EUGENE O'NEILL, AN ANALYSIS OF
THREE METAPHYSICAL PLAYS:
THE GREAT GOD BROWN, LAZARUS LAUGHED, AND DYNANO

by
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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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ABSTRACT

This work is an attempt to establish a previously unnoted cycle of plays by Eugene O'Neill. Also, it attempts to identify the metaphysical concepts expressed in the plays and evaluate the treatment and development in the cycle. All three plays were predicated upon the belief, as stated by O'Neill, that the old god is dead. This assumption brings the author and his characters to seek a replacement for the human need to believe in something.

Each play presents a different approach to the problem of replacing god. Brown presents the materialistic solution, in the form of Billy Brown, failing. Lazarus presents another course involving the individual becoming a superman, somehow above the struggle. Finally, Dynamo shows pure science failing to surfeit man's need for a religion.

Although each play displays a different approach to the problem, each is weakened by an identical failing. Every effort to create viable, serious drama in the lives of real people, is scuttled by schematizing the characters into obvious representations. This militates against the themes presented, as well as the dramatic validity of characters and their acts.

In this paper, the tendency toward schematization of character is identified, and the results in respect to the validity of each play are evaluated at some length. Unfortunately, the plays are seriously weakened by the apparent desire of O'Neill to have his people go beyond mere individuals and be representative types, as the use of masks would seem to indicate. The failure occurs when these characters are so easily recognized as types, rather than individuals, and their symbolic message is so grossly communicated that their dialogue is anticlimactic.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis will be to establish that the three plays, *The Great God Brown*, *Lazarus Laughed*, and *Dynamo*, make up a cycle of plays which has as its unifying principle the setting forth of certain metaphysical ideas. More particularly, the purpose will be to show that in these three plays, more than anywhere else in his work, O'Neill allowed his preoccupation with metaphysics to influence his writing in such a way as to seriously impair the dramatic effectiveness of the plays.

The unifying metaphysical theme of this cycle was best stated by O'Neill himself: "Most plays are concerned with the relation between men," he has said, "but that doesn't interest me at all. I am interested only in the relation between man and God." On another occasion he wrote: "The playwright today must dig at the roots of the sickness of today as he feels it—the death of the old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfying new one for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fears of death with."¹

As is well known, these statements apply in one degree or another to the major portion of O'Neill's mature plays. But they have a very special relevance to the plays to be examined

¹
here, for it was in these three plays that he explored the problem of "the sickness of today" most directly, most overtly, most completely. As the following pages will attempt to show, the three plays suffer in consequence.

They suffer, as we shall see, because on these occasions O'Neill allowed his theme to carry him away from basic methods of dramatic structure into a realm of abstract speculation more or less devoid of dramatic interest. More specifically, he leaves, in these plays, in varying degrees, the necessary context of specific reality to plunge into what John Gassner in *The Theatre in Our Times* has called "a vast inane of generalizations." Speaking more at length on this point, Gassner has said:

In generalizations, the result is too frequently an academic kind of playwriting that no one can produce, hieratic art which snuggles under the shadow of some great cathedral, or more or less sophomoric theatricality parading as profundity. To different degrees, O'Neill succumbed to generalization in... *Dynamo, Lazarus Laughed*, and other plays."

Significantly, O'Neill himself seems to have recognized some such weakness in one of the plays under consideration here; he has said:

It was far from my idea in writing *Brown* that this background pattern of conflicting tides in the soul of Man should ever overshadow and thus throw out of proportion the living drama of the recognizable human beings, Dion, Brown, Margaret and Cybel. I meant it always to be mystically within and behind them, giving them a significance
beyond themselves, forcing itself through them to expression in mysterious words, symbols, actions they do not themselves comprehend.

Here, O'Neill senses the flaws within the cycle. Although he mentions only Brown, the same tendency to make the characters represent schematized abstractions occurs in all three plays. Schematization takes place as the characters are overwhelmed by theme. They become little more than representations of terms in a discussion: e.g., character A represents "Man-in-search-of-a-new-god," character B represents "materialism-as-new-god," and so on. Gassner is again helpful in making clear the dangers of such a method:

In the various stylizations of drama, this danger of suppressing or depersonalizing the human being has been equally manifest, if not more so. Mechanization vitiated expressionism and expressionistically slanted drama. It even deprived the latter-day modern masters of some of the interest and power we had a right to expect of them. O'Neill, for example, overindulged in the schematization of characters and plays. . . . From The Emperor Jones to The Great God Brown, Dynamo, and Lazarus Laughed, O'Neill's plays would suffer to different degrees from a schematization of men and ideas. There was a great overflow of dramatic tension and energy in all his work, but this is not to be confused with a flow of life when he became Freudian or metaphysical.

Complete stylization and schematization can of course produce effective drama of a sort, as we know from Medieval Morality plays and from certain of the expressionist plays to which Gassner refers. But in these cases, the use of characters as mere embodiments of abstractions is clearly
deliberate. The trouble with the plays to be considered here is that a similar deliberateness is by no means apparent in them. Instead, O'Neill seems to offer us as flesh and blood, three-dimensional characters, agents whom we can only view as walking abstractions. In short, we are too often given in these plays, agents who function well neither as abstractions nor as concrete characters because O'Neill has in large measure failed to make them clearly the one or the other.

