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# EUGENE O'NEILL: A STUDY IN MASKS

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## Resumo

Para O'Neill, o uso de máscaras não era apenas uma técnica, mas também um reflexo de sua própria personalidade. Para ele, as máscaras expressavam um importante mundo psicológico do qual ele inconscientemente participou e pelo qual lutou através da expressão de valores morais, religiosos e sociais do seu tempo.

Influenciado por leituras sobre Nietzsche e Jung, O'Neill intensificou o uso de máscaras nos anos de 1923 a 1926, período em que ele escreveu três das suas mais importantes peças com máscaras - All God's Chillun Got Wings, The Great God Brown, e Lazarus Laughed - objetos deste estudo.

O uso simbolico das máscaras levou o autor a lidar com imagens ou valores opostos tais como preto/branco, concreto/abstrato, morte/vida, produzindo uma interminável ação/reação por parte dos personagens, e colocando a máscara como parte essencial do tema.

## Abstract

For O'Neill, the use of masks was not only a technical device, but also a reflection of his own personality. For him, masks expressed a significant psychological world in which he unconsciously participated and struggled for the moral, religious, and social values of his time.

Influenced by the reading of Nietzsche and Jung, O'Neill intensified the use of masks in the years between 1923 to 1926, a period in which he wrote three of his most important masked plays - All God's Chillun Got Wings, The Great God Brown, and Lazarus Laughed - the object of this paper.

The symbolical use of masks conducted the author to deal with opposite images or values such as black/white, concrete/abstract, death/life, producing an endless action/reaction from the characters, and placing the mask as an essential part of the theme.

To my husband Carlos Barreto, and children, Carlos Frederico and Gustavo Henrique, my debt of gratitude and appreciation for their patience and encouragement in the process of writing this thesis.

" Dogma for the new masked drama.
One's outer life passes in a solitude
haunted by the masks of others; one's
inner life passes in a solitude
hounded by the masks of oneself."

Eugene O'Neill, "Memoranda on Masks."

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# Introduction

History tells us that primitive man used to paint pictures on cave walls to represent men or animals. These drawings were their first manifestation of art, and also the expression of their everyday life of fishing and hunting. Soon, afterwards, man discovered that he could easily trap his prey by disguising himself in the skin of the animal he tried to catch. Man then started to disguise himself, to imitate the steps and movements of his prey, because he thought that by imitating he could ensure good hunting.

To imitate animals was not a difficult task, because man is an imitative creature by nature. As Macgowan and Melnitz suggest:

> Imitation is natural to man from childhood, one of his advantages over the lower animals being this, that he is the most imitative creature in the world, and learns first by imitation. And it is also natural for all to delight in works of imitation.[1]

Man has indubitably the ability for imitation; thus in childhood he stammers the first words, and starts a rudimentary process of communication. As man imitates, he tries to reproduce the posture and speech of animals and of his fellow creatures, as well as to imitate the appearance of objects through sculpture and painting. Again Macgowan and Melnitz comment on man's imitative nature thus:

[1] Kenneth Macgowan and William Melnitz, The Living Stage (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1955), p.4; hereafter to be cited as Macgowan.

> The pleasure of imitating and watching others imitate has made civilized man write and act plays, and gather in crowds to enjoy the theater.[2]

But this sense of imitation that would lead modern man to theatres is also responsible for its first primitive manifestation through dancing. The origin of dance is quite simple: man's joy in catching his prey makes him feel the need to express this emotion.As man's heart beats rhythmically, he can make rhythmic movements by using his feet and body in order to demonstrate his happiness. Thus dance is, by itself, a product of imitation, and as such, man has ritualistic dances to imitate the animals and the gods he worships.

Gathered in tribes, man still may dance for other reasons and purposes. He dances for rain and thunder when the weather is dry, and for the sun and food when he feels cold or close to starvation. He may still dance to thank the gods for good plantations and harvests.

Man's most pressing needs, however, are reflected in important dance ceremonies, such as the Snake Dance, the Canoe Dance, the War Dance, each one having its own ritualistic significance. There are even social dances which persist in some African tribes to this day; for instance, the Initiation Ceremony consists in rituals performed when a boy comes to puberty, that is, when he is initiated into a man's estate in the tribe. Chelney

[2] Macgowan, p.5.

describes such an event thus:

> Now he must know the tribal history and the tribal rules and customs. So the maturer tribesmen act out for him the myths and legends of the totem, graphically, through pantomimic dance.[3]

In these dances, if a mistake in the movement of a foot or a hand is made, or even if a single word is incorrectly spoken, this is sufficient to produce punishment or death. When this occurs, the dance is immediately stopped, and the whole ceremony has to be repeated.

It is impossible to determine the place where dance first appeared, but apparently it has spread throughout the world in thousands of different places whenever the occasion has required a certain expressiveness. Dancing is then the first stage leading to the use of masks.

Along with the development of ritualistic dances, man has worn masks or disguises to symbolize animals, gods, and the spirit of his departed ancestors. Primitive masks were made of the head of a beast, but later on, when they were used in dramatic sketches or theatrical representations, masks became more expressive and rich. Masks made of wood were usually the most popular, but there were also masks made of metal, leather, pottery, cloth and even of human skulls. Beside masks, primitive tribes also employed a variation of adornments such as special costumes, puppets, paintings, and wooden dolls in their ceremonies.

According to Macgowan and Melnitz, two primitive religious beliefs called animism and totemism are

[3] Sheldon Cheney, The Theater: Three Thousand Years of Drama Acting and Stagecraft (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1949), p.16.

suggested through the use of masks, for "...man believed that everything around him was possessed by a spirit, which was an 'anima',or soul."[4]

This means that the spirit of man, leaving his body at death would go into a stone or a piece of wood, and that, "...everything that moved - the bush, the river, the smoke of a fire - had a spirit, too."[5] Those spirits could not be killed, and their preservation made them more powerful and respectable. Macgowan and Melnitz conclude:

> The mask became a sort of animated fetish through which he could control the spirits and work powerful magic.[6]

In totemism, man considered animals immortal but vulnerable spirits, and as long as the animals lived, any man who took them as his totem would be safe and live as long as he used his totem. Masks are undoubtedly a dramatic device, and are more impressive than any actor's face can ever be. They express their terrifying qualities and emphasize mankind's everyday drama of life and death.

Stewart Culin describes masks as "coverings for the face, taking various forms, used either as a protective screen or as a disguise."[7] These "protective screens" or masks, were soon applied as a theatrical device, and they still exist in the Orient today, mainly in Japan, China,

[4] Macgowan,p.9.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Stewart Culin, "Masks," Encyclopedia Britannica, 1956 ed. XV, p.11, hereafter to be cited as Stewart Culin.

Tibet, Siam, Ceylon and Java. In each country however, drama has taken different characteristics and variations that have contributed to the development of our theatre of today.

In the 14th century, for example, there started in Japan a new form of drama, the Noh drama, that still exists to this day. The Noh dramas are performed in palaces or temples; noblemen act as participants, and a large number of masks is used in their performances, despite the fact that only the principal actors are masked. The actors are all men who play the roles of men, women, gods, demons, and animals. The masks are always of a very large size, made of wood, and coated with plaster.

In the Chinese theatre, on the other hand, the actors make their own masks by using cosmetics and paint. The masks are of different colors and have a traditional significance. For example, "a corrupt ruler is given a white mask, a just man a red, and a violent and brutal man, a black mask."[8]

The African masks, in addition, are made of carved wood and are divided into three principal classes: "war masks, dance masks, and masks of the féticheur - that man who is a combination of priest, magistrate and physician."[9]

From their primitive state, masks have gradually improved by the addition of paintings and adornments, which have also provided them with wealth and personality.

[8] Stewart Culin, p.12.

[9] Stewart Culin, p.13.

American tribes, for example, used to paint their masks in different colors and adorn them with plumes and beads. One fact worthy of attention is that masks have sex, masculine or feminine: the round heads are masculine, and the square ones, feminine. They are decorated for the ceremonies and the spirit of the divinity they represent is supposed to reside in them.

But masks for theatrical purposes are as old as civilization itself: in Greece, masks were used in the worship of Dionysus, and the dramatic representations at that time developed the mask into a covering for the whole head, with hair attached to it, and openings for the mouth and eyes.

Besides the Greek, the Egyptian drama is also relevant, with the characters masked in plays dealing with hero-gods. Horus was hawkheaded, Thoth had the head of an ibis, and Anubis the head of a cow. The Egyptian drama had about four or five forms of plays. The earliest one was the "Pyramids text" which tells us about the physical resurrection of the deceased, rulers or noblemen. There was still another form of drama, the "Coronation Festival Play," celebrating the accession of a pharaoh into power, as well as the "Passion Play," where Osiris was the central figure.

Such ancient uses of the mask were the first lead to Eugene O'Neill, who once said:

> Looked at from even the most practical standpoint of the practicing playwright, the mask <u>is</u> dramatic in itself, <u>has always</u> been dramatic in itself, <u>is</u> a proven weapon of attack. At its best, it is more subtly, imaginatively,

> suggestively dramatic than any actor's face can ever be. Let anyone who doubts this study the Japanese Noh masks, or Chinese theatre masks, or African primitive masks.[10]

Thus Japanese Noh masks, Chinese or African primitive masks so far only considered museum pieces, become, in the mid twenties, the pole of attention for America's foremost playwright. There is no denying that O'Neill, from Hairy Ape (1921) on to Mourning Becomes Electra (1931) is intensely interested in the use of masks as a dramatic device. The evidence is to be found in the plays themselves, and in a short collection of notes on the subject published in The American Spectator, 1932-1933, called "Memoranda on Masks."

And what renders the question more intriguing is, that after 1931 there is no indication that he will effectively use what he has clearly expressed in his "Memoranda."

This is one of the purposes of this paper: with the help of the "Memoranda", to determine the chief dramatic effects aspired to by O'Neill through the use of masks on stage in the twenties; then to evaluate the process and achievement in at least three plays selected on the basis of a sustained and continuous use of masks on stage. The plays selected for this purpose are: All God's Chillun Got Wings, (1923) The Great God Brown (1925) and Lazarus

[10] Eugene O'Neill, "Memoranda on Masks" in O'Neill and his Plays,"ed. Oscar Cargill, N.Bryllion Fagin, and William J. Fisher,(New York: New York University Press, 1961),p.117.Future references to this work will be abbreviated as "Memoranda".

Laughed (1926). Borrowing the expression from Eugene M. Waith, who first used it, this will really amount to an "exercise in unmasking"[11] in which we will invert the process - present effects first, then look for causes, hidden in O'Neill's mind, personality, and art. A foregone conclusion is that in the twenties, O'Neill is deliberately hiding himself beneath masks, to protect his double self as an artist and as a man, as, in a way, it has been his practice from Bound East for Cardiff (1916) to The Iceman Cometh (1946), the last of his plays presented while he was still alive. For what is Long Day's Journey Into Night but an explicit exercise in unmasking?

Thus we start with a series of questions - what motives led O'Neill to turn to masks in the twenties? Why did he abandon them later? What was his real purpose when he used them for the first time? Why did he propose that all his plays could be presented with masks? A partial answer may be found in his brief notes "Memoranda on Masks." There he associates the idea of mask with "the symbol of inner reality" to add, further on, as a dogma for the new masked drama, that "One's outer life passes in a solitude haunted by the masks of others; one's inner life passes in a solitude hounded by the masks of oneself."[12] External and internal masks only confirm the

[11] Eugene M. Waith, "Eugene O'Neill: An Exercise in Unmasking" in O'Neill: A Collection of Critical Essays ed. by John Gassner (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1964), pp.29-41. Future references to this article will be abbreviated as Waith.

[12] "Memoranda," p.117.

inevitability of masks in life, a fact that leads him to revise past productions of his plays and propose masks for what had, so far, been unmasked: The Emperor Jones, or stress it further, as in The Hairy Ape, All God's Chillun Got Wings, The Great God Brown, Marco Millions, Strange Interlude and, finally, Mourning Becomes Electra.

In the last section of his "Memoranda" called "A Dramatist's Notebook," O'Neill clarifies his thesis further by advocating the use of masks for stage crowds, mobs "wherever a sense of impersonal, collective mob psychology is wanted."[13]

There he is merely confirming his practice in Hairy Ape when a bewildered Yank collides with faceless people coming out of a church on a Sunday morning, a principle that he is to expand and make a consistent use of throughout the whole of Lazarus Laughed. O'Neill explains his primary intention in that play thus:

> In masking the crowds in that play /Lazarus Laughed/ I was visualizing an effect that, intensified by dramatic lighting, would give an audience visually the sense of the Crowd, not as a random collection of individuals, but as a collective whole, an entity. When the Crowd speaks, I wanted an audience to hear the voice of Crowd mind, Crowd emotion, as one voice of a body composed of, but quite distinct from, its parts.[14]

O'Neill's purpose, then, is to strike a balance between the singular unmasked character of Lazarus and the multiplicity of masked faces of the crowd acting as one mind - to juxtapose, oppose, and move towards a final

[13] "Memoranda," p.120.

[14] Ibid.

solution that may annul one of the dramatic factors involved. It is hard to visualise that process in any other condition but in the theatre itself. Thus O'Neill restores the theatre to its primary imaginative function, as he himself states in one of his concluding paragraphs:

> I harp on the word 'imaginative' - and with intention! But what do I mean by an 'imaginative' theatre - (where I hope for it, for example, in the subtitle of Lazarus Laughed:A Play for an Imaginative Theater)? I mean the one true theatre, the age-old theatre, the theatre of the Greeks and Elizabethans, a theatre that could dare to boast - without committing a farcical sacrilege - that it is a legitimate descendant of the first theatre that sprang, by virtue of man's imaginative interpretation of life, out of his worship of Dionysus. I mean a theatre returned to its highest and sole significant function as a Temple where the religion of a poetical interpretation and symbolical celebration of life is communicated to human beings, starved in spirit by their soul-stifling daily, struggle to exist as masks among the masks of living![15]

In one paragraph, O'Neill sums up the whole of dramatic experience in the western world, from the Greeks through the Elizabethans, to modern times, characterizing that experience as "imaginative" and proposing its sole and significant functions as a Temple to cultivate "poetical interpretation" first, and "symbolical celebration of life" next. This fact provides us with guidelines to examine the three plays which will be considered under the three points proposed, namely:

1) Imagination

2) Poetical interpretation

3) Symbolical celebration of life

15 "Memoranda," p.121.

