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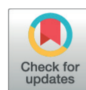

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The Disnarrated and Denarrated in Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*

Abstract

Drawing on the notions of "disnarration" (telling what did/does not occur) and "denarration" (cancelling or negating what has occurred) as theorized by, respectively, Gerald Prince and Brian Richardson, this paper examines the narrative structure of Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* (1939). We focus on textual details to explain how the disnarrated and the denarrated in O'Neill's play are mostly manipulated as narrative as well as thematic devices to mark the consoling and soothing illusions of the "pipe dreams" which give meaning to the lives of the bar's regulars. Central to our analysis is how the self-deluded tavern loafers, of whom Hickey is a paragon, resort to a whole spectrum of narrative negations because to them truth is too painful to bear. We argue that the use of disnarration and denarration by Hickey and the other characters in the play helps to create an all-protective world of non-being furnished with an illusion of safety and a false sense of contentment masking feelings of fragility and meaninglessness. These narrative features are central, whether we take Hickey to be a character who is genuinely suffering from mental illness or a cunning criminal who has killed his wife in cold blood.

Keywords: Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*, narratology, disnarration, denarration.

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INTRODUCTION

Much has been written by literary scholars from many critical perspectives on the arch theme of self-deception in Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* (henceforth *Iceman*). In this essay, we attempt to probe the play's omissions and silences as well as its depiction of dreams, evasions, and distortions of reality, using the critical apparatus of narratology provided through the lens of the insights developed by Gerald Prince in his landmark 1988 essay "The Disnarrated" and Brian Richardson in his seminal 2001 essay "Denarration in Fiction: Erasing the Story in Beckett and Others." Prince's "disnarration" describes events which are not clearly incorporated or embedded in the story's plot while Richardson's "denarration" portrays events of a paradoxical and contradictory nature, which disrupt the logical flow of the story and render it impossible to establish whether or not those events have actually occurred in the story. Obviously, these strategies are cognitively significant as they mean to prevent the story of each character's life from being completely narrated and shared with the reader. In the following pages we will examine how O'Neill attempts to create the effect of lifelikeness through deliberate deployment of "disnarration" as well as "denarration" in his play. We show that his characteristic strategy of negation brings to light his characters' blind search for realizing their true self and vocation.

It should be noted that the narratological concepts of disnarration and denarration have been extensively discussed in fiction but are far less frequently addressed in relation to drama. Both novels and plays "tell stories," however, and the common ground is there. As the German narrative theorist Manfred Jahn puts it, "a play's text must be read and understood as a piece of narrative fiction before it may be used as (and possibly turns into) a recipe for performance containing 'instructions' by the playwright" (672). Plays, Jahn maintains, "have a narrative world (a 'diegesis'), which is not distinct in principle from any other narrative world" (674). In other words, Jahn further explains, they "have a story and a plot, and even if they do not literally 'tell' their story, tellability and experientiality are dramatic criteria as well as epic ones" (ibid.). O'Neill's *Iceman* should thus be regarded in this context of narration in drama. Moreover, these narratological conceptualizations obviously overlap with Possible Worlds Theory, the more philosophical subcategory of cognitive poetics. Accordingly, our analysis will also take into account this connection. As narrative strategies, the disnarrated and denarrated occur in virtually every narrative; however, they have generally received little scholarly attention in relation to *Iceman* although they seem to be essential to O'Neill's narrative and thematic structure in this particular play.

Iceman has come to be widely acknowledged as one of O'Neill's greatest achievements. The play came into being promptly. O'Neill began writing it in June and completed it in November 1939 in a short span of time (Shafer 172). In his autobiographical plays, including *Iceman*, O'Neill "dramatized his personal family relationships in many and different guises, when his dramatic art seems to have matured to its fullest extent" (Berlin 166). It would, therefore, come as no surprise that the American dramatist has employed the formal narrative strategies of omission and erasure in order to, among other things, disguise, to some extent, his personal life. The play takes place at Harry Hope's, a waterfront saloon and rooming house, on the downtown West Side of New York during the summer of 1912. The hotel was mostly modeled after three dive bars: "Jimmy the Priest's," "the Garden Hotel," and "the Golden Swan Café" referred to as "the Hell Hole" where O'Neill himself became a regular in his late youth. This was a time of personal predicament for the playwright, who experienced heavy drinking, a suicide attempt, divorce, a bout of malaria and convalescence at a tuberculosis sanatorium. The characters in the play resemble those that O'Neill encountered during his difficult times throughout the 1910s (Dowling).

