

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE  
O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

TABLE OF CONTENT:

INTRODUCTION .....	1
FROM GREEK TRAGEDIES TO MODERN TRAGEDIES .....	3
O'NEILL AND HIS PLACE IN AMERICAN LITERARY HISTORY .....	8
THEORY/METHOD .....	9
ANALYSIS I.....	13
A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE ICEMAN COMETH .....	14
ANALYSIS OF THE ICEMAN COMETH .....	16
CHARACTERIZATION .....	18
THE TRAGIC HERO OF THE ICEMAN COMETH .....	28
THEMES OF THE ICEMAN COMETH .....	35
ANALYSIS II .....	37
A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA .....	37
ANALYSIS OF MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA.....	38
CHARACTERIZATION .....	41
THE TRAGIC HERO OF MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA .....	47
THEMES OF MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA .....	50
DISCUSSION .....	56
CONCLUSION .....	58

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

INTRODUCTION

I want to examine the re-actualization of Aristotle's *Poetics* theory in two of Eugene O'Neill's plays – *The Iceman Cometh* (1947) and *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1932). Could there even be talk of a re-actualization of the Aristotelian theory in these plays, and if so how does this manifest itself in the aforementioned plays? This project argue that there is a re-actualization in *The Iceman Cometh* (1947) and *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1932) by Eugene O'Neill.

It is difficult if not impossible to even talk about the American Theatre without the mention of the grand playwright Eugene O'Neill. Reading his biographies one gets the sense that it did not take long before his career took off, and he did achieve a lot more in his sort life than most playwrights ever did: "Mr. O'Neill is only forty-nine, but he has already done more important and memorable work in the theatre than any American before him" (Cargill, Fagin, Fisher. *O'Neill and His Plays*. P. 307. 1961).

2016 seems to be the year of O'Neill with three major productions of: *Hughie* (1998), two productions of *Long Days Journey Into Night* (1991). This could also be said about Shakespeare – that he has more than one life.

These past two years seems to be the years of O'Neill in the sense that there have been a number of productions of O'Neill's plays with high profile actors both on and off Broadway in New York City and in Bristol at The Old Vic. New York audiences have had the pleasure of seeing a production of *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) with actors such as Nathan Lane and Brian Dennehy, the later actor is someone, whom is not foreign in the O'Neillian world. Although in this production Dennehy played the part of Larry Slade, he has in the past played the main character, Hickey, whom Nathan Lane had the pleasure of portraying this time around.

*Hughie* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1998) is an O'Neill play that is not often staged, but New York audiences had the pleasure of seeing Forest Whitaker in the play this season. One of the big O'Neill plays, *The Long Days Journey into Night* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1991), was staged both in New York City, with an impressive cast that included: Gabriel Byrne and Jessica Lange, and in Bristol. While in Bristol and The Old Vic one of the greats, Jeremy Irons, commanded the stage as James Tyrone.

These wonderful productions bring to mind the fact that O'Neill is one of those playwrights, whom appear to resurface every so often when a new generation discovers him much like the plays of William Shakespeare. Just as it is the case with the plays by Shakespeare that never

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

seem to get old or irrelevant, it could also be argued that this is indeed also the case with the plays by O'Neill: "O'Neill is apparently one of those writers who are destined to have more than one life. After a period of denigration they are rediscovered and reinstated in esteem, or a new generation discovers them for the first time and finds them important" (Cargill, Fagin, Fisher. *O'Neill and His Plays*. P. 4. 1961).

Some would perhaps describe O'Neill as an experimental playwright of his time, but then on the other hand was he really that experimental compared to another great playwright such as Tennessee Williams? It can seem almost impossible to pin down Williams to a theory such as the Aristotelian theory. Williams is also an example of a playwright, whose later plays, have not been recognized by the critics or the public until now. One might suggest that Williams was ahead of his time.

However, one might suggest that there are few playwrights of that time and perhaps even now, who would be willing to put their characters through as much pain and suffering as it would appear that O'Neill did. The extraordinary thing or rather one of the extraordinary things about O'Neill is that, he was willing to speak the truth about his characters, put them through hell and yet without any sort of judgment on his part.

It is difficult to talk about O'Neill without mentioning the fact that he would often base characters on people in his life. *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) is merely one example of this. *Hughie* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1998), and *Long Day's Journey into Night* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1991) are also examples of O'Neill using people from his own life and even himself as inspiration. One could argue that it was almost therapeutic for O'Neill to write some of the aforementioned plays - especially *Long Day's Journey into Night* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1991), which in greatly dealt with the family unit – O'Neill's own family unit.

A person that O'Neill frequently based characters upon was his own brother, Jamie O'Neill. One might speculate why this is the case. *Long Day's Journey into Night* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1991) is perhaps the most evident example of this, whereas the main character in *Hughie* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1998) and certainly Hickey in *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) only share a few characteristics with Jamie O'Neill, which is something that I will return to in this assignment. One might dare suggest that it is brave and perhaps even commendable that Eugene O'Neill would be willing use so much of his own personal life in his plays. Perhaps this is why it seems almost effortless to identify with some of his characters?

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

“In [O'Neill's] plays things happen, things that all may see and understand. There are fights, there is drunkenness, there is violent language, swearing and blasphemies, with a piquant American accent. There is everything that is likely to appeal to the postwar mind and taste” (Cargill, Fagin, Fisher. *O'Neill and His Plays*. P. 257. 1961).

Death and subsequently sorrow are both common occurrences in his plays. Certainly Mary Tyrone in *Long Days Journey into Night* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1991) mourns the loss of her son, Eugene, Harry Hope mourns the loss of his wife in *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947), and one could claim that later on in *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) they all mourn the loss of their pipe dreams: “[O'Neill] created a series of bereaved characters who, like their author, could neither mourn nor free themselves from their ghost” (Black, Stephen A. *Eugene O'Neill: Beyond Mourning and Tragedy*. P. 299. 2002). One could argue that Mary Tyrone, in *Long Days Journey into Night* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1991), is almost haunted by the death of her baby boy just as one might suggest that it would appear that Hickey is in *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) by the death of his wife, and one could argue that Orin and Lavinia Mannon are both haunted by the family ghosts in *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1932).

Furthermore one could argue that the characters in *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) mourn the lives that they could have had. One could argue that the pipe dreams are chances not taken or perhaps even lives not lived, and that the pipe dreams are not only misconstrued hopes that these characters have, lies that they tell themselves every day of their lives, but that the characters might also be in mourning of the lives that they do not dare to live.

### FROM GREEK TRAGEDIES TO MODERN TRAGEDIES

In this chapter I will give a brief explanation of the Greek tragedy, and then I will move on to how American Theatre is presented in the modern world. This is important, because there are elements from Greek tragedy that have been passed on into the American Theatre. This is something that is evident in a few of Eugene O'Neill's tragedies as well as in some of Arthur Miller's tragedies.

According to Leo Aylen's book *Greek Tragedies & The Modern World* (P. 28. 1964) Greek tragedies began with a riotous choral improvisation and out of this the dithyramb grew. What was the dithyramb? The dithyramb was just one way that a performance of this kind was organized, and furthermore it was the earliest form to be governed by rules (Aylen, Leo. *Greek Tragedies & The Modern World*. P. 28. 1964).

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

The chorus is also something that Aristotle mentions in his theory, and once a chorus starts to perform the element of improvisation will subsequently diminish, because the chorus must work together – after all they are not soloists (Aylen, Leo. *Greek Tragedies & The Modern World*. P. 28. 1964).

If one studies the Aristophanes in relation to the topic of Greek tragedy, it is quite clear that like other primitive peoples, they probably had a mime, whom was very good at his job (Aylen, Leo. *Greek Tragedies & The Modern World*. Pp. 28-29. 1964), and this would help elaborate the sometimes obscure texts that the choruses would perform. A mime is not something that one sees often in the theatre these days. A mime is almost closer to being a street-performer nowadays, but back then a mime would not just imitate passersby, but he would help clarify the poetry by using his mime technique.

Although one could claim that Samuel Becket had a character in *Waiting for Godot* (2011), who was almost like a mime throughout most the play, because he does not speak until late in the play, and so perhaps it was not that long ago that there was a mime in what would seem to be a normal modern theatrical production.

Mime is not the only that the Greeks were fond of in their performances. As a matter of fact the use of masks stems from Attica, and it was Thespis, who began the custom of using a masked soloist that spoke verse in order to help illustrate the story that was being told (Aylen, Leo. *Greek Tragedies & The Modern World*. P. 29. 1964).

It should be noted that in the beginning the mask did not represent the character, but it might have had some sort of ritual significance, or it may have been made merely to increase the remoteness of the performer (Aylen, Leo. *Greek Tragedies & The Modern World*. P. 29. 1964). Have masks ever been used in the theatre since those days? Yes they have. Even O'Neill tried to use masks in a production of a play, which did not quite work the way he hoped, it would. However, another great playwright by the name of William Shakespeare often used masks in his productions, because a character or more would pretend to be someone other than he or she was for instance.

Whereas *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) can appear to be almost crowded with people onstage at times, the Greeks did not use more than three actors in tragedy, as they preferred to emphasize the basic pattern at the expense of the detail of characterization (Aylen, Leo. *Greek Tragedies & The Modern World*. P. 29. 1964). Therefore one might claim that the individual was not as important at that particular time in history, and that the individual was not of value, but

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

rather the masses were important. Whereas as today it seems to be the other way around – it is perhaps not so much what the majority would like, but what the individual likes and wants: “The audience of Greek tragedy were invited to contemplate the totality, not to become involved with individual characters as they are in the normal modern theatre” (Aylen, Leo. *Greek Tragedies & The Modern World*. P. 30. 1964).

The masks are not the only thing that has crept its way into more recent dramatic work: “In Greek drama actors often speak to the audience direct” (Aylen, Leo. *Greek Tragedies & The Modern World*. P. 30. 1964). This is something that one experiences a number of times in William Shakespeare's *Richard III* (1995) for instance. Richard often shares his plans with the audience before he follows through with them, and the same could be said for the character of Frank Underwood, a part that has won Kevin Spacey a number of awards, in the highly popular Netflix drama *House of Cards* (Willimon, Beau. 2013).

According to Aylen plays are a form of teaching and just one form of showing us how to live (Aylen, Leo. *Greek Tragedies & The Modern World*. P. 31. 1964), but when one reads plays such as *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) or *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1932), one wonders if the opposite is not the case? That instead of tragedies showing us how to live our lives, that they are rather a way of showing the audience how not to live instead of how to live. Who would want to consciously live like so many of the regulars at Harry Hope's in *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) do? It is doubtful that anybody would consciously make that choice. One could also argue that this is the case with *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1932). Who would want to be a part of a family such as the Mannons?

According to the Aristotelian theory the higher the fall from grace is for the tragic hero, the more sympathy and pity it evokes in the audience. For instance in *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) Hickey's fall from grace might not seem to be that significant, because he is not rich, well-educated etc. However; he does appear to have more money, more happiness and finer clothes than his friends, who spent the majority of their lives in the backroom of Harry Hope's drinking, and therefore Hickey's fall from grace arouse pity and sympathy from the audience.

This is something that stems from the Greek tragedies – the audience's sympathy for the suffering that is played out onstage: “Our sympathy for sufferings seen on stage is always that of spectators; we are able to detach our sympathy from our moral judgement. [...] it was part of the outlook of the fifth-century Greeks to be able to see the reason for suffering at the same time as pitying it” (Aylen, Leo. *Greek Tragedies & The Modern World*. P. 157. 1964). This is something

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

that one can also see in O'Neill's tragedies – for instance in *Long Day's into Night* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1991), because the fall from grace for the character of Mary Tyrone is significant in that she came from a well-to-do family only to marry an actor, lose a child and in the end become addictive of morphine.

This of course also brings Hickey in *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) to mind, because the regulars of Harry Hope's almost see Hickey as their Messiah, and one could argue that he sees himself as the Messiah as well, and thus his fall from grace becomes even greater, because as the audience one is tempted to go along with the regulars' thoughts and opinions of Hickey in the beginning of the play.

Greek tragedies were also a means for the audience to discuss and ponder the important issues of life and death, and at the same time the tragedies were a kind of social activity (Aylen, Leo. *Greek Tragedies & The Modern World*. P. 158. 1964). As Aristotle remarks in his theory, tragedy can also imitate life, and Aylen would probably agree with that, because there is only one thing that everyone, who is born into this life, knows for certain and that is that everybody has to die at some point (Aylen, Leo. *Greek Tragedies & The Modern World*. P. 1. 1964).

Perhaps this is why tragedy revolved and does revolve so much around death? Because there was a higher death in society as a whole than there is today? It was not uncommon to lose a child or to lose your wife, whilst she was giving birth to your child etc. Learning how to deal with death could very well be a function of tragedy, because everybody knows there is an expiration date on this life, but few know how to live with that fact or even think about it (Aylen, Leo. *Greek Tragedies & The Modern World*. P. 1. 1964), and this perhaps because the mere thought of death, feels as though it brings one a little closer to death.

How does one learn from tragedy? Essentially tragedy teaches the audience right from wrong, and therefore there is a constant awareness of human ability (Aylen, Leo. *Greek Tragedies & The Modern World*. P. 2. 1964). Tragedy teaches the audience right from wrong and about death by showing the audience examples of individuals or societies gone wrong and how they went wrong (Aylen, Leo. *Greek Tragedies & The Modern World*. P. 159. 1964). Tragedy can teach the audience about the downfall of individuals or societies by showing us examples such as Mary Tyrone in *Long Day's Journey into Night* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1991), Hickey in *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947), and The Mannons in *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1932).

As time went by and the world changed, tragedy changed along with it. In the beginning tragedies focused more on what brought men down, and not the man himself, whereas William

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

Shakespeare put his focus on the man, which is something we see in later tragedies by Eugene O'Neill and Arthur Miller as well: "In tragedy we are asked to watch men being swept down waterfalls, not only the man, the waterfall too. In Greek tragedy, which has no heroes, we are asked more to watch the waterfall, in Shakespeare, more to watch the man" (Aylen, Leo. *Greek Tragedies & The Modern World*. P. 164. 1964).

This clearly makes Shakespeare's tragedies far more personal and individual (Aylen, Leo. *Greek Tragedies & The Modern World*. P. 159. 1964), and perhaps one could argue this is also one of the things that makes Shakespeare's tragedies so interesting, and furthermore it might be why his work is still relevant today. This might be one of the many reasons why one keeps coming back to Shakespeare, just as one keeps coming back to Eugene O'Neill because they both tend to focus on the man, which make their tragedies all the more personal and relatable.

However, there are some significant differences between the plays written by William Shakespeare and those written by the great American playwrights, Arthur Miller and Eugene O'Neill, in the sense that they did not write about Kings and Queens as Shakespeare tended to do. Miller did state in an essay that he believed the common man was just as apt a subject for tragedy as Kings and Queens were (Miller, Arthur. *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*. P. 3. 1996).