Using these principles, we propose to search for truth hidden in the mystery of masks, be it that vivid and empty world of the primitive African mask now merely an ornament of the Harris' home, or the vivid and creative world of Dion Anthony, or, even more to the point, the multiplicity of masks watching and observing Lazarus laugh. Throughout these three episodes O'Neill's imagination created particular levels of meaning that should be clarified if we are ever to see O'Neill's theatre in its true perspective. For masked or unmasked, O'Neill the artist has more secrets than O'Neill the man - the object of our first chapter.

## I. The Birth of a Genius

When Eugene O'Neill was born, his fate was predicted by Lillian Brennan, a visitor who, considering the largeness of the baby's head, pronounced her judgement by saying: "He'll either be an idiot or a genius."[16] In this blunt way of talk, she could never believe that her prediction was right, and that on October 16, 1888 a genius was born for the greatness of America and enchantment of the world.

Son of James O'Neill, an Irish immigrant and famous interpreter of Dumas' play, The Count of Monte Cristo, and of Ellen Quinlan O'Neill, a beautiful American girl, who was both romantic and a very talented pianist, Eugene was to make the theatre his special vocation too. Eugene Gladstone O'Neill was born in New York City, in a hotel room at the Northeast corner of 43rd Street and Broadway Avenue, in an area that years later was renamed "Times Square."

It was his father's appointments in the theatre that forced his mother to tour along with her husband, as the couple could not bear being long separated from each other. This situation prevented Eugene from living in a stable home, and, consequently, made him a trouper at a very early age, moving from one place to another, in a succession of anonymous hotel rooms.

[16] Louis Sheaffer, O'Neill Son and Playwright (London:J.M. Dent,1968),p.4, hereafter to be cited as Sheaffer.

In spite of the intense and agitated family life, the child was not physically neglected, as his parents hired a nursemaid to look after him. The nurse was Sarah Jane Bucknell Sandy, an Englishwoman who, remaining with the O'Neills for seven years, became part of the family, and took care of Eugene until he entered boarding school.

At the age of seven he was sent to Mount Saint Vincent, a Catholic boarding school for girls, which, for the convenience of families, also maintained a small school for boys, aged from seven to twelve. Life at the boys' section of the larger Mount St. Vincent School was both rigid and uncomfortable. There was no central heating system in the two floor cottage that served for both school and residence; the boys had classes and meals on the ground floor, and slept on the second. Days also started very early at school, especially on Sundays, when the boys had to attend mass at the chapel at six.

Before Eugene entered school, he had rarely been in contact with other children, as he usually lived a lonely and isolated life. That was poor preparation for school life, rendered worse by the fact that he felt abandoned and betrayed by his parents, who, perpetually on the road, seldom had a chance to visit him.

After spending seven years at the Catholic school of Mount St. Vincent, Eugene at the age of fourteen entered Betts Academy, where he remained for a period of four years. In this new place he found an open atmosphere

"with the boys fraternizing with their teachers and competing with them in sports."[17] The Academy was a three-story building located in a residential section of Stamford, Connecticut, with its classes having no more than six to seven students. Despite this new form of life and his freedom at school, Eugene remained reserved, quiet, and withdrawn. One of his former school mates, Harold M. Green, recalled, "He never said much, but when he did he used fine English and seemed to weigh every word. It took him a long time to get something out."[18] And Sheaffer concludes, "This slow, ruminative manner marked him all his life and, indeed, developed to such an extreme degree that people would cut in on him, thinking he had finished, as he lingered among his thoughts and groped for words."[19]

Eugene had developed into a tall, handsome youth when, in September 1906, he entered Princeton. By then his interest for books was already evident, and his literary background was certainly amazing. In Princeton he studied Shakespeare in class, and read Dostoevski, Gorki, and Tolstoi privately. At that time he used to go to New York for weekends, where, along with his brother Jamie, he went to parties and met girls.

It was on a date arranged by a friend that Eugene became attracted to Kathleen Jenkins, a tall, brown-haired girl of beautiful grayish-blue eyes. When O'Neill learned that she had become pregnant, he was oppressed

[17] Sheaffer, p.90.
[18] Sheaffer, p.93.
[19] Ibid.

by both the friend who had introduced them and insisted that he should marry her, and by his father who was totally against the union. O'Neill could hardly satisfy both; however, he managed to do it by marrying the girl first and immediately leaving for Honduras next. Both O'Neill and Kathleen were twenty when on October 2, 1909 they were pronounced married at the Trinity Protestant Episcopal Church in New Jersey.

O'Neill's marriage to Kathleen and his prompt departure to Honduras become the first instance of the several masks he is to don throughout life, for, in this case, he tries to reconcile irreconcilable elements: his own will to keep his freedom, and his inability to resist social pressure and repair damages he could not overlook. In this case, marriage became only an excuse to forget both Kathleen and his marital status, which he promptly did. Shortly after he arrived in Honduras, he sounded optimistic "...I like the country and the people and think there is every chance in the world for making good."[20] However, after weeks of experience in the jungle, sweating and itching all over from flies, fleas, ticks, gnats and mosquitoes, he wrote to his parents: "...after having been in all the different zones of this country I give it as my fixed belief that God got his inspiration for Hell after creating Honduras."[21] He had intended to remain in Honduras until June, but malarial fever forced him to leave the country earlier.

[20] Sheaffer, p.152.
[21] Ibid.

Returning to New York Eugene was informed that he had become the father of a ten-and-a-half-pound child who received the name of Eugene Gladstone O'Neill, Jr. He, however, kept away from his wife and baby as long as he lived in New York after his return.

A month later, in the spring of 1910, he departed for Buenos Aires on a sailing ship, the Charles Racine, in search of new experiences. A member of a crew of nineteen, he masked himself once again as a sailor, in an attempt to escape from the confusion of his past life. During his stay in Buenos Aires he worked unsuccessfully at a series of jobs such as at the Westinghouse Company, at the Swift Packing Company, and at the Singer Sewing Machine Company. Most of the time, however, he spent drinking with a variety of friends. Returning to New York a year later in 1911, he did not care to see either his father and mother, or his wife and child. One point of the trip, however, had been positive for him, for, like Melville, the sea and the sailors became the chief source of inspiration for his future writings.

On his return from Buenos Aires Eugene occupied a room in a place known as "Jimmy the Priest's", a second class bar visited by sailors and drunkards. He continued to drink even more heavily at Jimmy the Priest's, when, one day, he was surprised at the information that his wife Kathleen wanted a divorce. She did not care for alimony or support for the child, but she needed evidence of adultery, necessary for the divorce, according to the laws in the state of New York. This she proposed to Eugene, who agreed immediately. On the night of December

29, he went to a brothel in Times Square, to meet one of the girls. A witness was provided to testify in court that Eugene and this woman had been caught in bed together, and divorce procedures were started. This obvious mascarade is another instance of O'Neill's inclination to wear masks: he dutifully played the role of unfaithful husband to oblige his, up to that time, totally neglected wife.

The following months were not easy for Eugene. First he learned that one of his favorite sailors, Driscoll, had just committed suicide by jumping overboard in mid-ocean; second, that an old theatrical friend, Jimmy Byth, had also committed suicide by jumping from a bedroom window; and third, he himself attempted suicide by swallowing an overdose of veronal tablets. Fortunately, he was taken to a hospital in time to be saved.

This suicide attempt he was later to treat as a farce and even make dramatic use of in Exorcism; his remarks, however, are a third instance of O'Neill's use of the mask to hide his real feelings.

Physical and emotional problems affected Eugene's health to such an extent that in 1913 he had to be taken to Gaylord Farm, one of the finest TB institutions in the country. He used his five months of enforced quiet at the Sanatorium to write his first plays, and soon afterwards he found a vocation and a reason for living. His early full-length play was The Straw, based on his stay at Gaylord Farm. By this time the sanatorium had also admitted a twenty-three year old patient, Catherine Anna

Mackay from Waterbury, who had been there once before. She inspired O'Neill and became the luckless heroine of The Straw. Five months after his arrival at the hospital, the doctor reported that Eugene was perfectly well and could return home. He left Gaylord on June 3, 1913, and remained in New Haven overnight to celebrate the event with another girlfriend who had left the Sanatorium some time before.

His life had become a series of involvements, never serious, often short-lived, and apparently desultory as well. They were to come to an end only in 1918 when he married for a second time. His second wife was Agnes Boulton, a twenty-four year old writer, who, just like O'Neill, had been married before and had had a child. She was not very fond of the theatre, but she admired O'Neill's work and used to read his manuscripts. They lived together for ten years; in that period he wrote the plays that made him famous, and received his first Pulitzer Prize. It was Agnes' individualistic character and Eugene's personal problems with alcohol, however, that determined the end of their marriage. Nevertheless they had two children: Shane, born in 1919, and Oona in 1925.

The existence of children, however, little contributed to the permanence of the union. Eugene O'Neill met Carlotta Monterey, an actress who had played the leading feminine role in Hairy Ape in the past, and promptly fell in love with her. Agnes was difficult in granting him a divorce, which became final only in 1929, in Reno.

Eugene's third wife, Carlotta Monterey, was totally

different from Agnes. Carlotta loved the theatre and enjoyed being an actress. She never had a chance to become widely famous as an actress, but she became a famous beauty. They made a long voyage to the Orient, but, as O'Neill got sick, the couple returned to Europe after his recovery in a hospital. During their sixteen years of married life, Carlotta protected O'Neill from reporters and visitors, and on their twelfth wedding anniversary the manuscript of Long Day's Journey Into Night was dedicated to her. One day, however, Carlotta felt jealous of Eugene's new acquaintances, and she deserted him for a brief period of time. Both suffered a complete physical and nervous breakdown then, but fortunately they recovered later, and were finally reconciled.

Success and fame made O'Neill progressively move to luxurious houses. His first home with Carlotta was a chateau at Saint Antoine du Rocher, where they lived for two years. Returning to New York he built "Casa Genotta", whose name was a combination of Gene and Carlotta, a luxurious mansion in Georgia with a studio resembling a ship's prow. With the money received from the Nobel Prize he built his most stately mansion, the "Tao House" in Danville, California, where he lived for more than six years. During the last years of his illness he lived in Marblehead Neck; finally, when he got worse, he moved to a hotel room in Boston, where he died.

Eugene's health had become increasingly poor and the diagnosis of Parkinson's disease destroyed any hope of prompt recovery he might ever have had. Finally, on

November 27, 1953, the United States was in mourning for the greatest dramatist of the century - Eugene Gladstone O'Neill. A newspaper critic, Brooks Atkinson, expressed a national feeling when he lamented:

> A giant writer has dropped off the earth; a great spirit and our greatest dramatist have left us, and our theatre world is now a smaller, more ordinary place.[22]

Eugene O'Neill won three Pulitzer Prizes during his lifetime. The first in 1920 for the play Beyond the Horizon; the second in 1921 for Anna Christie, and the third in 1928 for Strange Interlude. In 1936 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. A fourth Pulitzer Prize was granted to O'Neill in 1956, after his death, for his dramatic autobiography in Long Day's Journey Into Night.

Russel Crouse, the noted theatre man, expressed the view of many when he summed up his feelings: "O'Neill is one of the most charming men I know, and I've known him for twenty-five years, but I can't say I understand him. His face is a mask. I don't know what goes on behind it, and I don't think anyone else does."[23] Crouse was probably right in his estimate. But he should have added that in order to understand what was going on behind O'Neill's mask, one had to go and delve deeply into his plays.

[22] Frederic I Carpenter, Eugene O'Neill (New Haven, Connecticut: College and University Press, 1964), p.17; hereafter to be cited as Carpenter.

[23] Sheaffer, p.78.

## II. Inescapable States of Mind

O'Neill's All God's Chillun Got Wings is a play in two acts and seven successive scenes focussing the emotional conduct of a couple, Jim and Ella, in childhood, adolescence, and maturity. The play takes place in New York, in the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, and it stretches out over a period of seventeen years. This play about the Negro is one of the most serious treatments ever given to the racial problem in America, and the complexity of its racial theme brought both fame and notoriety to O'Neill. According to Carpenter, "because it dramatized the marriage of a Negro man and a white woman, its production caused a sensation, and New York censors persecuted it by denying licenses to some of its actors. This action only caused more people to flock to see it; and, in spite of poor reviews from most of the critics, it enjoyed a succès de scandale."[24] The play also achieved status when it was praised by European critics as "a courageous study of American race relations,"[25] and it was performed in Russian by the Moscow Kamerny Theatre, in Paris. It was, however, the structure of the play, as well as the realism of the dialogues that made O'Neill a leader of expressionism in America. He commented on the dramatic techniques used thus: "There is nothing predetermined about form. The end is all. This is the

[24] Carpenter, p.102.

[25] Ibid.

way I see these people, the way in which I sense their emotional conduct.