O'Neill's choice of a bar as the play's setting in fact gives him greater freedom and scope of action to undertake a "trenchant study of human weakness and self-deception" (Grecco 146). Harry Hope's bar is ideal for the central figure of the play, Hickey, who "dis/de/narrates" the story of his life. As Emil Roy explains, "the advantages of Hope's saloon as a place of retreat for Hickey are obvious: no one he knows in his business will ever meet him there," so Hickey can easily misrepresent the truth (300). For Hickey, Hope's saloon is significant as a place of retreat to which he could escape to connect with his old pals. Hickey is both keeping a secret from others and from himself. In the former, misrepresentation of truth occurs as people in the world outside the bar are not likely to meet him there and know about what he has done. In the latter, misrepresentation of truth occurs as the bar is the last resort Hickey has to challenge his perception of love and hate, and to build a case of insanity defense. The play's setting and themes thus seem to yield themselves more unreservedly to the narrative strategies of excision and omission.

Harry Hope's bar is inhabited by a group of drunken "misbegotten" habitués, clinging to their "lying pipe dreams" in order to escape reality. These illusions are nourished by drinking. On the morning when the play begins, the bar's inebriated customers are awaiting the arrival of Hickey for Harry's sixtieth birthday celebration. Finally, Theodore Hickman, the hardware salesman, known as Hickey, arrives towards the end of the first act but unexpectedly starts preaching to them to relinquish their

dreams in order to encounter their "true self." Hickey has newly become a teetotaler and urges the barflies in Act Two to find a "new life of peace and contentment where no pipe dreams can ever nag at [them] again" (O'Neill 144). He thus exhorts many of the drunken derelicts to regain sobriety, leave the bar, and chase after their dreams. In the end, Hickey proves to be a fake saviour. He is the one who had frequently cheated on the faithful Evelyn, has murdered her and possibly feigns insanity to save himself from the death penalty.

From a narratological perspective, here we focus on the role of "disnarration" and "denarration" in their evocations of "possible alternate worlds" or "alternate diegetic worlds." Graphically, the narrative dimensions of the disnarrated and the denarrated in *Iceman* exhort the reader to engage with the fragments camouflaged behind the central narrative. Through these techniques, O'Neill attempts to delve deep into the inner recesses of human nature and show how uncanny its workings are rather than displaying outward appearances. In this way, he throws into high relief his central theme threading all the parts together: "Man lives by illusion, dies by reality" (Walker 145). Through the character of Hickey, O'Neill suggests that humans find solace in life-saving lies and that death is the only way out when such solace is no longer viable.

The most manifest nexus of the deployment of disnarration and denarration in O'Neill's text is the character of Hickey, who displays creative absences and erasures as his dreadful secrets are gradually revealed in the course of the play. In what follows we examine several instances of these narrative acts. These indicate that Hickey's experience must have been much more profound than he might have been prepared for. As Van Hulle notes, "both the strategies of 'dis-' and 'denarration' tend to have a disconcerting effect" (258). Hickey creates his self-image through these narrative tactics: they allow him to consciously twist and deform the reality from which he strives to escape. That is why Hickey, the play's guilt-stricken protagonist, breaks down when he realizes the truth about himself.

THE DISNARRATED

The narratological concept of the disnarrated (in French: *dénarré*), as coined by the American literary theorist Prince, in his essay "The Disnarrated," "covers all the events that *do not* happen but, nonetheless, are referred to (in a negative or hypothetical mode) by the narrative text" (2). To put it most succinctly, Prince's notion of disnarration is "a function of unrealized strings of events" (5). This concept in fact emphasizes how the non-

occurrence of events or acts in a story appears to have a determining role in the development of the narrative sequence. Disnarration, Prince contends, can be expressed by "the narrator and his or her narration," or "one of the characters and his or her actions" (2). It is accomplished through "alethic expressions of impossibility or unrealized possibility, deontic expressions of observed prohibition, epistemic expressions of ignorance, ontologic expressions of nonexistence," and also through "purely imagined worlds, desired worlds, or intended worlds, unfulfilled expectations, unwarranted beliefs, failed attempts, crushed hopes, suppositions and false calculations, errors and lies, and so forth" (3). Thus, the disnarrated can serve numerous different purposes.

In the light of Claude Bremond's demonstration, Prince further elaborates the concept by stating that "every narrative function opens an alternative, a set of possible directions, and every narrative progresses by following certain directions as opposed to others: the disnarrated or choices not made, roads not taken, possibilities not actualized, goals not reached" (5).[1] Every narrative function, according to Prince, involves a bifurcation into a virtual and an actual possibility. Taken as a whole, disnarration as a narrative dimension highlights the proposition that when one narrative path is already taken, the other is excluded. As Robyn Warhol-Down, a feminist narrative theorist, observes in her essay "'What Might Have Been Is Not What Is': Dickens's Narrative Refusals," the disnarrated aspect of a text becomes "a vividly *present absence*, existing at a narrative level somewhere between the text and everything that is left out of it" (49). This narrative negation can be traced back to Jacques Derrida's antagonistically intertwined concepts of the metaphysics of presence and the metaphysics of absence, thereby challenging the separating boundaries between presence and absence.