As previously stated one could argue that both O'Neill and Miller helped make tragedies a little more accessible for the common man by making tragedies about the common man. It suddenly became easier to relate to these often quite depressing tragedies that were played onstage.

The model of 'right or wrong' was something that Arthur Miller claimed to use as a sort of basis for his plays, and this is especially clear in his play, *Death of a Salesman* (Miller, Arthur. 1998):

"In all my plays and books I try to take settings and dramatic situations from life which involve real questions of right and wrong. [...] in the most realistic situations I can find, the moral dilemma [...]. I don't see how you can write anything decent without using the question of right and wrong as the basis" (Miller, Arthur. *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*. P. xxi. 1996).

It is clear that, although there have been made changes for the modern tragedies, since the first Greek tragedies were written and subsequently performed, there are still some things in the modern tragedies that can be traced back to the Greek tragedies such as the teachings of right from wrong, and how to deal with death.

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

O'NEILL AND HIS PLACE IN AMERICAN LITERARY HISTORY

This chapter will be a brief introduction to Eugene O'Neill as a playwright and his place in American literary history. Once O'Neill committed himself to being a playwright, it did not take long, before he was recognized as a major force in the American theatre, and another ten years after that he was known worldwide as the winner of the Nobel Prize – this was in 1936 (Bradbury, M. & Ruland, R. *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*. P. 327. 1991). Eugene O'Neill is the only American playwright thus far to have been honored with such an award.

When O'Neill first began as playwright, he was thought of as experimental and a modernist (Bradbury, M. & Ruland, R. *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*. P. 328. 1991), but if one compares O'Neill's work with that the later work of Tennessee Williams for instance, Williams would most likely come of as the most experimental of the two. Edward Albee is another American playwright, one might think of as being experimental – after all he did write a play about a man and his deep and true love for a goat.

One is tempted to think of O'Neill has having something recognizable about his work – such as his tendency to write incredibly detailed descriptions of his characters, which some directors find annoying and more or less disregards them whereas others find them helpful, and rather lengthy monologues: “Many of the plays contain lengthy monologues; *The Iceman Cometh* (1947) ends with perhaps the longest such speech in recent dramatic history” (Bradbury, M. & Ruland, R. *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*. P. 328. 1991). When the actress Glenda Jackson was part of a television revival of the nine-act stream-of-consciousness *Strange Interlude* (1928), she remarked that Eugene O'Neill did not write dialogue, but rather speeches (Bradbury, M. & Ruland, R. *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*. P. 328. 1991).

Eugene O'Neill was for a time associated with The Provincetown Players, which was amateur theatrical group that I will mention again later on in this assignment. O'Neill's somewhat long association with The Provincetown Players gave him the opportunity for extensive experiments in dramatic still and structure, and thus earned The Provincetown Players a place in American literary history as well (Bradbury, M. & Ruland, R. *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*. P. 328. 1991).

The association with The Provincetown Players also helped channel European currents into the New York productions and in time it would earn O'Neill the Nobel Prize in 1936 (Bradbury, M. & Ruland, R. *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*. P. 325. 1991). Speaking of challenging the European currents in European theatre to American theatre O'Neill often cited the sig-

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

nificance of Strindberg in his personal letters and journal in his own development as a playwright: “In the theater, the influence of Ibsen Strindberg and Maeterlinck would revivify the American drama of Eugene O’Neill and Elmer Rice, and that would duly pass lessons back to modern European drama” (Bradbury, M. & Ruland, R. *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*. P. 268. 1991). Also, Strindberg’s innovative style advanced the cause of modernism, which freed others such as Eugene O’Neill and Arthur Miller to experiment with the dramatic form (Miller, Arthur. *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*. P. 1. 1996).

Furthermore O’Neill’s wide reading and interest in Freud, Jung and Adler step by step led him to attempt to dramatize the inner struggles and conflicts that govern the search for existential meaning (Bradbury, M. & Ruland, R. *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*. P. 328. 1991), which is something that is fairly obvious in most of his plays as well.

As innovative as O’Neill was compared to other playwrights, when he first came to the scene, if his audiences were added up with those of Maxwell Anderson, Clifford Odets, Robert Sherwood and Lillian Herman, they would never match up to the ever growing numbers of the audiences at the movie theaters (Bradbury, M. & Ruland, R. *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*. P. 325. 1991), which of course was the new and exciting medium, when all of the aforementioned playwrights started their careers.

As Hollywood began to spread its wings during the 1930s, it was typically not the playwrights that went to Hollywood to have careers as screenwriters – strange as it may seem, but rather novelists like Faulkner and Fitzgerald (Bradbury, M. & Ruland, R. *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*. P. 325. 1991). O’Neill never went to Hollywood. His life and career was firmly placed in the American theatre almost from the beginning of his life, it seems.

However, the lack of playwrights in Hollywood changed after World War II, when everyone realized that films were there to stay, and playwrights such as Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, William Inge and Edward Albee established firm connections with Hollywood (Bradbury, M. & Ruland, R. *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*. P. 325. 1991). Several of both Tennessee Williams’ and Arthur Miller’s plays were turned into movies.

## THEORY/METHOD

I have chosen to use Aristotle’s *Poetics* (1998) theory to analyze the re-actualization of this theory in two of Eugene O’Neill’s plays – *The Iceman Cometh* (1947) and *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1932) and to discuss whether or not there is in fact talk of a re-actualization of the Aristotelian the-

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

ory in these two plays. I have chosen this theory and the plays by O'Neill, because I have often found in the past with other assignments that the aforementioned theory often fits perfectly with tragedies written by Eugene O'Neill.

In Aristotle's theory the primary asset is as follows: a single unit/unity and an action which takes place during the course of twenty-four hours or just over: "[...] while that of tragedy is normally a single twenty-four hours period, or just over" (Aristotle/McLeish, Kenneth. *Poetics*. P. 9. 1999). One might suggest that there could be a somewhat simple reason for only having one set, when one is discussing theatre and especially the beginning of theatre. It is a lot easier to deal with just one set, because one does not have to create any kind of 'diversion' in order to shift the audience's attention from the all the commotion onstage of changing the present set to another by removing furniture and maybe even adding new furniture to the current set in the process.

When one looks to the characters, there has been made an almost obvious distinction between the characters of tragedy and the characters of comedy: "Tragic characters idealize reality, comic characters caricature it" (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. 5. 1999).

Also, Aristotle writes about an author's job actually is. One might be tempted to think that the author's only job is to simply report or observe what happens, but that is not the case. The author's job is rather to evoke a series of possibilities and/or choices and these should at the very least plausible: "It is clear from all this that the job of an author of fiction is to write not about what actually happens but about what might happen in a given set of circumstances" (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. 13. 1999).

The two most vital points in the Aristotelian theory would be the plot and the tragic hero. First I will concentrate on the plot. It is obviously necessary that the plot of a tragedy has a beginning, a middle and an end. This is opposed to throwing the audience into the middle of a plot that would appear to have begun prior to the audience having arrived in the theatre, and the play's beginning:

"By 'whole' I mean that it has a beginning, a middle and an end. A beginning is something, which does not follow or result from anything else but after which something else follows or results. An end is the mirror image of this: something which follows or results from something else, but which nothing else results from or follows. A middle follows something else and itself is followed" (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. 12).

Like just about any character in a play or book, it is also essential according to the Aristotelian theory that the characters in the play are someone that the audience will find likeable,

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

feel hatred towards or feel sorry for. Why is this the case, one might ask? Because this will without a doubt evoke the audience's attention easier than otherwise: "As regards the characters, there are four points to aim at. First and most important, they must be 'good.' [...] Second, character should be appropriate. For example, there is a 'manly' character, and it would be inappropriate if a female character [...] showed intellectual ability. Third, characters should fit their 'reality.' [...] Fourth, character should be consistent. Even if the character is inconsistent in the author's source, that character in the play should be consistently inconsistent" (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. 20-21. 1999).

It is doubtful that an audience would find themselves emotionally invested in a play with characters who are more or less indifferent and have no sense of purpose: "The people doing or suffering these actions must be 'good' or 'bad' – the standard moral distinction between members of the human race. It follows that the people imitated must be 'better' than us, 'worse' than us, or exactly the same" (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. 4. 1999).

Another thing that a tragedy cannot be without is of course reversal and discovery. I will begin with reversal. According to the Aristotelian theory, reversal in tragedy means that things change from one state to a completely other state. An example of this could be Mary Tyrone in *Long Day's Journey into Night* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1991) – when her sons, her husband and the audience all believe that she has kicked her morphine habit and all is finally well with Tyrone family, but then she begins to shoot up again: "Reversal, as I said above, is when the circumstances change to their direct opposite – and it, too, should be inevitable or plausible" (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. 15. 1999).

I would now like to move on to the matter of discovery. Just as there must be a reversal of the state of things, there must be a discovery and thus something to be discovered. An example of this could be Hickey in *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947), when we discover that his dear wife, Evelyn, did not just die of natural causes, but that he killed her. Another example could be when Lavinia and Orin discover their mother's affair with the young Adam Brant in *Mourning Becomes Electra*. Therefore one must conclude that the discovery is linked with the reversal: "Discovery, as the word suggests, is a change from ignorance to knowledge" (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. 15. 1999).

In order to have any kind of success with a play it is vital that the action, especially that of a tragedy, happens between people who are connected with each other and share a close bond. This usually means that the action in a tragedy takes place within a family unit, as it often the case with the tragedies of William Shakespeare. However, the action can take place between a

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

group of friends such as it is the case with *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) as opposed to within a family unit as it is the case in *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1932). It is imperative that the action does not happen between strangers, because that would not evoke a lot of pity from the audience. The audience is far more likely to emotionally invest in a tragedy that revolves around people, whom are closely connected to one another, and furthermore the characters are more likely to gain a kind of understanding from the audience:

“Since the author’s task is to arouse, by imitation, the satisfaction of feeling pity and terror, the ability to do this must be inherent in the incidents of the play. We need to examine what kind of incidents will result in such reactions. What is done in a play inevitably happens between people who like each other [...]. Authors should work for situations where terrible things happen between intimates” (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. 19. 1999).

As previously mentioned in this chapter about the Aristotelian theory, it is important that a play somehow make every choice and/or everything impossible to avoid. It should at the very least appear likely, and this ought to somehow or other influence the characters in the play:

“When writing characters, just as when organizing the muthos, it is important to make everything inevitable or at least plausible. Whenever a given character says or does something, it should follow inevitably or plausibly from what we know of the character and from what has gone before” (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. 21. 1999).

As I have more or less stated previously in this chapter, there must be some kind of complication, which will undoubtedly be discovered, and there should be a resolution after this complication. According to this particular theory the resolution is everything that happens after the complication, and examples of resolution could be what happens to Don Parritt and Hickey in *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) or the suicides of Orin and his mother and subsequently the self-confinement of Lavinia in *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1932):

“All tragedies consist of complication [...] and resolution [...]. Events before the play’s first scene, and some of those in the action itself, make the complication, and the rest of the play makes the resolution. Complication is everything from the start of the story to the moment of reversal, from misery to happiness or happiness to misery. Resolution is everything which follows that change of fortune” (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. 25-26. 1999).

I will now move on to the matter of the tragic hero or heroine as the case may be in some tragedies. According to this theory it is essential that the tragic hero is a character that comes from a higher class, because the character’s fall from grace will be far greater in that case. The

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

hamartia, as it is called, will therefore come across as far worse, more painful and will be completely shocking to the audience, and this will make the character's fall more instructive: "Aristotle's main reason why the hero of tragedy should be a person of distinction is that only such a person's fall from eminence is morally instructive; we are not moved by reversal in little lives" (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. xi. 1999).

Before I end this chapter, I should explain the word: hamartia. Hamartia is characterized as being a flaw or an imperfection, which is fatal. This imperfection will unavoidably force the tragic hero into his or her fall from grace: "[...] this was hamartia. On a larger scale, but essentially no different, were such actions as committing a crime, blaspheming or willfully taking any course which you knew to be wrong" (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. xi. 1999).

Hamartia can be almost anything, but the crucial thing to remember here, is that hamartia is not merely the thing that will bring about the downfall of the tragic hero or heroine, but hamartia is also the thing that will arouse a sense of terror and even pity in the audience. One should note that the disastrous choice that the tragic hero or heroine does not come from a place of wickedness:

"The heroes [...] are not saints, but their sufferings are caused less by innate wickedness than because of hamartia. [...] Hamartia is the failing in understanding or moral character which leads someone to a disastrous choice of action: a choice which arouses our pity because it is both catastrophic and made deliberately but not out wickedness, and arouses our terror because we identify with both the innocence and the helplessness of the person who makes the choice. Heroes should be people of high degree and reputation" (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. 17. 1999).

I will, as I have stated previously, use this theory to analyze *The Iceman Cometh* (1947) as well as *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1932) and to determine the re-actualization of this theory in those plays.

## ANALYSIS I

As the title of this chapter indicates I will analyze the previous mentioned plays by O'Neill in this chapter. However, the analysis will be split into two separate chapters. This chapter 'Analysis I' will deal with *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947), and the chapter 'Analysis II' will deal with *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1932). Before I begin my analysis of *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) I want to make a small introduction of the play, and I will do the same with *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1932) in the chapter 'Analysis II.'

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE ICEMAN COMETH

Near the end of his life Eugene O'Neill worked on some of his perhaps greatest plays. One of those plays was *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947): "[...] the last play he had offered to the theatre world was *The Iceman Cometh*, produced in 1947 but written in 1939" (Cargill, Fagin & Fisher. *O'Neill and His Plays*. P.1. 1961). This play was a great undertaking for any director. It is not just a depressing and soul-gutting tragedy, but it was also a fairly long tragedy. The first production of this play included a meal-break.

*The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) was not popular or perhaps even understood, when it was first staged. When Eddie Dowling staged the play in 1947, it did indeed receive some mixed reviews. It was not until a few years after Eugene O'Neill's death, that the great José Quintero had the chance to stage this massive play Off-Broadway in 1956. The cast included Jason Robards as Hickey. The production was such a success that the play made it all the way to television in 1960 with Sidney Lumet directing it. Sidney Lumet would return as director of filmed version of an O'Neill play in 1962, when he directed *Long Days Journey into Night* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1991), and once again Jason Robards found himself a part of the cast – this time as the older brother, Jamie Tyrone.

Jason Robards would years later, in 1985, return to the stage as Hickey in *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947), and José Quintero would once again direct him. This time the play did not open Off-Broadway, but on Broadway. One could be tempted to call Jason Robards a regular in O'Neill's productions.

*The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) is certainly one of the great American plays, and one of the great modern tragedies. It is a play about a group of men, who are waiting for Hickey in such a way that it reminds one of the damned waiting for salvation. The men in that bar are waiting for their Jesus.