This way I must write this play to get the effects I desire. If the public accepts my work, good: if not,I have at least been honest with myself."[26]

As All God's Chillun Got Wings covers a period of seventeen years, theatrical techniques are employed to give the audience the impression that the time has passed. First, light effects are necessary to produce the repetitive sunsets and sunrises required in the play; secondly, sound devices are needed to express the noises of a city that has recently been mechanized. In scene one, the repetitive sounds are "the roar of the Elevated, the puff of the locomotive, and the lazy sound of a horse-car, the hooves of its team clacking on the cobbles."[27] However, nine years later, in scene two, "the street noises are now more rhythmically mechanical, eletricity having taken the place of horse and steam."[28]

The racial problem is also treated in the play in a serious and compassionate way, presenting a black-white marriage as the climax of the situation. The play,however, shows the audience that it is not the social or economic difficulties that prevent the Negro from promoting himself, but only the inner conflicts of his mind. An Raleigh confirms it:

[26] George P. Baker, "O'Neill's First Decade" in O'Neill and his Plays, ed. Oscar Cargill, et al.p.246.

[27] John H. Raleigh, The Plays of Eugene O'Neill (Edwardsville: Southers Illinois University Press,1965), p.27; hereafter to be cited as Raleigh.

[28] Ibid.

> The heart of the play resides in the fact that it is not about the economic and legal barriers that impede the rise of the Negro; to the contrary, Jim's father was a successful businessman. Jim is able to go to law school with white students and to take the examinations; he can marry, and in a church at that, a white woman; he can go to live in France with her, to escape. But he can't escape, and has to return, for the play is about inescapable states of mind created by an impossible situation, under which no individual can have the strength and dignity to be himself.[29]

The only adjusted Negro character in the play is Jim's mother, because she accepts herself as a "negro", and the acceptance of her color not only makes her a tolerant person, but also renders her a person dispossessed of tension. The play is, however, full of contrasts, having the difference in color as the central contrast between the white and the Negro people. Behaving as two different races, black and white look different, talk differently, live differently, live on opposite sides of the street, and even sing different songs. Stage directions, in fact, suggest that the Negroes are "uninhibited and gay, while the whites are constrained and nervous."[30] To produce veracity in the play the actors speak the Negro dialect, that is, they slur the pronunciation, mispronounce vowels and consonants, and suppress the last letter of words. The play is impressive from beginning to end, and undoubtedly O'Neill succeeds in giving this theme a universal dimension.

The two principal characters in the play are the Negro Jim and Ella Downey, the white heroine. In successive scenes they show the development of a plot that starts in childhood and extends itself to middle age. Both characters

[29] Raleigh, p.112.

[30] Raleigh, p.107.

bear the familiar given names of Eugene O'Neill's father and mother, "Jim" and "Ella", and this is, in part, why critics have said that there is some relationship of this play with the psychological conflicts later dramatized in O'Neill's Long Day's Journey Into Night; they also say that there is an intimate relationship between this play and O'Neill's own family life and personality. Nevertheless, Jim Harris is presented as a disturbed person, whose psychological state of mind turns him into a pathetic and tragic failure. Jim is a person whose tragedy originates from his continuous search for acceptance and status, besides his love for Ella; for him marriage becomes a constant exercise of adoration, self-evident from his last remark in the play:

> Honey, Honey, I'll play right up to the gates of Heaven with you![31]

Ella Downey is seen as a weak and embittered creature, who reflects confusion and frustrations that culminate with her mental breakdown. The play has, however, a simple plot: Jim Harris marries Ella, a white girl, whom he respects and worships. (Their affair started in the past, on a street corner, witnessed by black and white faces, members of a group they used to join to play.)

In the process of growing up, Ella becomes involved with bad people, and as a result, she deteriorates and degenerates. Jim, on the contrary, painfully struggles to

[31] Eugene O'Neill, All God's Chillun Got Wings in Nine Plays (New York: The Modern Library, 1959), p.133, hereafter to be cited in abbreviated form: AGCGW. All references to subsequent plays belong to the same edition, and their titles will be properly abbreviated thus: The Great God Brown: GGB; Lazarus Laughed: LL.

get an education and starts to study law. Time passes and only when Ella is sick and defeated does she agree to marry Jim. After the marriage, Jim struggles between his love for Ella and his ambition to succeed, while Ella struggles between her love for Jim and her hatred for him, as if he were the cause of her exile from her own people. Out of self-respect, Jim needs to become a lawyer, but Ella establishes her superiority over him. She does so by destrying his self-confidence to such an extent that he feels incapable of passing the bar examination for which he has been studying over the years. Jim feels an unconscious hatred for the Negro, and consequently for himself too. Marrying Ella and becoming a lawyer are for Jim part of the unconscious desire to achieve the status of a "white".

One of the most important scenes of the play is that in which Ella becomes mad and stabs an African mask that is placed on the wall. This mask which is considered the symbol of art and religion, is taken by Ella as a symbol of degradation. The conflict reaches its climax and is followed by reconciliation. From that moment on, Jim understands that she has ruined his life and has returned to the childhood world of the past. Therefore, when Ella becomes a child again, and needs protection, he accepts her as his destiny and says:

> Forgive me, God, for blaspheming You!
> Let this fire of burning suffering purify me
> of selfishness and make me worthy of the
> child You send me for the woman You take away![32]

[32] AGCGW, p.133.

When all his hopes have been frustrated, Jim finds his "Wings", considering that he has found himself by losing himself. In other words, he finds what he wants, a situation from which he will never withdraw. The final moments of the play reveal that the principal characters revert to childhood. Therefore, the struggle is over, and the unconscious mind is victorious. For O'Neill, symbols and images are in evidence, and All God's Chillun Got Wings has also a variety of symbols. The play is, first of all, a symbolic study of the conflict between the Negro and the white man; it is also about the Negro struggle for success, status, and acceptance. The symbolical moment in the play is when Ella stabs the African mask which is, for her, a symbol of the blackness that she hates. Finally, Ella's dementia is also a symbol of her psychological state of mind when she, sick and depressed, returns to the past:

> I'll be just your little girl; Jim - and you'll be my little boy - just as we used to be, remember, when we were beaux; and I'll put shoe blacking on my face and pretend I'm black and you can put chalk on your face and pretend you're white just as we used to do.[33]

This amounts to saying that Ella's movement to the past is a backward movement, characterized by Waith thus:

> The backward movement of O'Neill's characters is always flight from the problems posed by existence; forward movement is the heroic, sometimes ecstatic, acceptance of them. Both movements may be toward death, but death in significantly different forms.[34]

[33] AGCGW, p.132.

[34] Waith, p.33.

And this is what renders the play particularly pathetic: if Ella moves backwards, towards the past and childhood, Jim has that forward impulse, characteristically ecstatic, accepting whatever conditions the future may bring; he expresses himself in the future ("...I'll play right up to the gates of Heaven with you.") and achieves thus a heroic status. This is their supreme moment of unmasking. Waith diagnosed such moments in the following passage:

> The characteristic structure of an O'Neill play, then, is determined by a movement toward unmasking, which is often also a movement of the principal characters toward discovery of the stance they must take toward the fundamental problems of existence.[35]

Ella looks back on to the past, Jim looks forward to the future: this tragic sense of misdirection emphasizes further the essential theme of the play, a futile attempt to reconcile irreconcilable elements, symbolically expressed through the juxtaposition of black versus white. If the three elements pointed out in "Memoranda,"namely, imagination, poetical interpretation of life, and symbolical celebration of life are all inclusive, still it is the last one that prevails in All God's Chillun Got Wings even though the other two elements coexist and coalesce in this first significant sample of Eugene O'Neill's extended use of mask in the twenties. These elements will be examined in the order previously mentioned, for the additional light they throw on the plot, argument, and characters of O'Neill's

[35] Waith,p.34.

play.

The elements of imagination are to be found in the stage directions. O'Neill creates a world of realities with a minimum use of props; the first act takes place out in the streets, where the opposition of black versus white is stressed thus: "In the street leading left, the faces are all white; in the street leading right, all black."[36] The second act, on the other hand, takes place inside Jim's home, where the only white element is represented by Ella herself. Then there is the imaginative use of time; the whole play covers a period of seventeen years corresponding to several stages of life itself: childhood, youth, and maturity. Songs are sung to characterize either the racial group or the in-lying theme of the scene. Thus the first act, first scene, corresponding to the years of childhood, has "Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage" sung in the white section, while a Negro sings "I Guess I'll Have to Telegraph my Baby" on his side of the street. In scene two -graduation time - the white tenor sings "Gee, I Wish that I Had a Girl," while the Negro replies "All I Got was Sympathy." In both songs the theme of Ella's first rejection of Jim is stressed. The parallelism of song and situation is even more evident in the third scene dealing with Ella's rejection of her white lover, Mickey, and her white world when a drunken white voice is heard humming "When I Lost You".The black singer answers with "Waiting for the Robert E. Lee," suggestive of Jim's reborn hopes...

36 AGCGW, p.91.

This line of imaginative use of songs reaches its climax with scene four - the wedding - when only one song is heard - that of a Negro tenor. But the racial duality, already observed in other instances, is this time stressed in the stanzas themselves, centering, the first one, in the "mourning dove" (white), the second in the "eagle in the air" (black), while the third merely repeats the refrain "I wish that I'd never been born."

The second act has no such devices. Inside the Harris' home the tragic implications are deeper: they are somehow expressed in the juxtaposition of Jim's father's portrait in full regalia and the primitive African mask.

Full drama has taken over and its appeal is visual rather than aural-oral. Yet there had been visual effects from the first, related to light versus darkness, to accompany and stress the development of the theme. Eugene O'Neill's imagination created, most of the time, a sunset setting for his drama - a very suitable choice for that is the time of the day when the conflicting elements of day and night wage their last war. The first scene of the first act, for instance, takes place at sunset, oddly contrasting with the actors, all of them children. (Is that a token of the uselessness of it all?) The second scene - graduation time - is set against twilight. However, when Ella rejects her white lover and his world in the third scene, it is night, while her marriage to Jim takes place on a Sunday morning in scene four.

A morning is also the starting point of Act II, scene one, the background for Jim and Ella's return from Europe. But this is the last time light is seen on stage; scenes two and three take place in unmitigated gloom, as the former develops in the evening and the latter at sunset. The dramatic story of Jim and Ella has come, again, full circle; it ends where it once started, with the blighted hopes of Jim Crow and Painty Face.

Sound effects, light effects, extensive use of imagination - and yet all that was not enough. As a last touch O'Neill suggested in "Memoranda" that:

> All save the seven leading characters should be masked; for all the secondary figures are part and parcel of the Expressionistic background of the play, a world at first indifferent, then cruelly hostile, against which the tragedy of Jim Harris is outlined. [37]

Masked and unmasked characters oppose the central image of the primitive African mask void of life but full of dark and somber implications about man's fate; in addition, there are references to the way the children used to paint their faces in their childhood, white Ella with shoe blacking and colored Jim with white chalk. The juxtaposition of masked crowds and unmasked leading characters is significant because it is the first step taken towards Lazarus Laughed; besides, there is the obvious contrast of indistinct masked crowds versus the unmasked central group of characters, the first group suggesting collective mass standardization, while the second group stands for individuation, conflict, and race

37 "Memoranda," p.119.

hostility. In the later play, Lazarus Laughed, masked mobs will be multiplied to create visual effects, while only one character, Lazarus, remains unmasked, as if he were to represent a new version of man, redeemed from the fear of death. The trend of masks versus faces is thus strengthened in the later plays; All God's Chillun Got Wings is, apparently, the very first instance in which such confrontation is made. However, there is no doubt that the most ingenious device in All God's Chillun Got Wings is the contrast of light and shadows, of white versus black; and the impressive control of light and darkness naturally leads to the second guideline, poetical interpretation of life.

Poetry is all pervasive: the lines get very simple and straightforward as in the short dialogue below:

> Ella: You've been white to me, Jim. (She takes his hand)
> Jim: White - to you!
> Ella: Yes
> Jim: All love is white. I've always loved you. (This with the deepest humility)[38]

This lyrical note is to be retrieved later on close to the end, when the two main characters stand transfixed, with the sudden realization of their true selves - one hard and all demanding, the other soft and all indulgent:

> Ella: (brightly) Well, it's all over, Jim. Everything'll be all right now. (Chattering along) I'll be just your little girl, Jim - and you'll be my little boy - just as we used to be, remember, when we were beaux; and I'll put shoe blacking on my face and

38 AGCGW, p.107.

pretend I'm black and you can put chalk on your face and pretend you're white just as we used to do - and we can play marbles - only you mustn't all the time be a boy. Sometimes you must be my old kind Uncle Jim who's been with us for years and years. Will you, Jim?

Jim: (with utter resignation) Yes, Honey.

Ella: And you'll never, never, never, never leave me, Jim?

Jim: Never, Honey.

Ella: 'Cause you're all I've got in the world - and I love you, Jim.[39]

This poignant appeal can only be matched with the already mentioned closing lines spoken by Jim that seem effectively to sum up the world of evasion and illusion Ella and Jim build for themselves from that moment on: it is a promise, on his part, to play with her throughout eternity, if necessary. The way is wide open to playwrights to come, to create selfdeluded characters as Willy Loman in Death of a Salesman, or Blanche Dubois in Street-Car Named Desire; Jim and Ella Harris are only the first in an endless gallery of portraits suggestive of frustration and futility in American Drama, recently expanded with the bitter exposure of the couple who play family games in Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

Dramatically Jim and Ella make the ultimate decision to withdraw from life and reality by re-creating the childhood world of Jim Crow and Painty Face on the false premises of white chalk and shoe blacking: a foolish and futile attempt to escape the fate of those who once tried to reconcile irreconcilable elements. This is what Waith means when he refers to "unmasking" as "...a movement of the principal characters toward discovery of the stance

39 AGCGW, p.132.

they must take toward the fundamental problems of existence."[40] Incapable of dealing with their frustrations in an adult way, they revert to a make-believe world where they can control their differences through masks of white chalk and shoe blacking. Jim's successive failures in his exams, and Ella's pathetic rejection of her husband's world can at last be neutralized by the childish games they will play "right up to the gates of Heaven."