Examination of evidence in support of these generalizations will be the work of the following pages.
CHAPTER TWO: THE GREAT GOD BROWN

In the introduction to Nine Plays, Krutch says: "The Great God Brown . . . should remove any . . . doubt of the fact that O'Neill's concern was not with either the literal accidents of contemporary life or the local problems of our day." Herein lies the seed of failure in these plays, The Great God Brown, Lazarus Laughed, and Dynamo. O'Neill is so interested in discovering universals, that his techniques, his world, and finally his characters created to embody the thesis become too schematized to be relevant to our world.

As has been pointed out earlier, O'Neill is interested primarily in the great "conflicting tides" between and within men. These tides are a result of the themes O'Neill seems to predicate the plays upon; i.e., the old god is dead; materialism is used as a substitute and it, too, turns out to be dead; finally man dies leaving the result of his search too generalized to be convincing. The danger lies in the tendency to project these characters and ideas into ineffective generality. To achieve dramatic effectiveness, characters must be recognizable human beings, or at the very least, must have recognizable characteristics. O'Neill, in his attempt to pare away the superfluities and
highlight only those ideas important to his thesis, succeeds
only in eroding all but the most superficial aspects of
humanity. The characters become emotionless overgenerali-
izations.

For instance, early in the play we find Dion
discovering Margaret's love for him:

DION: (moved) Underneath? I love love! I'd
love to be loved! But I'm afraid! (Then
aggressively) Was afraid! Not now! Now I
can make love--to anyone! Yes, I love Peggy!
Why not? Who is she! Who am I! We love, you
love, they love, one loves! No one loves!
All the world loves a lover, God loves us all
and we love Him! Love is a word--a shameless
ragged ghost of a word--begging at all doors
for life at any price!

This speech reveals to us the depths of feeling of which
Dion is capable. Because this speech goes so deeply into
the emotions of Dion, we are immediately compassionate.

Dion, having been told that Margaret is waiting
for him, continues:

DION: (dazedly, to himself) Waiting--waiting for
me! (He slowly removes his mask. His face is
torn and transfigured by joy. He stares at
the sky raptly) O God in the moon, did you
hear? She loves me! I am not afraid! I
am strong! I can love! She protects me!
Her arms are softly around me! She is my skin!
She is my armor! Now I am born--I--the I!--
one and indivisible--I who love Margaret!
(He glances at his mask triumphantly--in tones
of deliverance) You are outgrown! I am beyond
you! (He stretches out his arms to the sky.)
O God, now I believe!

We accept this as a beginning of a real character,
one who is warm, who feels deeply, who involves the audience.
We see in Dion a human being, or at least one facet of a human being. It is reasonable to expect integrity and truth from Dion, at least as he sees it. Therefore, when he approaches Margaret without his mask, and she fails to recognize him, we would accept anger, frustration, pain, agony—any kind of masculine reaction to reflect the depth of his feeling. Instead, with an absolute lack of integrity, he shifts into the phony, self-saving device of irony and accepts this excuse for love. He accepts this rejection of his unmasked self without a murmur. One moment he tells us how important love is; the next, he totally accepts this mockery of love with only slight discomfiture.

Margaret says to him:

Who are you? Why are you calling me? I don't know you!

DION: (heart-brokenly) I love you!

MARGARET: (freezingly) Is this a joke—or are you drunk?

DION: (with a final pleading whisper) Margaret! (But she only glares at him contemptuously. Then with a sudden gesture he claps his mask on and laughs wildly and bitterly.) Ha-ha-ha! That's one on you, Peg!

Because we believed in Dion's depth of feeling, we are disappointed in the shallowness of his reaction. It is too facile, too slick. It is reasonable to doubt the character of Dion and his actions from this point on for the symbolic begins to undermine the fundamentally real in him.
The character of Dion is a fine example of what befalls all of O'Neill's efforts in these plays: they are reduced to the most obvious of types or stereotypes which serve the plays in a most unfortunate manner. This is true in that the characters never quite carry the necessary validity and effectiveness we would like.

The same sort of weakness found in Dion can be found in others in the play. For instance, William Brown must be considered the dramatic as well as the ideological heir of Dion, for he seeks the nature of Dion's successes with Margaret and assumes his identity after he dies by wearing his mask. This last touch is a distinct mark of the symbolic overwhelming the human and leaving the play weaker. However, from this action, we may conclude that their aspirations are similar. They both seek success, but this abstraction, success, is so grossly and so heavily represented by the somewhat melodramatic devices of masks that change characters into others and figurative murders that lead the culprit to his death in a blaze of police gunfire that the adequacy of the plot might be questioned.

O'Neill begins the play at the time of Brown's and Dion's high school graduation. We meet their families, to show us too patently, it would seem, that even people of completely different backgrounds and temperaments can be caught in the same web of circumstances. The descriptions
of the characters certainly point out the differences. Brown is described as "... a handsome, tall and athletic boy of nearly eighteen. He is blonde and blue-eyed, with a likeable smile and a frank restraint. His manner has the easy self-assurance of a normal intelligence." In short, Brown is the extrovert, easy to get along with, brother to Margaret, close friend to Dion. This facade of self-assurance serves him well until he finds he cannot have Margaret. Brown's love for her and his failure to win her create doubt in his mind and thus his desire to discover what it is that Dion has that he does not. This is a bit too schematic to be dramatically effective.