As I have mentioned before, it is difficult, if not utterly impossible to speak about the American Theatre without mentioning Eugene O'Neill. When Nathan Lane was asked about *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) and O'Neill, he had this to say: "I don't think there's anything like it - other than maybe in Shakespeare. I mean that's why they call him the American Shakespeare" (Goodman Theatre. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoYLVxXIjnM>. 2012). This brings back to mind the many revivals that there have been of O'Neill's plays – quite similarly to Shakespeare. They are both rediscovered by the next generation, and their plays are universal.

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

As mentioned earlier in this assignment, O'Neill found a lot of inspiration in his surroundings, and would use this when he created some of his characters and even the setting. This appears to be the case with Harry Hope's bar in *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947): "[...] 'The Golden Swan.' It was one of three places that O'Neill had in mind in creating the setting of *The Iceman Cometh* (the others being the bar at The Garden Hotel and Jimmy The Priest's)" (Black. *Eugene O'Neill: Beyond Mourning and Tragedy*. P. 187. 2002).

However, it is also hard to mention O'Neill without mentioning the Provincetown Players, which was led by husband and wife, George Cram Cook and Susan Glaspell. The Provincetown Players was a group of writers, artists and people who were interested in theatre. It was a sort of amateur theatre, and The Provincetown Players were in part responsible for launching the career of Eugene O'Neill. The Provincetown Players would on occasion join O'Neill at The Golden Swann:

"[...] Provincetown Players drank at The Hell Hole – officially known as The Golden Swann – which stood at the southeast corner of Farth Street and Sixth Avenue in Greenwich Village [...]. The Hell Hole before the First World War, when it stayed open all night, was one of the principal models that [O'Neill] copied for Harry Hope's saloon in *The Iceman Cometh*" (Cargill, Fagin and Fisher. *O'Neill and His Plays*. P. 41. 1961).

O'Neill himself had a room upstairs above the barroom of The Hell Hole (Black. *Eugene O'Neill: Beyond Mourning and Tragedy*. P. 187. 2002). This would be one of the places where he would meet most of the people that he would sketch in *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947).

For instance the owner, Harry Hope, of the bar in *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) was based on an actual person that O'Neill had met, while he frequented The Hell Hole in his youth. The barkeep, Rocky, that the audience meets in the beginning of the play was based on a bartender that worked at The Hell Hole:

"[O'Neill] based Harry Hope partly on Tom Wallace, The Hell Hole proprietor, who had ties with Tammany Hall and spent his days with cronies in an upstairs room while Lefty Louie (just Lefty to regulars) served his patrons in the barroom. Lefty was probably the model for the bartender Rocky in *The Iceman Cometh*" (Black. *Eugene O'Neill: Beyond Mourning and Tragedy*. Pp. 187-188. 2002).

Joe Mott, the only African American in the play, was based on the friendly Joe Smith. This was a guy that O'Neill was lucky to know, when times were rough for the young playwright

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

back in 1915-1916: “[...] Eugene credited with the helping him stay alive that winter of 1915-1916, along with a black gambler, Joe Smith, who sometimes took him into his home, fed him, and gave him a bed. O’Neil based Joe Mott in *The Iceman Cometh* on Joe Smith” (Black. *Eugene O’Neill: Beyond Mourning and Tragedy*. P. 188. 2002).

O’Neill had quite the brush with death as a young man, when he tried to kill himself. If it had not been for Jimmy Byth, O’Neill would not have lived on to become one of the greatest, if not the greatest, and one of the most influential American playwrights of all time. Jimmy Byth would go on to become the inspiration for one than one creation, but one of them was the character of Jimmy Tomorrow in *The Iceman Cometh* (O’Neill, Eugene. 1947):

“[...] in 1912, Jimmy Byth would save Eugene’s life when O’Neill nearly died from a deliberate overdose of veronal. A year and a half after rescuing Eugene; Byth himself died a suicide. He was the subject of O’Neill’s only published short story, *Tomorrow*, and the model for Jimmy Tomorrow in *The Iceman Cometh*” (Black. *Eugene O’Neill: Beyond Mourning and Tragedy*. P. 97. 2002).

Lastly, and perhaps most important, the main character of *The Iceman Cometh* (O’Neill, Eugene. 1947), Hickey, was also based on a real person from O’Neill’s life, his big brother, Jamie O’Neill. As I have stated before in this assignment, Jamie O’Neill was the inspiration for a couple of characters that Eugene wrote in the course of his career. There are quite a few similarities between Hickey and Jamie:

“There are many similarities between Hickey and Jamie O’Neill [...]. Both grew up with churchy fathers in Indiana; both hated their fathers. Both have a gift of gab and make friends wherever they go. Both are greatly popular with women and with drinking companions; for both, sex is associated with prostitutes and is mostly separated from love of an idealized woman” (Black. *Eugene O’Neill: Beyond Mourning and Tragedy*. P. 422. 2002).

### ANALYSIS OF THE ICEMAN COMETH

Before I move on to the setting of *The Iceman Cometh* (O’Neill, Eugene. 1947) play, I want to begin with the timeline of the play, which is about twenty-four hours, and that fits perfectly with the Aristotelian theory, and it certainly helps in re-actualizing Aristotle’s *Poetics* theory.

The setting of the play almost remains the same throughout the play, and this also helps to re-actualize the Aristotelian theory. The setting is Harry Hope’s bar throughout the play,

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

but in act one and two the setting is the backroom of Harry Hope's, while the setting in act three and act four is the backroom and a section of the bar.

Harry Hope's is a Raines-Law Hotel of the 1912 period. It is described as a cheap ginmill with five-cent whisky, and as a last resort situated on the downtown West Side of New York. Harry Hope's is of course owned by the character Harry Hope. Harry Hope's is a narrow five-story building of the tenement type, and the proprietor lives upstairs in an apartment, which makes it easy for old Harry to go to work, but one also gets the impression that it is just as easy for him to go downstairs to drink as work – if not easier.

However, it is not only Harry Hope, whom lives upstairs. There are other rooms upstairs for rent, which under the Raines-Law loopholes (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 1. 1947), would technically make Harry Hope's a hotel, and this also provides the place with the grand privilege of serving alcohol in the backroom of the bar after closing hours – even on Sundays, if a meal is served with the drink. This would the backroom a hotel restaurant technically, and gives Harry Hope the chance to serve a lot more liquor than he would have otherwise.

Although, there is food served with the drinks after hours, the kind of food that is served with the drinks, does not sound delicious or even edible. It sounds rather appalling: “[...] sandwich [...], an old desiccated ruin of dust-laden bread and mummified ham or cheese which only the drunkest yokel from the sticks ever regarded as anything but noisome table decoration” (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 1. 1947). It sounds rather unsanitary and certainly not healthy. It is a wonder that no one has died from eating one of those so-called sandwiches.

The backroom of Harry Hope's is not really a separate room. It is merely the back of the barroom, and it has been divided from the bar by drawing a dirty black curtain across the room (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 1. 1947). The way it is described, it sounds like it would be almost impossible to get around in the backroom sober – let alone drunk, because it is crammed with round tables and chairs. Of course one make the argument that one makes more money this way – the more tables one has in a restaurant, the more customers one can serve, and who knows? Perhaps it is easier to tempt the customers with an extra drink or two, if the bartender has to struggle to walk between the various tables.

The way that Harry Hope's is described, it does not sound like a place that one would go to willingly on a Friday night, unless one would not mind the dirt: “Against the middle of the left wall is a nickel-in-the-slot phonograph. Two windows, so glazed with grime one cannot see through them, are in the left wall, looking out on a backyard” (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 1.

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

1947). The phonograph is important here, because it lives up to another point in the Aristotelian theory, which is that there must be music in a tragedy. Therefore this is something that helps to re-actualize the Aristotelian theory. At the beginning of act two, as they are all preparing to celebrate Harry Hope's birthday, a musical instrument is mentioned, and once again this helps to further re-actualize the Aristotelian theory: "An old upright piano and stool have been moved in and stand against the wall at left, front" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 51. 1947).

It is not only the windows at Harry Hope's that are dirty apparently. The walls and ceiling used to be white, but that was a long, long time ago: "[...] they are now so splotched, peeled, stained and dusty that their color can best be described as dirty" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. 1947). Surely it can be agreed that O'Neill has failed in describing a place, where most people sober would want to eat.

The play begins early one summer morning in 1912, and ends the following morning (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 1. 1947), which again means that the play sticks to the twenty-four hour timeline of the Aristotelian theory, and that helps to re-actualize the theory.

### CHARACTERIZATION

I will begin the characterization of the characters in *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) by first characterizing the minor characters, and I will end with the bigger characters such as Larry and Hickey.

I will begin with the character of Hugo Kalmar. Hugo is described as a small man in his late fifties, with a head that is much too big for his body, a high forehead, crinkly long black hair streaked with grey, a rather square face with a pug nose, a walrus moustache, dark eyes behind thick-lensed spectacles, tiny feet and hands (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 1. 1947)

When one reads the further description of Hugo and his personal hygiene, one is immediately aware of what a contrast Hugo is to his surroundings – the filthy bar: "He is dressed in threadbare black clothes and his white shirt is frayed at collar and cuffs, but everything about him is fastidiously clean. Even his flowing tie is neatly tied" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 12. 1947).

As has been stated previously in this project, the character of Joe Mott is the only African American in this play. The character, Joe Mott, does make several speeches throughout the play about race, which is why it is tempting to characterize those speeches as a sort of social commentary on the society at the time.

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

Joe is about fifty years of age, stocky, and he is wearing a light suit that has once been sporty, but now it looks as though it is about to fall apart (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Icedman Cometh*. P. 2. 1947). Mott's shoes, faded pink shirt and tie belong to the same vintage as his suit (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Icedman Cometh*. P. 2. 1947). It appears that despite the state of dress that Joe is in, he is not at all dirty, and therefore he functions as a sort of contrast to Harry Hope's establishment: "[...] [Joe] manages to preserve an atmosphere of nattiness and there is nothing dirty about his appearance" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Icedman Cometh*. P. 2. 1947).

He is an opposite in another regard. He is the only character with a scar on his face. This might have been a choice on O'Neill's part to make it apparent that although, the other characters might have some difficulties in their lives, Joe bares the proof on his face that he has had to fight his way through life: "[Joe's] hair is crinkly and he is beginning to go bald. A scar from a knife slash runs from his left cheek-bone to jaw. His face would be hard and tough if it was not for its good nature and lazy humor" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Icedman Cometh*. P. 2. 1947). This might be another social commentary on O'Neill's part.

Piet Wetjoen is also a man in his fifties, and he unlike Hugo, he is described as a huge man. While Joe Mott is balding, Piet is already bald and has a long grizzled beard. Piet is by no means a man, who has much faith in personal hygiene: "He is slovenly dressed in a dirty shapeless patched suit, spotted by food. A Dutch farmer type, his once great muscular strength has been debauched into flaccid tallow" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Icedman Cometh*. P. 2. 1947).

The characters of Jimmy Tomorrow and Hugh Kalmar have a number of things in common. They are both approximately the same size, and they are the same age. Just as Hugo Jimmy wears threadbare black, and everything about him is clean (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Icedman Cometh*. Pp. 2-3. 1947). Therefore, Jimmy functions as yet another contrast to the bar that he frequents.

Jimmy's face is like that of an old bloodhound, with folds of flesh hanging from each side of his mouth, and he has big brown friendly guiltless eyes that are more bloodshot than any bloodhound's ever were (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Icedman Cometh*. P. 3. 1947). He might not be bald, but his hair is indeed thinning. He sounds as someone, who would stand out at the bar because of his manners:

"[...] a little bulbous nose, teeth in a small rabbit mouth. [...] his eyes are intelligent and there once was a competent ability in him. His speech is educated, with a ghost of Scotch rhythm in it. His manners are those of a gentleman. There is a quality about him of a prim, Victori-

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

an old maid, and at the same time of a likeable affectionate boy who has never grown up” (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 3. 1947).

Cecil Lewis is another character that would appear to stand out at Harry Hope's place of business. He is the same age as Larry Slade, whom I will return to later in this analysis. Cecil is unlike the others in the backroom not quite dressed, and one can only wonder as to what kind of swell party might have went on the night before, the play begins. Lewis is also referred to as 'The Captain', and this is not without reason:

“Cecil Lewis [...] is obviously English as Yorkshire pudding and just as obviously the former army officer. [...] His hair and military moustache are white, his eyes bright blue, his complexion that of a turkey. His lean figure is still erect and square-shouldered. His is stripped to the waist, his coat, shirt, undershirt, collar and tie crushed up into a pillow on the table in front of him [...]” (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 3. 1947).

Both Pat McGloin and Ed Mosher are described by O'Neill as being rather big paunchy men (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 3. 1947). One wonders how a man like Pat, a former police officer, ended up at this bar. Like most of the other occupants of the backroom of Harry Hope's, he is also in his fifties. He has sandy hair, is bullet-headed, jowly, with protruding ears and little round eyes (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 3. 1947). O'Neill notes that Pat's face must have been brutal and somewhat greedy, but as time has passed whisky has melted it down, turned him into a good-humored parasite's characterlessness (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 3. 1947). Like most of the other regulars, whom enjoys a visit to Harry Hope's backroom, Pat too wears old clothes and is slovenly.

Ed Mosher is the same age as Larry Slade. He is described as being unshaven and a drunkard. His further description brings quite the image to mind:

“He looks like an enlarged elderly, bald edition of the village fat boy – a sly fat boy, congenitally indolent, a practical joker, a born grafter and con merchant. But amusing and essentially harmless, [...]. The influence of his old circus career is apparent in his get-up. His worn clothes are flashy; he wears phony rings and a heavy brass watch-chain” (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 3. 1947).

Willie Oban belongs to the younger group of the bar, since he is in his late thirties and most of the other customers are either in their fifties or sixties. He is of average height, and he is thin as well. He is blond like Don Parritt, a character that I will return later in this chapter. Howev-

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

er; his hair is not curly like Parritt's. Instead Willie's blond hair is in bad need of a haircut, and his hair clings in a limp part to his skull, which does not sound all that attractive.

Willie is contrast to the younger Parritt in another sense. Whereas Parritt is beautifully dressed, Willie is not. His clothes are described as something that belongs on a scarecrow, and as if that was not bad enough for the poor guy, his shoes seem to be in a far worse state: "[...] wrecks of imitation leather, one laced with twine, the other with a bit of wire. He has no socks, and his bare feet show through holes in the soles, with his big toes sticking out of the uppers" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 4. 1947).

The miserable state of his clothes might be a reflection of his mental state, because Willie's eyelids flutter while he sleeps, and he keeps muttering and twitching in his sleep. One does not get the impression that Willie is at all well. He really does sound like a poor creature: "His haggard, dissipated face has a small nose, a pointed chin, blue eyes with colorless lashes and brows." (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 4. 1947).

