" (630) at the root of Parritt's problems and not the "Great Cause" (630). Like the god which inspires his madness, Hickey has the ability to prophesy and his prediction that Parritt and Larry must "get to the final showdown" (631) is also correct. Hickey recognizes that Parritt's persistence and need to confront Larry with his problems will produce the same effect which Hickey is working toward: the destruction of all pipe dreams and the facing up to the truths of oneself.

The closer Hickey and Parritt get to penetrating Larry's consciousness, the more they merge and send his ordered existence into a tailspin. After Larry has come as close to admitting his own desire to live in a tragically
ironic and inward-looking speech of denial while under the fire of Hickey's probing questions, Parritt "lifts his head from his hands to glare at Larry - jeeringly" (675) to say: "That's the stuff, Hickey! Show the old yellow faker up! He can't play dead on me like this! He's got to help me!" (675). Hickey then says: "Yes, Larry, you've got to settle with him. I'm leaving you entirely in his hands. He'll do as good a job as I could at making you give up that old grandstand bluff" (675). Intuitively, Parritt recognizes that he must first bring Larry back to life before the old man can help him. "Look out how you try to taunt me back into life" (637) are Larry's furious words to Parritt in Act Two. Like Hickey, Parritt becomes a priest of confrontation. If Hickey is the "Iceman of Death" (667), Parritt is at some level the embodiment of Life. The two embody the paradoxical nature of existence which the Dionysian mask symbolizes. They work together and apart, consciously and unconsciously, neither of them fully aware of the consequences (or sources) of their actions for themselves or others.

On the other hand, Larry seems to realize the destructive course of Hickey's logic for the "whole family circle of inmates" (585). However, although he resists confrontation with the two "mad tortured bastards," he is never sure as to the implication of their influence on himself. His past and beliefs behind him, he is the only one without a pipe dream--without vulnerability--or so he
seems to think. But Parritt gets under his skin, although Larry is unaware of the kid’s effect. The safe distance between himself and the other inmates provided by the "condescending affectionate pity" (594) which all inmates feel toward one another while another is off dreaming, quickly deteriorates.

Prior to Hickey’s appearance and not too long after Larry has finished introducing his "whole family circle," the old man’s tolerance of the dreamers of his home shows signs of breaking down, thus exposing his own dependency on this community and the risks of isolation inherent in any behavior which threatens its dream network or established order. Mid-way through Act One, after a round of consecutive dreams has taken place, and Hope has just finished saying, "(...with condescending pity)...[that]...

Jimmy’s started them off smoking the same hop" (595), Larry breaks into the room’s sleepy silence with words that seem like an act of rebellion to Harry Hope, the curator of dreams:

Larry - ( aloud to himself - in his comically tense, crazy whisper) Be God, this bughouse will drive me stark, raving loony yet!

Hope - ( turns on him with fuming suspicion) What? What d’you say?

Larry - ( placatingly) Nothing, Harry. I had a crazy thought in my head.

Hope - ( irascibly) Crazy is right! Yah! The old wise guy! Wise, hell! A damned old fool Anarchist I-Won’t-Worker! I’m sick of you and Hugo, too. Bejees, you’ll pay up tomorrow, or
I’ll start a Harry Hope Revolution! I’ll tie a dispossess bomb to your tails that’ll blow you out in the street! Bejees, I’ll make your Movement move!... (595)

Hope has picked up on Larry’s feelings of superiority and the threat to the community inherent in those feelings and related them to a time when Larry once acted according to his beliefs and allowed his desires to express themselves in action. Hope intuitively senses Larry’s desire to "move," making it clear that there is no room for that kind of movement in this fragile world of pipe dreams where actual movement is illusory but real to the characters who believe in it. Immediately after Hope’s challenge, Larry takes back his comment, qualifying it as "a crazy thought." That is, it is a thought which leads one on the road to isolation, or at least alienation. To acknowledge aloud the hopelessness of pipe dreams and the pointlessness of their repetition is the beginning of the end of a world. This is Hickey’s death-call. It is a crime worthy of dispossesion and bound toward alienation and insanity. Hope’s saloon is "the last harbor." Larry’s position in this community is at stake and he knows it and behaves accordingly. Yet, two pages later, these disturbing feelings resurface and Larry says: "(aloud to himself more than to Parritt - with irritable wonder) Ah be damned! Haven’t I heard their visions a thousand times? Why should they get under my skin now? I’ve got the blues, I guess. I wish to hell Hickey’d turn up" (597). The
source of Larry's "blues" is sitting right beside him, determined to bring the old man back to life.

Nonetheless, Larry turns unconsciously toward Death in longing for Hickey. Hickey is selling salvation in Death—a kind of metaphysical fixity (like Heaven) which negates the significance of the living, often suffering moment. The Hickey who arrives succeeds in severing the network of dreams which holds this society together and in so doing encourages the regulars of Hope's saloon to attempt to act out their hopeless dreams in the outside world. This course of action is madness. On the other hand, Parritt's pull on Larry is toward a more complex version of the past. The fact that this young man can admit his hatred of his mother alongside his love for her (704) is part of Parritt's life-affirming role in this Dionysian drama. The acceptance of his ambivalent feelings toward his mother is the antithesis of Hickey's reaction to his hatred of Evelyn—hatred he cannot conceive of as real and therefore considers the product of an insane man (701).

Hickey's sense of reality springs from the society in which he lives—a society where a person can be found not guilty by reason of insanity. The assumption behind the law is that a person should be punished for his actions as long as he is in control of himself. The law does not distinguish between the subjective experience of guilt and the legal idea of guilt—it tends to assume they are the same. This is of course quite different from a Greek sense
of justice. For the Greeks, you are connected to what you do even if you do not have control. To deny this fact is to force a split between that part of yourself which acted and the awareness. O’Neill makes the distinction between our conception of law and that of the Greeks in juxtaposing Parritt’s personal, internal sense of guilt which is acted upon when he commits suicide and Hickey’s divided understanding of guilt which reflects the system to which he willingly commits himself. As Hickey says: "She [Evelyn] knows I was insane. You’ve got me all wrong, Officer. I want to go to the Chair" (703).

All the regulars of Harry’s asylum, including Larry, subscribe to this point of view, even if it is their ongoing lack of control which has driven them to "The End of the Line Café." Once the bums convince themselves that Hickey is crazy, they are free to resume their pipe dreams and forget the irrational and chaotic experience of the recent past. Rocky’s comments to his two tarts who ask, "Where’s dat louse, Hickey" (709), reveal the logic of the assumptions behind our law: "...He’d gone crazy.... He’ll get Matteawan. He ain’t responsible. What he’s pulled don’t mean nuttin’. So forget dat whore stuff..." (709). If we are not responsible, the act is meaningless. In The Iceman things start to fall apart when individuals no longer feel they have control over what they say or do.

Once this is understood, the beauty of O’Neill’s ironic tragedy becomes evident. Larry’s inadvertent admission of
his desire to live in Act Three becomes truly tragic. Here Larry is on the verge of meaninglessness. The compulsion to "clutch greedily" at his "stinking bit of withered old flesh which is...[his] beautiful little life!" produces "self-loathing" and his pipe dream of detachment is undermined, as is his role in his community. The "Old Wise Guy" (600) is renamed "Old Cemetery" (627). Larry turns toward Hickey and the perceived salvation offered in the death which he sells. He turns toward Hickey because he cannot stand to watch Parritt struggle to deal with life, ambivalence and the feelings of alienation which accompany this struggle and are a function of confronting one's mortality. But in doing so he escapes neither. In Act Three, just prior to his ironic admission, Larry turns from Parritt, exclaiming: "You can't make me judge you!" (666), and "goes to the bar" (666) to soak up the booze paid for by Hickey's "bourgeois long green":

Larry - Set 'em up, Rocky. I swore I'd have no more drinks on Hickey, if I died of drought, but I've changed my mind! Be God, he owes it to me, and I'd get blind to the world now if it was the Iceman of Death himself treating! (He stops, startledly, a superstitious awe coming into his face.) What made me say that, I wonder (with a sardonic laugh). Well, be God, it fits, for Death was the Iceman Hickey called to his home! (666-67)

Larry is already well on his way to being "the only real convert to death Hickey" (710) makes. His "superstitious awe" at losing control of his speech is quickly masked "with a sardonic laugh."
Like Hickey, Larry cannot accept a moment of exposure without quickly finding some way to make it meaningless or meaningful, or, in other words, without finding some rational explanation for the irrational. Hickey, the anti-therapist, looks for the "symptoms" and a "cure" and Larry, the rationalist priest, seeks "reasons." However, Parritt's tortured ambivalence and the hatred behind his betrayal of his mother and the Movement exceed the bounds of rational explanation in the intensity of feeling they evoke in Larry. When Hickey says what he has "always wanted to say: 'Well, you know what you can do with your pipe dream now, you damned bitch!' (He stops with a horrified start, as if shocked out of a nightmare, as if he couldn't believe he heard what he had just said. He stammers.) No! I never - !" (700) and Larry "stops, startledly, a superstitious awe coming into his face," the audience witnesses the intellect struck dumb and the mouth speechless at the mysterious, unexplored regions of the psyche which reveal themselves in language--the medium through which these two unique rhetoricians assert their control over their circumstances. However, whatever explanation they come up with for a loss of control, it is always inadequate. There is always more behind our words and the "masks of living." As O'Neill says of The Iceman in a letter to Lawrence Langner: "there are moments in it that suddenly strip the secret soul of a man stark naked, not in cruelty or moral superiority, but with an understanding compassion
which sees him as a victim of the ironies of life and of himself. Those moments are for me the depth of tragedy, with nothing more that can possibly be said" (Selected Letters 511).