Dion "... is ... without repose, continually in restless nervous movement. His face is masked. The mask is a 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." Two such dissimilar persons could scarcely be found, and one wonders at their friendship. So the key to their destiny lies not in the similarity of characteristics, but in similarity of desire for success.

To be fair, it is necessary to the purposes of O'Neill to show some dissimilarities, for Dion and Brown must struggle between themselves over Margaret. These dissimilarities
ultimately decide who will win her hand. Also, they establish that different types of men share the same kind of fate.

The differences extend also to the families of the young men. Brown's family is ambitious for him. They wish him to be successful and happy. In short, they appear to be simple materialists, affably oriented to American society. We see this quite clearly in the following scene:

MOTHER: Isn't the moonlight clear! (She . . . sits on the center bench . . .) After he's through college Billy must study for a profession of some sort, I'm determined on that!

FATHER: (eagerly . . .) Just what I've been thinking, my dear. Architecture! How's that? Billy a first-rate, number-one architect! That's my proposition! What I've always wished I could have been myself! Only I never had the opportunity. But Billy—we'll make him a partner in the firm after. Anthony, Brown, and Son, architects and builders—instead of contractors and builders.

MOTHER: And we won't lay sidewalk—or dig sewers—ever again?

FATHER: (a bit ruffled) I and Anthony can build anything your pet can draw—even if it's a church! . . .

Here we have a picture of a family whose image is, at the very least, pleasant. Ultimate success is in the offing, and there is no internal conflict.

The Anthonys offer an entirely different picture: they seethe with dissension. Although the mother seems to understand Dion, it is never specified. Instead, she appears
to feel intuitively that Dion is unhappy. The father sees his boy as a loafer, a wastrel. He does not understand him. The Anthonys are materialistic, but not in the sense that the Browns are. There is rapport between the Browns, and therefore their materialism gives an air of well-being. The Anthonys blaze at one another; the father bitter, the mother frustrated, and Dion agonized in his struggle between the artistic and materialistic within himself.

MOTHER: (suddenly--pleading): You simply must send him to college!

FATHER: I won't. I don't believe in it. Colleges turn out lazy loafers to sponge on their poor old fathers! Let him slave like I had to! That'll teach him the value of a dollar! College'll only make him a bigger fool than he is already! I never got above grammar school but I've made money and established a sound business. Let him make a man out of himself like I made of myself!

DION: (mockingly--to the air) This Mr. Anthony is my father, but he only imagines he is God the Father . . .

FATHER: (with angry bewilderment) What--what--what's that?

MOTHER: . . . Dion, dear! (Then to her husband-- tauntingly) Brown takes all the credit! He tells everyone the success is all due to his energy--that you're only an old stick-in-the-mud!

FATHER: (stung, harshly) The damn fool! He knows better'n anyone if I hadn't held him down to common sense, with his crazy wild-cat notions, he'd have had us ruined long ago!
MOTHER: He's sending Billy to college—Mrs. Brown just told me—going to have him study architecture afterwards, too, so's he can help expand your firm!

FATHER: (angrily) What's that? (Suddenly turns on Dion furiously) Then you can make up your mind to go, too! And you'll learn to be a better architect than Brown's boy or I'll turn you out in the gutter without a penny! You hear?

DION: (mockingly—to the air) It's difficult to choose—but architecture sounds less laborious.

MOTHER: (fondly) You ought to make a wonderful architect, Dion. You've always painted pictures so well—

DION: (with a start—resentfully) Why must she lie? Is it my fault? She knows I only try to paint. (Passionately) But I will, some day! (Then quickly, mocking again) On to college! Well, it won't be home, anyway, will it? (He laughs queerly and approaches them. His father gets up defensively. Dion bows to him.) I thank Mr. Anthony for this splendid opportunity to create myself—(He kisses his mother, who bows with a strange humility as if she were a servant being saluted by the young master—then adds lightly)—in my mother's image, so she may feel her life comfortably concluded. (He sits in his father's place at center and his mask stares with a frozen mockery before him. They stand on each side, looking dumbly at him.)

There are several other interesting elements to be found in these scenes, besides a demonstration of the differences between the Browns and the Anthonys. We now know the Browns are relatively satisfied, while the Anthonys are involved in their intramural feuds. However, we find that only Dion is actively seeking a faith, searching for something in which to believe. It might be himself, his art, or God,
we do not know which, as yet. There is one fact which we do know: he has not accepted the convenient materialism embraced by his parents as Brown has. We see this as Dion mockingly expresses concern for his mother's comfortably concluded life. We see also his seeking, in the line "But I will, some day!", i.e., practice his art.

These same scenes also establish the inability of either the Browns or the Anthonys to conceive of any kind of eternal verity beyond this world. All save Dion seek to find their salvation in material success, perhaps even Margaret. She fills the rather stereotyped role of Wife. At first, her goals include being a good mother and a good wife. She seeks comfort for her family, but all of these seemingly homey virtues succeed in only pointing out the schematization of Margaret. There is no spiritual need in her for the fulfillment of these goals. We are not shown why Margaret must be a good wife and a good mother. Apparently, any woman should wish to be all of these things, and this might be true. But it does not help Margaret become a fully articulated character, nor does it distinguish her from women in general. All of this, then, tends to make Margaret, if not materialistic, at least very limited, compared to Dion, in her spiritual needs. But Dion wants something more, something which transcends the mundane. Dion feels that there must be more to living than materialism, but he does not know what.
Not only does Dion struggle with his family, but he also struggles with himself. O’Neill hints at this at the outset, by describing Dion as "... without repose ... dark, spiritual, poetic, passionately supersensitive, helplessly unprotected ..." He then gives Dion a mask, pictured as "... a mocking, reckless, defiant, gayly scoffing and sensual young Pan." The search, then, is not only for an object of faith, but for an identity.