Rocky, the bartender is a Neapolitan-American in his late twenties, and he therefore belongs to the younger crowd that occupies the bar. He sounds like the right bartender to have in a place like Harry Hope's: "He is [...] squat and muscular, with a flat, swarthy face and beady eyes. The sleeves of his collarless shirt are rolled up on his thick, powerful arms and he wears a soiled apron. A tough guy but sentimental, in his way, and good-natured" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 4. 1947). Rocky is not only a bartender, but also something a pimp in the neighborhood, and the way he feels about this employees reveals his own chauvinistic tendencies:

"A pimp don't hold no job. I'm a bartender. Dem tarts, Margie and Poil, dey're just a sideline to pick up some extra dough. Strictly business like dey was fighters and I was deir manager, see? [...] And I don't beat them up like a pimp would. I treat them fine. Dey like me. We're pals, see? What if I do take their dough? Dey'd only trow it away. Tarts can't hang on to dough" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 6. 1947).

Although Rocky does function as a pimp to these three women; Margie, Cora and Pearl, in the play it is clear, that he is in deep denial about his second job as one can see from the line above this paragraph, and there is yet another time, when he asks Margie and Pearl about how much money, they have made: "You dumb baby dolls gimme a pain. What would you do wid money if I wasn't around? Give it all to some pimp" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 36. 1947). This of course makes it almost abundantly clear that Rocky is in denial about his second job,

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

and one might speculate as to whether or not this might be Rocky's pipe dream – that he is not really a pimp, because after all he does not beat the girls, and in his mind that makes him a good guy.

However, it is not long before Rocky breaks his golden rule about beating the girls. He mentions a few times throughout the play that he is not a pimp, because he does not beat the girls, and perhaps it is a matter of the severity of the beating for Rocky.

He does slap the girls at one point in the play, but perhaps he does not consider a slap here and slap there as though he is beating the girls: "Rocky: I'll loin yuh! (he gives [Margie] a slap on the side of her face. [...] [Gives Pearl a slap too] and dat'll loin you!" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 55. 1947). This could of course also be another dimension of his denial about his second job as well as being a part of his pipe dream.

Rocky does get dissatisfied when Chuck calls him out on the fact that he beat the girls, and he denies that he beat them, while he attempts to clarify what a slap means to him: "I ain't never beat dem up! What d'yuh tink I am? I just give dem a slap, like any guy would his wife, if she got too gabby" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 56. 1947).

Rocky is not the only one who is in utter denial about his work. Margie and Pearl are also in denial about what they do for a living:

"Margie: Anyway, we wouldn't keep no pimp, like we was reg'lar old whores. We ain't dat bad.

Pearl: No. We're tarts, but dat's all" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 37. 1947).

Margie is described as having brown hair and hazel eyes and as being a slum New Yorker with mixed blood (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 34. 1947), while Pearl is described as being obviously Italian with black hair (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 34. 1947). They both have a somewhat plump figure and wear blobby makeup (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 34. 1947).

Margie and Pearl seem to be a little bit jealous of their colleague, Cora. Perhaps that is because she has been doing the job for a longer time, than they have, and she has found someone to love and someone to love her. But then again with a job like Cora's, and her boyfriend, Chuck, being a miserable drunk like most of the other men at Harry Hope's, their future together might be nothing more than a pipe dream: "I'll bet dey sittin' around kiddin' demselves wid dat old pipe

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

dream about getting' married and settlin' down on a farm!" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 37. 1947).

One could argue that Margie and Pearl are jealous of Cora, because she has a pipe dream. It might be a pipe dream, but at least Cora has one to cling on to with her boyfriend. They might never fulfill their pipe dream about marriage, but they will have a pipe dream that they can share with each other in their darkest hours, and that might be enough to get them through this life.

Cora is described as a thin blonde, and she is a few years older than her colleagues, Margie and Pearl (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 38. 1947). Her age shows in her age, which could explain why she is desperate to hang on to her pipe dream – her youth will be gone soon or is gone, and the customers might be far between.

Another observation that one could make regarding the female characters in this play is that the women appear to be wither whores or Madonnas. For instance Harry Hope and Hickey think of their wives as Madonnas. Now that their wives are dead, they put them on a pedestal, whereas Cora, Pearl and Margie are merely whores.

This is not an uncommon occurs in an O'Neill play. In *Long Day's Journey into Night* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1991) also depicts the mother as a Madonna or almost as a saint, and one gets the impression that Hickey and Harry Hope in *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) feel the same way about their wives in that regard as James Tyrone did in *Long Day's Journey into Night* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1991).

Cora's boyfriend, Chuck, is a tough, thick-necked, barrel-chested Italian-American, and he has a fat, amiable, swarthy face (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 38. 1947), and he wears what could best be described as a loud suit (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 38. 1947). He may be a drunk, but at least he looks healthier than most of the customers who come into Harry Hope's.

Harry Hope, the proprietor of Harry Hope's, is the same age as Larry Slade and Ed Mosher. He has white hair, and he is apparently so thin that: "[...] the description 'bag of bones' was made for him" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 4. 1947). He is almost one of the most well-dressed men in the backroom. His coat might be old and from one suit and his pants from another, but at least neither is filthy or full of holes.

He is known to be prone to tantrums, much like a child, which is something that one experiences throughout the play. According to O'Neill, Harry is one those men whom everyone likes on sight, because he is a softhearted slob, and he does not feel superior to anyone. He is per-

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

haps a little peculiar though, because although he is a little deaf, he likes to pretend that his condition is much worse.

Harry likes to pretend to be the old worthless man, who cannot do anything, and he is just waiting to die. He also pretends that his sight is far worse, than it actually is:

“He wears five-and-cent-store spectacles which are so out of alignment that one eye at times peers half over one glass while the other eye looks half under the other. He has badly fitting store teeth, which click like castanets when he begins to fume” (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 4. 1947).

From the description of this character, one gets the impression that all he probably wants is a little sympathy, pity and kindness.

Like most of the characters in the play, Harry too has a pipe dream. Every night he says he will take a walk around the block, which is something he has not done since his wife died, but like his friends he never follows through with his pipe dream. However, Hickey wants him to take that walk and be done with his pipe dream. Hickey nearly makes it clear that he wants Harry to take that walk from the second he walks into the bar:

“Hope: Walking? Bejees, do you mean to say you walked?”

Hickey: I sure did. All the way from the wilds of darkest Astoria. Didn't mind it a bit either. I seemed to get here before I knew it. I'm a bit tired and sleepy but otherwise I feel great. [...] that ought to encourage you, Governor – show you a little walk around the ward is nothing to be so scared about” (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 44. 1947).

Hickey of course cannot help but ruin Harry's pipe dream by making him take that walk around the block. Hickey knows that Harry will return, and he knows that Harry will never make it around the block, and surely Harry returns before long in a state of absolute panic (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 107. 1947). It would appear that Hickey's helping hand has not done good old Harry much good: “Harry: Bejees, give me a drink quick! Scared me out of a year's growth! Bejees, that guy ought to be pinched! Bejees, it ain't safe to walk in the streets! Bejees, that ends me! Never again!” (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 107. 1947).

With the age of eighteen Don Parritt is the youngest man, who frequents Harry Hope's. Unlike Hugo he is tall, broad-shouldered but thin, gangling and somewhat awkward (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 11. 1947), which is something that one sees several examples of throughout the play. As mentioned previously his clothes are definitely a contrast to the clothes that Willie Oban wears. His pretty clothes make him stand out at a place like Harry Hope's.

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

Whereas Willie's clothes look as though they ought to be on a scarecrow, Parritt's clothes and shoes are not only new, but look expensive and somewhat sporty. He may look beautiful on the outside, but he is rotten on the inside, which is something that the reader or audience gets to see in some of his talks with Larry Slade: "His face is good-looking, with blond curly hair and large regular features but his personality is unpleasant. There is a shifting defiance and ingratiating in his light-blue eyes and an irritating aggressiveness in his manner" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 11. 1947).

As stated previously Parritt does not bring warm up feelings in the audience. He is not particularly likeable, and it is difficult to stir up any sort of pity for this character, and that is in spite of the fact that he is practically a motherless and fatherless young man, who is seeking some advice as to what to do next in terms of what he did before he went on the run from the police.

Immediately when Parritt enters the stage he gets all the characters onstage and the audience on edge with his aggressive attitude and sheer meanness. This is something that occurs throughout the play: "I hate every bitch that ever lived! They're all alike!" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 38. 1947). There are several examples of his meanness and complete disregard for other people. The perhaps best example of this is the fact that he gave up his own mother to the police:

"Parritt: But I never thought the cops would get her! You've got to believe that! You've got to see what my only reason was! I'll admit what I told you last night was a lie – that bunk about getting patriotic and my duty to my country. [...] It was just for money! I got stuck on a whore and wanted dough to blow on her and have a good time!" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 87. 1947).

Although Hickey is well-liked by his friends at Harry Hope's, Parritt is not well-liked by any means, but when Hickey first meets Parritt, he immediately senses that the two of them have something in common: "Hickey: But I still know damned well I recognized something about you. We're members of the same lodge – in some way" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 46. 1947).

Throughout the course of the play Parritt is eager to talk to Larry, whom would rather be rid of him, but Larry cannot seem to get rid of this highly unlikable young man. Parritt is relentless with Larry. He wants Larry to tell him what to do. Basically he wants Larry to give him his proper punishment for what he has done, but Larry will not hear of it at first, although Hickey points out to him exactly what this young man wants, and that he will not stop harassing Larry until

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

he gets it: “Hickey: [...] you’ll find that he won’t agree to that. He’ll keep after you until he makes you help him. Because he has to be punished, so he can forgive himself. He’s lost all his guts. He can’t manage it alone, and you’re the only one he can turn to” (O’Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 63. 1947).

The character of Don Parritt is connected to Larry Slade. Larry has to listen to Parritt’s often unpleasant stories about his life, and why he has ended up at Harry Hope’s. Bot Parritt and Larry are tall, but that is not the only thing that they have in common. Larry used to know Parritt’s mother and be a part of the Movement, which is how these two characters are connected.

Parritt is a tortured character, and his story almost functions as a little Greek tragedy on its own: “O’Neill makes Parritt’s story a miniature Greek tragedy, which he sets in the context of the play as a whole” (Black, Stephen A. *Eugene O’Neill – Beyond Tragedy and Mourning*. P. 423. 1999). There is a sense of catharsis when Parritt jumps from the building and kills himself (O’Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 140. 1947), because he takes his punishment for what he did wrong – just as Hickey does, when he calls the cops to come get him knowing what that will mean for his future.

Larry is sixty, and he is therefore among the older regulars of the bar. Unlike Parritt, who appears to be clean and pretty, Larry is a little rough on the eyes. In some ways these two characters are each other’s opposites. Larry is described as a raw-boned man with coarse straight white hair, which is long and somewhat raggedly cut. He does not have a pretty face like his shadow, Parritt does: “He has a gaunt Irish face with a big nose, high cheek-bones, a lantern jaw with a week’s stubble of beard, a mystic’s meditative pale-blue eyes with a gleam of sharp sarcastic humor in them” (O’Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 2. 1947).

Larry’s clothes are not only a contrast to Parritt’s, but also to Hugo’s which is fairly neat, meanwhile Larry’s dirty, and it shows that it has been slept in quite a bit. Furthermore it is apparent that his grey flannel shirt has never been washed (O’Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 2. 1947). He does not pretend to be happy or pretend to have something to look forward as most of the other drunks do: “From the way [Larry] methodically scratches himself with his long-fingered, hairy hands, he is lousy and reconciled to being so.” (O’Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 2. 1947).

When the play begins all the regulars, except Larry, are asleep in the backroom. One wonders if this is another way of showing the reader or the audience for that matter, that Larry in many ways is the true observer in the play.

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

It would also seem that Larry's fate in this play is to constantly listen to Parritt's stories about his mother and the movement. Maybe because Larry does not appear to have any thoughts about tomorrow, he is the sole person in that bar who can bare to listen to Parritt and notice everything around him: "In relation to Parritt, Larry is chorus leader, the *choregos* who witnesses and feels the tragedy of Parritt's story; he is the only one among the regulars in the bar who can afford, emotionally, to notice it all" (Black, Stephen A. *Eugene O'Neill – Beyond Mourning and Tragedy*. P. 423. 1999).

Larry, himself, gives the reason as to why he is able to observe what is happening around him and comment on these things. He is able to do that, because he claims that he no longer to has any pipe dreams, and that in fact all he has left in this life is the long wait for death: "Mine are all dead and buried behind me. What's before is the comforting fact that death is a fine long sleep, and I'm damned tired, and it can't come too soon for me" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 5. 1947).

He is also the character who often tells the audience what they should pay attention to. One could that he is in a sense pointing the audience in the right direction. The first time this happens is after Hickey has told them all what he plans to do, how he wants to save them all, and the majority of them think that this is another one of Hickey's jokes, but Larry proves his abilities as the observer and as a character who sometimes holds the audience's hand and guides them through the play: "Larry: You'll make a mistake if you think he's only kidding" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 48. 1947). There is yet another example of Larry almost whispering into the audience's ear. For instance after Hickey has told them all that his wife died: "Larry: You notice he didn't say what his wife died of" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 86. 1947).



*The Iceman Cometh* (1973)

Larry begins as the observer, but he ends as the executioner, when he passes a sentence onto Don Parritt. Hickey was right, when he told Larry that the kid would not stop until he gave the kid what he was searching for: "Larry: Go! Get the hell out of life, God damn you, before I choke it out of you! Go up-!"

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

Parritt: “[...] Thanks, Larry, I just wanted to make sure” (O’Neill, Eugene. *The Icedman Cometh*. P. 135. 1947).

It is tempting to think of Larry Slade as not only an observer, the O’Neill character, but also as a sort of consciousness. One might even argue that he is the audience’s consciousness – the little voice in their head which tells them right from wrong.

Furthermore the character of Larry Slade has often been called the O’Neill character onstage, as Brian Dennehy noted in an interview backstage, when he had the pleasure of portraying Larry Slade in a production of *The Icedman Cometh* (O’Neill, Eugene. 1947) last year: “[...] Larry Slade has been called the Eugene O’Neill character onstage. He’s the witness” (Goodman Theatre. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoYLVxXJjnM>. 2012)

#### THE TRAGIC HERO OF THE ICEMAN COMETH

The tragic hero of *The Icedman Cometh* (O’Neill, Eugene. 1947) is Theodore Hickman – better known to the regulars of Harry Hope’s as Hickey.

He is about fifty years of age, and he is a little under medium height, which probably puts him just above Hugo’s height. Hickey is described as having a stout and roly-poly figure with a round and smooth face as well as big-boyish bright blue eyes (O’Neill, Eugene. *The Icedman Cometh*. P. 41. 1947).