The experimentation with new techniques of narrative presentation became an integral part of the modernist era as it offered a more substantial degree of flexibility, autonomy, and variation for authors. Likewise, Prince's "disnarration" mainly occurs in modernist narrative, which "more so than any other genre, insists on our confronting and defining the problematic relationship between what is said and left unsaid" (Lindholm 48). Although O'Neill's *Iceman* is not exactly a modernist play, it is a work that, like every play, offers a pool of linguistic and thematic triggers for virtual, unrealized possibilities. As an example of

[1] Jorge Luis Borges's "The Garden of Forking Paths" (1941) is the prototype example of the narratives of "roads not taken," demonstrating labyrinths of branching plot possibilities which can be overwhelmingly endless. The *fabula* in Borges's story accommodates "the existence of multiple alternative worlds," which as Raphaël Baroni states, "cannot be reduced to mutually exclusive versions" (251).

modern drama, O'Neill's play most notably aims to display "narrative obfuscations" and "a feeling of waiting for something inscrutable" (Krasner 3, 1). The play's central thematic concerns, particularly that of self-deception, constitute the basis for hypothetical sequences of events. Prince illustrates that disnarration has the effect of conjuring up specific and suggestive images and scenarios: "the class of themes that somehow imply the notion 'unrealized' (the theme of missed occasions, lost illusions, unjustified ambitions)" and, more largely, "the class of themes governed by contrasts and contraries (lifelikeness and reality, appearance and being, determinism and freedom, imagination and perception, and so on)" (*Narrative as Theme* 37–38). The disnarrated, then, introduces and develops many themes.

O'Neill's "pipe dream" bears some similarity with Ibsen's "life lie." O'Neill underlines the Ibsen-inspired concept of "saving lies" or "pipe dreams," as they are called in *Iceman*, that is, "the necessary self-deceptions required to survive life's vicissitudes" (Anderson 199). The cynical Dr. Relling in Ibsen's 1884 *The Wild Duck* utilizes a noun, *livsløgnen*, which is interpreted as the "life lie," or the "the saving lie," or the "lie that makes life possible" (Bailey 2). Hickey resembles Gregers Werle; both attempt to "heal" the life-lies and end up destroying those around them. Nevertheless, O'Neill's pipe dream pertains to all of the characters: "Their pipe-dream selves depend on a mutual validation by the others; this is the internal social contract that shields them from the rapidly changing external world" (Eisen 64). These pipe dreams "are connective rather than collective, not a revolutionary movement so much as the 'hopeless hope' that generates tragic consciousness from its inescapable dialectic of ambition and despair" (Eisen 49). It is the state under which everyone must live—the dream of life is what makes life endurable with all its tragedies and ambiguities, the tonic which makes life brighter.

Drawing upon the conception of tragedy in the classical tradition and Ibsen's social problem plays, O'Neill attempts to describe "the suffering of individuals who are either self-deluded or untrue to their destinies, and his plays gain intensity through a slow stripping away of a character's mask to reveal a core psychic identity" (Anderson 199). O'Neill himself acknowledges "the human need for the saving illusion by restoring the community of Harry Hope's saloon at the end of *The Iceman Cometh*," but he also "leaves the characters in a state of paralysis with Larry, the only enlightened member, recognizing that all they are doing is waiting for death" (Murphy 223). Shattering the dreams of the bar's inhabitants only turns them into despondent, waxen zombies. This kind of living, promised by illusions of hopeless fantasy, does not appear to yield creative or significant outcomes.

The play's disnarrated successions mostly involve those pipe dreams of the denizens of Harry Hope's bar which can only be demystified at the expense of "descend[ing] into states of death-in-life" (Cannon 176). The play opens with Larry Slade, the "Old Grandstand Foolosopher," talking about "the lie of a pipe dream," which is "what gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of [them], drunk or sober" (O'Neill 83, 10). Significantly, however, the reader is not informed as to what each character's "pipe dreams" are. The reader is left to wait for Hickey's arrival and, in the meantime, to speculate on what these pipe dreams might be. The fact that they stick to "a single doctrine—the doctrine of Tomorrow—keeping hope alive through the anticipation of significant action on a day which never comes" further opens space for narrative fissures (Brustein 342). The disnarrated gaps in the play propel the story forward to its conclusion, maintain the readers' interest all the while, and allow them to reflect on the narrative.