O'Neill wrote a letter to the *New York Evening Post* in which he confirms this inner conflict. In it, he says this about Dion:

I had hoped the names chosen for my people would give a strong hint of this. (Man's struggles within himself) Dion Anthony--Dionysus and St. Anthony--the creative pagan acceptance of life, fighting eternal war with the masochistic, life-denying spirit of Christianity as represented by St. Anthony--the whole struggle resulting in this modern day in mutual exhaustion--creative joy in life for life's sake frustrated, rendered abortive, distorted by morality from Pan into Satan, into a Mephistopheles mocking himself in order to feel alive; Christianity, once heroic in martyrs for its intense faith now pleading weakly for intense belief in anything, even Godhead itself."

From this explanation, the duality of Dion's character is established reasonably well.

Fundamentally, no two people could be more dissimilar than Dion Anthony and Billy Brown. But O'Neill introduces a device which chains them helplessly together. They both love Margaret.
If Margaret is to be effective dramatically, she should exemplify some metaphysical value to Dion. Otherwise, Dion would have no need of her, outside of simple earthly comfort. Brown, of course, needs no other justification to love her. Margaret should symbolize ideal humanity, or at least ideal womanhood, purity, honor, or creative spirit, something metaphysical. Any of these might help Dion to discover his own identity and grasp some object of faith. Instead, all he finds is "love" which is not even directed at him, but at the mask he wears.

From the very beginning, O'Neill seems to have failed in making the character of Margaret three-dimensional. O'Neill describes her as follows in the prologue: "On her entrance, her face is masked with an exact, almost transparent reproduction of her own features, but giving her the abstract quality of a Girl instead of the individual, Margaret."

In O'Neill's letter to the New York Evening Post, he further explained Margaret. "Margaret is my image of the modern direct descendant of the Marguerite of Faust—the eternal girl-woman with a virtuous simplicity of instinct, properly oblivious to everything but the means to her end of maintaining the race."

This telegraphs the danger which any playwright faces when he conceives of character in terms of cold, dehumanized ideas, rather than warm, human, and therefore dramatically
interesting, characteristics. To exemplify this, we need only compare Dion to Margaret.

We see in Dion uncertainties, needs, fears, hopes, which spring from deep within his being. He must have love, or his soul shrivels and dies. Margaret, as we shall see, needs only a Provider, a father for her children; in short, material security. She needs the trappings of marriage, not Dion. She needs a Man, since she is only a Girl.

DION: . . . (He suddenly tears off his mask—in a passionate agony) . . . I love you with all my soul! Love me! Why can't you love me, Margaret? (He tries to kiss her, but she jumps to her feet with a frightened cry holding up her mask before her face protectingly.)

MARGARET: Don't! Please! I don't know you! You frighten me!

DION: (puts on his mask again—quietly and bitterly) All's well. I'll never let you see again. (He puts his arm around her—gently mocking.) By proxy, I love you. There! Don't cry! Don't be afraid! Dion Anthony will marry you some day. (He kisses her.) "I take this woman—" (Tenderly joking) Hello, woman! Do you feel older by aeons? Mrs. Dion Anthony, shall we go in and may I have the next dance?

MARGARET: (tenderly) You crazy child! (Then, laughing with joy) Mrs. Dion Anthony! It sounds wonderful, doesn't it? (They go out as the curtain falls.)

This incident should have shown Dion conclusively that nothing but frustration awaited him, in a marriage to Margaret. It does not. Thus, we are not surprised when,
seven years later, their marriage is a mutually debilitating relationship:

MARGARET: (with a forced gaiety) Good morning--at four in the afternoon! You were snoring when I left!

DION: (puts his arms around her with a negligent, accustomed gesture—mockingly) The Ideal Husband!

MARGARET: (already preoccupied with another thought—comes and sits in chair on left) I was afraid the children would disturb you, so I took them over to Mrs. Young's to play. (a pause. He picks up the paper again. She asks anxiously) I suppose they'll be all right over there, don't you? (He doesn't answer. She is more hurt than offended.) I wish you'd try to take more interest in the children, Dion.

DION: (mockingly) Become a father—before breakfast? I'm in too delicate a condition. (She turns away, hurt. Penitently he pats her hand—vaguely) All right. I'll try.

MARGARET: (squeezing his hand—with possessive tenderness) Play with them. You're a bigger kid than they are—underneath.

DION: (self-mockingly—flipping the Bible) Underneath—I'm becoming downright infantile! "Suffer these little ones!"

MARGARET: (keeping to her certainty) You're my oldest.

DION: (with mocking appreciation) She puts the Kingdom of Heaven in its place!

MARGARET: (withdrawing her hand) I was serious.

DION: So was I—about something or other. (he laughs.) This domestic diplomacy! We communicate in code—when neither has the other's key!

But even this reveals one of the conflicting tides within Dion's personality; his desperate need for spiritual
repose. Mutual misunderstanding has already loosened the bonds which hold them together. Dion's hope of refuge is dashed upon a non-comprehending female, who counts check book balances and coos about the children. Dion realizes he must seek another refuge, because neither Margaret, nor Margaret's love have any answers to his questions. He seeks an eternal truth. Margaret seeks a conventional, and therefore, temporary truth.