Unfortunately for Hickey he is bald except for a fringe of hair round his temples and the back of his head (O’Neill, Eugene. *The Icedman Cometh*. P. 41. 1947). He is wearing his salesman’s winning smile when he enters Harry Hope’s. Just from the way that Hickey’s entrance to Harry Hope’s is described, one immediately gets the impression that not only is Hickey well-liked by his peers, but that he is also easy to like, which is a winning quality in a salesman, which Hickey is (O’Neill, Eugene. *The Icedman Cometh*. P. 41. 1947).

When Hickey enters the stage, Parritt is not the only well-dressed individual onstage. Although, Hickey’s clothes are not described as being flashy, they are however described as being conspicuously spic and span (O’Neill, Eugene. *The Icedman Cometh*. P. 41. 1947), and by the end of the play, one wonders whether or not that particular description of Hickey’s clothes was a clue as to what he had done to his wife, before he left for Harry Hope’s.

Hickey is depicted almost like a savior to his friends and almost by his own admission as well. Harry Hope is expecting Hickey for his birthday as always, and none of them can wait to

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

see what he has in store for them all this time. However, as Cora reveals to them, just before Hickey enters the stage Hickey: “And he says, ‘Tell the gang I’ll be along in a minute. I’m just finishin’ figurin’ out de best way to save dem and bring dem peace’”(O’Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 40. 1947). One could be tempted to call Hickey their Messiah.

Hickey shows up with a great desire to not only help all his dear friends, but to save them. He is their savior – their Messiah. This was also something that came to mind when the actor, Nathan Lane, was asked about playing Hickey in a New York production last year: “[Hickey] has a Jesus-complex” (Goodman Theatre. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoYLVxXIjnM>. 2012).

Hickey makes it sound as though, that him helping them all realize that their pipe dreams are nothing more than pipe dreams is for their own good. In his mind he is there to help them and not to cause pain, although that is exactly what he ends up doing to his friends – cause them more pain than they ever imagined, at least for a time:

“Hickey: No, boys and girls, I’m not trying to put anything over on you. It’s just that I know now from experience what a lying pipe dream can do to you – and how damned relieved and contented with yourself you feel when you’re rid of it” (O’Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 47. 1947).

As soon as Hickey tells his friends that he has come to save them, and that he does not drink anymore, they are afraid that he has come to save them from drinking, which he promises is not the case. However, one cannot help but wonder if Hickey truly has found peace, because he did tell his friends that he has not been able to sleep for a while now:

“Hickey: Of course, I was only kidding Cora with that stuff about saving you. [...] No, I wasn’t either. But I didn’t mean the booze. I meant save you from your pipe dreams. I know now, from my experience, they’re the things that really poison and ruin a guy’s life and keep him from finding any peace” (O’Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 44. 1947).

One might argue that Hickey does indeed try to bring his friends some happiness by his clumsy attempt to help them destroy the only thing that they have when the nights get lonely and dark: “[...] Hickey who attempts to bring happiness of truth through the destruction of illusion” (Bradbury, M. & Ruland, R. *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*. P. 329).

The audience is given a clue that something is not right with Hickey, when he has said his hellos: “I’m going up in a little while and grab a snooze. Haven’t been able to sleep lately and

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

I'm tired as hell" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 42. 1947). The audience is told that this insomnia is not something that usually happens to the dear Hickey: "Hope: First time I've ever heard you worry about sleep. Bejees, you never go to bed" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 42. 1947).

Hickey also reveals to his friends that he has stopped drinking, which is a shock, but that they are more than welcome to drink in his presence, and that they are not to hold back: "No, I forgot to tell Rocky – You'll have to excuse me, boys and girls, but I'm off the stuff. For keeps" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 43. 1947). Nobody can understand Hickey's choice, because if one cannot drink then what can one do? Hickey does not need alcohol anymore, and the audience gets wise as to why later in the play, when he reveals that he has killed his wife: "Hickey: I have changed. I mean, about booze. I don't need it anymore" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 43. 1947).

Hickey, like the others, used to have a pipe dream. A pipe dream about a happy marriage, and since he has killed her, he no longer has a pipe dream and therefore he no longer needs the booze like he did before:

"Hickey: The only reason I've quit is – Well, I finally had the guts to face myself and throw overboard the damned lying pipe dream that'd been making me miserable and do what I had to do for the happiness of all concerned – and then all at once I found I was at peace with myself and I didn't need booze anymore" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 43. 1947).

Hickey indirectly tells his friends that he has killed his wife, when he talks to them about their pipe dreams and why they must free themselves of them: "Hickey: So you've got to kill them like I did mine" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 103. 1947). One could argue that not only was his wife, Evelyn, Hickey's pipe dream and their happy marriage a pipe dream as well, but that Hickey perhaps was her pipe dream and furthermore that her idea of a happy marriage with Hickey was another dimension of her pipe dream.

Clearly Hickey's arrival and the revelation of his plans to help his friends with their pipe dreams have caused quite the upset in all of them. It is obvious in act two as they are getting ready to celebrate Harry's birthday that Hickey has changed the mood in the backroom. Everyone of them is afraid of what Hickey is going to do, and how he is going to help them. They would probably wish that he was their good old Hickey again – all fun and games, but unfortunately he is not, and this has everyone on edge:

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

“All of them, with the except of Chuck and Rocky, have had plenty to drink and show it, but no one, except Hugo, seems to be drunk. They are trying to act up in the spirit of the occasion but there is something forced about their manner, an undercurrent of nervous irritation and preoccupation” (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 51. 1947).

When Hickey reveals that his wife is dead, they all begin to speculate as to how she might have died, especially when Larry Slade makes a point of reminding everyone that Hickey never did tell them how his lovely wife came to die: “Hickey: [...] I'm sorry to tell you my dearly beloved wife is dead” (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 82. 1947). Hickey is very matter of fact at first when he tells his friends what he has done: “Hickey: I had to kill her” (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 122. 1947). He makes it sound as though he did not have a choice. As though he had caught her doing something that made him go mad.



*The Iceman Cometh* (1973)

Hickey is the tragic hero of *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) for several reasons. For instance according to the Aristotelian theory the tragic hero must be someone of importance: “Aristotle's main reason why the hero of tragedy should be a person of distinction is that only such a person's fall from eminence is morally instructive; we are not moved by reversal in little lives” (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. xi. 1999).

Compared to the other characters of this play Hickey is certainly a character of distinction. He is one of the few to have a job, fine clothes and was supposedly happily married as well. Hickey's fall is greater than the other's, because he is likeable, and everyone believes that all is the same with good old Hickey. They do not have the imagination to believe that Hickey would kill his wife in cold blood for instance. Hickey's fall from grace is worsened when the audience learns that his father was a preacher: “He was a preacher in the sticks of Indiana [...]” (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 45. 1947). This could give an audience the impression that Hickey should have been installed with better morals than the others characters in the play.

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

In order for Hickey to be a true tragic hero, he must almost commit hamartia, which is explained as such: “[...] this was hamartia. On a larger scale, but essentially no different, were such actions as committing a crime, blaspheming or willfully taking any course which you knew to be wrong” (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. xi. 1999). Hickey does commit hamartia as only a true tragic hero would. He commits the act of hamartia, when he kills his wife. One could argue that this act is worsened by the fact that he runs away from his responsibility at first. Then again one could also argue that he makes up for it, when he calls the police and turns himself in.

As mentioned in the chapter about Aristotle's theory the heroes are not saints:

“[...] but their sufferings are caused less by innate wickedness than because of hamartia. [...] Hamartia is the failing in understanding or moral character which leads someone to a disastrous choice of action: a choice which arouses our pity because it is both catastrophic and made deliberately but not out wickedness, and arouses our terror because we identify with both the innocence and the helplessness of the person who makes the choice. Heroes should be people of high degree and reputation” (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. 17. 1999).

Once again this fits Hickey's character. He is certainly not a saint compared to a lot of people, but one could argue that he is a saint to his friends. After all they do speak of him often and how they cannot wait for his arrival or all the different kinds of fun he might have planned for them all this time. Also, one could argue that Hickey does not truly understand what he has done until the two detectives come to take him away, and therefore his killing his wife was not an act of wickedness, but nearer an action of pity – at least in his mind because he saved her from himself by killing her. Hickey evokes pity from the audience, because he is so likeable and all he wants is to help his friends. He does not come across as someone who would deliberately hurt another human being.

As I have mentioned in my theory it is important, when creating characters, to make everything inevitable or at the very least plausible (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. 21. 1999). For instance whenever a character says or does something, it should follow inevitably or plausibly from what we have learnt about the character and from what has happened before (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. 21. 1999). Now, it is made plausible from the beginning that Hickey might have killed his wife. For instance he indirectly tells the audience that he did kill her, only he called her his pipe dream instead.

One could argue that Hickey's admission to killing his wife also marks the reversal, which is important in any tragedy, because he suddenly goes from the Messiah to the Devil. Going even further one could argue that Hickey is not merely gone from the Messiah to the Devil by kill-

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

ing his wife and running away from his dirty deed, but that this also forced him to take death with and that he himself became 'the iceman', when he killed his wife: "In *The Iceman Cometh* Hickey seems to bring death to the saloon or even is himself the Iceman of death [...]" (Black. *Eugene O'Neill: Beyond Mourning and Tragedy*. P. 451. 2002). Larry even remarks that he thought he saw or rather felt the death in Hickey: "Larry: Be God, I felt he'd brought the touch of death on him!" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 82. 1947).

On the other hand one could argue that the reversal happened earlier in the play, when he revealed that he did no longer enjoy an alcoholic drink.

However, there can be no doubt that the discovery of what he has done is made by Rocky, who tells everybody at the bar what he has done: "Rocky: "[...] but it looks like he croaked his wife" (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 114. 1947). This and the reversal helps re-actualization Aristotle's theory.

The fact that Hickey killed his wife and not a stranger, also helps to re-actualize the theory, because the action of a tragedy is something that should happen between intimates. One could also argue that all the guys at Harry Hope's function as a sort of family to Hickey, because he keeps coming back there no matter what has happened in his life, and that it therefore helps to re-actualize the theory even more so.

According to the Aristotelian theory all tragedies must consist of some sort of complication and resolution (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. 25-26. 1999). Furthermore events that take place before the play's first scene, as well as some of those in the action itself, create the aforementioned complication, and the rest of the play should make the resolution (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. 25-26. 1999). The complication is everything from the beginning of the story, to the moment of reversal, from misery to happiness or happiness to misery, and the resolution is everything that follows the change of fortune (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. 25-26. 1999).

One could argue that Hickey brings a sort of complication along with him, when he decides to destroy the pipe dreams of his friends. Certainly the biggest complication that he brings with him is the fact that he killed his wife, and he tries to create a form of resolution by helping his friends – or that is what he is telling himself. The true resolution comes when he gives himself up to the police. These are all things that help to re-actualize Aristotle's theory.

One could argue that Hickey brings catharsis to the play in two ways. The obvious way that he brings catharsis to the play is when he gives himself up. On the other hand one might

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

argue that there is another instance, prior to the police picking him up, of his bringing catharsis to the play is, and that is when he reveals what he has done, and why he did it with complete honesty:

“I began to be afraid I was going bughouse, because sometimes I couldn't forgive her for forgiving me. I even caught myself hating her for making me hate myself so much. There's a limit to the guilt you can feel and the forgiveness and the pity you can take!” (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Icedman Cometh*. P. 130. 1947).

When Hickey tells everybody why he shot his wife, it also explains why he has treated his friends the way, he has. One could argue that it was not to save them, but rather to act out his own rage against his dead wife: “In the instant of showing the audience why he shot his wife, he also shows why he has abused his friends at the bar: without fully knowing why, he treats them as he has felt treated by her, acting out his continuing rage against her” (Black. *Eugene O'Neill: Beyond Mourning and Tragedy*. P. 418. 2002).

One could also argue that by making his friends go through with the destruction of their pipedreams, that he is not only taking out his contempt for his wife on his friends: “By making them feel as he thinks she has made him feel, he hopes to make them understand why he shot her” (Black. *Eugene O'Neill: Beyond Mourning and Tragedy*. P. 421. 2002). One could argue that by doing this Hickey hopes to evoke their pity and the pity of the audience, because now that the audience has seen what all his friends have gone through, and how bad it made them feel to lose their pipe dreams it might make them understand and pity Hickey, once he reveals what he has done.

However, it is not made clear that this is something that Hickey does consciously; because when the police finally do take him away, he loses the clear-headedness that he entered the stage with: “Hickey remains unaware of what he has done to his friends or why, as we see at his final exit” (Black. *Beyond Mourning and Tragedy*. P. 421. 2002). Hickey tries to tell them that he must have been mad to do what he did.

On the other hand one could also argue that Hickey is trying to cling to his own pipe dream about his marriage, as the police takes him away. That he cannot bring himself to realize the truth about his marriage or even the truth about what he has done: “As the police leads [Hickey] off, he is still trying to save his friends from their pipe dreams. At the same time, it is clear that he still clings to his own pipe dream that he and Evelyn share a perfect love for each other – present tense” (Black. *Eugene O'Neill: Beyond Mourning and Tragedy*. Pp. 421-422. 2002).

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

One could go a step further and actually take Hickey up on his word that he was crazy all the time. That he had not been sane since he killed his wife, and that his reform was not real, but just another pipe dream – a new pipe dream that he had given himself after he had destroyed the other: “Hickey was crazy all the time! His reform was a pipe dream too” (Cargill, Fagin, Fisher. *O'Neill and His Plays*. P. 205. 1961).

Keeping the Greeks in mind and their traditions in tragedy, one could go a step further and argue that Hickey was not to blame for any of his actions. One could argue that he was not to blame for killing his wife, and that he was not to blame for forcing his friends to destroy their pipe dreams. Why? Because of *até* – a sort of temporary madness: “[...] actions are sometimes attributed to *até*, which does involve a lack of control, a temporary madness [...]; the Greeks were prepared to say that an individual was less responsible for his acts under its influence” (Aylen, Leo. *Greek Tragedies & The Modern World*. P. 18. 1964).

In conclusion Hickey is the tragic hero of *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947), and therefore this character helps to re-actualize the Aristotelian theory.

#### THEMES OF THE ICEMAN COMETH

Death must be considered a theme in *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947), after all death is mentioned or referenced a total of 71 times, and if one includes the times that the iceman, which is clearly a reference to death, is mentioned death is mentioned a total of 77 times. One could argue that Hickey had left his wife with the iceman: “[Hickey] had left [his wife] that very morning safe in bed – with the iceman” (Cargill, Fagin, Fisher. *O'Neill and His Plays*. P. 204. 1961).