In the story world, the barflies are left to wait for Hickey's arrival and, in the meantime, they are at liberty to indulge their own alcohol-ridden fantasies, considering what their present encounter might bring about, as from the very outset everything signals that this visit will be different. Before Hickey appears, Cora, the bar's older prostitute, informs other boarders that she has just encountered him on the street and that he has told her: "I'm just finishin' figurin' out de best way to save dem and bring dem peace" (O'Neill 74). Harry Hope simply ignores it as "a new gag" (74) but he soon admits: "He ain't like the old Hickey! He'll be a fine wet blanket to have around at my birthday party! I wish to hell he'd never turned up!" (88). This time Hickey seems to be quite different from his usual self. The disnarrated gap is here related to "epistemic expressions of ignorance" (Prince, "Disnarrated" 3). By promising to "save" his old drinking companions, Hickey generates a disnarrated gap in the story, which demands to be unraveled in the process of the narrative.

Furthermore, the characters' waiting for Hickey's arrival/appearance signifies that they are going to entangle themselves in the logic of mere appearances throughout the play. O'Neill's tragedy is replete with disnarrated gaps, mainly through focusing on the inclination of all the regulars at Harry Hope's to retreat into alluring reveries, which challenge and distort reality and create alternative visions of reality. Hickey comes into Hope's bar with this pipe dream to induce the "whole family circle of inmates" (O'Neill 36) to fearlessly face the truth about themselves in order to achieve serenity of mind and happiness. From the start, Hickey seems to be operating as a dramatic character, manipulating the others in order to expose them in their habitual lies. He attempts to lead his friends towards a more honest appraisal of themselves (while knowing that this will fail).

In Act Three, he sardonically addresses them: "You can't hang around all day looking as if you were scared the street outside would bite you!" (190). The pipe dreamers seek refuge in a bar which provides an environment most suitable for nourishing and sustaining, in Prince's account of the disnarrated, "purely imagined worlds, desired worlds, or intended worlds, unfulfilled expectations, unwarranted beliefs, failed attempts, crushed hopes" ("Disnarrated" 3). Larry Slade heralds in Act One what destiny lies in store for the vagrants and alcoholic dropouts in the bar. Right at the outset, he represents the boarders at Harry Hope's saloon as being at peace for they have sunk to the bottom; there is no farther for them to go:

> What is it? It's the No Chance Saloon. It's Bedrock Bar, The End of the Line Café, The Bottom of the Sea Rathskeller! Don't you notice the beautiful calm in the atmosphere? That's because it's the last harbor. No one here has to worry about where they're going next, because there is no farther they can go. It's a great comfort to them. Although even here they keep up the appearances of life with a few harmless pipe dreams about their yesterdays and tomorrows, as you'll see for yourself if you're here long. (O'Neill 25)

Larry introduces Hickey in the same act as "a great one to make a joke of everything and cheer you up" (13). Hickey has the knack of disguising facts in favour of pleasing his own companions and lightening the atmosphere up. Hope affirms Hickey's sense of humour in Act One: "Bejees, I can't figure Hickey. I still say he's kidding us. Kid his own grandmother, Hickey would" (86). Similarly, the young former anarchist Don Parritt describes Hickey's humorous ability in Act Two as something unhuman: "There's something not human behind his damned grinning and kidding" (126). Hickey's uncanny humour seems to lie in his deftness in disnarrating. Crucially, he disnarrates the story of his wife, Evelyn, and the Iceman. As Hope discloses in Act One: "Always got a million funny stories. . . . Remember that gag he always pulls about his wife and the iceman? He'd make a cat laugh!" (61). When Hickey says to the "Gang" (76) in Act One that he is "off the stuff. For keeps" (78), Hope hypothesizes: "Sure! Joined the Salvation Army, ain't you? Been elected President of the W.C.T.U.? Take that bottle away from him, Rocky. We don't want to tempt him into sin" (78). From the moment he arrives in the bar, Hickey seems surrounded with an aura of mystery and secrecy, claiming that he has a story to tell. Larry, who suspects that there is a problematic narrative to be pieced together, mentions this state of suspense in Act One: "You're keeping us all in suspense. Tell us more about how you're going to save us" (85). Here "suppositions," in Prince's parlance, can open the way for the disnarrated gap.