In exposing their "secret soul" to the regulars of the bar, Hickey and Parritt raise the dead ghosts of the past and the suffering inherent in this ritual. Like Dionysus, the god who "is beaten and in his fright has to take refuge in the depths of the sea" (Otto 103), the suffering men who stop at "The Bottom of the Sea Rathskeller" (577) find contentment for a time. However, as the god must surface and claim his rites and mysteries, so too do the chaotic desires of O'Neill's male characters. "The dead were honored at several of the chief festivals of Dionysus" (Otto 116) and Harry's birthday party is no exception. Larry's "Feast of All Fools" (569) may be an allusion to the ancient All Soul's celebrations in which Dionysus and the dead came to the upper world (Otto 117), and if this is the case, Larry's allusion, made with "half-drunken mockery in his eyes" (569), takes on an ominous and ironic tone when considered in the light of Larry's soon-to-be reactivated past.

The horror and ecstasy embodied in Dionysian wine is also alluded to when Hickey's birthday champagne triggers the repressed aristocratic past of the devout proletariat preacher, Hugo Kalmar, to the point where they are unbearably present:
Hugo - (suddenly raises his head from his arms, looking straight in front of him, pounds on the table frightenedly with his small fists) Don’t be a fool! Buy me a trink! But no more vine! It is not properly iced! (with guttural rage) Gottamned stupid proletarian slaves! Buy me a trink or I will have you shot! I am not trunk enough! I cannot sleep! Life is a crazy monkey-face! Always there is blood beneath the willow trees! I hate it and I am afraid! (He hides his face on his arms, sobbing muffledly.) Please, I am crazy trunk! I say crazy things! For Gott’s sake, do not listen to me! (But no one pays any attention to him. Larry stands shrunk back against the bar. Rocky is leaning over it. They stare at Hickey. Parritt stands looking pleadingly at Larry.) (680)

Hickey’s wine and his "line of bull" have shattered Hugo’s dream of himself as the self-sacrificing, devout man of the people and stimulated his violent, aristocratic desires and the guilt which goes along with them. The worship of Dionysus seems to have involved the ingestion of the blood of a sacrificial human being or animal whose blood symbolized "the principle of animal life..the unrestrained potency which man envies in the beasts and seeks to assimilate. His [Dionysus’] cult was originally an attempt on the part of human beings to achieve communion with this potency. The psychological effect was to liberate the instinctive life in man from the bondage imposed on it by reason and social custom: the worshipper became conscious of a strange new vitality, which he attributed to the god’s presence within him..." (Doddss xx). Clearly, O’Neill is headed in this symbolic direction. When Hugo first tastes Hickey’s champagne, he says: "Dis vine is unfit to
trink..." (645). Hickey responds by saying: "Always a high-toned swell at heart, eh, Hugo? God help us poor bums if you'd ever get to telling us where to get off! You'd have been drinking our blood beneath those willow trees!" (645). Hickey makes Hugo taste the violent potential of the human passions--passions which found their way into the cannibalism of Dionysian ritual. Hugo's ecstatic dream of drinking wine under the willow trees turns into the horrifying vision of drinking the blood of his comrades. E.R. Dodds, in his introduction to The Bacchae, points out that the bull and the wild goat are amongst the more common animals used in sacrificial Bacchic rites (xviii). This knowledge unearths some of the tragic ironies which permeate Larry's first statement regarding his philosophical detachment: "So I said to the world, God bless all here, and may the best man win and die of gluttony! And I took a seat in the grandstand of philosophical detachment to fall asleep observing the cannibals do their death dance" (570). Larry becomes that lone, sacrificial wild goat at the end of O'Neill's Dionysian drama. Like Hugo, Larry will soon find himself in the "death dance" of life caught in the horrifying vortex of his own repressed desires. Moreover, Hugo's tormented words at the end of Act Three crystalize the allusions to Dionysian worship. Those who drink the god's wine share in his suffering. Hugo is no longer simply drunk; he is "crazy trunk." He is possessed by the same madness which drives the women of Thebes to abandon their
domestic duties to run wild through the mountains in The Bacchae. Like the bums who are driven into the outside world by that "bastard" Hickey, Hugo "cannot sleep," losing control of his words and the repetitive phrases which once provided relief at the same time. Wine turns to blood and the greeting which usually involves the phrase, "leedle monkey-face," becomes a declaratory statement: "Life is a crazy monkey-face!" The "leedle," distinct, manageable "monkey-face" masks which represented Hugo's reality have melded into one overwhelming mask of "Life." Previously Hugo seems to have projected his repressed desires and unconscious activity onto the people around him in the form of harmless "leedle monkey-faces," but Hickey's presence has shattered this illusion. The truth of his own desires and those who surround him floods in through his bloodstream like the sacrificial blood of another human being symbolic of the mad god, Dionysus. The Christian "Gott" to which Hugo appeals is dead.

With the coming of Dionysus, the worshippers of the Greek god experienced the primeval world--the world to which O'Neill's "monkey-faces" seem to belong--a world which stepped into the foreground where there are no illusions or fantasies (Otto 95). "There's no damned life left" (680) in the booze-perpetuated pipe dreams of Hope's asylum by the end of Act Three. Hugo "suddenly raises his head from his arms and, looking straight in front of him, pounds on the table frightenedly with his small fists" to speak his
tortured words, "But no one pays any attention"--no one in the bar, that is. In the stare and cry of this likeable, little, grotesque, old man the audience is intended to see the horror of a man whose soul is stripped "stark naked."

Hugo stares into space and ineffectually pounds on the table. He is like a maenad during the worship of Dionysus, "whose shrill exultation we think we have just heard, frightens us with her rigid stare, in which we can see the reflection of the horror which drives her mad" (Otto 93-94).

The final visual image of Act Three is staged so that the deathly effects of the Dionysian as exhibited in Hugo and the devastated Harry Hope (who has returned from the outside world without a pipe dream) are juxtaposed against the effect of those same forces at work on Larry--the man whose eyes have been "fixed with fascinated horror on Hickey" (679) while the stranger has had "his eyes on Larry" (680) throughout the final moments of the Act. Larry's time is coming.

Like the young king of The Bacchae whose palace is razed "to the ground where it lies, shattered/in utter ruin" (182), Larry witnesses the shattering of the home he calls the "dump" (611) and "Palace of Pipe Dreams" (611).

Pentheus and Larry are reduced to being "A man, a man, and nothing more" (The Bacchae 182) in their war with this paradoxical god. Their curiosity makes them vulnerable to the seductive powers of the god. In Act Two Larry asks vindictively: "what it was happened to you [Hickey] that
converted you to this great peace you’ve found. I notice you didn’t deny it when I asked you about the iceman..." (648). This jab prompts vengeful laughter from the victims who have been "Listenin’ to his [Hickey’s] crazy bull" (625). Captain Lewis then breaks in on a series of jokes made at Hickey’s expense, with the comment: "...Hickey, old chap, you’ve sprouted horns like a bloody antelope!" (649). General Wetjoen then puts in his two cents, adding that the horns look "Like a water buffalo’s!" (649). It seems as though Larry’s questions have enabled the bums to come close to seeing Dionysus in his traditional form as the bull. It is at this point that Hickey first reveals that his beloved wife Evelyn is dead. Larry then makes a comment about Hickey bringing "the touch of death on him" (649), only to feel "More ashamed of himself than the others" (649). Humiliated, Larry is under the god’s power. Hickey will exploit Larry’s curiosity and sensitivity to loss from now on.

In The Bacchae a similar process of seduction takes place. Pentheus questions the "god incognito" and the god capitalizes on the young man’s lustful curiosity and voyeuristic tendencies. Having already humiliated other characters, Dionysus charms the young king into dressing in the feminine garb of a Bacchante, thus humiliating him, although Pentheus is unaware of his compromising position while possessed by the god. Looking "like one of the daughters of Cadmus" (195), as Dionysus says, Pentheus
notices that "Horns have sprouted/from" (195) the god's head, thus seeing the god as a bull for the first time. Like Larry, who prides himself on being a spectator of the "death dance," Pentheus is willing to "pay a great sum to see that sight" (190). He wishes to see the "revels on the mountain" (190), which include maenads (one of whom is his mother) "mating like birds, caught in the toils of love" (198). This journey into the mountains also includes the chance to be carried home "cradled in your mother's arms" (198). Pentheus is eventually brutally dismembered by his mad mother and her two sisters, and his mother returns home in a delusive state, displaying her son's head "impaled upon her thyrsus" (205). Larry's fate is quite different, although his repressed desires do surface in the wake of the combined effects of the two Dionysian figures, Parritt and Hickey, who are tormented by their ambivalent feelings toward women: Evelyn, Hickey's motherly wife, and Rosa, Parritt's revolutionary mother.