An example of death being mentioned is at the very beginning of the play when Rocky is cleaning up and thereby waking everyone up: “Dis dump is like de morgue wid all dese bums passed out” (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 7. 1947). One could also argue that death is brought to Harry Hope's by Hickey, but then on the other hand one could also argue that death was hanging around there long before Hickey ever arrived, because as Larry states he, himself, is merely waiting to die, and one could argue that this is also the case for the rest of the regulars at Harry Hope's.

One could argue that because of their pipe dreams, death is there. These characters have nothing left, except their pipe dreams: “Besides the pipe-dream motive, which is developed in turn by each of the characters playing in groups of threes and fours, there is also the predominant, haunting theme of Death” (Cargill, Fagin, Fisher. *O'Neill and His Plays*. Pp. 206-207. 1961). It is

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

unlikely that any of them will ever really and truly miss each other when they die. They are close, because they have no one else to be close to or anywhere else to go, and Hickey might very well like these guys, because it is perhaps the only place in this world, where he could be himself

One could also argue that tomorrow is another dominant theme of this play. Tomorrow is mentioned or referenced a total of 26 times. Tomorrow has a strong connection to all their pipe dreams, because every night more or less each character says that tomorrow they will follow through with their pipe dreams. Tomorrow they will get their jobs back as a police officer, go back to being a lawyer, take a walk around the block or get married, and as Larry states one point: “The tomorrow movement is a sad and beautiful thing [...]” (O’Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 26. 1947).

As previously stated one could argue that Hickey brings death with him to Harry Hope’s, because Parritt ends up committing suicide, Larry realizes that death is all he has left in this life, and Hickey is probably going to the chair because of his admission of guilt in the death of his wife: “Hickey gives himself up to the police for murder, Parritt commits suicide realizing he is as guilty of mother-murder as Hickey of wife murder and Larry the philosopher faces the fact that for him too death is the only answer” (Cargill, Fagin, Fisher. *O’Neill and His Plays*. P. 205. 1961).

One could also argue that guilt is a theme in the play. Parritt is certainly overcome with guilt the nearer he gets to realize what he must do in order to repent his actions. Guilt is also a dominant theme of *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O’Neill, Eugene. 1932): “The exploration of complex forms of guilt became a central theme that led the playwright to *The Iceman Cometh*” (Black. *Eugene O’Neill: Beyond Mourning and Tragedy*. P. 418. 2002).

Another theme of this play is closely connected with the theme of tomorrow, and that is pipe dreams. They all have pipe dreams, even Larry who claims that he has none. Maybe that is his pipe dream? That he is the one person in that joint whom does not have a pipe dream left – maybe that is what has kept him sane all this time? One might wonder why these characters cling on to their pipe dreams so fiercely. It might be because the pipe dreams all they have, and what gets them through each day of their lives, as Brian Dennehy stated in an interview he did, while he was performing in *The Iceman Cometh* (O’Neill, Eugene. 1947):

“The only way to get through life is with pipe dreams. Not only are they to be understood, to be cherished, and sometimes they are very destructive. [...] point is you have to have dreams. You have to have dreams for yourself that even if they don’t work out, they will somehow

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

get you through the night or the next day or the next year” (Goodman Theatre.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoYLVxXIjnM>. 2012).

One might also ask if Hickey's reformative ways changed anybody at Harry Hope's? Or if any character in that play changed at all? Certainly Don Parritt changed in sense that he owned up to what he had done to his mother, and he took the punishment that Larry thought he deserved. One could therefore also argue that Larry going from merely the observer to the executioner changed him, and finally that Hickey is changed. Hickey was changed before he ever arrived at the bar. He changed, when he killed his wife. The other regulars at the bar have not changed: “They can go back to their old illusions, their whisky, their dreams; they reach thirstily for their bottles. Only the boy Parritt, Larry and Hickey himself are changed” (Cargill, Fagin, Fisher. *O'Neill and His Plays*. P. 205. 1961).

Why have they Parritt, Hickey and Larry changed? Those three characters are the only ones who have changed, because they have truly lost their pipe dreams. Larry's pipe dream about not caring and having any pipe dreams is forever gone, Parritt's pipe dream about him being a patriot and not just a horrible person who gave up his own mother, is gone and Hickey's pipe dream about a happy marriage is certainly gone.

Why does it make everyone sad when they think, they have lost their pipe dreams, after Hickey had forced them all to go through with their pipe dreams today instead of tomorrow? Because as Larry states at the beginning of the play, pipe dreams is what gives meaning to their lives – it is what gets them all out of bed in the morning and make them face yet another day: “The lie of a pipe dream is what gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of us, drunk or sober.” (O'Neill, Eugene. *The Iceman Cometh*. P. 5. 1947).

## ANALYSIS II

As the title of this chapter indicates I will analyze the previous mentioned play *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1932) by O'Neill in this chapter. Before I begin my analysis of *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1932) I want to make a small introduction of the play.

### A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA

Unlike *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1932) is not an original idea, but rather a retelling of an old Greek tragedy by Aeschylus entitled:

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

*Oresteia* (1984). O'Neill's characters in *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1932) resemble the characters from the aforementioned Greek tragedy. O'Neill changed the names in his retelling. For instance Orestes became Orin, Electra became Lavinia and so on.

As a matter of fact Orestes would go on to become an almost tireless source of inspiration to Eugene O'Neill: "Orestes would be the archetype for several characters in O'Neill's plays based mostly on himself, including the son, Orin, in *Mourning Becomes Electra* and Parritt, the young suicide, in *The Iceman Cometh*" (Black, Stephen A. *Eugene O'Neill – Beyond Mourning and Tragedy*. P. 90. 2002).

This tragedy by O'Neill features some rather modern problems such as: adultery, revenge, Oedipal complexes and even murder. However, one could argue that these are not modern problems, and that they have existed for hundreds of years.

Sadly, this play is not often staged, because of its large cast and because of its length. It is therefore, when staged, often cut down by a few pages. The cast of *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) might be considerable, but *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1932) outweighs it – only by a few characters, though.

*Mourning Becomes Electra* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1932) got the Hollywood treatment in 1947, when Dudley Nichols directed it. Rosalind Russell, who starred as Lavinia, and Michael Redgrave, who played Orin, both received rave reviews for their performances. Since then there have been made a mini-series of this play, but unfortunately this play by O'Neill has not quite had the pleasure of being played big stars more than that one time, whereas *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) had that pleasure in 1973, when John Frankenheimer directed the likes of Lee Marvin, Robert Ryan, Fredric March and a young Jeff Bridges.

One could speculate as to why this is the case, but then one could also argue that although *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1932) does take place from 1865-1866, it might still feel too far away, and the subject matters might be appear to be too farfetched in today's society, where neither shame and guilt play large roles. On the other hand one could also argue that Shakespeare's tragedies are still played, and their setting is even further back in time so why is this? Are the other tragedies by O'Neill simply more relatable for today's audiences and therefore the more popular choice? Or is it the number of characters that scare theatres in today's world?

ANALYSIS OF MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

In this chapter I want to begin with the timeline and the setting of the play. However, since *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1932) is basically a trilogy, I will have to divide my analysis between these three. *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1932) consists of the following: *Homecoming*, *The Hunted* and *The Haunted*. *Homecoming* is a play in four acts and part one of the trilogy. *The Hunted* is a play in five acts and part two of the trilogy. Finally *The Haunted* is a play in four acts, and it is part three of this trilogy.

I will begin with the timeline of the first part of the trilogy – *The Homecoming*. According to the Aristotelian theory the timeline of a tragedy should be no more than twenty-four hours. As one can almost guess *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1932) breaks this rule. The play breaks this rule already in the first part of the trilogy, *The Homecoming*. The play begins at the exterior of the Mannon house in New England sometime in April 1865, and it ends a week later.

The setting of *The Homecoming* changes from the exterior of the Mannon house in act one to Ezra, the father, Mannon's study in act two. The setting changes again in act three. However, it changes back to the setting of act one – the exterior of the Mannon house. Finally, it changes for the last time in act four. This time it changes to a bedroom in the Mannon house. However, one could argue that the change of sets does not interfere with the theory, because although the set might change from the exterior of the Mannon house to the interior, it does not completely change the setting, since it all takes place in the Mannon house or rather on their property. Therefore, one could argue that since the set does not change completely, it does help to re-actualize the Aristotelian theory.

I will now move on to the timeline of part two of the trilogy, *The Hunted*. The timeline of *The Hunted* breaks the rule of the twenty-four period because it takes place during the course of twenty-four hours, and therefore it does not help to re-actualize the Aristotelian theory.

The setting of *The Hunted* changes in all five acts, and the setting does not remain in the Mannon house or even on the grounds, thus breaking Aristotle's rule about merely having one set. Act one of *The Hunted* takes place at the exterior of the Mannon house, act two in the sitting-room of the Mannon house, act four takes place at the stern of the clipper ship 'Flying Trades', and finally act five is the same as act one – the exterior of the Mannon house.

The timeline of *The Haunted* does in no way follow the twenty-four hour rule of Aristotle's theory. The play begins on an evening in the summer of 1866, and act two takes place a month later thus breaking the rule of the Aristotelian theory.

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

I will now move on to the setting of *The Haunted*, which changes from act to act. Act one, scene one begins outside the Mannon house, and in scene two of the same act the action is moved to a sitting-room in the Mannon house. The setting of act two is the study, and in act three the set is once again the aforementioned sitting-room. The fourth and final act is the exterior of the Mannon house.

The Mannon house is described as a grand place to live with its white Grecian temple portico with its six tall columns (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. 1932). It certainly appears to look much better than the setting of *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947). However, the Mannon house is also described as a tomb, which is mildly disturbing. It becomes even more disturbing when one learns that Grandfather Mannon built the current house after he tore down the old one, because he would not live in a house where his brother had disgraced the family by impregnating a Canuck girl.

Ezra's study is described as having a stiff and austere atmosphere (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 27. 1932), and there are paintings on the walls of George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, John Marshall and of Ezra himself. The bookcase in Ezra's study is full of law books, and this fits the Aristotelian theory, because men should appear knowledgeable compared to the women: "[...] Second, character should be appropriate. For example, there is a 'manly' character, and it would be inappropriate if a female character [...] showed intellectual ability" (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. 20-21. 1999).

Thus, this helps to re-actualize the Aristotelian theory. It is interesting that Ezra's study becomes Orin's study and not Lavinia's study, when she was closer to their father than Orin was. This could be construed as an example of Aristotle's theory – of course the men should have the room of knowledge and not the women. One could argue that it appears that the men are of a higher class compared to the women.

The sitting room is described as being a bleak room without intimacy (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 71. 1932), and one might wonder if this is a sort of intentionally clue as to the fate of both Orin's relationship with Hazel and Lavinia's relationship with Peter – that neither of them will achieve this with their respected love interests.

The stern of the clipper ship is described as unloaded and with a black side, which rises nine or ten feet above the level of the wharf (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 93. 1932). One could argue that the color black is a fitting color for the clipper ship considering that this is where Orin will kill his mother's lover, Adam Brant.

## CHARACTERIZATION

Christine Mannon is a tall good-looking woman of forty, but she looks younger than her age (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 8. 1932). She supposedly moves with an animal like grace (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 8. 1932), and one could argue that this is a reference to her sexual desires and that she is a slave to these. She is not described as beautiful, but rather as a handsome woman with a pale face and black eyebrows (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 8. 1932), and by the way she dresses it is obvious that she is rich. Christine wears a colorful dress as opposed to her daughter, who prefers to wear black, when she is introduced in the first part of the trilogy.

Christine does not come across as a likeable person. For instance when she learns that the gardener, Seth, has let some of his friends look around on the property, she does not show any sort of hospitality: "Because they know that lazy old sot, does it give them the privilege of trespassing?"

Lavinia: I gave Seth permission to show them around

Christine: And since when have you the right without consulting me?" (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 15. 1932).

Christine likes to keep up appearances. When her daughter, Lavinia, tries to start a fight with her outside the house (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 16. 1932), she refuses to quarrel any further outside and subsequently suggest that they take their fight inside where nobody can hear them.

One could argue that Christine shows her guilt, when Lavinia demands to talk to her in her father's study, and Christine cannot look at her husband's portrait. One could argue that she dislikes being in the study, because she knows that she is guilty of adultery, and therefore it is difficult not only to look at his portrait, but also to be in his room.

Christine is a liar and tries to remain so, until Lavinia confronts her in her father's study: "Stop lying, I tell you! I went upstairs! I heard you telling him – 'I love you, Adam' and kissing him! [...] You vile -! You're shameless and evil!" (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 28. 1932). Christine claims that the reason for her adultery is that she hates her husband, Ezra (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 28. 1932). One could argue that the discovery of Christine's adultery is what sets every awful thing that happens next in motion.

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

Christine admits to not loving and caring for her daughter: “I tried to love you. I told myself it wasn't human not to love my own child, born of my body. But I never could make myself feel you were born of any body but his!” (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 29. 1932). She also admits to the fact that she loves her son, Orin, and not her daughter. She claims that the reason she could love Orin and not Lavinia is that while she was pregnant with Orin, and when he was born, Ezra was in Mexico (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 29. 1932). She could therefore truly mold Orin to hers and Ezra's.

Christine disregards her responsibility for her adulterous ways by trying to guilt her daughter into thinking that she was to blame for it: “[...] I hope you realize that I never would have fallen in love with Adam if I'd had Orin with me. When he had gone there was nothing left – but hate and a desire to be revenged – and a longing for love!” (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 29. 1932). Christine also reveals that she knew who Adam was, and this does not seem to bother her one bit, which speaks volumes about her character (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 30. 1932). Furthermore she rubs it in by letting Lavinia know that she forced Adam to flirt with her, so that Lavinia would not be suspicious (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 32. 1932). Christine might be beautiful on the outside, but she certainly appears rather rotten on the inside.

There are some Oedipal tendencies in Christine's relationship with her son, Orin. For instance she states her lover, Adam, reminds her of her son: “Brant: It would be damned queer if you feel in love with me because I recalled Ezra Mannon to you!

Christine: [...] No, no, I tell you! It was Orin you made me think of!” (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 33. 1932).

Christine even admits that she has prayed that her husband would never return from the war, because she would rather spend the rest of her life with Adam:

“I wanted you every possible moment we could steal! And I simply couldn't believe that he ever would come home. I have prayed that he should be killed in the war so intensely that I finally believed it would surely happen! [...] Oh, if only he were dead!” (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 34. 1932).

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*



*Mourning Becomes Electra* (1947)

She is ready to murder her husband to be with Adam, and now that she knows of her husband's weak heart, it will be easy for her to kill him, which she conspires to do with Adam (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 37. 1932). They are both happy to kill Ezra, because of their love for each other and for the heritage. They are greedy not only in their love for each other, but also for the material things in life.