In Act Two, the bar's residents are left to speculate from the fragmented evidence of Hickey's story as to what his way to peace might be:

> Beginning to do a lot of puzzling about me, aren't you, Larry? But that won't help you. You've got to think of yourself. I couldn't give you my peace. You've got to find your own. All I can do is help you, and the rest of the gang, by showing you the way to find it. (112)

The bar's denizens stare at Hickey in a state of incredulous, bewildered confusion when he announces that his "dearly beloved wife" Evelyn is dead, but he does not feel any grief, as Evelyn is finally free of "a no-good cheater and drunk" husband and is finally at peace (151). In the penultimate act, Hickey still remains a puzzle that needs to be solved; as Larry puts it: "What did your wife die of? You've kept that a deep secret, I notice—for some reason!" (204). Hickey, who in fact "cheats" the bar's inmates by promising them peace, is an expert in disnarration, filling his speech with "epistemic expressions of ignorance," "unwarranted beliefs," "suppositions and false calculations, errors and lies" (Prince, "Disnarrated" 3). He falsely supposes and calculates in Act Two that he can make the pipe dreamers liberate themselves of "the damned guilt that makes you lie to yourselves you're something you're not, and the remorse that nags at you and makes you hide behind lousy pipe dreams about tomorrow" (O'Neill 147). But his mission is just another pipe dream which readily yields itself to disnarration.

The fact that Hickey appears as a performer opens the space for disnarration. As Matthew H. Wikander notes, "Hickey is a performer, a salesman, a 'bughouse preacher,' . . . peddling the language of recovery and rehabilitation" (176). When, in the first Act, Hickey points out that he does not need alcohol any more, Harry Hope interprets his teetotalism as a theatrical act: "That sounds more like you, Hickey. That water-wagon bull—Cut out the act and have a drink, for Christ's sake" (O'Neill 80). Hickey is aware that his "brand of temperance" (79) would be taken as sheer performance and tries hard to convince his audience otherwise: "It's no act, Governor. But don't get me wrong. That don't mean I'm a teetotal grouch and can't be in the party. Hell, why d'you suppose I'm here except to have a party, same as I've always done, and help celebrate your birthday tonight?" (80). The fact that Hickey puts on his con act before the dreamers thus invites a chain of suppositions and speculations about him.

Even love is disnarrated in the play. It is presented, as Edwin A. Engel contends, as "an illusion, and all women are bitches or whores" (286). "Palpable and undisguised symbols of this truth," Engel further points out, "are the three prostitutes, the only women to appear on the stage. Yet the

presence of four others is felt: Hickey's wife, Evelyn; Parritt's mother, Rosa; Hope's wife, Bessie; Jimmie Cameron's wife, Marjorie" (286). Thus, the disnarrated gap is here related to "unfulfilled expectations" (Prince, "Disnarrated" 3). The absent women are also disnarrated in the play as they may be misrepresented. As Judith E. Barlow points out: "We do not see the perspectives of that 'damned bitch' Evelyn Hickman, 'that nagging bitch' Bessie Hope, or that 'damned old bitch' Rosa Parritt, except through the eyes of their spouses, lovers and sons" (172). Concerning the absent women, the disnarrated gap is thus related to "suppositions and false calculations, errors and lies," in Prince's terminology ("Disnarrated" 3).

Hickey paints a rosy picture of his marriage; the tension-ridden, love-hate relationship of Evelyn and Hickey is disnarrated until the end as a loving one. A guilt-ridden Hickey murders his ever-forgiving wife for her "insistence on conventional morality" (Barlow 165). Nevertheless, Hickey disnarrates his own shocking confessions at the expense of the confusion and mystification of roomers at Harry Hope's and the audience. Ironically, Hickey's jokes about the iceman turn out to be an attempt to displace his sense of guilt. In one reading Hickey's attempt to convert the daydreamers could be taken as a ruse to build a case of insanity defense as he knows that he will be indicted for his wife's murder. Hickey's disnarration here could be a calculated strategy to avoid a death sentence. However, his disnarration generally stems from his instability.

The question of whether Hickey suffers from mental illness or not is a moot one. He calls police officers and is prepared to go to the electric chair. He transforms his story (of having murdered his wife out of love) when confronted with the lie: he has murdered her out of hate, not love. He murders his wife in a calculated and cold-blooded manner, replacing the pipe dream of his reformation with that of the salvation of the gang at Hope's bar. As such, Hickey's plight could be said to be, in one sense, his failing to think and behave rationally. Believing in an all-invincible rather than a vulnerable self, Hickey confuses love and hatred. His desire for alternatives, evident in his deployment of disnarration and denarration, results from this confusion.