The self-deluded gesture of hiding the real color of their skin under masks ultimately leads to O'Neill's third and last principle: the symbolical celebration of life.

This principle can be summed up as one's attempt to overcome the unendurable, and to cling to life as the ultimate reality; something Brutus Jones fought for and lost in Emperor Jones (1920) and Yank only had a glimpse of, in his last moments in the cage in the Hairy Ape (1921). Jim and Ella do not die - there are worse fates than death; they create wings to withdraw from the cruel hostile everyday world; and these wings, one wonders, will they be strong enough or last long enough to protect all God's Children? The answer is beside the point. What is really important then is the fact that, for the first time, O'Neill's characters cling to life. Survival through crisis is the heart of tragedy as a symbolical celebration of life. Eben and Abbie will repeat it in Desire Under the Elms (1924), and Lavinia Mannon, all alone,

[40] Waith, p.34.

will echo that tragic situation in Mourning Becomes Electra (1931); even the four haunted Tyrones will somehow manage to see another dawn in their Long Day's Journey Into Night (1955). After all, these creations are mere projections of the sense of endurance of their creator: it takes an O'Neill to punish himself for being born...and to know that the ultimate goodness in spite of everything else, is to exist. The interesting point is that of the plays quoted above, All God's Chillun Got Wings (1923) Desire Under the Elms (1924) were somehow related to O'Neill's life unconsciously, as a critic[41] has already pointed out; while Long Day's Journey Into Night is a self-confessed backward glance to his tormented family life in his early years. What O'Neill is really stressing is the communication of life as a principle to those who, "starved in spirit by their soul-stifling daily struggle to exist as masks among the masks of living! "[42]

This awareness of life as a force-giving principle - dionisiac exaltation and exultation - is a characteristic note of O'Neill's theatre in the twenties. First focussed on All God's Chillun...it is echoed in The Great God Brown (1925), and Lazarus Laughed (1926), and probably integrates the group as a common theme with the other two plays. All God's Chillun is not merely a play about racial prejudice and tension, as The Great God Brown is not just about art versus life, or Lazarus Laughed about matter versus spirit; the three plays have psychological implications that can be somehow summed up in Lazarus'

41 Carpenter, pp.102-103; p.105.

42 "Memoranda," p.122.

deepthroated "yes" to the question in Jesus' eyes. The principle is to be further expanded in the other two plays, but here it is for the first time suggested. This principle unifies all elements so far detected: the imaginative use of sounds and lights, or the poetical interpretation of the reconciliation of irreconcilable elements; the symbolical celebration of life is self-evident in the wide span of seventeen years attributed to the plot, in the confrontation of the seven unmasked characters with the masked crowds, and, finally, in the opposition of the primitive African mask and Jim's father in full regalia.

As a matter of fact the mask and the portrait dominate the whole second act, and give to it special point. Their opposition is detected from the very first, according to the stage directions:

> On one wall, in a heavy gold frame, is a colored photograph - the portrait of an elderly Negro with an able, shrewd face but dressed in outlandish lodge regalia, a get-up adorned with medals, sashes, a cocked hat with frills - the whole effect as absurd to contemplate as one of Napoleon's Marshals in full uniform. In the left corner, where a window lights it effectively, is a Negro primitive mask from the Congo - a grotesque face, inspiring obscure, dim connotations in one's mind, but beautifully done, conceived in a true religious spirit. In this room, however, the mask acquires an arbitrary accentuation. It dominates by a diabolical quality that contrast imposes upon it.[43]

The portrait and the mask - are they not symbols of life once lived and lost? The former in full regalia

[43] AGCGW, p.112.

is just another mask of one once living, while the primitive mask is the blank and lifeless prop that once protected several distinct identities of witches and féticheurs. One is known, the other is unknown; and facing the mystery of things, the latter is more threatening because it is indistinct. Ancestral faces wore masks; but so did Jim's father before him, parading the tokens imitative of the white man.

The point is subtly stressed when Mrs. Harris discusses the matter with Hattie, Jim's sister:

> Mrs.H. (shaking her head) I ain't talkin' of shoulds, It's too late for shoulds. Dey's o'ny one should.(Solemnly) De white and de black shouldn't mix dat close. Dere's one road where de white goes on alone; dere's anudder road where de black goes on alone -
> Hattie.Yes, if they'd only leave us alone!
> Mrs.H. Dey leaves your Pa aone. He comes to de top till he's got his own business, lots o' money in de bank, he owns a building even befo' he die. (She looks up proudly at the picture. Hattie sighs impatiently - then her mother goes on) Dey leaves me alone. I bears four children into dis worl',two dies, two lives, I helps you two grow up fine an' healthy and eddicated wid schoolin' and money fo' yo' comfort -
> Hattie. (impatiently) Ma!
> Mrs.H. I does de duty God set for me in dis worl'.
> Dey leaves me alone.[44]

Mrs. Harris' common sense summed up the theme of the play beautifully: "De white and de black shouldn't mix that close." Her husband has been allowed to grow and prosper, parade as a black Napoleon of the jungle,provided he kept to his own people. He married into his own race, he offered no threat to white organized society. And so

[44] AGCGW,p.113.

did the rest of the family, except for Jim, who dared to cross racial barriers. Ella, his white wife, is the antithesis, and naturally she reacts violently against both the portrait and the mask. She stiffles a cry when she first sees the mask and shuns away from Hattie's demonstrations. In the final lines of her soliloquy, she sums up her feelings both against the portrait and the mask:

> Ella. It's his Old Man - all dolled up like a circus horse! Well, they can't help it . It's in the blood, I suppose. They're ignorant, that's all there is to it. (She moves to the mask -forcing a mocking tone) Hello, sport! Who d'you think you're scaring? Not me! I'll give you the laugh. He won't pass, you wait and see. Not in a thousand years![45]

But Ella will not laugh for long. In scene two, as if it were to underline the abnormal condition of Ella's mind, stage directions suggest:

> The walls of the room appear shrunken in, the ceiling lowered, so that the furniture, the portrait, the mask look unnaturally large and domineering.[46]

The portrait and the mask are the mute testimonials of Jim's devotion and dedication to his deranged wife; yet, they are still the butt of Ella's aggressiveness and a substitute for her murderous impulses towards her husband. In scene three this is still emphasized further, as the stage directions suggest: "The spring twilight sheds a vague, gray light about the room, picking out the Congo mask on the stand by the window. The walls

[45] AGCGW, p.120.

[46] AGCGW, p.121.

appear shrunken in still more, the ceiling now seems barely to clear the people's heads, the furniture and the characters appear enormously magnified."[47] In her distracted condition, Ella's horror of the black world she lives in now is concentrated on the Congo mask, to whom she addresses abusive words. Soon afterwards Jim comes in, with news of his renewed failure in exams. Ella's reply is that of an insane person:

> (She stands in front of the mask - triumphantly) There! What did I tell you? I told you I'd give you the laugh! (She begins to laugh with wild unrestraint, grabs the mask from its place, sets it in the middle of the table and plunging the knife down through it pins it to the table) There! Who's got the laugh now?
>
> Jim. (his eyes bulging - hoarsely) You devil! You white devil woman! (In a terrible roar, raising his fists above her head) You devil!
>
> Ella. (looking up at him with a bewildered cry of terror) Jim! (Her appeal recalls him to himself. He lets his arms slowly drop to his sides, bowing his head. Ella points tremblingly to the mask). It's all right, Jim! It's dead. The devil's dead. See! It couldn't live - unless you passed. If you'd passed it would have lived in you. Then I'd have had to kill you, Jim, don't you see? - or it would have killed me. But now I've killed it. (She pats his hand) so you needn't ever be afraid any more, Jim.[48]

The stabbing of the mask is, therefore, not only the central image of the play but probably its most unforgettable scene.

[47] AGCGW, p.128.

[48] AGCGW, p.131.

O'Neill mentioned it among the things he would not change in the production of his plays, and added a word of praise for the Moscow Karmeny Theatre rendition of it, suggesting that the mask was"dramatically intensified and emphasized."[49] Waith mentions that O'Neill was in good company; that other directors and producers were equally interested in masks. He mentioned Kenneth Mcgowan, Herman Rosse, Gordon Craig and Robert Edmond Jones as well as a book called Masks and Demons, illustrated with reproductions of masks from Greece, Japan, the Congo, and New Mexico.[50] So the Congo mask at the Harris' home may have had its origin in the pages of Mcgowan and Rosse's book first...

The origin is not so important; its implications, however, are. There is something highly dramatic in the vision of an insane white woman who stabs a primitive African mask, comparable to another famous contemporary image of Eliot in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night:"

> Midnight shakes the memory
> As a madman shakes a dead geranium.[51]

In both cases violence is done senselessly to inanimate objects as if the gesture would be sufficient to liberate the mind from the load of anger and anxiety. Ella sees the darkness of the world around her embodied in the mask; she not only rejects it, but she also tries to suppress it altogether, as if her intimate relations with Jim have polluted her, and to destroy the mask is

[49] "Memoranda,"p.118.

[50] Waith,p.30.

[51] T.S.Eliot,Selected Poems (London:Faber,1973),p.25.

the only way open to the restoration of her purity. Ella probably had misgivings about their union in the first place; Jim implies that much in his conversation with Hattie when, groping for words, he brokenly admits that the first year they lived like friends - like brother and sister.[52] And this is what Ella has to offer to Jim at the end, inverting, however, their respective skin - colors: "Don't cry, Jim! You mustn't cry! I've got only a little time left and I want to play. Don't be old Uncle Jim now. Be my little boy,Jim. Pretend you're Painty Face and I'm Jim Crow. Come and play!"[53] The mask is destroyed, its mystery is unsolved; the union is untied, its relationship is replaced by childish games making the participants believe whatever they want; thus Ella's sordid past with Mickey is annulled along with present misery with Jim; there is only a hereafter built on frustration on Jim's part,and alienation on Ella's. After all, it does not really matter: they certainly will wear their chalk-and-shoe blacking masks to eternity, where, as God's children with wings, they can alternate and play each other's role as they think fit. Only insanity can bring about the marriage of heaven and hell; and this seems to be the case with Jim and Ella Harris.

The reconciliation of irreconcilable elements is never fully attained at least, not in this play; a house divided cannot stand. For O'Neill, at this point, two can never be one; he goes to greater lengths to

[52] AGCGW, p.115.

[53] AGCGW, p.133.

prove that in his next play, The Great God Brown, another symbolic play about self-deluded characters who learn how to hide their inner conflicts and psychological insights under the universal guise of the mask.

III. Pan Gradually Changes into Mephistopheles

O'Neill worked on two different plays simultaneously, The Great God Brown and Marco Millions; the former, however, was published and produced first, in 1925. The play extends itself from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, and it deals with O'Neill's ideas on materialism in America and in modern societies of the world. O'Neill himself once said:

> I still consider this play /The Great God Brown/ one of the most interesting and moving I have written. It has its faults of course, but for me, at least, it does succeed in conveying a sense of the tragic mystery drama of Life revealed through the lives in the play.[54]

It was, however, soon after the play was written that producers refused to take it; but in spite of that, O'Neill, together with Kenneth Macgowan and Robert E. Jones, decided to produce it all by themselves. At first, the play was not entirely successful, mainly because of the use of masks, but in 1926 it ran in New York, in the Broadway theatres, for a period of eight months, being well accepted by the critics and appreciated by the public.

This play is one of his most difficult plays, because of the confusion with the use of masks. The mask expresses a mixture of internal or subconscious elements, with external or knowledgeable behavior, in concern with the conflicts of social values in a materialistic society. This is the reason why The Great God Brown become O'Neill's expressionistic experiment, and also his favorite play.

[54] Waith, p.36.

He became so deeply involved with the play, that it turned out to be a reflection of his own life, as for example, he had lost his mother and father when he wrote this play; yet, they were so present in his mind, that he took pains in describing them fully in the Prologue when he presented Dion Anthony and Billy Brown both with their parents in their graduation exercises, similar to what may have been his own experience in adolescence. Furthermore there is a passage in which Dion muses on his father's death, and it suggests the thoughts that O'Neill himself may have had on his own dead parents at the time:

> What aliens we were to each other! When he lay dead, his face looked so familiar that I wondered where I had met that man before. Only at the second of my conception. After that, we grew hostile with concealed shame. And my mother? I remember a sweet, strange girl, with affectionate, bewildered eyes as if God had locked her in a dark closet without any explanation. I was the sole doll our ogre, her husband, allowed her and she played mother and child with me for many years in that house until at last through two tears I watched her die with the shy pride of one who has lengthened her dress and put up her hair. And I felt like a forsaken toy and cried to be buried with her, because her hands alone had caressed without clawing. She lived long and aged greatly in the two days before they closed her coffin. The last time I looked, her purity had forgotten me, she was stainless and imperishable, and I knew my sobs were ugly and meaningless to her virginity; so I shrank away, back into life, with naked nerves jumping like fleas, and in due course of nature another girl called me her boy in the moon and married me and became three mothers in one person, while I got paint on my paws in an endeavor to see God![55]

The whole passage foretells what is to come, years later, in Long Day's Journey Into Night.

[55] GGB, p.333.

O'Neill is also creative by giving realism to this play through the use of symbols, words and actions, as if it were an attempt to involve the mystery of things and express them through a poetic style. The use of masks was his method to dramatize; however he was not too successful in its use either. Masks were also a device to express the different personalities within the same human being.