The struggle between Dion and Margaret, coupled with Dion's own internal war, should provide good dramatic development of character, as well as theme, provided an articulate resolution of conflict occurs. To provide this resolution of conflict, O'Neill introduces Cybel.

It is important to note that in each of the three women in Dion's life, first his mother, then Margaret, and now Cybel, he seeks a mother. Here O'Neill shows the continuing search for a new object of faith. Interestingly, he makes that object one of solace and comfort. The new god should protect one from life, at least the painful aspects of that life. Dion wishes to escape from life. Unfortunately, Dion may not escape because he does not present a clear understanding of living. Where O'Neill might have made Dion a fully developed character by investigating life through him, O'Neill does not. He states obscurely that Dion seeks refuge from unknown fears and pains. Dion says this about his
mother's death: ". . . 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." In Margaret, Dion finds one who maintains the role of mother exclusively in offering the material comforts of home. She creates the environment of mother, she protects and encourages like mother, but she does not know him. She never did. Dion must always wear his mask with her.

The frustrating relationship with Margaret leads Dion to alcohol, when he finds he cannot develop as an artist. He discovers Cybel in the midst of one of his drinking bouts. She takes him into her home, immediately establishing a protective mother image. Dion further learns that Cybel understands him. He does not need his mask with her. Here is the opportunity for which he has been searching, to be himself.

O'Neill tells us she is the Mother Earth. We find her described in this manner: " . . . her large eyes dreamy with the reflected stirring of profound instincts. She chews gum like a sacred cow forgetting time with an eternal end." Cybel's purpose is not only to fulfill Dion, but to direct Brown toward his destruction. Although she is a chorus and comments upon the action, as we shall see, she is
also an actor within the play. Dion involves himself with Cybel because of his inability to achieve fulfillment with Margaret. The physical side of love Dion has experienced, and found wanting. He wants more in his physical love than Margaret is able to provide, apparently. He finds it with Cybel:

DION: (turning to her) You're lost in blind alleys, too. (Suddenly holding out his hand to her.) But you're strong. Let's be friends.

CYBEL: (with a strange sternness, searches his face) And never nothing more?

DION: (with a strange smile) Let's say, never anything less! (She takes his hand . . .)

Dion finds from Cybel the somewhat impersonal truth that life recurs; generations pass, but others take their place; men may die, but man does not. This theory, although comforting to the scientists, perhaps, tends to negate the individuality of characters, and therefore their effectiveness is diminished. They become dimly lit shadows upon a gigantic treadmill of creation.

DION: (sadly) You've given me strength to die.

CYBEL: You may be important but your life's not. There's millions of it born every second. Life can cost too much even for a sucker to afford it--like everything else. And it's not sacred--only the you inside is. The rest is earth.

Cybel, with bovine serenity, proceeds to explain her entirely impersonal, all-pervading love of mankind, symbolized through her relationship with Dion.
CYBEL: ... Be yourself! He's healthy and handsome—but he's too guilty. What makes you pretend you think love is so important, anyway? It's just one of a lot of things you do to keep life living.

DION: (in same tone) Then you've lied when you've said you loved me, have you, Old Filth?

CYBEL: (affectionately) You'll never grow up! We've been friends, haven't we, for seven years? I've never let myself want you nor you me. Yes, I love you. It takes all kinds of love to make a world! Ours is the living cream. I say, living rich and high! (A pause. Coaxingly) Stop hiding. I know you.

DION: (taking off his mask, wearily comes and sits down at her feet and lays his head in her lap— with a grateful smile) You're strong. You always give. You've given my weakness strength to live.

CYBEL: (tenderly, stroking his hair maternally) You're not weak. You were born with ghosts in your eyes and you were brave enough to go looking into your own dark—and you got afraid (after a pause) I don't blame your being jealous of Mr. Brown sometimes. I'm jealous of your wife, even though I know you do love her.

DION: (slowly) I love Margaret. I don't know who my wife is.

CYBEL: (after a pause—with a queer broken laugh) Oh, God, sometimes the truth hits me such a sock between the eyes I can see the stars!—and then I'm so damn sorry for the lot of you, every damn mother's son-of-a-gun of you, that I'd like to run out naked into the street and love the whole mob to death like I was bringing you all a new brand of dope that'd make you forget everything that ever was for good! (Then, with a twisted smile) But they wouldn't see me, any more than they see each other. And they keep right on moving along and dying without my help anyway.
O'Neill seems to intend this scene to point out the life-denying quality in people, that part of man which will not let him live. Cybel the Earth Mother sees this, and in her own way understands it. She recognizes that Dion has denied life in one way, i.e., has allowed his psychological nature to overwhelm him, as well as the mother complexes and the inability to fulfill love, and others. Cybel also sees that Brown has denied life in all ways, except in the limited material sense. So the earth, according to O'Neill, gives to each man what he seeks, or she would like to give, if man would just allow it, leading us into the Biblical charge "Ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you".

At the point of the play where Dion tells Cybel "now I have the strength to die", we see that he has finally broken away from the psychological afflictions. It is now possible for him to burst forth into a new life-accepting human animal, aware of this life, this earth, to the greatest possible extent as Cybel is. Although Dion attempts to break away from the denial of life implicit in Christianity, his last words are: "Blessed are the meek and the poor in spirit! . . . What was the prayer, Billy? I'm getting so sleepy . . . Our Father . . .(He dies . . .)