THE DENARRATED

In *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction*, Richardson discusses modern authors' "continuing desire to 'make it new'" as a "primary motive" behind inventing "novel forms of representing consciousness in fiction" (135). His concept of the "denarrated" descriptions and events is modeled on Prince's concept of the "disnarrated" (Richardson, "Denarration in Fiction" 169). Denarration, Richardson writes, is "an

intriguing and paradoxical narrative strategy that appears in a number of late modern and postmodern texts" (168). It is a type of narrative erasure in which "a narrator denies significant aspects of her narrative that had earlier been presented as given" (168). In the same essay, Richardson considers the simplest example of denarration as "something like, 'Yesterday it was raining. Yesterday it was not raining'" (168). In denarration, the statements are so at odds with each other that the logical continuity of the plot is destabilized. Hence, the readers must decide between contradictory events, but they do not have enough information to determine which events have actually occurred in the story. In Richardson's "more extreme interventions," the narrative negation, like Penelope at her loom, tangibly disentangles the threads of what has been woven within the fabric of the narrative (170). The "narrative world," Richardson postulates in the same essay, "may start to fissure; instead of observing a fluctuating narrator alter descriptions of a stable world, we will see the world being created and recreated anew" (170). The narrative strategy of denarration suggests that a fictional universe is created seemingly out of nothing, then de-created back into nothing.

Richardson continues that "very little (if anything) is left over after the assaults of textual negation the narrative performs upon itself" (171). He argues that denarrated events fabricate "an inchoate temporality that cannot be analytically reconstructed into any sustained order" (173). He contends that in instances of denarration one can observe "the ontological fragility of the status of much fictional discourse—at any point, the narrator can contradict what has been written, and thereby transform the entire relation between events as well as the way they are interpreted" (173). In fact, Richardson declares that literary fictions may first narrate and then denarrate events by revising the narrative over and over; perform cancelation or de-creation of characters and events, and then bring them back to life on the page; they may escape final fixed and stable endings; or offer forking narrative paths.

As Richardson points out, these narrative instances of denarration have much in common with what Brian McHale has designated in *Postmodernist Fiction* as "'Worlds under Erasure'" ("Denarration in Fiction" 171). As McHale contends, it is possible to find fragmented narrative as a tendency in modernist narratives as well: "Narrative self-erasure is not the monopoly of postmodernist fiction, of course. It also occurs in modernist narratives, but here it is typically framed as mental anticipations, wishes, or recollections of the characters, rather than left as an irresolvable paradox of the world *outside* the characters' minds" (101). Contrary to postmodernist narratives, McHale suggests that "the canceled events of modernist fiction occur in one or other character's subjective domain or subworld, not in the projected world of the text as

such" (101). As such, the world of the text is not destabilized in modernist narratives, but the slippages among wishes, recollections, or anticipations only occur in the characters' minds.

Hickey comes to Harry Hope's bar to denarrate the story of the barflies' pipe dreams and to strip the dreamers of their alcohol-fuelled illusions. He exhorts each of the bar's inmates to abandon their pipe dreams, which hold them prisoners in the bar, and to risk the reality outside. Hickey says to the drifters in the first act: "Just stop lying about yourself and kidding yourself about tomorrows" (O'Neill 81). Hickey purports to liberate them of their pipe dreams so they can "[r]est in peace. There's no farther you have to go. Not a single damned hope or dream left to nag you" (86). The barflies are already at peace. They are content. Hickey assumes that he just needs to provoke them to action; he needs to "save" them in order to confirm that he was right to murder Evelyn. Hickey denarrates not only the story of their "pipe dreams but also their close friendships" (Floyd 268). At one point in the first act, he even denarrates his own mission: "I was only kidding Cora with that stuff about saving you. No, I wasn't either" (O'Neill 81). Hickey's first statement to Cora is immediately negated by the second, hence the possibility of the first statement becoming a consistent part of the narrative is undermined. Moreover, during the course of the play, "his most cherished illusion—that he loved Evelyn" is denarrated as well (Voglino 82). With the declaration of his insanity, whether genuine or feigned, Hickey denarrates all his sermon-sounding admonishments to the bar's inhabitants about facing their true selves. The denizens of Harry Hope's saloon immediately seize on this opportunity: "They can return to their pipe dreams in peace. There is still a hope in the world" (Chaturvedi 275). Thus, the story of their pipe dreams can be narrated once again. He even figuratively denarrates himself from the very point he appears in Harry Hope's bar, as is evidenced in Cora's remark in Act Two: "When he forgets de bughouse preachin', and quits tellin' yuh where yuh get off, he's de same old Hickey" (O'Neill 110). One can infer that right from the very moment Hickey appears in the bar he vacillates between being "old Hickey" and striving to act like a "bughouse preacher."