The Great God Brown, a play in four acts, eleven scenes, a prologue and an epilogue is, on account of the nature of its plot, a double play - the reader may even think so due to its dual nature. It seems, in fact, that the play has two linear plots occurring simultaneously; one plot is both materialistic and concrete, while the other is abstract and psychological. The materialistic plot involves two families; each family has a son, and they are, respectively, Dion Anthony and Billy Brown. Their fathers are partners in the same construction firm. The play opens in an academic ceremony in which both boys court Margaret, a girlfriend; the girl, however, falls in love with Dion Anthony, and marries him years later. The play properly opens seven years after that, when Margaret, mother of three children and involved with financial difficulties, goes to Billy Brown for help. Billy offers Dion a job as a designer in his architectural firm; Dion reluctantly accepts the job. This acceptance contributes to make Dion's drinking condition even worse. Billy Brown is then a successful architect, and a prosperous businessman, with a large area of shared experience with Dion, as "both love Margaret, both patronize Cybel, both

are architects, and both work in the same office."[56] Dion's designs are apparently better than Billy's, although the neurotic conflict in Dion's mind makes him increasingly unable to paint and support his family properly. This culminates with Dion lacking the appreciation of his old friend, his own wife and children, besides his employer; he makes up for it, looking for help in Cybel, the eternal prostitute, symbolically called "Mother Earth". It is in Act III, in Billy Brown's house, that Dion Anthony dies. Billy immediately assumes his friend's personality, as an attempt to inherit Margaret's love first, Dion's ability to create, next, and Cybel's love last. At this point of the play Billy Brown as an independent character also dies.

The psychological plot on the other hand, consists of Dion's adoption of Pan's mask - the same element responsible for Margaret's love early in the play. According to O'Neill's words, Margaret is:

> The eternal girl-woman with a virtuous simplicity of instinct, properly oblivious to everything but the means to her end of maintaining the race.[57]

After Dion and Margaret are married, however, Dion's face changes into a suffering mask and his Pan mask becomes impulsively satanic; also, the pressure of working for Billy Brown limits Dion's process of creation and narrows it down to a process of self-destruction and humiliation. The whole process leads him into the arms of Cybel for comfort. Dion then wears his Mephistophelean mask in

[56] Waith, p.37.

[57] Doris V. Falk, Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1958), p.100; hereafter to be cited as Falk.

order to hide his true self.

In this play the use of masks is a device to show what is behind the characters: the eternal conflict of their minds. Brown, for example, assumes Dion's mask right after his friend's death and inherits his ability to create and to be loved. As a matter of fact, Dion and Billy are not two distinct personalities, but a divided self or two separate parts fused into one, as if in each half one could find what is missing in the other, that is, ability and love, in one, materialism and rejection in the other.

The Great God Brown has four main characters, two masculine, Billy and Dion, and two feminine, Margaret and Cybel. Margaret, Dion's wife, does not reveal any psychological torment, and in spite of the disillusionment of her marriage to Dion, she maintains her confidence in him. Her beauty, however, changes and she acquires a suffering mask when Dion's madness becomes more intense; nothing, however, alters Margaret's simplicity and resignation.

Cybel, the prostitute, is loved by both men. It is Dion, however, who looks for her in the difficult moments of his life, and she becomes his refuge then, when he feels distress and despair.

Brown is the talented materialist who, according to O'Neill is:

> The visionless demi-god of our new materialistic myth - a Success - building his life of exterior things, inwardly empty and resourceless, an uncreative creature of superficial preordained grooves,

> a by-product forced aside into slack waters by the main currents of life desire.[58]

As to the use of masks, there is a clear indication that Dion Anthony, whose name was intended to suggest Dionysus and St. Anthony, wears, at the beginning of the play, the mask of a mocking Pan, but gradually changes it into the tense mask of Mephistopheles or Satan. According to A. Richard Sogliuzzo, Dion's inner self is first "dark, spiritual, poetic, passionately supersensitive, helplessly unprotected in its childlike, religious faith in life";[59] later these elements are concealed into a second mask of a "mocking, reckless, defiant, gayly scoffing and sensual young Pan."[60] He assumes, however, a third mask, shortly before his death, which possesses a "terrible death-like intensity, its mocking irony become so cruelly malignant as to give him the appearance of a real demon, tortured into torturing others."[61]

Besides The Great God Brown, O'Neill used masks in several other plays such as: The Hairy Ape, The Ancient Mariner, All God's Chillun Got Wings, The Fountain, Marco Millions, Lazarus Laughed, and Days Without End. But the use of masks in these plays was never a sustained effort as it was in The Great God Brown and Lazarus Laughed. The use of masks in the other plays was accidental and episodic, never quite the central point of the play as in The Great God Brown and Lazarus Laughed. O'Neill also

[58] Falk, p.103.

[59] A.Richard Sogliuzzo, "The Uses of the Mask in The Great God Brown and Six Characters in Search of an Author" Educational Theater Journal, 18 (1965), 224-229; the reference is to page 225, and future references will be abbreviated as Sogliuzzo.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

published his "Memoranda on Masks" in The American Spectator, in 1932. In this article he says that masks would be the "freest solution to the problem of expressing in drama those profound hidden conflicts of the mind which the probings of psychology continue to disclose to us."[62]

Concerning The Great God Brown, O'Neill says in the "Memoranda" that he "would like to make the masks in this play symbolize more definitely the abstract theme, rather than stress the superficial meaning that people wear masks before other people."[63] Cybel, for example, is a good-hearted person who hides herself behind the mask of a prostitute, showing to people only the dark side of her life - her profession. She, however, drops the mask and shows Dion the fabulous woman she really is. Margaret's mask, on the other hand, reflects her own inner self. As she is good and simple, she is also the brave young woman whose optimism changes into a false mask to conceal her own disillusionment with Dion.

As it was mentioned before, O'Neill's dogma for the new masked drama was then:

> One's outer life passes in a solitude haunted by the masks of others; one's inner life passes in a solitude hounded by the mask of oneself.[64]

However, the most significant question in the "Memoranda" is:

[62] "Memoranda," p.116.

[63] "Memoranda," p.119.

[64] "Memoranda," p.117.

> For what, at bottom, is the new psychological insight into human cause and effects but a study in masks, an exercise in unmasking?[65]

And the answer is, in a way, to be found in The Great God Brown`itself.

In the Prologue of this play O'Neill is descriptive, an attribute of his that requires a lot of imagination on his part. He first describes a cross section of the pier of the Cassino, then the two families involved in the plot. He becomes particularly detailed when he describes the four principal characters, Billy, Dion, Margaret, and Cybel. He describes Margaret thus:

> She is almost seventeen, pretty and vivacious, blonde, with big romantic eyes, her figure lithe and strong,her facial expression intelligent but youthfully dreamy, especially now in the moonlight.[66]

The story stretches out for eighteen years - the period in which Billy and Dion grow up, fall in love, suffer, and die. As in All God's Chillun Got Wings, the story takes place in different parts of the day:moonlight in the prologue, sunset in Act II, and morning in Act III. Time is also important as the play begins in mid-June and skips to spring seven years later. Sound devices are used in various scenes, starting right in the Prologue:footsteps, the sound of waves, and the sound of the school quartet rendering "Sweet Adeline" are heard. In Act I a piano is "groggily banging out" a sentimental song, and in Act II Dion reads aloud from the "Imitation of Christ", by Thomas à Kempis. The play devēlops in four different main sets:

65 "Memoranda,"p.116.

66 GGB,p.312.

Margaret's home, where she lives with Dion and her three children in a two-family house in an ugly section of town is the first one; four pieces of furniture are present - an armchair at left, a table with a chair in back of it at center, and a sofa at right. The second setting is Billy Brown's office, composed of a mahogany desk with a chair at center, an office armchair to the left, and an office lounge to the right. The third setting is the library of William Brown's home, where there is a heavy table at the center, a leather armchair at the left and an opulent couch at the right. The fourth setting is Cybel's parlor, where there is an automatic player-piano at the center, a chair at the left, and a second-hand sofa on the right. A cheap yellow-brown paper covers the wall, and a cheap alarm clock on top of the piano characterizes the place.

Billy and Dion become outstanding characters in different parts of the play. We could say that in the first half, or up to the Second Act, it is Dion who appears in all his magnitude. But, when he dies in Act III, and Brown steals his mask and appears to Margaret, it is Billy Brown who becomes the outstanding character, occupying the central place; to him all attention then is drawn.

The play develops a linear plot where there is a metaphysical conflict between Christianity and Naturalism. This conflict conducts the central characters, Billy and Dion, from the state of a healthy mental situation into that of gradual psychological-conflict. For example, in the first half of the play there is God, represented by Pan, while in

the second half there is the Devil as represented by Mephistopheles. Here below are the words that verbally characterize the transformation of one mental situation into the other:

| In the beginning | At the end |
|---|---|
| Good-Humor | Tension |
| Self-assurance | Frustation |
| Pride | Envy |
| Spiritual | Neurotic |
| Defiant | Torment |
| Gayly | Disillusionment |
| Sensual | War |
| Vivacious | Nervous |
| Poetic | Defensive |
| Passionate | Distraught |
| Romantic | Suffering |
| Sweet | Hostile |
| Strong | Disturbed |
| Beautiful | Deformed |
| Dreamy | Darkness |

There are passages in the play where O'Neill is particularly creative, and by being so, he confuses the reader with his fertile imagination. There is, for example, a passage where Dion is sitting on the stool in back of the table, reading aloud from the "Imitation of Christ" to his mask, which is on the table before him; and the surprising passage at the end of the fourth Act when Billy discards his own mask, assumes Dion's, and then proclaims that "Mr. Brown is dead!" and they return

"carrying the mask of William Brown, two on each side, as if they were carrying a body by the legs and shoulders."[67]

Considering the fact that Dion Anthony has two personalities, and that both are abstract, since one is pagan and the other is Christian, O'Neill imagines situations of religious aspects where Dion, impregnated by strong Christian feelings, invokes the name of God, such as in scene one of Act II when he "(gets to his knees and with clasped hands looks up raptly and prays with an ascetic fervor) - Into thy hands, O Lord,"[68]...; or in scene three of the same act when Dion prays (drowsily) "Our Father...,"[69] and dies; and yet, when, (like a priest, offering up prayers for the dying) he says:

> Quickly must thou be gone from hence, see then how matters stand with thee.Ah, fool - learn how to die to the world that thou mayst begin to live with Christ! Do now, beloved, do now all thou canst because thou knowst not when thou shalt die; nor dost thou know what shall befall thee after death.[70]

The Great God Brown, besides being an imaginative and symbolical play, is, furthermore, full of poetical passages, in spite of the confusion of its difficult theme. A beautiful poetical passage develops early in the Prologue, when Dion takes his mask off and reveals himself to Margaret as an embittered person:

> Why am I afraid to dance, I who love music and rhythm and grace and song and laughter?

[67] GGB, p.370.

[68] GGB, p.337.

[69] GGB, p.350.

[70] GGB, p.341.

> Why am I afraid to live, I who love life and the beauty of flesh and the living colors of earth and sky and sea? Why am I afraid of love, I who love love? Why am I afraid, I who am not afraid? Why must I pretend to scorn in order to pity? Why must I hide myself in self-contempt in order to understand? Why must I be so ashamed of my strength, so proud of my weakness? Why must I live in a cage like a criminal, defying and hating, I who love peace and friendship?[71]

Cybel is also, on her own, a poetical element in the play. By wearing the mask of a prostitute, and on account of her dubious personality both profane and religious, she suffers from segregation and rejection of her own society. Her presence is relevant in the last scene, when "Dion Brown", in agony, looks for her comfort for the last time:

> Brown: It was dark and I couldn't see where I was going and they all picked on me.
> Cybel: I know. You're tired.
> Brown: And when I wake up...?
> Cybel: The sun will be rising again.
> Brown: To judge the living and the dead! (Frightenedly) I don't want justice, I want love.
> Cybel: There is only love.[72]

In order to stress the fact that people wear masks before other people, to hide their feelings, O'Neill created his most confusing and symbolical play - The Great God Brown, which is, by the complexity of its theme, and the use of psychological values, a play with a very strange plot. It is known that constant use of masks in the play symbolizes Jung's psychological principle of the "persona," which is the sole process a person has to express his outer personality or façade to others.

[71] GGB, p.315.

[72] GGB, p.374.

The most symbolical passage however, is at the end of the play, when Brown assumes Dion's identity, and he is unable to bear his double personality; so he ends up by killing the Billy Brown part existing in himself, in order to integrate himself as only one person. At this point of the drama, he discards the mask of Brown, and, like his rival Dion, he returns to the arms of Cybel, the Mother Earth. Dion (Brown) accused of murder, is followed by the police, and is finally shot.

Brown's dying prayer is one of the most symbolical passages because it shows the death of a god, and, consequently, the liberation of his inner self.

> Brown: I'm getting sleepy.
> What's the prayer you taught me? -
> Our Father -?
> Cybel: (with calm exultance) Our Father Who Art!
> Brown: (taking her tone - exultantly) Who art!
> Who art! (Suddenly - with ecstasy) I know!
> I have found Him! I hear Him speak!
> "Blessed are they that weep, for they
> shall laugh!"
> Only he that has wept can laugh! ...[73]

Libarating his inner self, Brown's mask falls down, and the Great God is then free to the world and to himself again, because he is then, simply, - Brown, or, as Cybel puts it, Man.

For, like All God's Chillun Got Wings which preceded it, The Great God Brown is a compound of the three elements already pointed out: imagination, poetical interpretation of life and symbolical celebration of life; the only difference is that symbolism prevailed in All God's Chillun Got Wings while the heart of the matter with The Great God Brown is undoubtedly its poetical interpretation

[73] GGB, p.374.

of life. Still, a detailed account of these elements in the play is due; for the sake of balance the order will be inverted, and symbolism and imagination will be examined first, and poetical interpretation of life last.

The symbolical celebration of life, so obviously stressed in All God's Chillun Got Wings with the survival of the major characters against the greatest odds at the end is here less obvious, as both central characters, Dion Anthony and Billy Brown, die; however, it is implied in the poetical utterances celebrating life which constitute the greatest bulk of the play. Furthermore, it is developed side by side with the main theme of the play that starts at the graduation exercises (is not the occasion the birth of a professional?) and ends with the death of a successful artist-businessman, once called by Cybel Dion Brown (IV,ii,p.372). Birth, life, and death - is there anything more symbolical of man's social fate? Beginning, development, and conclusion: this is man's fate on earth in a nutshell.