In The Iceman the "Force behind" is manifest in the animating energy of the feminine presence, specifically that of the mother. Both Larry's desire to live while longing for death and his inability to accept the conflict seem to stem from his ambivalence toward women, Rosa Parritt specifically. Walter Otto's insights into the role of women in the worship of Dionysus are particularly illuminating in this respect:
We should never forget that the Dionysiac world is, above all, a world of women. Women awaken Dionysus and bring him up. Women accompany him wherever he is. Women await him and are the first ones to be overcome by his madness.... Much more important than the sexual act are the act of birth and the feeding of the child.... The terrible trauma of childbirth, the wildness which belongs to motherliness in its primal form, a wildness which can break loose in an alarming way not only in animals - all these reveal the innermost nature of the Dionysiac madness: the churning up of the essence of life surrounded by the storms of death. Since such tumult lies waiting in the bottom-most depths and makes itself known, all of life's ecstasy is stirred up by Dionysiac madness and is ready to go beyond the bounds of rapture into a dangerous wildness. The Dionysiac condition is a primal phenomenon of life in which even man must participate in all of the moments of birth in his creative existence. (142)

Otto goes on to make a point central to Nietzsche's The Birth of Tragedy: "This feminine world is confronted by the radically different masculine world of Apollo. In his world not the life mystery of blood and of the powers of earth but the clarity and the breath of the mind hold sway. However, the Apollonic world cannot exist without the other" (142). In his resistance to the Dionysiac world, Larry demonstrates a strong Apollonian force. Larry's most fundamental desires are so deeply repressed that once they do surface his madness represents potentially the most horrifying of all madness experienced by the regulars of the bar. For Larry, these desires are never clear enough to be articulated, but they do have to do with his feelings toward women and Mother. These two factors and the isolation involved in their experience seem to indicate that his deathlike stare
at the end of the play may not disappear for some time—if at all.

Critics have debated over O’Neill’s final ambiguous scene in The Iceman, and they will probably continue to do so. However, the unique nature of this ironic tragedy is still to be fully explored. The tragic efforts to control the course of existence permeate the words of O’Neill’s Dionysian drama. For the O’Neill of the cycle plays and the last four plays, and in the myth and cult of Dionysus, the forces of Life and Death are inextricably connected to the powers of the Mother and those who resist the suffering involved in accepting this reality suffer the more brutal fate. Presumably Larry manages to keep his sexuality and his love relationship of the past at an innocuous distance until the arrivals of Parritt and Hickey. It is only once he is pressured with the merging of the past and the present that his feelings of control and distance are threatened. Larry’s philosophical position of detachment is based on a reaction to a past life where attachment, camaraderie and family were ubiquitous. Larry belonged to two families, both of which overlapped: one being the Movement headed by Rosa and the other family group of Larry, Rosa and her son. This earlier period of his life represents a time of belief, love and commitment, and no matter how much he represses the feelings of loss connected with this past and the forces which drove him away from his past life, the old man’s present behavior is motivated by it. When a critic like
Judith Barlow splits Larry's pipe dreams into four--"that he is through with the Movement; that he no longer cares about his former mistress, Rosa Parritt; that he is eagerly awaiting and unafraid of death; and that he is 'in the grandstand', unconcerned about his fellow men" (Barlow 46), arriving at the conclusion that "the first two pipe dreams are the least important in the final play" (Barlow 46) -- she loses touch with the underlying "Force behind" which drove Larry to construct these illusions, making them inextricably related and of equal importance.

Larry will do and say almost anything to avoid the intensity of feeling connected with the past. Parritt's quest for the "reason" for his betrayal mirrors Larry's determination to deny the "reason" for his betrayal of Rosa and the Movement she represents. To examine and "judge" Parritt's tortured, ambivalent heart is to feel his own ambivalence. In Act Three, when Larry "springs to his feet...[and] goes to the bar" to escape judging Parritt, he treats himself to a drink on the "Iceman of Death" and he does so to preserve his whole, integrated dream network of denial. Larry seems to know no other way to deal with the mysterious forces which drove him from his past life, although he does seem aware of the destructive potential inherent in the process of unleashing repressed desires. His fear of Hickey's and Parritt's "mad" need to "tell" demonstrates this awareness. In discussing The Bacchae, E.R. Dodds speaks of this same issue in Dionysian terms:
...so the "moral" of the Bacchae is that we ignore at our peril the demand of the human spirit for Dionysiac experience. For those who do not close their minds against it such experience can be a deep source of spiritual power and ἐνθαύσιον. But those who repress the demand in themselves or refuse its satisfaction to others transform it by their act into a power of disintegration and destruction, a blind natural force that sweeps away the innocent with the guilty. When that has happened, it is too late to reason or to plead: in man's justice there is room for pity, but there is none in the justice of Nature; to our "Ought" its sufficient reply is the simple "Must"; we have no choice but to accept that reply and to endure as we may. (xlv)

Parritt's mind is open and his final words to Larry and Hugo illustrate a "spiritual power" and grace worthy of the most tragic characters (Black 30). On the other hand, Hickey's power is destructive and acts like "a blind natural force that sweeps away the innocent with the guilty." Larry is headed in this destructive direction and at some level he senses it. When he turns from Parritt and "goes to the bar" to have a drink on the "Iceman of Death," he takes one big step in the wrong direction with "a superstitious awe coming into his face."

Parritt goes through a kind of mourning process in his psychological journey toward truth. He comes to accept his mother's spiritual death and the part his hatred of her played in bringing it about. In doing so, Parritt is able to re-member Rosa Parritt and eventually accept his fate along the same lines that Agave, Pentheus' mother, who, in Arrowsmith's version of The Bacchae, once she awakens from
the wild Dionysian madness which possessed her and led to the dismembering of her only son, "mourns each piece [of his body] separately before replacing it on the bier" (216) and accepts the god's punishment of banishment with her words, "It is fated, Father. We must go" [my italics] (218). With Larry's help Parritt figures out what he must do. Just before Larry tells Parritt to "Go up" (704), Parritt says to Larry: "...She [his mother] makes all the decisions. She's always decided what I must do. She doesn't like anyone to be free but herself.... I suppose you think I ought to have made those dicks take me away with Hickey. But how could I prove it, Larry? They'd think I was nutty. Because she's still alive. You're the only one who can understand how guilty I am..." [my italics] (704). As long as Parritt is obsessed with what he "ought to do" (686), he will never arrive at what he must do for himself. What is driving Parritt is a "Greek" sense of justice which has nothing to do with what Dodds calls "man's justice." His betrayal of his mother and the suicide he is contemplating are beyond the terms of our legal justice system. What drives him is not so much belief as it is necessity. Is Parritt responsible for his actions? Did he mean for his mother to get caught? These questions are more or less unanswerable. At some level he meant it and at another he didn't. What is important to him is that he did it and that he accept his actions and his motives for them.
In his last exchange with Larry and Hugo, Parritt is operating according to a different mythos from the rest of O’Neill’s characters, who operate at a level of moral "ought" which works in conjunction with pipe dreams and the power of belief behind their existence. Hickey, for instance, goes to his death, or to Matteawan, denying the meaning inherent in his calling Evelyn a "damned bitch." He chooses to see his feelings of hatred as insane and thus meaningless. Hickey cannot believe what he hears himself say and he is compelled by his personal, psychological limits to deny. Yet he also feels compelled to apologize for the hatred which he denies, and yet expresses.

Hickey says of his promise to Evelyn not to "do any of the bad things" (695) he has done anymore: "I meant it, too. I believed it" (695). The kind of Judeo-Christian morality represented by Evelyn holds that "things" are either good or bad or that a man either hates or loves his wife, and this same morality eats away at Hickey to the end. He will never be able to free himself from Evelyn’s pipe dream that he will change his sinful ways. Ambivalence is inconceivable as well as unbearable. Unlike Parritt, Hickey will never be able to articulate his hatred and believe it. It is far too repressed and only surfaces in the heat of the moment in an insane murder and a moment of oblivious speech and sudden recall. Hickey believes in the dream of peace (salvation) without pipe dreams he sells to the gang, but he retains his melodramatic illusion of himself and his
feelings for Evelyn. The bums "oughtn't to act" (689) unappreciative, especially when they see "how contented and carefree you ought to feel" (691), but they do. Their ambivalent feelings are just as unbearable as his own. They too are stuck at a level of reality where the merging of polarities creates simply a longing for Death. The problem of understanding one's actions and arriving at the point where that understanding can be articulated is Larry's problem at the end of the play.

The necessity driving Parritt is internal and his suicide is for his own sake and no one else's. He pushes Larry to this realization and the old man says pleadingly: "Go, for the love of Christ, you mad tortured bastard, for your own sake" (705). Parritt must go for the love of himself and no one else. He is isolated in his quest for truth. Larry may allow this "pest" (624) to stick around, but he does so to keep up his mask of indifference. Larry is certainly not going to mourn Rosa's "death" along with Parritt, no matter how strong the attachment to this woman of the past. When "De Old Foolosopher" (570) takes his drink on Hickey he makes his choice. Parritt's comment to Larry, "I have nowhere to go now. You're the only one in the world I can turn to" (653), rings true and Rocky offers his confirmation when he follows Parritt's words with his own: "He don't belong" (653). Parritt has probably never belonged. He has been neglected by his religiously political mother and the members of the Movement itself. He
is also fatherless and without the patriarchal identity which is so essential to the Greeks. His guilt is so overwhelming and his sense of alienation so acute that he must go. As Stephen Black states: "In cultures like classical Greece, where suicide did not seem inherently shameful, Parritt's end might have been perceived as restoring a measure of honour to a life marked for misfortune" (30). Parritt remains under his mother's control until he decides what he must do for himself and accepts his Dionysian, amoral fate. Parritt acknowledges his fate "simply and gratefully" (704) with the words: "I can see now it's the only possible way I can ever get free from her. I guess I've known that all my life" (704).