She states later on in the play that she hates death: "I hate the sight of death! I hate the thought of it!" (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 90. 1932). And one could perhaps argue that her hate or maybe even fear of death is precisely the reason why she has taken herself a young lover like Adam Brant. Christine is a clever woman, and she manipulates even her son through lies and deceit. She is a master manipulator if ever there was one.

Ezra Mannon is the husband of Christine, and he is the father of Lavinia and Orin. He is a former judge, and when the play begins, he is away in the war. Ezra is tall like his son and daughter. He is big-boned and fifty years old (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 43. 1932). He is dressed in his Brigadier-General uniform when he comes home. He walks like his daughter with stiff military-like movements. There is nothing sensual about him like there is about his wife. Ezra does not come across as an especially affectionate person.

He warns Christine not to be too baby their son, when he returns from the war (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 45. 1932), because he does not want her to ruin all the hard work, he has done to make a man of him, as he says. He wants his daughter to stay close to him just as Christine wants Orin to stay close to her: "Christine: [...] You're the only man I'll ever love! I'm going to stay with you!

Mannon: [...] I hope so. I want you to remain my little girl [...]"(O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 47. 1932).

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

Like Lavinia Ezra is confrontational. When he returns from the war, and he wants to make sense of why he and his wife have driven apart, she does not want to talk about it, but he is relentless. Christine might have wanted him to die in this war, but he reveals that years ago when he went to the Mexican War, he went wishing that he would die (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 50. 1932), because he was sure she did not love him.

Orin returns from the war wounded. He has the same facial expression as his father, and he is tall like him. He has a natural boyish charm, which makes all women want to mother him (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 67. 1932). Like his sister he looks older than he actually is. He is merely twenty years old, but he looks at least ten years older. One could argue that this is what the war has done to him. One could argue that Orin goes mad after their mother commits suicide.

He helps his sister reveal their mother's true nature by hiding the box of poison by their father's body, and by her scream she reveals herself for what she is: a murderess (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 91. 1932). Orin appears to be almost excited about the mere thought of telling their mother what they have done to her lover, Adam Brant: "You let me do the talking! I want to be the one!" (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 107. 1932).

Orin changes after his mother's suicide. He turns into his father: Lavinia: "Father's law books?"

Orin: Why not? I'm considering studying law [...]"(O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 135. 1932).

Seth Beckwith is the Mannon's gardener, and he is described as being a tall, raw-boned, bent-shouldered old man of seventy-five with white hair and beard, who has a case of rheumatism as well (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 6. 1932) like Harry Hope in *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947). Seth is loyal to Lavinia, and she is loyal to him. Whenever he comes back from town drunk, she does not tell on him, and she lets his friends see the grounds. Seth does not argue with her, and one could argue that this not merely a symbol of his loyalty to her, but also his awareness that she is his boss.

Hazel Niles is the sister of Peter, and she is the love interest for Orin. Hazel is described as a pretty and healthy girl of nineteen with dark hair, dark eyes and a beautiful smile (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 11. 1932). In the description that O'Neill has

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

made of her it says that one can immediately sense that she is a frank, innocent and good person (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 11. 1932).

Peter Niles is the brother of Hazel, and he is Lavinia's love interest. Peter is apparently a lot like his sister: "[...] Peter is [...] straightforward, guileless and good-natured" (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 11. 1932). He moves with awkwardness and certainly not animal-like grace as his would-be mother-in-law, Christine. He is twenty-two with a plain face, and he wears the uniform of an artillery captain from the Union Army, when he is first introduced to the audience. Peter has asked Lavinia to marry him twice, but she has refused him each time.

Adam Brant is the thirty-six year old lover of Christine Mannon. He has black long hair, bushy eyebrows and hazel eyes. He has a sensual mouth, moustache, tall and is broad-shouldered. He is the son of David Mannon, Lavinia's grandfather's brother. When Lavinia reveals that she knows who he is, he tells her how badly it ended for his father – that he was a drunk for most of his life until he hung himself: "The only decent thing he ever did!" (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 23. 1932).

Adam cannot forgive his father for having struck his loving mother, and thus old David hung himself out of guilt for what he had done, and what he had become. He resented his mother for forcing him to become a gentleman, and he ran off to sea, but when he returned from the sea, he found his mother dying from starvation and learnt that Ezra Mannon had refused to help her (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 23-24. 1932). This might explain why Adam is so decisive in his revenge over the Mannons.

Apart from the previously mentioned characters of *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1932) there are also some minor characters that function as a sort of chorus. The comment on what has happened prior to audience getting to the theatre. The chorus gives the audience the backstory in the beginning of the play so to speak, and as the play progresses they comment on what has happened and what is happening. The chorus consists of townsfolk.

Amos Ames is a member of the chorus, and he is a carpenter who is taking a holiday and is therefore dressed in his Sunday best as are his wife and her cousin (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 6. 1932), when they are introduced. He is described as being a bit of a gossip, and as someone who loves scandal, because it is a popular talking point.

Amos' wife, Louisa, is taller than her husband and stouter (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 6. 1932), and she is also a member of the chorus. She too loves gossip, and is the same age as her husband, who is in his fifties.

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

Louisa's cousin, Minnie, is another member of the chorus. She is not tall like her cousin and she is a plump woman of forty (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 6. 1932), and she is eager to listen to the newest gossip. An example of Minnie's gossip with Louisa and Amos could be when they all first see Lavinia, and Minnie states that: "She looks like her mother in face – queer lookin' – but she ain't purty like her" (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 10. 1932).

Josiah Borden, another member of the chorus, is described as a small man of sixty years, a shrewd and competent man, who is the manager of the Mannon shipping company (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 61. 1932). At Ezra Mannon's funeral Josiah and the Hills talk about what a good man he was, but Josiah makes a curious statement about Ezra, which hints at the fact that there is no more good to come in this play: "He was the power for good" (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 63. 1932). One could argue that since Ezra is now dead there is no longer a power for good, and therefore nothing good will ever happen to this family again.

Emma Borden, Josiah's wife, is ten years younger than him, and she is also a part of the chorus. She is described as having the face of a horse, big teeth and feet and as being somewhat defensive (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 61. 1932).

Everett Hills is the well-fed minister of the town (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 61. 1932), and he too belongs to the chorus. He is described as snobbish, ingratiating and as a timid man, who is in his fifties as is his wife. She is yet another member of the chorus. Both Mrs. Hills and Mrs. Borden like to gossip, and they do so at Ezra Mannon's funeral: "Mrs. Borden: Queer, the difference in her and Lavinia – the way they take his death. Lavinia is cold and calm as an icicle

Mrs. Hills: Yes. She doesn't seem to feel as much sorrow as she ought

Mrs. Borden: That's where you're wrong. She feels it as much as her mother. Only she's too Mannon to let anyone see what she feels" (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 62. 1932).

Mrs. Hills foretells what will happen to the Mannon's when they are at Ezra's funeral: "Maybe it's fate. You remember, Everett, you've always said about the Mannons that pride goeth before a fall and that some day God would humble them in their sinful pride [...]" (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 63. 1932).

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

The last members of the chorus are Doctor Blake is the old kindly best-family physician and a self-important man (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 61. 1932), Abner Small, Joe Silva, Ira Mackel and Chantymen. He is a thin man of sixty-five with black hair, beard and a moustache. It shows in his face that he has sailed for most of his life. He lies drunk on the clipper ship when Adam comes onboard. Abner Small is a little old man of sixty-five, and he works as a clerk in a hardware store (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 115. 1932). Joe Silva is a sixty-year-old fat Portuguese fishing captain (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 115. 1932). Ira Mackel is a farmer (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 115. 1932). Ames, Small, Silva and Mackel are Seth's drinking buddies, and they think that they are seeing the ghosts of the Mannon's house. One could argue that they are almost foretelling what will happen in the end.

THE TRAGIC HERO OF MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA

Lavinia is twenty-three, but she looks as though she is a lot older (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 8. 1932). This makes Lavinia a contrast to her own mother, who looks considerably younger than she actually is. Unlike her Lavinia is tall. She is described as thin and flat-breasted and she wears black. Again this could be construed as a contrast to her mother, who wears a green satin dress, when she first enters the stage.

Whereas Christine moves with an animal-like grace, Lavinia moves as though she is marching for the military (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 9. 1932). She appears stiff and certainly not sensual like her mother. She is even described as talking to others as though she is giving orders to her officers: "She has a flat, dry voice and a habit of snapping out her words like an officer giving orders" (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 9. 1932).

She may not have a lot in common with her mother's physical appearance, but apparently she bears a striking facial likeness to her mother (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 9. 1932). However Lavinia does not care to emphasize this fact, and as the plot progresses one begins to understand why: "But it is evident that Lavinia does all in her power to emphasize the dissimilarity rather than the resemblance to her parent" (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 9. 1932).

She is the tragic heroine, because her fall from grace is that much bigger than most of the other characters. She begins with taking the moral high ground, and as the play progresses, she begins to lose some of her old self. This helps to re-actualize the theory, because: "Aristotle's main

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

reason why the hero of tragedy should be a person of distinction is that only such a person's fall from eminence is morally instructive; we are not moved by reversal in little lives" (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. xi. 1999). It moves the audience that Lavinia ends up punishing herself by creating a prison in her own house – she must take the final punishment for what has happened in the family.

One could argue that Lavinia does indeed commit the act of hamartia when she conspires to kill her mother's lover and thereby essentially pushes her mother to commit suicide. It is Lavinia's high moral sense that ends up destroying her and her brother in the end, because she knows that murder is wrong, or she should know when she has just accused her mother of it: "[...] this was hamartia. On a larger scale, but essentially no different, were such actions as committing a crime, blaspheming or willfully taking any course which you knew to be wrong" (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. xi. 1999).

Lavinia evokes the audience's pity, because she is her father's daughter, and perhaps especially because of her mother's meanness towards her. The audience cannot help but root for the poor girl. Lavinia also appears to be the character, whom suffers the most throughout the play, and according to the theory: "The people doing or suffering these actions must be 'good' or 'bad' – the standard moral distinction between members of the human race. It follows that the people imitated must be 'better' than us, 'worse' than us, or exactly the same" (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. 4. 1999). Lavinia stands in grave contrast to her mother, whom is not good, but depicted as an evil woman, whom murders her husband and tries to convince everyone that her daughter is insane to get away with it.

Furthermore Lavinia does not just commit the act of hamartia and thereby shows that she is not a saint, but her act also arouses pity in the audience, because one does understand her need to regain the moral high ground for the family:

"The heroes [...] are not saints, but their sufferings are caused less by innate wickedness than because of hamartia. [...] Hamartia is the failing in understanding or moral character which leads someone to a disastrous choice of action: a choice which arouses our pity because it is both catastrophic and made deliberately but not out wickedness, and arouses our terror because we identify with both the innocence and the helplessness of the person who makes the choice. Heroes should be people of high degree and reputation" (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. 17. 1999).

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

One could argue that Lavinia has an incestuous love for her father. When the good-natured Peter asks her to marry him, she denies his marriage proposal because she has got to stay at home, where her father needs her: “I can't marry anyone, Peter. I've got to stay at home. Father needs me

Peter: He's got your mother

Lavinia: [...] He needs me more!” (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 13. 1932).

Lavinia makes it clear to Adam Brant there is nothing she would not do to protect her father from getting hurt (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 20. 1932). Another example of her protectiveness towards her father is after she has found out who Adam is, and she confronts her mother. She declares to Christine that she wishes to see her punished, and that she would tell her father about the adultery, if only it would not hurt him: “It's my first duty to protect him from you!” (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 30. 1932).

It appears that there is nothing Lavinia will not do for her father. She will stay with him forever. She would rather not get married and stay close to her father than get married. She feels that it is her duty to protect and take care of her father. There are some Oedipal tendencies in her love and affection for her father. She is jealous of the suddenly affectionate relationship between her parents, when her father returns from the war: “I hate you! You steal even Father's love from me again! You stole all love from me when I was born! [...]” (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 52. 1932).

Lavinia is also somewhat of a control-freak. She is desperate to make sure that Orin will be on her side and not their mothers, when he comes back from the war: “All I want to do is warn you to be on your guard. Don't let her baby you the way she used to and get you under her thumb again. Don't believe the lies she'll tell you! Wait till you've talked to me!” (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 69. 1932).

It could be argued that Lavinia changes after her mother's death. For instance she does not wear black any longer. She wears colorful clothes like her mother did (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 128. 1932). One could argue that after Christine has committed suicide, Lavinia takes her mother's place with Orin, and he begins to depend on her: “Orin: I'll be all right – with you

Lavinia: [...] That's all I wanted – to hear you say that” (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 123. 1932).

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

One could go a step further and argue Lavinia actually becomes her mother after she is dead and gone. One could perhaps even argue that Christine is thereby haunting her own daughter: “Orin: Little by little it grew like Mother’s soul – as if you were stealing hers – as if death had set you free – to become her!” (O’Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 125. 1932). In order for Lavinia to truly turn into her mother, she must become the master manipulator that she was, and one wonders if that is the case? Of course could argue that by the way she handles Orin, she is in fact manipulating him to think as she does: “Lavinia: Who murdered Father? Answer me!

Orin: Mother was under his influence –

Lavinia: That’s a lie! It was he who was under hers. You know the truth!” (O’Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 126. 1932).

One could also argue that Lavinia is not only manipulating her brother, Orin, but also herself into believing that they did not drive their mother to suicide. She tries to convince herself and Orin into believing that Christine’s decision of committing suicide was only Christine’s decision to make, and that neither of them pushed her to do it by killing her lover and subsequently telling her of their actions: “But we protected her. She could have lived, couldn’t she? But she chose to kill herself as a punishment for her crime – of her own free will! It was an act of justice!” (O’Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 127. 1932).

Lavinia changes after her mothers death. She does not wear black any longer. She wears color like her mother (O’Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 128. 1932).

#### THEMES OF MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA

There are several themes in *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O’Neill, Eugene. 1932). There are themes of jealousy, Oedipal tendencies, lies and deceit, death and fate. I will begin with the theme of jealousy. It is clear that there is almost always an element of jealousy between the major characters of this play. Christine might claim that she does not love her daughter, but it is clear that she is jealous her relationship with Ezra: “You’ve tried to become the wife of your father and the mother of Orin! You’ve always schemed to steal my place” (O’Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 31. 1932). Orin is also guilty of jealousy, when he learns that his mother did indeed cheat on their father. Ezra’s jealousy is perhaps a little more innocent in the sense that the gossip he has heard about his wife and Adam Brant has made him jealous and long for home: “[...] I shouldn’t have bothered

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

you with that foolishness about Brant tonight. [...] But I was jealous a bit, to tell you the truth” (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 49. 1932).

One could also argue that there are clear Oedipal tendencies in this play. One could argue this exists in the relationship between Orin and Christine for instance. She is quick to manipulate her son with her love, and because he loves the attention, he does not question it: “Orin: My head got aching till I thought it would explode

Christine: (leans over and puts her hand on his forehead) Poor boy! Does it pain now?