The imaginative interpretation of life in The Great God Brown acquires a metaphysical connotation as it discusses the tragedy of antithesis, again, the irreconcilable elements in man himself, at war with himself; as Falk has precisely pointed out,

> This final ironic twist is a statement of his dilemma - that he cannot kill the Billy Brown in himself without killing also its opposite, the Dion Anthony, for as Cybel recognizes, he is now Dion Brown. His name is also, as Cybel tells the police,Man. In Brown's dying prayer at the end O'Neill proclaims his affirmation of the tragic spirit - almost literally as it appears in the origins of tragedy in ritual celebrating

> the death of the fertility god Dionysus. Here as there the god dies and is reborn in one rite. Flowing between the inevitable opposites of pride and humility, joy and sorrow, birth and death, life takes meaning from process.[74]

The difference then is that in All God's Chillun Got Wings two remain two - white Ella and black Jim - while in The Great God Brown there is a violent attempt to make two become one - and there is a huge failure at the end, as Dion Brown dies. Imagination, however, plays a heavy hand in this process of integration of the two distinct halves into one, through a clever manipulation of masks. Again, this is a distinctive difference from All God's Chillun Got Wings. In the first play, the use of masks is restricted to two devices: the African mask on the wall, and the central characters' childish attempts to change their racial color. In the first case, it is static; in the second, it is dynamic, and it leads to the main use of masks in The Great God Brown.

The use of masks in The Great God Brown is indeed imaginative and dynamic: characters wear masks (except Billy Brown at first), take masks off, again, they put them on, to remove them later, at will. This has been criticized by scholars at large[75] while O'Neill himself defended it thus:

> It was interesting to watch, in the final rehearsals of The Great God Brown, how after using their masks for a time the actors and actresses reacted to the demand made by the masks that their bodies become alive and expressive and participate in the drama. Usually it is only the actor's

[74] Falk, pp.105-106.

[75] See Carpenter, p.111: "But the trouble with The Great God Brown lies in the confusing ambiguity of its use of masks."

> faces that participate. Their bodies remain bored spectators that have been dragged off to the theatre when they would have much preferred a quiet evening in the upholstered chair at home.[76]

And O'Neill adds, further on, a highly illuminating passage, commenting on such usages as "imaginative:"

> So when I argue here for a non-realistic imaginative theatre I am hoping, not only for added scope for playwright and director and scenic designer, but also for a chance for the actor to develop his art beyond the narrow range to which our present theatre condemns it. Most important of all, from the standpoint of future American culture, I am hoping for added imaginative scope for the audience, a chance for a public I know is growing yearly more numerous and more hungry in its spiritual need to participate in imaginative interpretations of life rather than merely identify itself with faithful surface resemblance of living.[77]

The use of masks in The Great God Brown is, indeed, imaginative, as masks become alive and are interchangeable with the person. Thus Margaret is shocked in the Prologue, when she sees Dion's face unmasked; she hardly recognizes him, and begs him to put his mask on again. Later on, in Act I, according to stage directions, Dion is "sitting behind the table, staring before him. The mask hangs on his breast below his neck, giving the effect of two faces. His real face has aged greatly, grown more strained and tortured, but at the same time, in some queer way, more selfless and ascetic, more fixed in its resolute withdrawal from life. The mask, too, has changed."[78]

With no mask on, Dion reads from the New Testament, but the mere awareness of someone coming makes him put

[76] "Memoranda," p.121.

[77] Ibid

[78] GGB, p.320.

his mask on, in a hurry. It is Margaret, his wife. The conversation that follows is punctuated with exclamation marks - an indication of the highly emotional state of both characters. In scene ii Margaret pays a visit to unmasked Billy Brown - and she is masked:

> Margaret enters. Her face is concealed behind the mask of the pretty young matron, still hardly a woman, who cultivates a naively innocent and bravely hopeful attitude toward things, and acknowledges no wound to the world.[79]

Her mask is on, and she deliberately masks her own opinion of Dion's attitude, as she discusses her husband with Billy Brown. Whatever she says then hardly agrees with what she has said to Dion himself in the previous scene. She wants Billy Brown to offer a job to her husband - and to hear her talk, there is no one to compare to her husband Dion. She manages to convince Brown, mainly because he is hopelessly in love with her.

As a contrast, in scene iii, at Cybel's parlour, Cybel's mask carelessly lies close to a cheap alarm clock. The juxtaposition of the mask and the alarm-clock sets the circumstances of freedom from pretences as well as freedom from time. Cybel and Dion talk to each other freely; there is a moment in which both put their masks on, because someone rings the bell; it is Billy Brown. They all talk and discuss; Dion removes his mask; later he replaces his mask and, for the first time, he alludes to his friend as "Omnipresent Successful Serious One, the Great God Mr. Brown, instead!"[80]

In Act II, Scene One, again Dion's and Cybel's

[79] GGB, p.325.

[80] GGB, p.334.

masks lie close to the clock. When Cybel mentions Brown, Dion reaches for his mask - a ravaged Mephistophelean mask full of cruelty and irony. Dion keeps removing and putting the mask on, as the dialogue proceeds; however, before he leaves, Cybel's question is self-revealing: "Haven't I told you to take off your mask in the house?"[81] They say good-bye; she hands him back his mask gently.

Left alone, Cybel has another visitor; this time it is Billy Brown, who does not recognize her as Cybel, since she has no mask on. He takes her for Cybel's sister, and asks her to remember him to Cybel when she writes to her.

Scene ii offers a contrast: Dion, with no mask on, reads aloud to his mask and talks to it as if it were a person. When Margaret comes he puts his mask on; but in desperation, he takes it off. Margaret cannot stand the sight of his face; she says: "Dion! Don't! I can't bear it! You're like a ghost! You're dead!"[82]

Margaret's words turn out to be prophetic. In scene iii Dion dies in Brown's office; Billy Brown then assumes his personality and starts to wear his mask. In Act III the plot becomes very complicated in terms of masks; Billy Brown is, at times, taken for Dion and at other times he is taken for himself; on the other hand, Margaret, extremely happy with Dion, needs no mask to hide her feelings. Billy Brown, for the first time, wears a mask that is very much like his own face. To this mask he addresses bitter words: "You're dead, William Brown, dead beyond hope of resurrection! It's the Dion you buried in your garden who

[81] GGB, p.339.

[82] GGB, p.343.

killed you, not you him!"[83]

And his plot to kill Billy Brown and become Dion Anthony permanently gets started. Ironically, enough, it will be his own downfall; Brown's disappearance leads the police to Dion. He is finally located at Cybel's. A moving scene follows, when Cybel recognizes him as Dion Brown; their peace and elation is short-lived, as the police comes to kill him. Cybel's public recognition of Man's identity is sharply followed by an ironical twist, in which the policeman asks: "How d'yuh spell it?"[84] - as if the whole species would not recognize one of his own kind. Dion Brown, Billy Brown, Dion Anthony - they are all masks of just one reality: Man; and the deliberate use of masks renders the play both dynamic and confusing. But its essential message that these are mere reflections of man's true reality really leads us to the third and most pervasive principle of poetical interpretation of life.

Poetry is implied from the very beginning, and it is associated with the mask; in the stage directions Dion Anthony is described as "masked;" "the mask is fixed forcing of his own face - dark, spiritual, poetic, passionately supersensitive, helplessly unprotected in its childlike, religious faith in life - into the expression of a mocking, reckless, defiant, gayly scoffing and sensual young Pan."[85]

83 GGB, p.357.

84 GGB, p.375.

85 GGB, p.310.

But poetry becomes inherent to the character of Dion Anthony at the very beginning, when he utters his very poetical speech, already quoted, which starts with a series of questions: "Why am I afraid to dance, I who love music and rhythm and grace and song and laughter?"[86]

Again, his reflections on his father, already referred to, are of the highest poetical order. And so are some of Cybel's comments such as "What's the good of bearing children? What's the use of giving birth to death?"[87] As a matter of fact, death becomes a highly poetical subject in this play. At the moment of his own death, Dion exclaims:

> I've loved, lusted, won and lost, sang and wept! I've been life's lover! I've fulfilled her will and if she's through with me now it's only because I was too weak to dominate her in turn. It isn't enough to be her creature, you've got to create her or she requests you to destroy yourself.[88]

Poetry seems to have been inherited by Brown along with Dion's mask. So far a prosaic character, Billy Brown explodes into poetry as he assumes his friend's personality; thus in the midst of a long tirade, he says:

> ...Now I am drinking your strength Dion - strength to love in this world and die and sleep and become fertile earth, as you are becoming now in my garden - your weakness the strength of my flowers, your failure as an artist painting then petals with life![89]

[86] GGB, p.315.

[87] GGB, p.339.

[88] GGB, p.347.

[89] GGB, p.359.

But in Brown's poetic utterances, there is something left of his own old, prosaic self: Falk, for instance, suggests this in the following passage:

> For all this ecstatic affirmation, with its embarrassing pseudo-poetry, the lines that stick in the reader's mind are those bitterly prosaic ones of Dion Brown's as he prepares to seek annihilation: 'This is Daddy's bedtime secret for today: Man is born broken. He lives by mending. The grace of god is glue!'(Act IV,Sc.i,Plays,III,p.318)[90]

Carpenter, on the other hand, comments on the same passage: "The final 'grace' of The Great God Brown, perhaps, lies in its symbolic joining of dissociated fragments of experience by the glue of the creative imagination."[91]

But poetic imagination does not end there; it is present in Dion Brown's prayer, a third echo to the The New Testament and Imitation of Christ:

> Mercy, Compassionate Savior of Man! Out of my depths I cry to you! Mercy on thy poor clod, thy clod of unhallowed earth, thy clay, the Great God Brown! Mercy, Savior![92]

However, the last lines of sheer poetry are left for Cybel to say:

> Always spring comes again bearing life! Always again! Always, always, forever again! - Spring again! - life again! - summer and fall and death and peace again! (with agonized sorrow) - but always, always, love and conception and birth and pain again - spring bearing the intolerable chalice of life again! - (then with agonized exultance) - bearing the glorious, blazing crown of life again![93]

[90] Falk,p.106.

[91] Carpenter,p.112.

[92] GGB,p.371.

[93] GGB,p.375.

There is a subtle rhythmic cadence starting with the repetition of words leading to a series of poetical fragments, incantatory, self-elusive, and significative; for Cybel's final song closes the circle once started by Dion Anthony in his early song to life and later continued by Dion Brown's poetical fragments after he assumed his friend's personality. In a play about matter versus spirit, these three characters - Dion Anthony, Dion Brown and Cybel - stand for poetry; poetry of religion in the first case, poetry of annihilation in the second, poetry of creation in the third. It is as if life were made of two movements: creative first, and self-destructive next; only the Earth, indulgent mother, would reconcile both, by receiving the germ of the first and the ashes of the second to mix them up in one perpetual chain of life turned into ashes and resurrected in the flower... For life, death, resurrection - future subjects to be discussed in Lazarus Laughed are already present in The Great God Brown as an embryo, to be developed further in the next play. When Margaret comes to complain that Billy Brown is working Dion to death, Brown laughs more than once, makes cryptic remarks, and ends by saying:

> See Dion? See Dion? Well, why not?
> It's an age of miracles. The streets
> are full of **Lazaruses**. Pray! I mean -
> wait a moment, if you please.[94]

A man who is dead is to appear again shortly - the conclusion of The Great God Brown is the very beginning of Lazarus Laughed; and both seem to be landmarks of

[94] GGB, p.367.

what is still to come.

Waith points out, "The relationship, as Kenneth Tynan acutely observed in his review of the recent revival, seems to anticipate the mingled love and hate between the two brothers in Long Day's Journey."[95] Carpenter, on the same subject, has something else to add:

> The Great God Brown succeeded on the stage in spite of its strange plot, and it continues to fascinate the reader despite its confusing use of masks. Its occasional excellence derives partly from its author's autobiographical insight, reflected in the action, and partly from his creative use of his wide reading. Dion's tragedy is clearly an allegory of O'Neill's own. Cybel tells him: 'you're not weak. You were born with ghosts in your eyes and you were brave enough to go looking into your own dark.'[96]

May we add, then, that both critics have certainly suggested The Great God Brown as an embryo for Long Day's Journey Into Night? The love-hate relationship of Dion Anthony and Billy Brown finds its counterpart in Jamie's love and hate for Edmund; the ghosts in Dion's eyes could well be those of the haunted Tyrones. Thus another piece of the puzzle may be added; if Jim and Ella Harris in All God's Chillun Got Wings are, in a way, a disguise for O'Neill's parents, Dion Anthony and Billy Brown are certainly aliases for James and Eugene O'Neill.

In the mid-twenties, and with the help of masks, O'Neill writes the unconscious autobiography he is later to present fully unmasked and in larger scale in Long Day's Journey Into Night. But this is still to come in the

[95] Waith, p.37.

[96] Carpenter, pp.111-112.

forties; in the twenties, O'Neill is not yet ready to face his own dead. His own art had not touched them to bring them back to life like Lazarus, the object of our next chapter.

## IV. Lazarus Raised from the Dead

There is a passage in the Bible which mentions a certain man named Lazarus, from Bethany. When he fell sick, his sister Mary who had anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, looked for Jesus and informed him of the fact by saying: "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." When Jesus heard that, he said: "this sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."