After this statement, O'Neill writes: "(He pauses - then with a derisive smile) It ought to comfort Mother a little, too. 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!' She'll be able to say: 'I am glad he's dead! Long live the Revolution!' (He adds with a final implacable jeer) You know her, Larry! Always a ham!" (704-5). In his mockery of his mother Parritt demonstrates a shift in the way in which he perceives her. You might say his perception of his mother shifts from a Mother with a capital "M" to mother with a small one. He is empowered by his decision. Her pipe dream (the Movement) operates at the level of a moral code of justice, and because he has
experienced his own necessity he is able to ridicule the illusions which have smothered him all his life—the illusions upon which communities depend for their cohesion and which he feels no allegiance toward. There is no place for this illusionless individual in such a world. Parritt's struggle to free himself from his mother and deal with his feelings of ambivalence and alienation eat away at Larry's defences, igniting the destructive potential of the old man's repressed desires and his own sense of isolation.

The young man's appearance puts Larry on the defensive and he can no longer withstand the pipe dreaming of his "brothers" of the "Tomorrow Movement" which once gave him a sense of superiority and security. The identification is now too close. In this frame of mind it is unlikely that he will ever "see all sides of a question," especially the kind of questions coming from a guilt-ridden, displaced traitor like Parritt, who seems to know which buttons to push in the old man's psyche. Whatever Larry says or does is tainted by feelings of defensiveness and self-preservation.

For him to see beyond himself and feel any empathy, he must be seduced and entranced into feeling whatever it was drove him away from his "first home"—a place where he belonged and his most essential needs were being met. This is in a way the course of the suffering god Dionysus, who must emerge from the bottom of the sea and return to his mother's grave; the same place where he was conceived and experienced his first feelings of separation from the
oneness and chaos of the womb and the experience of infantile ecstasy like that which occurs during early breast feeding; the place where birth and death are experienced simultaneously and all dualities meet. Integral to this male motherless god’s suffering are the feelings of distance between himself and the feminine source from which he is so violently separated. Otto says of the archetypal powers of the feminine awakened with the god’s coming: "They [women] are to become like feminine spirits of a nature which is distant from man - like the nymphs who have nurtured him and who riot and rage with him" (179). The distant, erratic behavior of O’Neill’s morphine-addicted mother, Ella, as she is depicted in the character of Mary from Long Day’s Journey into Night, testifies to the immediacy of Mother figures like Deborah of More Stately Mansions and Rosa in The Iceman Cometh: mothers who are forever beyond the reach of their "sons’" most fundamental needs for affection which, if never met, create an inability to reconcile the sexual mother and the idealized, virginal mother. Pentheus’ desire to be cradled in his mother’s arms and to witness her love-making illustrates a similar ambivalence. Parritt must have reached a point where the distance between himself and his mother (upon whom he has been dependent all his life) was no longer bearable. Consequently, he creates a situation for himself in which he can no longer rely on his mother, and, tragically, anyone else.
Over the course of O'Neill's Dionysian drama Larry's feelings of alienation intensify as his own need to confront the past which binds his present surfaces. The elemental desires which Dionysus embodies are manifest in the tortured souls of both Hickey and Parritt. Hickey cannot withstand the unleashing of such primal forces. His Christian, dualistic mind is forced to seek some kind of metaphysical salvation in Death. Larry, the self-proclaimed nihilist and rationalist priest, gradually succumbs to the lure of this identifiable form of escape as the irrational realities of Parritt's plight penetrate the old man's psyche. The provocations of both Parritt and Hickey require Larry to confront the forces embodied in the god surrounded by women.
PART TWO

Larry, Hickey and the rest of the bums are the product of a culture which experiences life in irreconcilable dualities, and as a result they cannot accept their own ambivalent feelings and the irrational forces behind them. Parritt's tortured presence and Greek-like capacity for suffering are anomalous in the face of the Judeo-Christian paradigm which limits the rest of O'Neill's characters in The Iceman. Larry cannot understand or recognize "Parritt's need for community" (Black 30) until he himself has acknowledged his own vulnerability and isolation and lived out the ingrained repression of his illusory existence. This process never occurs and the audience is left to ponder the fate of O'Neill's enigmatic character.

Larry's ability to understand himself and others is generally overestimated by critics. Judith Barlow states that "Larry must live with the pain of his pity for humanity" (62) without recognizing that at the end of the play Larry's pain stems from his own reactivated human desires. Barlow and critics such as Michael Manheim and Winifred Frazer idealize Larry because they seem to identify the old man with O'Neill himself. However, as Stephen Black states: "It seems difficult to make a case that the speech [Larry's last of the play] shows any significant insight or any sense of the tragic, except that he feels mortality more
deeply" (31). In the conclusion to his article on *The Iceman*, Black says that "Larry remains to suffer the consequence of knowledge and feeling" (31), but he does not mention that the old man has no ritual framework and communal arena through which to experience the elemental forces of his human condition--something fundamental to the theatrical experience of the ancient Greeks. Travis Bogard seems to be correct when he says that "there is no longer the possibility of being possessed by Dionysian ecstasy" (54). Despite his capacity to feel and his "tragic anagnorisis" (Black) Parritt must die, largely because of the inability of his society to accommodate the threat posed by this very capacity.

It is important to realize the degree to which the older Eugene O'Neill has distanced himself from his more limited characters--characters most of whom remind one of the author himself. By the time he writes *The Iceman*, O'Neill can empathize with his characters without necessarily identifying with them. When Winifred Frazer accepts the critics' conclusion that "Larry is...the mouthpiece for O'Neill" (25) she obscures the true nature of O'Neill's Dionysian, ironic tragedy. O'Neill went beyond Nietzsche's version of the Dionysian in creating a modern tragedy which has within it the potential to move the audience into the realm of the Dionysiac experience, feeling compassion for the characters on the stage who suffer the limits of our time. In his article, "Dionysus in *The Iceman*
Cornetht1@ Leonard Chabrowe anticipates this idea in the context of his discussion on Dionysian ritual in The Iceman Cometh and Lazarus Laughed: "The underlying aesthetic idea was that only through ritual could the audience be made to experience a Dionysian communion with life itself. And that only in such a communion would the pain and death of life appear justified as an aesthetic phenomenon. It was an idea that assumed the theatre to be a place of ritual and religious experience, both the idea and the assumption having its source in The Birth of Tragedy. In this sense The Iceman Cometh is just as Nietzschean as Lazarus Laughed" (386). It is somewhat ironic that it is Nietzsche's version of the Dionysian which inspired O'Neill's efforts in this regard, since Nietzsche's The Birth of Tragedy sets out to demonstrate the death of tragedy. It is in this sense that O'Neill moves beyond Nietzsche, and it is important to examine The Iceman in the context of the myth and cult of Dionysus and Greek tragedy and not simply through Nietzschean eyes. To understand Larry in this larger context is to come closer to understanding O'Neill's dream, "the Greek dream."

Despite his resistance, Larry's volatile past arises from the depths of his psyche. The powers of the god who is presumed dead reappear. In Act Two, in a bitter appeal for Larry's friendship, Parritt says: "You ought to [be my friend], for Mother's sake. She really loved you. You loved her, too, didn't you?" (634), and Larry replies
tensely: "Leave what’s dead in its grave" (634). Parritt has his own reasons for pressing the issue of Larry’s love of his mother and he may not be able to "tell the difference between his own youthful need for his mother and Larry’s lover’s love", as Stephen Black says (21-22). But this is no reason to suppose that Larry does not love Rosa as a mother figure as well as a lover. The fact that Parritt’s "betrayal of Rosa seems to him analogous to Larry’s rejection of her" (Black 22) may indicate more about "De Old Foolosopher" than critics often seem to think. One shouldn’t underestimate the powers of repression and the penchant for denial.