In Act Two Hickey proclaims that he does not give a damn about either life or death since he has divested himself of all his "pipe dreams" and exhorts his old pals to liberate themselves too: "Then you'll know what real peace means, Larry, because you won't be scared of either life or death any more. You simply won't give a damn! Any more than I do!" (116). Nevertheless, when he is about to be arrested in the final Act of the play, he starts pleading insanity to save himself from the death penalty: "Yes, Harry, of course, I've been out of my mind ever since! All the time I've been here! You saw I was insane, didn't you?" (243). Then, however, in his penultimate speech in the final Act, he narrates his earlier story, declaring that he does not give a damn

about life now that his illusion—that he killed his wife out of love—has been shattered: "God, you're a dumb dick! Do you suppose I give a damn about life now? Why, you bone-head, I haven't got a single damned lying hope or pipe dream left!" (245). Nevertheless, Hickey's confession of insanity denarrates his earlier claim in the play, when he convinces Larry in Act Two that he was "too damned sane" (117). Therefore, Hickey gets trapped in a vicious circle of narration, disnarration, and denarration throughout the play's plot, until he is led out of O'Neill's play by the two detectives, Moran and Lieb. Hickey is the one who ends each of the first three Acts of the play but when he is eventually ushered out of the tragedy, the last Act is ended with enthusiastic jeering chorus: "Tis cool beneath thy willow trees!" (240). The thematic line "The days grow hot, O Babylon! 'Tis cool beneath thy willow trees!" while it simultaneously "reinforces the connotation of the title," denarrates the very words of Scripture "wherein the warm, loving bridegroom of the Bible is replaced by the cold, profane iceman of death" (Frazer 1). So, Hickey's plans for "peace and contentment" lead only to disillusion and despair, and he turns out to be the Iceman of the play's title, or Death.

Hickey further denarrates himself, when his mission gradually becomes clear in the process of the narrative. He claims in Act One that "[j]ust the old dope of honesty is the best policy—honesty with yourself, I mean. Just stop lying about yourself and kidding yourself about tomorrows" (O'Neill 81). He promises to the bar's regulars that by divesting themselves of "lying pipe dreams," they can be raised to a position in which they can live an honest life. Nevertheless, he denarrates himself at the very moment he lies to himself and other boarders about the main reason for killing his wife, Evelyn. Therefore, his preaching loses its edge upon the pipe dreamers when the real motive of his own act of murder is revealed. In Act Four, once Hickey has in effect "killed" the drama, he thoroughly steps into the role of dis/de/narration. First, at the end of his sudden, shattering burst of confession in the final Act, Hickey proclaims that he murdered his wife out of love and later in his next speech, he again affirms his cherishing illusion: "There was love in my heart, not hate" (227). Through Hickey's long monologues in the final act, the barflies notice that he has quite conceivably fabricated the whole story. He insists that he is sincere about his love for Evelyn and Evelyn's love for him:

> I suppose you think I'm a liar, that no woman could have stood all she stood and still loved me so much—that it isn't human for any woman to be so pitying and forgiving. Well, I'm not lying, and if you'd ever seen her, you'd realize I wasn't. It was written all over her face, sweetness and love and pity and forgiveness. (238)

But when, in the same speech, Hickey states that he has torn Evelyn's picture, he displays the first signs of unreliability (238). In his next long monologue, Hickey denarrates himself, stating that he killed his wife out of hatred, and that he actually hated and despised her:

> Christ, I loved her so, but I began to hate that pipe dream! 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! (239)

His next disclosure in the final Act is the most problematic one, since it seems that he vacillates between loving and hating his wife—narrating and denarrating the vicious circle of love, hate, and then love again. He first displays signs of love, stating that he killed Evelyn "to give her peace and free her from the misery of loving [him]," then he suddenly reveals the terrible truth that he really harbored resentment against the "damned bitch" (241). At the end of his terrible confession, Hickey again denarrates the hate story: "No! I never—" (242).

Thus, in the midst of dis/de/narrating how he came to murder his wife, "Hickey inadvertently comes upon the truth that he has not killed her out of mercy and kindness to liberate her from the perpetual disappointment of her dream of reforming him" (Alexander 57). Rather, as Doris Alexander notes, "he has killed her out of the suppressed rage that has grown in him during the years of unbearable guilt and self-loathing her endless forgiveness of his periodical alcoholism has made him feel" (57). Laurin Porter asserts that Hickey's hatred (of himself and of Evelyn) has encouraged him to transform his own drinking companions into converts in order to mitigate his own guilt about killing his wife. "His anger in the face of Evelyn's pipe dream, his resentment at her attempt to make him over in her own image—these are the furies that have pursued Hickey to this moment of truth" (Porter 21). But this is an appalling truth he cannot tolerate. "Rather than confront his deep hatred for Evelyn, he falls back on the comforting delusion of insanity, even when it means allowing Harry and the others to reclaim their own pipe dreams" (Porter 21). Hickey cannot confront the gruesome truth of his hatred for Evelyn. He concludes that he must have gone insane if he had killed her and addressed her as a bitch. He denarrates himself this time once more when he affirms his love for her by attesting to his own insanity: "No! That's a lie! I never said—! Good God, I couldn't have said that! If I did, I'd gone insane! Why, I loved Evelyn better than anything in life! . . . Boys, you're all my old pals! You've known old Hickey for years! You know I'd never" (O'Neill 242). Hickey thus resorts to his old self when he narrates his love for Evelyn.