Jesus, however, remained two days in the same place where he was, before inviting his disciples to go into Judea again. Arriving in Bethany, Jesus found out that Lazarus had lain in the grave for four days, and that his body was probably in the process of disintegration. Many of the Jews had come to comfort Martha and Mary in concern with their brother's death. As soon as Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him and said: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." Jesus then answered thus: "Thy brother shall rise again." And Jesus complemented: "I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. "Martha went away; she called her sister Mary who had been in the house, weeping for her brother Lazarus. When Mary knew about Jesus, she rose up hastily and went out

to meet him. She saw him and fell down at his feet. When Jesus saw Mary weeping, he said "where have ye laid him?" They said to him: "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. Then some of the Jews said: "Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?" Jesus then came to the grave which was a cave covered with a stone and said: "Take ye away the stone." Martha said to him: "Lord, by this time he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days." To what Jesus replied: "Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" The Jews then took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid, while Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me." And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice: "Lazarus, come forth." And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus said to them: "Loose him, and let him go."[97]

This story of the raising of Lazarus told in the Bible has been freely interpreted by many authors in many different ways. William Butler Yeats, for example, conceived Lazarus "as indignant that Christ had called him back from the peace of the dead," while Robinson Jeffers conceived Lazarus "as unaffected by emotion because he had been freed from the illusions of life." For Eugene O'Neill, however, Lazarus is "wholly positive,"

[97] Freely adapted from N.T. John XI,1-57. The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, trans. The Gideons International, 1972 ed., pp.301-305.

because "he welcomes all life with joy, now that he has passed beyond the fear of death."[98]

Eugene O'Neill's drama Lazarus Laughed had its first performance in 1928 at the Pasadena Community Playhouse, in Pasadena, California, to an audience that not only filled the house, but also received the play with great enthusiasm. The play required a lot of money and a lot of work, as for its production an amount of four hundred costumes, three hundred masks and innumerable wigs were necessary; besides that, there was still the nature of its theme, rearrangement of platforms, sets of stairs, and the use of huge columns. The play had a body of a hundred twenty-five supernumeraries and employees specially trained to give an effect of ever moving mobs in continual procession before the audience. The use of chorus and crowds was most effective in the final scene where the crowd, located on a higher platform, watched the martydom of Lazarus at the stake, while the cry of Lazarus - "there is no death" - becomes the theme for many of the choruses in the play. The music for this play was composed by Arthur Alexander, formerly head of the Eastman Orchestra at Rochester, N.Y. The actors were carefully chosen: Lazarus was superbly played by Irving Pichel, whose laughter at one time ran without cessation for four minutes. Gilmor Brown, director of the Playhouse, performed Tiberius, Victor Jory was Caligula, Dore Wilson played the role of Pompeia, and Lenore Shanewise interpreted Miriam, Lazarus'wife.-

[98] Carpenter, p.118.

The plot of Lazarus Laughed is the story of Lazarus after he has been raised from the dead, that is, after his resurrection. The story develops in three different places, as it starts in Judea, moves to ancient Greece, and finally ends in Rome. In Act One Lazarus reappears among his family and neighbors in Judea, to whom he preaches that - "there is no death." He is a tall and powerful man of about fifty years of age. Inside his house, seven male Guests are grouped watching Lazarus, while the Chorus of Old Men, also seven in number, face him. All of these people are masked, except Lazarus himself, who is unmasked.

The second scene, however, develops some months later, in the exterior of Lazarus' home in Bethany, and shows the conflict between two hostile groups: his Christian followers, and the Orthodox believers of the old religion. Act two takes place in a square in Athens, where Lazarus is hailed as the new incarnation of the God Dionysus, and the second scene develops at mid-night, in a Temple inside the walls of Rome, where Lazarus proclaims his new gospel to the senators and legionnaires.

Next, Acts Three and Four develop some days later, and are performed in the garden of Tiberius' palace at Capri. They narrate the struggle between Lazarus' faith and the cynical disbelief of Tiberius and Caligula, by whom he is finally burned at the stake at dawn.

The play is full of contrasts, starting with Lazarus himself, who is about fifty years of age in Act One, looks less than thirty-five in Act Two, and looks no more than

twenty-five in Act Three. He is the opposite of Miriam, who is a delicate woman of thirty-five in Act One, and becomes a sad and resigned lady in Act Three. She grows old so rapidly, that her hair is almost white by the end of the play. Another point of contrast is that Miriam is always dressed in black and longs for death, while Lazarus is always dressed in white and clings to life. In fact, the play is composed of antitheses such as: death versus life, hate versus joy, evil versus goodness, despair versus ecstasy, Jews against the Nazarenes, Romans against Greeks and Jews, and so fourth.

O'Neill's Lazarus Laughed is also a play full of imaginative devices, starting with the use of masks, which is richly employed by all characters in the play, except Lazarus, who remains unmasked throughout the four acts.

Besides the use of masks, the play also deals with three periods of age - middle age, maturity, and old age; and five types of character - the self tortured introspective, the proud self-reliant, the servile hypocritical, the cruel revengeful, and the resigned sorrowful. Each period is represented by seven different masks of general types and there is a distinct predominant color for its costumes, which varies in kind according to its period. There are other imaginative devices which are used in the play, as for example, Lazarus returns from the dead with a positive affirmation that there is no death; he also stresses the constant use of an exultant "Yes," and an enigmatic laughter, which reveals power

and joy:

> Lazarus: Laugh! Laugh with me! Death is dead!
> Fear is no more! There is only life!
> There is only laughter!
> Chorus: Laugh! Laugh!
> Laugh with Lazarus!
> Fear is no more!
> There is no death![99]

Lazarus is always dressed in white with an aura of light emanating from his body. His face is beautiful, his eyes shine with glory, his words are convincing. His laugh is like music that in certain occasions becomes more intense. He is optimistic, but when he speaks he denotes authority in his voice, giving the people the confidence they need to convert themselves to his creed. The multitudes join his laughter and stare at him with admiration:

> Followers of Lazarus(in a great chanting singing chorus)
> Laugh! Laugh!
> There is only God!
> Life is His Laughter!
> We are His Laughter!
> Fear is no more!
> Death is dead![100]

Lazarus Laughed is a mystical drama; O'Neill was probably influenced by the image of Nietzsche's superman, as Lazarus is a kind of hero who, having experienced death and resurrection stands above the common level of all human creatures. In Nietzsche's philosophy of the Eternal Recurrence, he means "the absolute and eternal cyclical repetition of all things: the hypothesis that all the events of history are destined to be re-enacted,

[99] LL, p.388.

[100] LL, p.426.

precisely as they first occurred, in the same order and sequence, and not once only, but again and again, through all eternity."[101]

Considering Nietzsche's point of view, O'Neill observed the repetition of the phenomena of birth and death, as part of the circular process, where all problems, hopes, and dreams of mankind enter a process of endless repetition. This is the reason why Lazarus speaks to all men at all times.

Besides Lazarus and wife Miriam, there are other important characters in the play such as Caligula, Lazarus' main antagonist. Caligula wears a mask that covers only the upper part of his face to the section below the nose. Caligula is cruel, spoiled, weak and has a domineering personality; Tiberius, the Emperor, on the other hand, is an old man of seventy-six, tall and corpulent. He too, wears a half mask, behind which he hides his cynical and evil personality; there is also Pompeia, Tiberius' mistress, a Roman noblewoman, who wears a half-mask on the upper part of her face. Her mask is beautiful, her body is strong, and her complexion is pale. O'Neill's Lazarus Laughed impresses the audience with the use of abundant rhetoric, with the choreographic movements of its crowds, with the colorful sound effects of its choruses, and, above all, with the colorful power produced by its visual effects. It is undoubtedly a drama of pure mysticism, and is among the major works of American drama.

However, it has received the most adverse criticism from time to time; Cyrus Day, for instance, says:

[101] Cyrus Day, "Amor Fati: O'Neill's Lazarus as Superman and Savior" p.76, in Gassner ed. O'Neill: A Collection of Critical Essays; hereafter to be cited as Day.

> Lazarus Laughed is O'Neill's ugly didactic duckling; it is a tract in the guise of a play. Despite his own emotional involvement, and despite the masks, the crowds, the pageantry, the violence, and - yes - the importance of the subject, O'Neill did not succeed in transmuting his ideas into what the critics of the 1950's have become accustomed to calling viable drama.[102]

Waith, too, criticizes the play in the following terms:

> The relentless forward movement of Lazarus Laughed toward more and more exultant assertion of the value of life is part of what makes it the tedious play it is. There is no let-up in this yea-saying. Lazarus himself is a cross between Nietzsche's Zarathustra and Molly Bloom: his first word, like her last, is 'Yes!' to be said, according to the stage-direction, 'Suddenly in a deep voice - with a wonderful exultant acceptance in it!'[103]

Carpenter, in turn, sounds no more encouraging:

> Unique among O'Neill's dramas - and indeed, in all dramatic literature - is Lazarus laughed. It marks a turning point in his career. In it he attempted what few authors - and fewer playwrights - have ever done: to create a Paradiso, or ideal image of man; and, what is more difficult, to dramatize this ideal in terms of human action. Although he did not fully succeed, he did create a memorable work of the dramatic imagination.[104]

Yet, speaking in more general terms, Carpenter sums up criticism of the play thus:

> Criticism of Lazarus Laughed takes two forms. The first condemns the religious conception, and the gospel, or ideas, which the hero proclaims. The second condemns the abstraction of the play, and the imperfect dramatization of its ideal myth. The criticism of O'Neill's religious conception has often been narrow and doctrinaire, but the criticism of his imperfect realization of his myth in dramatic terms is more valid. One can only answer that O'Neill attempted the impossible, and partially succeeded.[105]

[102] Day, p.81.

[103] Waith, p.36.

[104] Carpenter, p.116.

[105] Carpenter, p.118.

Only Raleigh seems to disagree with what seems to be a commonplace in the criticism of O'Neill's plays; he simply says:

> Lazarus Laughed is the last of the O'Neill history plays of the distant past; it is also the most serious, profound, original, and distinctive work of this genre, as much an advance, in seriousness and originality, over Marco Millions, as Marco was over The Fountain.[106]

His words apparently echo O'Neill's own point of view in "Memoranda on Masks:" ... and finally, in Lazarus Laughed, "in which all the characters except Lazarus remain masked throughout the play. I regard this use of masks as having been uniformly successful."[107]

Certainly, both O'Neill and Raleigh are right in considering the play a success in terms of imagination; because it is, indeed, as his creator wanted it to be, a play for imaginative people.

But in order to detect the elements of imagination in the play, we will submit it to an examination of the three guiding principles we selected to direct us through this study of the three plays written in the mid-twenties. Again, we will invert the order, and see it first in its poetical interpretation of life; then, we will consider its symbolical celebration of life; then, we will consider it under the point-of-view of imagination. We believe this last principle to be all pervading and all prevailing in Lazarus Laughed. The motive for this inversion at this point is that we think that there is little poetry in the play; whatever poetry there is, it is only to be found in occasional

[106] Raleigh, p.42.

[107] "Memoranda," p.119.

> into flaming seed! The fields of infinite space are sown - and grass for sheep springs up on the hills of earth! But there is no death, nor fear, nor loneliness! There is only God's Eternal Laughter! His Laughter flows into the lonely heart![111]

This passage is highly charged with emotion - its very punctuation, an exaggerated use of exclamation marks, points this out; but its fragmentary nature, its cosmic allusions suggest a new role for words, which is to convey the hidden meaning of the play through the symbolical celebration of life. Falk has, indeed, called it "a vast symbolical pageant"[112] apparent from its very title, Lazarus Laughed. Carpenter comments on the title thus:

> The title Lazarus Laughed was chosen to contrast with the shortest verse in the Bible 'Jesus wept;' and these are the first two words spoken in O'Neill's play. Lazarus is intended as the counterpart of Jesus, and he now acts and preaches the joyous gospel of the resurrected Christ, in contrast to the tragic story of the crucified Christ. In origin and intention, Lazarus is Christian.[113]

However, through Lazarus is Christian in his origin, he seems to be all encompassing, for he is identified with Dionysus in the section dealing with Athens, and with mysterious magic from the East in Rome. He speaks to all men, to all races, and his message is indeed universal: "there is no death." This gospel of simplicity causes the strangest effects; it leads to fight and death between the Nazarenes and the Orthodox people, to suicide and homicide in Rome. For Lazarus is a paradox himself - a man who once died, he came back to preach to people that there is no death - in clear opposition to Christ

111 LL, p.457.

112 Falk, p.109.

113 Carpenter, p.118.

utterances of Miriam or Lazarus himself. Carpenter notices this thus: "At its best the eloquence achieves the effect of poetry, and it translates the laughter into words. But O'Neill was too little the poet to succeed by means of eloquence alone."[108] If there is little poetry, and sometimes it sounds chaotic, there is, however, a symbolical celebration of life only superseded by the use of imagination. Thus the inversion of the order of principles at this point obeys the logical principle of quantity. When Miriam questions Lazarus, "Then how could you laugh when they were dying?" Lazarus replies, in the midst of a tirade, with a beautiful poetic passage that has been identified by critics as an echo of Emerson's "Brahma."[109]

> ...We will to die! We will to change! Laughing we lived with our gift, now with laughter give we back that gift to become again the Essence of the Giver! Dying we laugh with the Infinite. We are the Giver and the Gift! Laughing, we will our own annihilation! Laughing we give our lives for Life's sake!...[110]

In this short utterance there is the barbaric rhythm of old rites, the repetition of words, the cryptic language of long-lived and long-forgotten poetry.However, the most poetical language is kept for Lazarus' adieu to Miriam:

> ...Lonely no more! Man's loneliness is but his fear of life! Lonely no more! Millions of laughing stars there are around me! And laughing dust, born once of woman on this earth, now freed to dance! New stars are born of dust eternally! The old, grown mellow with God, burst

[108] Carpenter, p.120.

[109] Carpenter, p.119.