The problem with assessing the degree and character of Larry’s love for Rosa is that most of what we know about their relationship seems to come from Parritt’s very subjective point of view. In her study of The Iceman, Judith Barlow deals with this problem and in so doing she cites a passage from the text, prefacing this quotation with a comment which reveals her own argumentative bias: "This was revised to include a final argument Parritt claims to have witnessed" [my italics] (48). The passage she cites reads:

I remember that last fight you had with her. I was listening. I was on your side, even if she was my mother, because I liked you so much; you’d been so good to me - like a father. 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!" (634)

Barlow then goes on to say that "Parritt is obviously projecting his own hostility toward his mother onto Larry: it is now the lover, not the son, who calls the woman a whore. Like Jim Tyrone in Moon, Parritt cannot bear to associate his mother with sexuality" [my italics] (48). Once again, this may be so, but it does not lessen the likelihood that things did happen the way Parritt relates them. Moreover, Larry may, even "now," feel what the son speaking through the lover feels. Barlow does acknowledge that "Larry's furious denial [of Parritt's version of his past] hints that Parritt remembers the incident accurately. Although this speech and Larry's response fail to clarify Larry's current attitude toward Rosa (he may still be angry over her infidelity, ashamed of his conventional reaction, or simply appalled at the young man's lack of respect for his mother), it does ally him in his younger days with many O'Neill men who cannot tolerate anything less than complete loyalty—including sexual loyalty—in the women they love" (48–9). Exactly! No individual is exempt from undergoing the gods' ritual suffering, especially those who resist. The effect of the wild women who appear with Dionysus is overwhelming and the desires they awaken primal. Behind Larry's response to the word "whore," "You lie! I never called her that!" (635), are desires that he probably doesn't understand himself. His response is not grounded in
"anger" or "shame" as Barlow speculates. Barlow can see Larry no other way because she is convinced that O’Neill has organized Larry’s pipe dreams hierarchically and, in doing so, she overlooks the "Force behind" which is driving Larry mad. One’s mortality and sexuality are inextricably related. As is the case in Act Three, when Larry inadvertently admits his desire to live at any price, denial is Larry’s most honest and revealing form of communication. O’Neill’s audience is not told what Larry feels; they must feel what Larry feels from behind his words. In other words, the ironies which run through his repeated denials resonate and create meaning.

Larry looks to dissociate himself from Parritt and his mother from the outset of the play. He is defensive in Parritt’s presence, as well as at the mere mention of the kid’s name. During the first conversation of the play in which Parritt is mentioned, Larry breaks into denial and then into a rational explanation as to why he is talking so much:

Rocky - Yeah, I figgered he [Don] don’t belong, but he said he was a friend of yours.

Larry - He’s a liar. I wouldn’t know him if he hadn’t told me who he was. His mother and I were friends years ago on the Coast. (He hesitates - then lowering his voice) You’ve read in the papers about that bombing on the Coast when several people got killed? Well, the one woman they pinched, Rosa Parritt, is his mother. They’ll be coming up for trial soon, and there’s no chance for them. She’ll get life, I think. I’m telling you this so you’ll know why if Don acts a bit queer, and not jump
Parritt may not be Larry's "friend," but he was someone for whom the old man showed particular interest and feeling. The two lived together for years while Larry and Rosa were lovers. Parritt says to Larry in Act One, "...You used to take me on your knee and tell me stories and crack jokes and make me laugh. You'd ask me questions and take what I said seriously. I guess I got to feel in the years you lived with us that you'd taken the place of my Old Man" (58), and Larry replies, "(moved in spite of himself) I remember well. You were a serious lonely little shaver (then resenting being moved, changes the subject)" (578-9). In other words, Parritt is not exactly lying when he introduces himself to Rocky as a "friend" of Larry's. Nothing is ever simply a lie or the truth in O'Neill's psychological drama--language is one of the many "masks of living." Larry may not have recognized the kid if he hadn't been told who he was, but the connection between himself and this "lonely little shaver" was far more intimate than Larry would like anyone to know--hence his resentment for being moved while speaking with Parritt.

Moreover, Rosa was a lot more than a "friend" to Larry years ago. They lived and fought together, and after Larry had left the Movement they wrote letters to one another--letters which the normally unsentimental Rosa kept (579). At some level Larry is probably aware of the inadequate or
misleading nature of the term "friend" which he applies to Rosa and this may be a reason for the hesitation he shows before lowering his voice to deliver Rosa Parritt's "story." On the other hand, he may simply be taking the time to organize the "facts" of his "story." Nonetheless, he manages to "change the subject" of conversation from his relationship with Rosa to that of Parritt and his mother and the scandal in which they are entangled. Rocky is then told exactly why he is the recipient of all this information. Larry claims to be speaking for the kid's sake, so Rocky won't "jump on him." This sympathetic gesture represents the side of Larry with which the optimist, Jimmy Tomorrow, identifies.

Not too long after the exchange between Rocky and Larry, Larry "breaks in sardonically" (589) on a sentimental song which Jimmy has just begun singing and Jimmy responds to Larry's cynical intrusion: "No, Larry, old friend, you can't deceive me. You pretend a bitter, cynic philosophy, but in your heart you are the kindest man among us" (589). His position of detachment being challenged, Larry responds characteristically in denial: "(disconcerted - irritably) The hell you say!" (589). Jimmy is not wrong, but he is also not acknowledging the part of Larry which is in pain and needs to defend itself from feelings of attachment and compassion--the same feelings he experienced with Rosa and her son--feelings which involve emotional ties and the risk of loss and betrayal.
When Larry says, "I'm telling you this so you'll know why...," he is not only telling Rocky why he is talking so much for Parritt's sake, he is also doing so for his own sake. He has to justify this interest of his without exposing his personal feelings of attachment in order that his role in the community as "The Old Grandstand Foolosopher" (611) remain intact, and to do so he winds up his speech with a rational explanation. Rational chatter is often the result of anxiety. Larry's longer speeches often involve denial and they occur at those times when his pipe dreams are most challenged.

Prior to the tortured, inward-looking, ironic confession of Act Three, there are two revealing instances of denial (one in Act One and the other in Act Two) where Larry's words extend beyond the usual cynical remark. In both cases Larry winds up his words of wisdom by denying his attachment to Rosa Parritt. Rosa and her Movement are the source of Larry's problems with belief and attachment. It was while in her presence that Larry lived most passionately and fully. His family life and political life were one. Inspired by the women he loved and the anarchist "cause" he believed in, he was constantly prepared to risk his life. However, Larry suddenly leaves all this after a fight with Rosa. The reason for his leaving is never quite clear. Larry believes in one version of the past and Parritt another. As we have already discovered, a person's motive in The Iceman is often extremely complex and mysterious.
In Act One, after Larry and Parritt agree that the fact that Rosa kept Larry's letters is unusual, Larry makes it clear that he "never answered her last letters...[and that he hadn't] written her in a couple of years - or anyone else..." (580). Here, after a pause, with characteristic defensiveness, he makes the point that he was writing other people as well as Rosa. Parritt does not let Larry go. After saying that his mother, the "revivalist preacher" (580), "seemed to forgive" (580) Larry's betrayal of the anarchist religion, Larry makes it clear that she wrote "to bring the sinner to repentance and a belief in the One True Faith again" (580). It is at this point that Parritt begins to offer his version of the events which led to Larry's sudden departure. "What made you leave the Movement, Larry? Was it on account of Mother?" (580), asks Parritt. Larry "(starts) Don't be a damned fool! What the hell put that in your head?" (580). At the mention of his attachment to Rosa, Larry "starts" and this reaction is very similar to the one Jimmy receives for calling Larry "the kindest man among us." Parritt seems to respond calmly to Larry's outburst when he says: "Why nothing - except I remember what a fight you had with her before you left" (580). At this point Larry responds resentfully with what is either a lie or the remark of a man who has managed to block out his more painful memories of the past: "Well, if you do, I don't. That was eleven years ago. You were only seven. If we did quarrel, it was because I told her I'd become
convinced the Movement was only a beautiful pipe dream" (580). The fact that Larry remembers how many years it has been since he left Rosa’s house and exactly how old the kid was when he left, testifies to the sharpness of his memory (as well as suggesting the close relationship which must have existed between the old man and the boy). Larry is either repressing the memory of the "fight" or simply lying to protect himself. In saying, "If we did quarrel...," he seems to be conceding that it is likely that this quarrel did take place. Larry reacts violently to Parritt’s detailed account of the fight. His denial that he said, "I don’t like living with a whore, if that’s what you mean!," reinforces the likelihood that the quarrel did take place. At this later point Larry accuses Parritt of lying about the words used and not the situation when he says: "You lie! I never called her that!" This evidence, when coupled with the early instance in which Larry calls Parritt a "liar" for introducing himself as a "friend" of Larry’s, suggests that there is always at least some truth to the words Larry denies and says are lies. Consequently, it seems that Larry’s initial outburst of denial, "Well, if you do, I don’t," is a product of a very strong desire to forget this particular emotionally charged exchange with Rosa in the past.