There are two possible interpretations of this line. One, perhaps the most probable, is that it means those who do not question the current orthodoxy and simply resign themselves to their existences, escape
the spiritual tortures that Dion has put himself through by refusing to be meek and poor in spirit. The other possible interpretation, based upon the fact that he is in the process of praying the Lord's Prayer, a singularly orthodox prayer, is that Dion has succumbed to Christian orthodoxy. In any case, the line tells us that the weaker side of Dion has prevailed. Another test of this final struggle will be Dion's meeting with Margaret.

In preparation for this meeting, O'Neill shows us Dion immersing himself in the Christian philosophy of Thomas a Kempis. Dion is described as being "gentler, more spiritual, more saintlike and ascetic than ever before."

DION: (like a priest, offering up prayers for the dying) Quickly must thou be gone from hence, see then how matters stand with thee. Ah, fool--learn now to die to the world that thou mayst begin to live with Christ! Do now, beloved, do now all thou canst because thou knowest not when thou shalt die; nor dost thou know what shall befall thee after death. Keep thyself as a pilgrim, and a stranger upon earth, to whom the affairs of this world do not--belong! Keep thy heart free and raised upwards to God because thou hast not here a lasting abode. "Because at what hour you know not the Son of Man will come!" Amen. (He raises his hand over the mask as if he were blessing it, closes the book and puts it back in his pocket. He raises the mask in his hands and stares at it with a pitying tenderness.) Peace, poor tortured one, brave pitiful pride of man, the hour of our deliverance comes. Tomorrow we may be with Him in Paradise! (He kisses it on the lips and sets it down again. There is the noise of footsteps climbing the stairs in the hallway. He grabs up the mask in a sudden panic and, as a knock comes on the door, he claps it on and calls mockingly) Come in, Mrs. Anthony, come in!
Dion's asceticism seems to preclude his being able to "live life" in Cybel's sense. He is preparing to die, having irrevocably chosen the weaker side of his dual nature. The stage is now set for his final confrontation with Margaret. She is to represent his psychological past, all of the things that have beaten and flayed him as he tried to live. We see a self-condemned man, facing the truth of his condemnation. The scene will be interesting, for we do not often hear dead men talk.

MARGARET: (wearily reproving) Thank goodness I've found you! Why haven't you been home the last two days? It's bad enough your drinking again without your staying away and worrying us to death!

DION: (bitterly) My ears knew her footsteps. One gets to recognize everything--and to see nothing!

MARGARET: . . . I suppose you haven't eaten a thing, as usual. Won't you come home and let me fry you a chop?

DION: (wonderingly) Can Margaret still love Dion Anthony? Is it possible she does?

MARGARET: (forcing a tired smile) I suppose so, Dion. I certainly oughtn't to, had I?

DION: (in same tone) And I love Margaret! What haunted, haunting ghosts we are! We dimly remember so much it will take us so many million years to forget! (He comes forward, putting one arm around her bowed shoulders, and they kiss). . . .

. . . No! I'm a man! I'm a lonely man! I can't go back! I have conceived myself! (Then, with desperate mockery) Look at me, Mrs. Anthony! It's the last chance! Tomorrow I'll have moved on to the next hell! Behold your man--the sniveling, cringing, life-denying Christian slave you have so nobly ignored in
the father of your sons! Look! (He tears the mask from his face, which is radiant with a great pure love for her and a great sympathy and tenderness) O woman—my love—that I have sinned against in my sick pride and cruelty—forgive my sins—forgive my solitude—forgive my sickness—forgive me! (He kneels and kisses the hem of her dress.)

MARGARET: (who has been staring at him with terror, raising her mask to ward off his face) Dion! Don't! I can't bear it! You're like a ghost! You're dead! Oh, my God! Help! Help! ...

DION: (He looks at her—then takes her hand which holds her mask and looks at that face—gently) And now I am permitted to understand and love you, too! (He kisses the mask first—then kisses her face, murmuring) And you, sweetheart! Blessed, thrice blessed are the meek!

Dion, having looked beyond his own life, now sees beyond this individual relationship with Margaret, and sees it as another symbolically futile attempt to substitute excuses for the real thing. "What haunted, haunting ghosts we are." But O'Neill will not let the individual die without a final struggle for identity. "I'm a man! I'm a lonely man! I can't go back!" This last, dramatic tremolo is all that is in Dion. There is but one task left to both Dion and O'Neill: Dion must pass on his legacy of self-torture to Brown; O'Neill must explore humanity and materialism through Brown's internal struggle.

Up to this point in the play, Dion Anthony has been the schematized searcher among the false gods. He has been the center of action. Now that he fails in the search,
Brown, The Great God Brown, who has represented blatant materialism, takes up the search.

O'Neill has created in Brown the materialist's substitute for the old god. Brown has achieved, in a rather overgeneralized way, all of the material successes of which man is capable, save one, which is domesticity. To achieve this last goal, materialism seems to Brown to be inadequate. He cannot buy Margaret. Therefore, he must emulate Dion in some manner which will win Margaret for himself.

The intention of the playwright is apparently to show the audience that materialism is inadequate in providing a substitute for the old, dead god. The minute success is achieved, doubts begin to form about the value of the successes. This process finally brings even the materialist face to face with the foolishness of his existence.