Curiously, Evelyn does not appear in the play and is presented entirely through her husband's descriptions of her. Almost all the other figures in the play are paired with another so that the stories they narrate can be verified/witnessed. But no one has ever met Evelyn. Therefore, Hickey can narrate, disnarrate, and denarrate to his heart's content, since no one knows otherwise. Evelyn might be much more like Bessie, Hope's wife, or Marjorie, Jimmy's wife, who are portrayed more three-dimensionally, although they do not appear either. One can assert that Hickey has fabricated the story of Evelyn to account for what he did. And the story is all retrospective, constructed on his walk from Astoria to the downtown West Side of New York—as a means to give grounds for his action. Finally, in his last words on stage, Hickey once again reiterates the illusion of his love for Evelyn, before being ushered out by the two detectives. "All I want you to see is I was out of my mind afterwards, when I laughed at her! I was a raving rotten lunatic or I couldn't have said— Why, Evelyn was the only thing on God's earth I ever loved! I'd have killed myself before I'd ever have hurt her!" (246). In denarrating himself once again, Hickey did not murder himself and instead shot his wife in her sleep and left her body in the bed.

Barbara Voglino opines that one encounters "three different Hickeys" in his three last successive speeches: first, "a mentally unstable person babbling about dying and meeting his wife," then "a clear-sighted man tortured by the merciless truth that confronts him," and finally "a dreamer struggling to hold on to his most cherished illusion at any price" (84). "The composite picture that emerges from these kaleidoscopic shifts of personality," adds Voglino, "is that of a man teetering on the edge of insanity" (84). Harry Hope takes advantage of Hickey's apparent insanity to avoid confrontations with the truths that he and his companions had been made to see about themselves. They no longer have to swallow the "bitter medicine, facing [themselves] in the mirror with the old false whiskers off," as Hickey asserts in Act Two (O'Neill 116).

The down-and-out residents of Harry Hope's bar claim that they knew Hickey must have been insane but acted otherwise to kid him along and humour him. Hope contends:

> We've known him for years, and every one of us noticed he was nutty the minute he showed up here! Bejees, if you'd heard all the crazy bull he was pulling about bringing us peace—like a bughouse preacher escaped from an asylum! If you'd seen all the damned-fool things he made us do! (244)

Hickey, a character previously "enslaved to two pipe-dreams: that he killed his wife out of love, and that he can 'save' his old cronies," finally seems to cling to a new illusion (Morgan 345). Alexander argues that all of the bar's

inhabitants, except Parritt and Larry, admit "Hickey's newest pipe dream that he had gone crazy in that moment of naked hatred because by doing so they can explain away as humoring a madman their futile attempts to enact their dreams in a real world" (57). As Julia White notes, Hickey was in fact "swallowed up by the magnitude of the task that he had proposed for himself" (119). Hickey is overcome by the unbearable weight of the missions he has assigned to himself. He eventually accepts that his pipe dreams are only pure fantasy as he cannot convert his own companions into sober allies, and he has to face the bitter reality that he killed his wife out of hate. As his pipe dreams are denarrated and their paradoxical and contradictory natures are revealed, Hickey is led out of the play. Hope finally negates the new Hickey and remembers only his old comrade: "We'll forget that and only remember him the way we've always known him before—the kindest, biggest-hearted guy ever wore shoe leather" (O'Neill 251). In this way the new Hickey is denarrated out of the world of the bar's inmates.

CONCLUSION

O'Neill's *Iceman* is characterized by narrative strategies of omission and elision. The narrative techniques of disnarration and denarration are closely interwoven with the themes of pipe dreams and self-deception in the play. By employing these narrative dimensions, O'Neill augments the suspense—a crucial element in the play—and helps craft the plot. Furthermore, these narrative techniques work to psychologically probe the characters, especially Hickey, a self-deceiving, potentially deluded or deranged man who has radically misconstrued his homicide as an act of self-sacrificial love. Hickey's many instances of disnarration and denarration reveal his complex, guilt-ridden character. They display the struggle of an angst-ridden protagonist to deal with his plight. As the play moves towards its end, the bar's inmates seem to try to lead the new Hickey out of the play so that they can resume their pipe dreams once more. O'Neill's overall style, marked by such techniques, uncannily fits the themes of illusion, self-deception and love-hate vicious circles in which his characters are trapped.

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