Once Larry finishes giving his version of the reason why he and Rosa may have quarrelled, Parritt responds "with a strange smile" (580) which seems to indicate that he
realizes that he has pushed the right button to get Larry to reveal himself: "I don’t remember it that way" (580). Larry then breaks into a long explanation which presumes to describe the true reasons for his leaving the Movement:

Larry - Then you can blame your imagination - and forget it. (He changes the subject abruptly.) You asked me why I quit the Movement. I had a lot of good reasons. One was myself, and another was my comrades, and the last was the breed of swine called men in general. For myself, I was forced to admit, at the end of thirty years’ devotion to the Cause, that I was never made for it. I was born condemned to be one of those who has to see all sides of a question. When you’re damned like that, the questions multiply for you until in the end it’s all question and no answer. As history proves, to be a worldly success at anything, especially revolution, you have to wear blinders like a horse and see only straight in front of you. You have to see, too, that this is all black, and this is all white. As for my comrades in the Great Cause, I felt as Horace Walpole did about England, that he could love it if it weren’t for the people in it. The material the ideal free society must be constructed from is men themselves and you can’t build a marble temple out of a mixture of mud and manure. When man’s soul isn’t a sow’s ear, it will be time enough to dream of silk purses. (He chuckles sardonically - then irritably as if suddenly provoked at himself for talking so much.) Well, that’s why I quit the Movement, if it leaves you any wiser. At any rate, you see it had nothing to do with your mother. (580-1)

Parritt is not convinced, and even Larry senses that he is explaining too much. This long speech begins with the suggestion that Parritt forget that Larry’s departure was marked by an emotionally charged fight. Larry then "changes the subject abruptly" from the emotional to the rational. As he does earlier, he shifts discussion away from his "friendship" with Rosa. As far as he is concerned, his
quitting the Movement "had nothing to do with" Parritt’s mother. At least this is what he believes and this belief makes his existence meaningful and rationally explicable, thus tolerable. However, like Hickey, who is an excellent reader of other people’s characters but a poor judge of his own in that he is unable to grasp the significance of the ambivalent feelings which underlie his actions, Larry may have been "born condemned to be one of those who has to see all sides of a [philosophical] question" but he is like a horse with blinders on when it comes to his personal feelings of ambivalence. Larry himself does not understand exactly why he left his "first family."

After thirty devoted years, he reached a point of emotional crisis where there were no more rational answers, and Rosa’s betrayal—something that Larry cannot deny—coincides with the pivotal decision to leave the Movement. As already suggested, Parritt is not a "liar." All of what he remembers may not be exactly true, but Larry’s outright denials are so vehement and so frequent that they are highly suspect and most likely the product of repression. Parritt arrives and begins a Dionysian festival of dead mad women. He cannot "leave what’s dead in its grave," as Larry pleads. He must invoke the spirit of "Mother." Larry’s denial, "You lie! I never called her that!," echoes Hickey’s denial of the significance of calling Evelyn a "damned bitch" and Hope calling his wife a "nagging bitch" (678). Larry probably did call Rosa a "whore" and he certainly seems to be "a
slave to bourgeois morality and jealousy" (635). O’Neill makes this "bourgeois morality" evident when he has Parritt say, "I’d get feeling it was like living in a whorehouse—only worse, because she [his mother] didn’t have to make her living—" (635), and Larry respond, "You bastard! She’s your mother! Have you no shame?" (635). No one in O’Neill’s drama is free of the moral, polar thinking of the Christian tradition.

After Larry’s long speech is over, Parritt continues to press him for what the old man interprets as answers to unanswerable questions. Larry says, "I feel you’re looking for some answer to something. I have no answer to give anyone, not even myself" (581-82), before reciting a couple of lines from Heine which recommend sleep, death, or never to have been born (582). Larry can see only one option through his inherited Christian blinders: the salvation of the "Big Sleep." He and Hickey are men whose lives become unmanageable because of the increasing pressure of ambivalent feelings toward women. Neither man can accept the distance between themselves and the women they love. Evelyn’s dream of Hickey’s reformation is beyond him and a pipe dream. Rosa’s dream of freedom, political and sexual, is as unattainable a pipe dream as Evelyn’s. Even Rosa seems "ashamed of being free," as Parritt points out to Larry. And neither woman can accept their men as they are. Once Larry says, "When man’s soul isn’t a sow’s ear...," he breaks off his speech to "chuckle sardonically," only to
become irritable at exposing himself. It seems that the questions became unanswerable once he began to look deeply into the soul of man, specifically his own. The point at which he breaks off talking here is the point at which he picks up in Act Three when he begins talking with the ironic words, "I'm afraid to live, am I?" and ends up "staring inward at himself with contempt and hatred" (675). As is the case for Hickey, Parritt, Hugo and others, Larry is driven by his inability to accept his own paradoxical desires and his limited control over them. In the instances in which he denies his attachment to Rosa his desires surface and prompt him to confront his mortality and limits as a man—something he did not have to confront while under the illusion of invulnerability, which was real and meaningful as long as he believed.

Belief entails the risk of loss for Larry. He once believed in his love of a woman and the ideals of the Movement, but once Rosa is unfaithful and the confusion over female sexuality sets in, the oneness and womb-like ecstasy of his life of attachment is shattered. Rosa will always remain distant and compelled to assert her pipe dreams of freedom. In Hope's saloon Larry has established himself as one of the believers in "the lie of a pipe dream" and Parritt's sudden appearance challenges Larry's dream of philosophical detachment and feelings of security. By the time Larry arrives at Hope's, he is aware of the destructive potential inherent in belief and the pipe dream of
salvation, except he does not see his own desire for death in those terms. In his anarchist actions of the past he risked his life without being conscious of the potential risk of loss involved, and it is not until he experiences the loss of his "family" that he feels the devastating impact of this reality. To care and to believe may be the ultimate expression of our humanity and life's affirmation, but it also puts you in touch with your own human vulnerability. And if there is no way of accepting and understanding loss and the feelings of isolation which accompany it, like the way demonstrated in the worship of Dionysus, mankind is left with the feeling that life is a "meaningless joke" (636).

Parritt asks Larry to believe in and face the painful memories which cluster around the figure of "Mother" and in doing so he is asking Larry to relinquish whatever illusions of security and control the old man has managed to perpetuate. In essence, he asks the tired old man to reconsider the significance of his own ambivalence and feelings of vulnerability; to face a void for which there is no rational explanation; to accept that he and Rosa are compelled by their own internal necessities. Someone or something is always responsible in the eyes of the Judeo-Christian Western man; otherwise life is meaningless. Larry will not allow such things to penetrate his consciousness. However, his words of resistance and sardonic wit cannot mask the contradictory truths which drive them. In Act Two,
Parritt's plea, "But I never thought Mother would be caught. Please believe that, Larry. You know I never would have -" (636), prompts Larry's desperate attempt to retain his illusory beliefs by pronouncing his creed, which is grounded in a denial of truth:

Larry - (his face haggard, drawing a deep breath and closing his eyes - as if he were trying to hammer something into his own brain) All I know is I'm sick of life! I'm through! I've forgotten myself! I'm drowned and contented on the bottom of a bottle. Honor or dishonor, faith or treachery are nothing to me but the opposites of the same stupidity which is ruler and king of life, and in the end they rot into dust in the same grave. All things are the same meaningless joke to me, for they grin at me from the one skull of death. So go away. You're wasting breath. I've forgotten your mother. (637)

Everything hinges on his claim that he has forgotten the kid's mother. She represents the past from which he hides. Like every other claim of his creed, the claim that he has forgotten Parritt's mother represents a denial of the truth. If Parritt can get Larry to believe in his confused feelings toward his mother, "his crime will seem at least human" (Black 20) and Larry will have had to confront his own feelings of loss and betrayal, as well as the vulnerability of his present condition in the bar. This is, of course, what is happening when he finds that pipe dreaming is getting under his skin. As Larry's pipe dream armour breaks down, the ironies which run through his words reveal themselves. Larry may be "sick of life" but he will also "clutch greedily to...[his] beautiful little life!"
Parritt’s appearance triggers Larry’s desires and his dissatisfaction with the "bughouse" he calls the "Palace of Pipe Dreams." The old man’s sense of "honor" and "justice" is very much alive. After Larry feebly states his creed, he warns Parritt that he "might remember the thing they call justice" (637). Ironically, on the same page that Willie, a representative of the legal justice system, says, "Deny everything" (665), Larry "bursts out with his true reaction..." (665) to denounce Parritt’s betrayal on moral grounds, suggesting that Parritt does not possess "the honor of a louse!" (665). Larry is caught in the effects of an ineffectual, anachronistic Christian dualistic mind-set which is incapable of reconciling what it sees as the "opposites" of existence. From the perspective of this limited point of view, in a world where God is dead, that which is beyond our control and responsibility is insane. Consequently, the paradoxical and irrational forces of Life and Death become a "meaningless joke." What Larry perceives as the "grin...from the one skull of death" would be the smiling mask of Dionysus to the early worshippers of the god. Larry chooses to turn toward Hickey’s salvation without grasping the significance of Parritt’s struggle. He cannot afford to risk the security provided by polar thinking, even if it is the source of his feelings of ennui: it would mean utter isolation.

Parritt, on the other hand, is open to the Dionysian experience because he is isolated from the start. He
pursues truth and shatters the illusions which might have enabled him to attach himself to a community in any meaningful way. He accepts the necessity of his compulsion. In contrast, the bums who are temporarily possessed by Hickey's bustling Dionysian energy return to their illusory existence, very much like the Chorus of The Bacchae, who, unlike the banished members of Pentheus' family, will rebuild their community under the belief that "god has found his way" (220). The bums, however, convince themselves that Hickey is on his way to Matteawan and that the past few turbulent days were meaningless: they will remember him as "the kindest, biggest-hearted guy ever wore shoe leather" (706) and forget the rest. Larry cannot forget. "At the table by the window Larry's hands grip the edge of the table. Unconsciously his head is inclined toward the window as he listens" (706) for Parritt's fall from the fire escape. The old man must live with the undeniable and involuntary involvement in life represented by the compassion which motivates him to tell the kid to "Go up -!" (705). He must live with the irrationality of Parritt's guilt and the mad rightness of his suicide. In Parritt, Larry is confronted with the irrational he has spent his later years distancing himself from.