The doubt in Brown is caused by a strange, but potent, perverted complex consisting of love of Margaret, love of art in his architecture, as well as an awareness that Dion was somehow better than he was. Brown had all possible success in material things, and yet it was not enough. He had to go further. Were he a simple Babbitt, we would not be compassionate toward him. However, Billy Brown must reach into an unknown and therefore he engages our imagination. He, too, tries to transcend the unimportantly personal, and attempts to find a universal meaning for man's existence.
Brown is weakened dramatically by the same factors which schematized Dion. Theme, again, overwhelms the psychological aspects of both characters. Neither one is allowed to become an individual. Each begins the play, as we have seen, as a flesh and blood human being. Each, unfortunately, fails to fulfill the potential, evidenced at the beginning of the play. Failure comes as a result of the characters being forced into positions which are mere symbolic adjuncts of the theme. That theme is a representation of the search among false gods which man undertakes when he discovers the old god is dead.

Difficulties occur when the theme overrides the individuality of the characters, and forces them into the position of lifeless symbols. For instance, Dion is what he is, according to O'Neill, because he is overly sensitive to life. It has hurt him many, many times. He seeks refuge in Mother's love. This fact is the psychologists' brand of truth. Men sometimes are too weak to face life on their own. Therefore, they seek refuge from what, to them, is too harsh to face. These psychological facts point to an attempt to create a full-dimensional character. Unhappily, thematic dialogue removes Dion from the personal level before his character can be developed. This can be seen in the confrontation between Dion and Brown. The thematic development of the play is recognizably elevated above the development
of individual characters. Dion passes on to Brown the legacy
of self-torture and search for a substitute for his old mode
of living. "O perfect Brown! Never mind! I'll make him
look in my mirror and drown in it!" This begins the unraveling
of Dion's justification for his own acts.

DION: Brown will still need me—to reassure
him he's alive! 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.

Dion admits that he is unable to conquer life, so life
requests that he destroy himself. But before he does, he
must strip away the illusions that mask Brown from himself.

First, down comes the symbol of success, for Brown is
uneasy with his material trophies. It is easy for Dion to
crumble them into dust, to throw them away, and let Brown
see how easily he has been misled.

DION: Consider Mr. Brown. His parents bore him
on earth as if they were thereby entering him
in a baby parade with prizes for the fattest—and
he's still being wheeled along in the
procession, too fat now to learn to walk, let
alone to dance or run, and he'll never live
until his liberated dust quickens into earth!

BROWN: (gruffly) Rave on! (Then with forced
good nature) Well, Dion, at any rate, I'm
satisfied.

DION: (quickly and malevolently) No! Brown isn't
satisfied! He's piled on layers of protective
fat, but vaguely, deeply he feels at his heart
the gnawing of a doubt! And I'm interested in
that germ which wriggles like a question mark
of insecurity in his blood, because it's part of the creative life Brown's stolen from me!

BROWN: (forcing a sour grin) Steal germs? I thought you caught them.

DION: (as if he hadn't heard) It's mine--and I'm interested in seeing it thrive and breed and become multitudes and eat until Brown is consumed!

Dion is able to sweep aside the life-long positions of a dedicated materialist. Brown capitulates. This points to schematization of elements within the play. O'Neill is seen to deal with types of people, generalizations rather than specifics. This is not to say that the basic philosophy is wrong. It may be true that, regardless of the type of personality, the inner psychological tides or the personal doubts and failures may overwhelm one if one is myopic. Indeed, it is probably true.

A newspaper reviewer has seen this capitulation as the downward turning point of the play:

As it continues beyond the point where Brown clamps upon his hungry face the malign mask of the dead genius, the plot seems almost to torture itself to moral conclusions. Quite as torturesome would be the attempt to retell those conclusions here. Enough that, as in every recent O'Neill play, a refrain of phrases bends the action artificially back into a complete cycle and locks the epilogue to that same sense of aching inevitability, youth without wisdom and world without end, which the prologue had begun.

The problem in the following scenes is that one character has all the strength, all the ability, all the
facts, all the logic, while his opponent is a straw man. Dion sweeps away Brown's defenses much too easily. It is not a struggle to the death, but a propagandist dissecting the fallacies of a child. No contest.

After the initial incision is made into Brown's beliefs, the rest follow swiftly and relentlessly:

DION: (in a steely voice) I've been the brains! I've been the design! I've designed even his success--drunk and laughing at him--laughing at his career! Not proud! Sick! Sick of myself and him! Designing and getting drunk! Saving my woman and children! (He laughs) Ha! And this cathedral is my masterpiece! It will make Brown the most eminent architect in this state of God's Country. I put a lot into it--what was left of my life! It's one vivid blasphemy from sidewalk to the tips of its spires!--but so concealed that the fools will never know. They'll kneel and worship the ironic Silenus who tells them the best good is never to be born! . . . Well, blasphemy is faith, isn't it? In self-preservation the devil must believe! But Mr. Brown, the Great Brown, has no faith! He couldn't design a cathedral without it looking like the First Supernatural Bank! He only believes in the immortality of the moral belly! . . . From now on, Brown will never design anything. He will devote his life to renovating the house of my Cybel into a home for my Margaret!

BROWN: (springing to his feet, his face convulsed with strange agony) I've stood enough! How dare you . . . !

DION: . . . Why has no woman ever loved him? Why has he always been the Big Brother, the Friend? Isn't their trust--a contempt?