Orin: Not much. Not at all when your hand is there. (Impulsively he takes her hand and kisses it – boyishly)” (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 73. 1932).

It is clear that Orin's love for his mother is of a significant size, and one could argue that he is driven more towards his mother than he is towards Hazel, who is his own age and in love with him. Almost immediately after Orin has returned from the war he throws himself at his mother and wants to be close to her constantly: “But your letters got farther and farther between – and they seemed so cold! It drove me crazy! I wanted to desert and run home – or else get killed! If only you knew how I longed to be here with you – like this! (He leans his head against her knee. His voice becomes dreamy and low and caressing.) I used to have the most wonderful dreams about you” (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 80. 1932).

As mentioned previously Hazel is the love interest of Orin, but he does not seem to want her after he gets back from the war, although he does get engaged with her later, he does not seem eager to marry her: “And I'll never leave you again now. I don't want Hazel or anyone [...]. You're my only girl!” (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 81. 1932).



*Mourning Becomes Electra* (1947)

However it is not only Orin who exhibits these Oedipal tendencies in the relationship with his mother. She exhibits them as well, and she admits to them, when Orin suddenly notices how fond

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

his mother is of Hazel, and realizes that she never was before: “Orin: What’s made you take such a fancy to Hazel all of the sudden? You never used to think much of her. You didn’t want me going about with her

Christine: [...] I was selfish then. I was jealous, too [...]”(O’Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 76. 1932).

Perhaps the saddest thing about Orin’s fate is that even after his mother has killed herself, and he knows what she did to their father and that she lied to him, he still has this Oedipal complex: “Don’t moan like that! You’re still under his influence! But you’ll forget him! I’ll make you forget him! I’ll make you happy! We’ll leave Vinnie here and go away on a long voyage [...]”(O’Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 109. 1932).

One could also argue that there is an almost incestuous relationship between Orin and Lavinia by the end of the play, because he does not Lavinia to leave him: “Orin: I love you now with all the guilt in me – the guilt we share! Perhaps I love you too much, Vinnie!” (O’Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 149. 1932).



*Mourning Becomes Electra* (1947)

Certainly the way that Lavinia feels about their father resembles how Orin feels about their mother. She is fiercely protective of him, and she does not want to ever leave him, which is why she refused Peter’s proposal at first: “Christine: [...] You’re the only man I’ll ever love! I’m going to stay with you!

Mannon: [...] I hope so. I want you to remain my little girl [...]”(O’Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 47. 1932).

One could also argue that there is something incestuous about the relationship between Christine and Adam, because of the way that he resembles Orin. This is also what makes their relationship mildly disturbing, because she has fallen in love with a young man who looks like

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

her son: “Brant: It would be damned queer if you feel in love with me because I recalled Ezra Mannon to you!

Christine: [...] No, no, I tell you! It was Orin you made me think of!” (O’Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 33. 1932).

Another theme of *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O’Neill, Eugene. 1932) is lies and deceit of which Christine Mannon seems to be the queen. For instance Christine lied to the doctor just as she lied to Lavinia about Ezra’s death. Dr. Blake makes her lies apparent to the audience, when he tells the rest of the chorus: “The minute they sent for me I knew what’d happened. And what she told me about waking up to find him groaning and doubled with pain confirmed it. She’d given him his medicine [...]”(O’Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 64. 1932).

One could argue that Christine is a hypocrite, because she accuses Lavinia of spreading lies at Ezra’s funeral, when she is the one who is spreading lies: “I know what you’ve been waiting for – to tell Orin your lies and get him to go to the police!” (O’Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 70. 1932). Christine is determined to get Orin on her side so she attempts to make Lavinia’s accusations sound ridiculous: “Orin: [...] Who’s this Captain Brant who’s been calling on you?

Christine: [...] On me? You mean on Vinnie, don’t you? [...]”(O’Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 76. 1932). As mentioned previously Christine tries to convince Orin how ridiculous it is that Brant should be in love with her and thereby manipulating him to be on her side and not Lavinia’s: “I’d be very angry with you if it weren’t so ridiculous! [...] You don’t seem to realize I’m an old married woman with two grown-up children!” (O’Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 78. 1932).

One could argue that Christine is not only lying to Orin about her affair with Adam, but also about the reason why she and Orin must stick together and leave Lavinia out of their little club, because she has no intentions of staying with Orin, but rather she has intentions of eloping with her lover: “Oh, how happy we’ll be together, you and I, if you only won’t let Vinnie poison your mind against me with her disgusting lies!” (O’Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 77. 1932).

Through her lies Christine tries to convince Orin that Lavinia is insane, and that therefore whatever comes out of Lavinia’s mouth cannot be trusted: “And now, with the shock of your

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

father's death on top of everything, I'm convinced she's actually gone insane. Haven't you noticed how queerly she acts?" (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 78. 1932).

One could also argue that another level of deceit takes place when Orin and Lavinia kill Adam Brant, because of the way they planned his murder. Orin makes a point of telling his mother about his and Lavinia's plan: "They think exactly what we planned they should think – that he was killed by waterfront thieves!" (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 108. 1932).

A big theme of *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1932) is death. When Ezra returns from the war, he talks a lot about death. This is probably because it is all he has seen while he has been away: "That's always been the Mannon's way of thinking. They went to the white meeting-house on Sabbaths and meditated on death. Life was dying. Being born was starting to die [...]" (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 49. 1932). Ezra is not the only family member whom has returned from the war with death on his mind. Death also occupies Orin's mind when he returns from the war: "I thought it would never end, that we'd go on murdering and being murdered until no one was left alive!" (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 67. 1932).

Death shows up several times throughout the play. It appears directly when Christine kills Ezra with poison instead of getting him his medicine: "[...] she pretends to take something from the stand by the head of the bed – then holds out the pellet and a glass of water which is on the stand. [...] – then suddenly a wild look of terror comes over his face. He gasps" (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 56. 1932).

Death appears directly more than once in the play. It appears again when Orin and Lavinia kill Adam Brant: "Orin steps through the door and with the pistol almost against Brant's body fires twice. Brant pitches forward to the floor by the table, rolls over, twitches a moment on his back and lies still" (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 102. 1932). Death drops by again when Christine kills herself after she learns that Orin and Lavinia has killed Adam, and she realizes that there is nothing left for her to live for: "Orin: Vinnie! [...] Mother – shot herself – Father's pistol – get a doctor [...]" (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 110. 1932). The last time that death drops by the Mannon house is when Orin kills himself, because he cannot take the guilt of what he has done to his mother anymore (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 151. 1932).

Finally there is the theme of fate, which seems to dominant the Mannon household quite a bit. When Ezra returns from the war, he cannot sleep, because his mind is racing, and this could be a sign of what is to come. He looks worried, and Christine asks if it is his heart: "It isn't

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

my heart. It's something uneasy troubling my mind – as if something in me was listening, watching, waiting for something to happen” (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 55. 1932).

Christine has her own trouble with fate. She had planned the murder of her husband so carefully and yet it went wrong, because Ezra screamed for their daughter and she saw what Christine had done: “I'd planned it so carefully – but something made things happen!” (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 99. 1932). One could argue that Orin true has a brush with fate, when he has killed Adam: “This is like my dream, I've killed him before – over and over” (O'Neill, Eugene. *Mourning Becomes Electra*. P. 103. 1932). One could also argue that it is Lavinia's fate to punish herself after all that has happened: ““There is no one left to punish me,’ says Lavinia, ‘I've got to punish myself”” (Cargill, Fagin, Fisher. *O'Neill and His Plays*. P. 299. 1961).

One could argue that certainly the complications of this play begin, once it is discovered that Christine is having an affair and not just with anybody, but with a young man who is a part of the family, and whom looks like her own son. One could argue that the reversal happens here, because the Mannon's quickly go from being a happy family to an extremely unhappy family hereafter for according to the theory: “Reversal, as I said above, is when the circumstances change to their direct opposite – and it, too, should be inevitable or plausible” (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. 15. 1999).

One could also argue that the point of discovery of this play has different faces. One could argue that Lavinia discovering that her mother is having an affair with Adam Brant is stage one, and that it escalates when Orin finds out as well, because: “Discovery, as the word suggests, is a change from ignorance to knowledge” (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. 15. 1999). After this point in the play Orin is no longer ignorant about his mother or what she might be capable of.

One could argue that the fact that this play revolves around a family unit makes the tragedy more intense, because the action should take place between people who like each other:

“Since the author's task is to arouse, by imitation, the satisfaction of feeling pity and terror, the ability to do this must be inherent in the incidents of the play. We need to examine what kind of incidents will result in such reactions. What is done in a play inevitably happens between people who like each other [...]. Authors should work for situations where terrible things happen between intimates” (Aristotle/McLeish. *Poetics*. P. 19. 1999).

On the other hand one could argue that not everyone in the family likes each other, but then again it could argued that with the exception of Lavinia and Christine, everyone in that family unit does

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

love each other at the beginning of the play, and that the love between the members of this family slowly disappears as the play progresses. Therefore this helps to re-actualize the theory.

One could argue that there is a contempt for humanity in this play, which is why the Mannon family has such an unhappy ending with multiple suicides, but this also helps to create and reinforce the hopelessness of that family's fate: "And the contempt for humanity [...] continues in *Mourning Becomes Electra*, creating, in a sense, the utter hopelessness of that tragedy" (Cargill, Fagin, Fisher. *O'Neill and His Plays*. P. 298. 1961).

## DISCUSSION

One could argue that *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1932) does not re-actualize the aforementioned theory, because the play does not uphold to primary assets such as the twenty-four hour timeline nor the single unit. However, one could also argue that it does almost hold up to the matter of the play taking place in one unit, because the set is usually the Mannon's house except for the act in which Adam Brant is killed.

On the other hand one could argue that *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1932) does help to re-actualize the Aristotelian theory because it is essentially a retelling of an old Greek tragedy, and because the action takes place within the family unit. One could perhaps even argue that the sheer numbers of deaths help to re-actualize the theory and make it a tragedy in the truest sense.

One could also argue that for Lavinia's fall from grace for instance is that much greater because she comes from a rich family, and she appears to be on a moral high ground at the beginning of the play. Her act of hamartia is even that more morally instructive to the audience. This helps to re-actualize the theory.

One could also argue that *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) helps to re-actualize the theory, because it upholds just about every rule in the book. The play takes place during the course of a twenty-four period, and the setting basically does not change from the original setting.

Furthermore one could also argue that the two tragic heroes certainly are likable. Hickey is described as being the fun friend of everyone at Harry Hope's, and the audience therefore takes an immediate liking to him, whereas Lavinia's mother helps the audience to feel pity and to root for Lavinia. This also helps to re-actualize the theory.

THE RE-ACTUALIZATION OF THE ARISTOTELIAN THEORY IN TWO OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S PLAYS – *THE ICEMAN COMETH* AND *MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA*

One could certainly argue that the fact that both plays have a beginning, a middle and end further helps the re-actualization of the theory.

What does tragedy represent? What do both of these plays represent? One could argue that they represent the wrong actions, and the consequences of these, which is what the audience can learn from: “Tragedy represents wrong actions and their consequences” (Aylen, Leo. *Greek Tragedies & The Modern World*. P. 158. 1964).

What connects these two tragedies besides suicide and death? One could argue that what truly connects these two tragedies besides their author is that they both deal with the sense of fate. Hickey and Parritt in *The Iceman Cometh* (1947) cannot escape their fate anymore than Christine, Orin or Lavinia can in *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1932), and this is something that is utterly recognizable about O'Neill – his preoccupation with fate:

“[...] O'Neill has to be set aside from the mainstream because his preoccupation was not so much with the journalistic reportage of what was going on – which is, I think, true of most of the other writers in the twenties and thirties – but with the quest for the relationship between an individual, and for want of a better word, fate.” (Miller, Arthur. *The Theater Essays of Arthur Miller*. P. 229. 1996).

One could also argue that it is not merely the matter of fate that binds these two plays together nor is it only their genre, but perhaps it is also the occurrence of doubt. For instance when Orin begins to doubt if he and Lavinia did the right thing by killing Adam, and if she ought to marry Peter or make him go away. One could also argue that there is a sudden spark of doubt in Hickey's mind when the police come to take him away: “[...] but it is not debatable that O'Neill's interest in the inscrutable forces that shape human destiny, in the dark layers of man's psyche, and in the problems of faith and doubt was persistent throughout his dramaturgic life” (Cargill, Fagin and Fisher. *O'Neill and His Plays*. P. 8. 1961).

One could also discuss whether or not there are tragedies like *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1932) and *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947) out there today, and the answer is yes. Sam Shepard wrote a tragedy recently which is based on the great and famous play about Oedipus. One could argue that this is not a new tragedy, but one could also argue that it holds up to the theory, because it is a retelling just as *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1932).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion the play that better re-actualizes the Aristotelian theory is *The Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1947), because it lives up to the better part of the rules as opposed to *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O'Neill, Eugene. 1932). One could wonder why this is the case, but then again one does not need to wonder for long, because the answer might as simple as this: O'Neill wrote *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1932) as a relatively young man, and therefore he might not have wanted to obey to all the rules of tragedy set forth by Aristotle. O'Neill might have been more inclined to do so when he wrote *The Iceman Cometh* (1947) as an older man.

One must conclude that both of these help to re-actualize the theory in their own ways. They might not both live up to every rule in the theory, but atlas there are enough rules that are being obeyed to help re-actualize the theory, which is the main issue here.

One might ask what O'Neill what to say with a play such as *The Iceman Cometh* (1947), and the answer might be in an interview that Nathan Lane did when he played the part of Hickey at BAM last year: "Basically [O'Neill's] saying that man cannot live without his illusions, his life lie, his self-myth – whatever you want to call it." It is tempting to agree with that statement, because what happens immediately after Hickey is arrested and taken away? They all return to their pipe dreams, because they may be able to live without Hickey, but they cannot live without their pipe dreams, because their pipe dreams help them forget just how miserable their lives truly are: "O'Neill's bums are all in pursuit of forgetfulness, of sleep, of death" (Cargill, Fagin, Fisher. *O'Neill and His Plays*. P. 207. 1961).

One might also ask what the theatre meant to Eugene O'Neill, and he was asked that once in an interview and he gave this response: "The theatre to me is life – the substance and interpretation of life. [...] life is a struggle, often if not usually, unsuccessful struggle; for most of us have something within us which prevents us from accomplishing what we dream and desire" (Cargill, Fagin, Fisher. *O'Neill and His Plays*. P. 107. 1961). The answer does not necessarily come as a surprise, when one has read several of O'Neill's plays, because his character seem to often go through the struggle or struggles before the play is over. Just look at Lavinia who loses her entire family her and her boyfriend, before the play is over.