His illusions are shattered. However, Larry is not simply motivated by compassion. "It's the only way out for him [Parritt]!" (710), says Larry while awaiting Parritt's fall, "torturedly arguing to himself" (710). But his next
words read, "For the peace of all concerned..." (710), one of whom is Larry himself. Larry sends the "mad tortured bastard" up for his own sake as much as he does for Parritt's sake, and he must live with that as well. Implicit in Larry's last distracted words to Parritt, "Go...for your own sake" (705), is the suggestion that this was not necessarily the sole reason why he told Parritt to "Go up -!" in the first place. His self-interest is what drives him crazy about the pity he feels toward the rest of the dreamers--the same pity which perpetuates the dream network which holds together the community on which he depends. This same self-interest underlies the "greedy madness" which he hates and blames for the failure of the Movement--the same self-interest which Hugo cannot stand to face in himself. Larry must live with the reality that at the root of any "Cause" which claims to be the "One True Faith" (580) there is self-interest and ambivalence. He and the rest of the inmates are caught in a godless, materialistic world. However, in The Iceman O'Neill creates a dramatic world where the limits of our modern thinking are transcended and the "Force behind" manifests itself while soliciting our participation.

In the final scene of the play the audience is confronted with the forces embodied in the mask of Dionysus. The juxtaposition of Larry's last ambiguous words and final "oblivious" stare against the noise of the bums' celebration is symbolic of the paradoxical situation in which modern man
finds himself. As the worship of Dionysus insists, faith comes through the acceptance of human limits and suffering. The greater the resistance to this process, often the more profound the suffering and humiliation. As William Arrowsmith states in his introduction to *The Bacchae*:

"Dionysus...is ambivalent: 'most terrible, and yet most gentle, to mankind'" (151). Unlike the bums who live out the god's madness and are finally able to get drunk and separate themselves from Hickey's pain by remembering him as "the kindest big-hearted guy," Larry is left to the limits of his human condition. All his worldly wisdom is undercut by the "Force behind" until the "Old Wise Guy" is left with nothing but the "fixed idea of the insane" (707). The poetic and symbolic coherence of O'Neill's ironic tragedy is crystalized in this final image of juxtaposition.8

Having absorbed the shock of Parritt's fall, Larry's final, hopeless remarks made from beside the window punctuate the noise made by the rest of Hope's clan:

Larry - (in a whisper of horrified pity) Poor Devil! (A long-forgotten faith returns to him for a moment and he mumbles) God rest his soul in peace. (He opens his eyes - with a bitter self-derision) Ah, the damned pity - the wrong kind, as Hickey said! Be God, there's no hope! I'll never be a success in the grandstand - or anywhere else! Life is too much for me! I'll be a weak fool looking with pity at the two sides of everything till the day I die! (with an intense bitter sincerity) May that day come soon! (He pauses startledly, surprised at himself - then with a sardonic grin) Be God, I'm the only real convert to death Hickey made here. From the bottom of my coward's heart I mean that now! (710)
These last ambiguous words, the subject of a wide range of critical interpretations, testify to O'Neill's tragic sensibility by virtue of the ironies which permeate them. Although Larry begins with "a whisper of horrified pity," the pity remains condescending, hence the words "Poor Devil!" and the feelings of distance and superiority which accompany the sound of his own voice inspire him to speak from a "long-forgotten faith." However, as Larry himself senses, this kind of faith and pity is useless and "the wrong kind." It is the product of a pipe dream, like every other faith he knows.

Larry cannot shake the residual Christian impulse which haunts his consciousness. By the time this last speech is heard, Larry's repeated appeals to God, "Be God," resonate with irony. Robert C. Lee, in his article, "Evangelism and Anarchy in The Iceman Cometh," makes a similar point with utter clarity: "...he [Larry] has only life-denying despair left in him. His 'Be God, there's no hope' might well be changed to 'Play God and there's still no hope!' Even when modern man plays God out of love of man, as in Larry's case, he does so only to compensate for his inner ache, his fear of tragic futility, of death. The final irony of Larry's religious failure is that his Christ-act had effect on Don, on betrayal, but not on himself. He is left empty" (Lee 186). Moreover, what Larry perceives as emptiness and meaninglessness could be experienced as meaningful if he could only avoid seeing "the two sides of everything." He
may think about "the two sides of everything" but he can seldom experience the feelings that go with the thoughts. Without knowing his feelings he has never fully experienced "all sides of a question."

Because Larry has to isolate feelings from the thoughts they are a part of, he has not fully understood Parritt's necessity and he has not learned anything new about death or himself. Larry demonstrates the limits of his understanding in Act Three when he flees from Parritt to take a drink on Hickey. Parritt's struggle to uncover the "reason" for his betrayal creates an unbearable amount of tension in the old man. Larry identifies with Parritt's guilt to the point where he feels the immediacy of his own guilt and past intensely. In an effort to break the tension Larry says: "For the love of Christ will you leave me in peace! I've told you you can't make me judge you!..." (666). Parritt's feelings threaten the "peace" of philosophical detachment. Parritt makes Larry feel but the old man refuses to understand. Larry senses that the act of judgement requires both feeling and intellect. Consequently, "He pushes back his chair and springs to his feet...[and] goes to the bar" (666). He smells death on the guilt-ridden youth. Larry turns his back on the reality of death in life when he refuses to confront Parritt's drive toward death. He refuses to acknowledge death.

However, his words betray him when he turns to the bar to take a drink on Hickey: "...I'd get blind to the world
now if it was the Iceman of Death himself treating! (He stops, startledly, a superstitious awe coming into his face.) What made me say that, I wonder...." It seems as if there is no escaping "Death." Larry chooses to "get paralyzed" (667) rather than to confront the fact of the appropriateness of Parritt's death. He denies the importance of death to living by turning toward Hickey. His inability to confront mortality leads to his acceptance of Hickey's illusory, conceptual form of Death—a "conversion" based on the denial of the suffering and vulnerability which is a part of living. The inability to accept and understand his own mortality triggers his inadvertent identification of Hickey with "the Iceman of Death." It is this same inability which motivates Larry to tell Parritt to "Go up--!" Larry is incapable of reconciling his fear of death with the idea of death. At the end of the play, when Larry "pauses startledly, surprised at himself..." for wishing that his death "come soon," he demonstrates that he no more understands what drives him now than he did when he fled from Parritt in Act Three. The fact that he accepts that he is "the only real convert to death Hickey made" gives him a sense of intellectual comfort but it does not imply that he understands death in any way. The tragic irony is that this man is incapable of grasping what it means to live—to live with knowledge of your mortality that is. When he reduces death to only a metaphysical idea, he denies its power to
frighten him, and death remains emotionally meaningless to him.

Larry is yet to be overwhelmed by the Dionysian forces of his desire. The grin from the "skull of death" originates in the smile of the mask of Dionysus and the forces of Life, Death and sexuality. Like Pentheus, who is dismembered by his mother and the women who are the object of his desires, Larry’s tragic fate is just beginning. Given the degree of his resistance and repression, his madness may be chronic and it may finally compel him to take his own life, since it will certainly isolate and alienate him from the pipe dreamers of his one remaining home.

At the end of O’Neill’s Iceman sits a man, Larry Slade, "frozen." Somewhere just outside the window beside which he sits is the dead body of the son of the woman he loved and about whom he feels guilty for leaving because of a "bourgeois morality" which he detests in himself; a woman who may have betrayed him despite and in resistance to accepting any idealized or virginal role. This son was the last free member of the anarchist movement in which Larry had been an active member. However, no individual is free in O’Neill’s Dionysian drama. Rosa is compelled by a desire to assert her freedom and control and it seems as if Larry’s idealized, monogamous and possessive conception of their relationship cut against the grain of her life. Rosa’s amoral pose and idealistic notions of freedom act so as to alienate and frustrate Larry (as well as her son Parritt).
These anarchist ideals are a moral code in themselves. This is evident in the way in which Larry's underlying (emerging within the context of a love relationship), more Christian ideals conflict with Rosa's (the Movement's) codes of conduct. Larry must live with the paradox of his transgression. His ambiguous religiosity and guilt engender his turn toward nihilism, and finally Death.

To one side of O'Neill's "frozen" character is the window and on the other side move the inmates of Hope's saloon, "roaring with laughter" (711), a clan of which Larry has been an intimate member for years. "Larry stares in front of him, oblivious to their racket" (711). His final ambiguous, haunted words and his fixed stare into the audience echo Hugo's stare into space at the end of Act Three. In this final scene of the play, Larry embodies Otto's description of "the maenad, whose shrill exultation we think we have just heard frightens with her rigid stare, in which we can see the reflection of the horror which drives her mad." In Act One the audience first sees Larry "facing front" (565); at the outset of Act Three "he stares ahead" (651); and at the end of the play he "stares in front of him, oblivious" to the "racket" being made by the only community he has left. The audience's experience of Larry's final stare is quite unique, despite the similarity of this "oblivious" stare to those of previous acts, primarily because this particular stare is unique for Larry himself. Michael Manheim, in his book, Eugene O'Neill's New Language
of Kinship, takes a position on Larry’s fate which is more or less opposite to mine, when he says: "Larry, having just recommended and experienced a suicide, says he has become a true convert to death – which might suggest that he too intends to commit suicide. But he does not ‘go’. He remains essentially in the same posture he has been in throughout the play, and there is nothing to indicate really that he will do anything else. He will keep doing the things he has been doing, and he will await death. In short, he will do what all people do, though he will now do it free of illusion" (142-43). I could not disagree more.