[110] LL, p.432.

who is said to have died, and is parodied in the crucified lion in Tiberius' palace. What Lazarus is really saying is that death is a mere passage to life everlasting; he is dramatically voicing the Nietzschean principle of eternal recurrence - and the contrast between orthodox Christian belief, and Nietzschean belief of eternal recurrence is symbolically expressed in the two major characters, Miriam and Lazarus. Miriam, an obvious symbol of Christian pain, submits herself to her fate, grows old, and finally dies; she is always dressed in black, whereas Lazarus, always dressed in white and gold, grows progressively younger as the play develops. When the play starts, he is fifty-five; when he dies a second time in the fire, his voice and his laughter sound childish. At the time O'Neill composed the play, he was under the strong influence of Nietzsche's theories, and probably believed that old and corrupted, Christianity had indeed been superseded by Zarathustra's New Gospel. Lazarus, and O'Neill through him, is speaking to the whole mankind; as Falk suggests,

> Obviously, in his use of the Hebraic Lazarus who gains a Greek insight from Christ, O'Neill implies analogy between the Christian, Hebraic, and Greek mythological patterns. His real emphasis, however, is upon the ritual death of Lazarus as Dionysus - 'Not,' says O'Neill,
>
> 'the coarse, drunken Dionysus, nor the effeminate God, but Dionysus in his middle period, more comprehensive in his symbolism, the soul of the recurring seasons, of living and dying as processes in eternal growth, of the wine of life stirring forever in the sap and blood and loam of things.' (Act II.Sc.i,Plays,I.p.415)

> But ritual is one thing and drama is another. By his deliberate use of established symbols O'Neill has conceptualized his philosophy in Lazarus Laughed, but he has not dramatized it. He has become what Emerson called not a poet (or creative artist), but a mystic who attempts to 'nail a meaning' to a given symbol.[114]

And this symbol, central in Lazarus Laughed, has been defined by Falk thus:

> By accepting the disunity of process, the finders have rediscovered then lost harmony with nature. Man's inner life moves through the cycle of birth and death as nature moves. The unity of his life is organic, infused with one creative spirit within which all opposites are one.[115]

"...All opposites are one" - is not that an answer to the problem first proposed in All God's Chillun Got Wings (black versus white, sane versus insane) further expanded in The Great God Brown (the spirit versus matter, the artist versus businessman)? Thus the real significance of Lazarus Laughed in this short-lived cycle of masked plays becomes all-too obvious; it is a final step taken toward the direction of reconciliation of irreconcilable elements - Christ and Dionysus, life and death, the integration of two into one. In order to express this central symbol, however, O'Neill appealed to imagination in an exuberant way through two main devices: laughter and masks. For the second principle of symbolical celebration of life is intimately associated with the third principle of imagination.

Imagination is the chief appeal in O'Neill's

[114] Falk, p.113.

[115] Falk, p.111.

extensive use of laughter and masks throughout the play. In the first case the appeal was audio-oral; in the second, it was mainly visual. In both cases it represents an advance from The Great God Brown, a play we consider an embryo for Lazarus Laughed. We have already pointed out a passage in The Great God Brown explicitly referring to Lazarus; we will now refer to another passage which foretells the laughter of the later play:

> Brown: Well, it certainly isn't drink. He hasn't had a drop. He doesn't need it 'Haha! And I haven't either, although the gossips are beginning to say I'm soused all the time! It's because I've started to laugh! Hahaha! They can't believe in joy in this town except by the bottle! What funny little people! Hahaha! When you're the Great God Brown, eh, Margaret? Hahaha![116]

Brown laughs for he is, according to his own admission a few moments later, "too near the grave..." as Lazarus once was in a grave, he has the ability to laugh, and to make people laugh. When they laugh they are, for a moment, supremely happy; they are so happy they forget human contingencies such as sadness, sickness, or death. "There is no death," they claim; and to prove that, they either kill or get killed. The laughter, awkward as it may sound on stage, is only subsidiary to the use of masks, a main feature in the play.

The use of masks in Lazarus Laughed is indeed complex. It has very little to do with the static African mask of All God's Chillun Got Wings or the dynamic use of masks in The Great God Brown, where the action as well as

[116] GGB, p.367.

the acting becomes complicated with a series of put-on or take-off masks by individual characters; it is rather a combination of both. It is static because characters are personified by the masks they wear; on the other hand, it is dynamic because there is a multiplicity of masks, implying a number of changes in the human condition. Stage directions emphasize the nature and appearances of masks, grouping them according to age, social condition, and psychological disposition. Raleigh is very elucidative in his analysis of the masks, and what they stand for:

> The characters of Lazarus Laughed fall into two categories: inner characters and outer characters. The outer characters are all masked types, and they are typed in three ways: according to age, of which there are seven; according to character, of which there are seven; and according to race, of which there are seven; and according to race, of which there are three: Jew, Greek, and Roman. By blending his three basic types in various and changing ways, O'Neill manages to suggest a great human world which is at one and the same time universally typical and infinitely varied - the play requires four hundred costumes and three hundred masks - and the masks, far from depersonalizing the people of this enormous chorus, individualize them in a peculiarly dramatic fashion.
>
> ...The inner characters, Lazarus, Miriam, Caligula, Tiberius, Pompeia, are set off, except for Lazarus who is unmasked, by the fact that they wear half-masks on the upper part of their faces. Again, these masks are not meant to depersonalize but to characterize and individualize in an extraordinarily telling and graphic manner. Lazarus alone is unmasked, which means that he is a complete, unified, and harmonious human being. Miriam's upper face is masked but there is no great discrepancy between her upper mask and lower face, which means that she is, though a lesser being than Lazarus, still a harmonious one. The three most

> interesting inner characters are Caligula, Pompeia, and Tiberius, each of whose personalities, as their respective half - masks indicate, is radically split.[117]

There will be no awkward movement to put on or remove the mask, no split case of personality as in The Great God Brown; instead, there is the highly effective juxtaposition of unmasked Lazarus and the multiplicity of masked people. One alone - Lazarus - is a whole, unified, integrated person; everybody else is split, torn between the highly conflicting forces of will and power.

But the fact that Lazarus is one and does not change sets a difficulty for the character, denounced by Day;

> He is a static character, incapable of learning anything more by suffering than he has already learned. ...Lazarus is colorless as well as static. He has no personal traits of any distinctive kind; he is not, in fact, a recognizable human being. He is a symbol, an abstraction, a mere mouthpiece - and an inarticulate one at that - for O'Neill's ideas.[118]

But that, probably, was O'Neill's intention from the first: to have a static and colorless character oppose multicolored and masked crowds. There would be both unity and variety; the coordination of both would set off his message both clearly and distinctively: Man should strive for the simplicity of the process of individuation, and neutralize the splitting forces in himself. Dion Anthony and Billy Brown cannot coalesce and coexist in Dion Brown - one has to kill the other;

[117] Raleigh, pp.44-45.

[118] Day, pp.80-81.

man must face himself and death, and ultimately say "yes" to life. This is O'Neill's problem in the mid-twenties, and he hides his own fears behind the multiple masks of Lazarus Laughed. Again, Raleigh has acutely and correctly identified Lazarus Laughed with Long Day's Journey Into Night:

> It is not often that one's own family bulks so large as to provide the cast of characters for the rulers of the Roman Empire, but such was the case with the O'Neills. At this point in his life, however, he could approach them obliquely, by way of Rome in A.D.37.[119]

So, as All God's Chillun Got Wings is distantly related to O'Neill's parents' life story, and The Great God Brown is a dramatic rendition of the antagonic forces opposing the Tyrone brothers, Lazarus Laughed provides the psychological setting for the final act in Long Day's Journey Into Night: all characters end up doing what they hate most and what they have struggled not to do: they have said "Nay" to life, and have, as a consequence, forgotten to laugh.

Thus in the mid-twenties O'Neill is still masked, indirectly using the story of his family to write drama, and yet he is incapable of resurrecting the dead and facing them with pity and understanding; rather he stands, like Caligula, groveling and beating himself, calling himself names: "Fool! Madman! Forgive me Lazarus! Men forget!" - for, apparently, he too, has killed the remembrance of things past in himself and has found solac-

[119] Raleigh, p.47.

in the multiple images of the world of art. The future and Long Day's Journey Into Night are still to come: for the world of Lazarus is the universal world of drama in general, and the private world of the deluded Tyrones in particular.

Carpenter has something to add in connection with this sense of the future in Lazarus Laughed:

> When the Theatre Guild had finally decided against producing Lazarus Laughed because of the expense and the technical difficulties involved, O'Neill speculated on its future. If only Chaliapin could be persuaded to play the part of Lazarus, singing the laughter in his magnificent operatic voice! In later years amateur groups have experimented in recording the laughter in musical cadences, and replaying it on the stage; but the result has seemed artificial. O'Neill subtitled Lazarus Laughed, a Play for the Imaginative Theatre.Perhaps in some theater of tomorrow, a combination of drama, opera, and pageantry may realize its potentialities. Who knows? [120]

The answer to Carpenter's final question may be that the cosmic transcendence of Lazarus can only be presented in the world as a stage, and in the time of the future - or else, just as a play to be read and performed in the reader's mind.

[120] Carpenter, pp.120-121.

## Conclusion

One of the chief purposes of this study has been to point out the overall ruling principle of unity in variety; thus three totally different plays written by O'Neill in the mid-twenties have yielded their secret that they do compose an organic whole, and that they have, in themselves, the three guidelines of the "Memoranda on Masks." These elements may be irregularly distributed and one pronciple may prevail over the other two; however, we come to the conclusion that All God's Chillun Got Wings is chiefly symbolical, while The Great God Brown is a poetical celebration of life, and Lazarus Laughed is really a play for imaginative people.

Our point of view could well be endorsed by Raleigh, who once noticed:

> Throughout O'Neill's dramatic career one can see this same process again and again: a character or an idea or a situation which is treated in a minor or secondary way in one play becomes dominant in a succeeding play. Especially is this true of the sequence, from 1923 to 1926, of Marco Millions, The Great God Brown, and Lazarus Laughed, which have all kinds of cross references and common themes. These plays constitute what might be called the 'apocalyptic' phase of O'Neill's career.[121]

The one thing we question is the starting point of the so called "apocalyptic plays:" it is not Marco Millions, written about the same time O'Neill wrote The Great God Brown; it starts really a year earlier, with All God's Chillun Got Wings and their common link is the mask motif.

[121] Raleigh, pp.41-42.

In All God's Chillun Got Wings the African mask is a theatrical prop used to intensify the dramatic action; it is both impressive and static. In The Great God Brown the use of masks to personify characters is both intense and dynamic, but it offers a stage problem difficult to be solved, as the characters keep putting them on or taking them off - this becomes a complicated and tiresome process. The difficulty was partially settled in the third play, Lazarus Laughed, when the characters received their masks permanently - never took them off - and contrasted violently with unmasked Lazarus. The seed of the principle is already present in The Great God Brown, in the character of Billy Brown, who remains unmasked in the earlier part of the play; he wears a mask, very similar to his own face, when he disguises his true feelings for Margaret; and finally he takes Dion's mask and uses it along with his own - a difficult device to be presented on the stage.

However, we may call the three plays "Apocalyptic" if we take the term to imply the idea of revelation. The three plays do reveal O'Neill's feelings at the time, principally if we consider the main fact that his father, James O'Neill, died in August 1920; his mother, Ellen, in 1922; and his brother, James O'Neill Jr., in 1923. The three plays do reveal his feelings towards the dead indirectly, as it has already been pointed out: All God's Chillun Got Wings is really about O'Neill's parents' intricate marital relationship, The Great God Brown is truly about the brothers' relationship; Lazarus Laughed,

on the other hand, may well have been the playwright's liberated self as related to the family as a whole. And a point has always been made that these three plays have been related to Long Day's Journey Into Night by critics at large; we consider O'Neill's posthumous play a real exercise in unmasking, as Waith would say. From the conflicts of life the artist created immortal art in a long life's journey into light; Falk indirectly comments on the fact thus:

> O'Neill lived according to his own 'Dogma for the New Masked Drama,' wherein 'One's outer life passes in a solitude haunted by the masks of others; one's inner life passes in a solitude hounded by the masks of oneself.' The tragic tension between opposite masks does result in a kind of creativity and action, to be sure, but it is not directed toward the objective world which demands such action. It is directed within and against the self. In this sense the tension is not really a supporting framework, a psychological and moral order within which one can move and produce. It is a trap from which there is no escape, where one is doomed to lifelong participation in a conflict between values and self-conceptions.[122]

The evidence is that O'Neill succeeded in escaping from the trap: he wrote Long Day's Journey Into Night, and permanently solved the conflict between values and self-conception through love, pity, and understanding of his dead. A suggestion for further study which would be worthwhile taking in the future would be the dissection of Long Day's Journey Into Night and the relation to the episodes in the three plays studied here. It could be done through a parallel-comparative study of the texts

[122] Falk, p.119.

mentioned; but since Long Day's Journey Into Night was only written in the forties, it does not belong to the present study.

The questions first posed in the introduction have thus been fully answered in this paper: O'Neill turned to masks in the mid-twenties not only because he was experimenting with the device, but also because he was secretly dealing with his own inner feelings towards his family; he abandoned the device later (he only referred to faces with mask-like effects in Mourning Becomes Electra - 1931), because, first, they were too clumsy to handle on the stage; second, because he had effectively gone through his catharsis in the writing of the three plays mentioned in this study. He did not need them any longer when he faced the dead Tyrones, except for the curious fact that he adopted the name of his dead brother, Edmund, and referred to the dead baby as Eugene. The use of masks by O'Neill in the mid-twenties, then, turned out to be a novelty; in spite of his "Memoranda on Masks" of 1931, claiming the use of masks for almost every one of his plays, still, his plays were produced as in their earlier version, that is, without masks. For O'Neill had looked into death and, like Lazarus, had said "Yes" to life.

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