In the end, the god is inside the old man. O’Neill begins his play with "Larry Slade and Hugo Kalmar...at the table at left-front, Hugo in a chair facing right, Larry at rear of table facing front, with an empty chair between them" (565).

Here, Larry sits secure within a community, beside his long-time friend, Hugo. He is surrounded by the reassuring snores of his "family." At the outset of Act Three "Larry sits in a chair, facing right-front. He has no drink in front of him. He stares ahead, deep in harried thought. On his right, in a chair facing right, Hugo sits sprawled forward.... At rear of the front table at left of them, in a chair facing left, Parritt is sitting..." (651). Hugo is still by Larry’s side, but so is the sobering presence of Parritt, and as a result the old man’s sense of security is shaken and he sits "deep in harried thought." In the final scene of the play Larry sits "oblivious" to the noise
created by the community which once reassured him. Hugo has already instinctively abandoned Larry to preserve the illusions which enable him to tolerate living. Hugo says to the old man who clings to the edge of the table while listening for Parritt’s fall: "...You look dead...Crazy fool! You vas crazy like Hickey! You give me bad dreams, too" (708). Larry’s illusionless condition is incompatible with the community of the "Palace of Pipe Dreams." Without a pipe dream he has no place—no home.9

A past from which Larry has distanced himself, but remained attached to, has intruded upon a present to which he has become accustomed: a present for which he felt philosophical detachment. Larry’s past and present intersect, merge and die as he sits poised between them. There are no more seats left in the grandstand of philosophical detachment—as a matter of fact I think the grandstand no longer exists. There is simply a field—a field of energy, you might say—and the only perspective is a chaotic one. Larry is possessed by the "Force behind." He is disoriented and alienated in his isolation. He does not belong. Unlike the bums who manage to make sense of Hickey’s actions and his effect on them, Larry cannot return to the comfort of illusion after his horrifying encounter with Parritt. The necessity of Parritt’s death is beyond the limits of Larry’s rational, dualistic mind. But Hickey is a false prophet and Larry’s "conversion" is meaningless in the face of the realities unleashed by Dionysian forces.
Larry, like Parritt and Hickey before him, will probably have to "go" (go up and take that hop off the fire escape or leave the bar) if he ever emerges from his madness. If he does manage to remain in Hope's saloon the other regulars will have to find some way of accommodating a man whose heightened sense of guilt and intensified feelings of loss will generate a more desperate cynicism.

O'Neill's Dionysian drama takes on new meaning in the light of the worship of Dionysus. *The Iceman Cometh* is an ironic tragedy and (as O'Neill had written seven years before finishing the first draft of the play) "a legitimate descendant of the first theatre that sprang, by virtue of man's imaginative interpretation of life, out of his worship of Dionysus...a theatre returned to its highest and sole significant function as a Temple where the religion of a poetical interpretation and symbolical celebration of life is communicated to human beings, starved in spirit by their soul-stifling daily struggle to exist as masks among the masks of living!" The final vibrating image of *The Iceman* crystalizes the poetic and symbolic nature of this Dionysian play, and O'Neill's audience is confronted with the merging of the polarities of blissful ecstasy and inexorable horror. Larry's horror and the bums' ecstasy resonate in our field of vision and our ears so that there is a sense of balance and spiritual power communicated. O'Neill's dream, "the Greek dream," comes true in a Dionysian, ironic tragedy.
Notes

1 In his article, "The Wisdom of Silenus in O’Neill’s Iceman," William Brashear looks at Larry from a Nietzschean perspective. He sees Larry as the undeceived tragic protagonist who is the only character to fully comprehend "the nothingness of life and at the same time the necessity for the ‘illusion’ or the ‘pipe dream’" (Brashear 181). However, Larry is unable to accept the significance of "nothingness." It is my opinion that the Nietzschean perspective alone limits one’s ability to see the scope of the Dionysian sensibility operating in The Iceman. Larry may sense and fear the "nothingness of life" but he certainly does not "comprehend" it as Brashear states. It is beyond the intellectual and rational and only by the end of the play, when all intellectual order is shattered, does Larry have a Dionysiac experience. For Brashear, Larry is "the tragic hero of The Iceman by virtue of the fact that he does understand and has with his mind’s eye pierced through the Socratic facades of existence and meaning to stand openly confronted by the terrifying Dionysiac realm, and he longs only for death" (182-3). As will be demonstrated, Larry only confronts the "Dionysiac realm" at the close of the play and his death-longing is a product of his more limited, Christian dualistic mind-set. Larry may know of the necessity for "illusion" or the "pipe dream," but he believes himself to be exempt from this necessity. His words of "wisdom" are often the source of The Iceman’s most ironically tragic moments. Looking at The Iceman with Nietzschean eyes leads Brashear to idealize Larry without recognizing the old man’s limits.

In his article, "Dionysus in The Iceman Cometh," Leonard Chabrowe argues "that the writing of The Iceman Cometh in 1939 was essentially a transposition of Lazarus Laughed into an idiom suitable for the New York stage, though one which in a subtle way was no less Dionysian" (377). Chabrowe’s article illuminates the ritualistic nature of The Iceman in the light of Nietzsche’s version of the Dionysian. He points out that in writing The Iceman O’Neill attempts to create "a drama equivalent in the modern theatre to that of the Greeks in the ancient Athenian" (377). Although I agree with Chabrowe on this last point, he, like Brashear, does not recognize the degree to which O’Neill contrasts a Greek mythos with Judeo-Christian dualism. Chabrowe shows no interest in the Greekness of Don Parritt’s suffering and the dramatic irony behind Larry Slade’s consciously ironic words of "wisdom." In "Dionysus in The Iceman Cometh," Chabrowe anticipates some of the claims made in my essay, but he does not explore them in any detail.
In his book on Dionysus, Otto describes the god's paradoxical birth: "He was the child of Zeus and a mortal woman [Semele]. But even before she bore him, she was consumed in the holocaust of the lightning of her heavenly bridegroom.... He [Zeus] took up the fruit of the womb, not yet capable of life, and placed it in his divine body." (65). Dionysus is the twice-born god.

Eugene O'Neill, Complete Plays 1932-1943 (New York: The Library of America, 1988), p. 577. All subsequent quotations from The Iceman Cometh are documented by pagination only.

At the end of The Bacchae, while all are confronted with the horrors of their own god-inspired actions, Cadmus repeats the word, "this," in an attempt to articulate that which is beyond comprehension and absolutely present:

This is a grief
so great it knows no size. I cannot look.
This is the awful murder your hands have done.
This, this is the noble victim you have slaughtered
to the gods.... (210)

In his introduction to the Heracles, William Arrowsmith makes a distinction between Euripidean and Aristotelian tragedy which allies O'Neill's tragic sensibility with Euripides: "For Aristotle a tragic fall is grounded in a consistent and harmonious sense of man's responsibility for his nature and his actions: when the hero falls, he falls for his own failure, and behind the rightness of his fall, working both pity and fear by the precise and relentless nature of its operations, stands the order which society and a god-informed world impose upon the individual. What the law requires the gods require too, and so the Aristotelian play portrays, like an image of human life, the individual torn and suffering between his nature and an objective world-order. In Euripides it is otherwise; here the suffering of the individual under his necessity may have no such rightness, or even none at all, as in the Heracles. The world-order of the gods as reflected in 'things as they are said to be' is either incredible or an indictment of that order, and it imposes necessities upon a man, the very courage with which he endures makes him tragic and gives him the moral victory over his own fate" (278).

In "Civilization and Its Discontents," Freud discusses the development of "ego-feeling" in adults, stating that "an infant at the breast does not as yet distinguish his ego from the external world as the source of the sensations flowing in upon him. He gradually learns to do so, in response to various promptings. He must be very strongly impressed by the fact that some sources of excitation, which he will later recognize as his own bodily organs, can
provide him with sensations at any moment, whereas other sources evade him from time to time - among them what he desires most of all, his mother's breast - and only reappear as a result of his screaming for help" (66-67).

7 This idea is the thesis of Winifred Frazer's book, Love as Death in The Iceman Cometh.

8 In a footnote to the Bacchae, E.R. Dodds mentions a parallel experience to that of being possessed by Dionysus which reflects the final, symbolic moments of O'Neill's play: "In the Ghost Dance of the North American Indians the dancers, one after the other, fell rigid, prostrate on the ground. During their seizure they had visions...and meanwhile the dance continued and others fell (R. Benedict, Patterns of Culture, 92).... The falling maenad is occasionally recognizable in vase-paintings..." (87). Deathlike silence and ecstatic activity are juxtaposed.

9 Cyrus Day, in "The Iceman and the Bridegroom," says: "Over and above their private illusions, however, stands Christianity, the collective illusion of what O'Neill thought of as a bankrupt Western civilization. Religion is an illusion, O'Neill evidently agreed; but unlike Freud, he did not think that the "swine called men" could live without it" (7).
Bibliography