BROWN: You lie!

DION: Why has he never been able to love--since my Margaret? Why has he never married? Why
has he tried to steal Cybel, as he once tried
to steal Margaret? Isn't it out of revenge—
and envy?

BROWN: (violently) Rot! I wanted Cybel, and I
bought her!

DION: Brown bought her for me! She has loved me
more than he will ever know!

BROWN: You lie! . . . I'll throw her back on the
street!

DION: To me! To her fellow creature! Why hasn't
Brown had children—he who loves children—
he who loves my children—he who envies me
my children?

BROWN: (brokenly) I'm not ashamed to envy you
them!

DION: . . . No! That is merely the appearance,
not the truth! Brown loves me! He loves me
because I have always possessed the power he
needed for love, because I am love!

BROWN: (frenziedly) You drunken bum! . . .

DION: . . . Ah! Now he looks into the mirror!
Now he sees his face!

BROWN: (humbly) Stop, for God's sake! You're mad!

DION: . . . I'm done. My heart, not Brown—
(Mockingly) My last will and testament! I
leave Dion Anthony to William Brown—for him
to love and obey—for him to become me—
then my Margaret will love me—my children
will love me—Mr. and Mrs. Brown and sons,
happily ever after! (Staggering to his full
height and looking upward defiantly) Nothing
more—but Man's last gesture—by which he
conquers—to laugh! Ha . . .

The previous scenes establish beyond a shadow of a
doubt that although Dion is unable to take advantage of his
understanding and appreciation of life, he nevertheless has
lived a full life. This is the last shriek of the defiant Dionysus. Death follows immediately.

Brown, not being too strong at the outset, is now desolated. The only thing Dion has left him is Dion's own desire for perception. Brown can see himself as a failure in life. He has achieved all he wanted to and he is still not satisfied. But to his confused mind Dion had something Brown wants: Margaret. This becomes, for Brown, his goal and at the same time serves to pattern the characters. For, though Brown must love Margaret, he seeks to change one representative characteristic (materialism) for another (vitality such as Dion had). Thus, instead of broadening the dimensions of Brown, O'Neill simply binds him tighter in generalities. Therefore, through a not-too-clear process, Brown decides it was the mask that created or, perhaps, generated Dion's success, and Brown decides to use it to achieve his own success.

The use of Dion's mask, however, creates problems: one for Brown and one for O'Neill. Brown's problem is how to dispose of Dion's body. O'Neill's is that if these masks are symbols of psychological truths, i.e., defense mechanisms, syndromes, complexes, and what not, then how is it actually necessary, or even possible for Brown to physically pick up and use another's defense mechanism? It would seem that Brown could create his own, tailor-made attitudes, based
upon Dion's original example. Perhaps this is a potential weakness in the psychological fabric of this play, but not necessarily in the dramatic. There seems little doubt of the dramatic effectiveness of such a scene.

O'Neill, through allowing Brown to assume Dion's identity, faces the more difficult problem, and yet dramatically effective device, of having Margaret think Brown is really her husband. This should allow us to see Brown from a different point of view, Margaret's, and should add a further dimension to the unfolding of his story.

The effectiveness of this masquerade lies mainly in Dion's prophesy that Brown should become Dion, thus allowing Margaret to love Dion. Simply, this means that Margaret, being a materialist, should have married Brown, also a materialist. However, since for some unexplained reason she loved and married Dion, their marriage was foredoomed. Now, with Dion out of the way, Brown can fulfill his life-long dream of being Margaret's husband. There is a catch. Brown must be Dion, to accomplish his desire. Therefore, Brown is chained to Dion's fate by this device.

The author's hand is here rather too much in evidence, moving the character of Brown through one predictable situation after another. For instance, what is the first question we ask ourselves when Brown assumes Dion's identity? What if Margaret should drop in at the office? In the very next
scene, Margaret goes to the office. Brown makes a feeble excuse for Dion's absence, which completely satisfies Margaret.

BROWN: (coaxingly) Now, don't get angry, Margaret! Dion is hard at work on his design for the new State Capitol, and I don't want him disturbed, not even by you! So be a good sport! It's for his own good, remember! I asked him to explain to you.

MARGARET: (relenting) He told me you'd agreed to ask me and the boys not to come here—but then, we hardly ever did.

BROWN: But you might! (Then with confidential friendliness) This is for his sake, Margaret. I know Dion. He's got to be able to work without distractions. He's not the ordinary man, you appreciate that. And this design means his whole future! He's to get full credit for it, and as soon as it's accepted, I take him into partnership. It's all agreed. And after that I'm going to take a long vacation—go to Europe for a couple of years—and leave everything here in Dion's hands! Hasn't he told you all this?

MARGARET: (jubilant now) Yes—but I could hardly believe . . .

Now the play becomes more melodramatic. The important aspect of the play is no longer a question of Man's metaphysical ends, but a simple matter of suspense. No longer do we ask who and what is Brown, but only will he get away with his charade? At this point, O'Neill seems to swing to the other extreme; from too much thought to too little, from characters who only represent to characters who represent nothing. He does not quite do this, of course, but he seems to. O'Neill quickly reverts to his original practice of providing
an emphasis on thought, however. At the same time, he almost
finds personal motivation for Brown.

In the third scene of the third act, we find Brown
talking to Dion's mask.

BROWN: Listen! Today was a narrow escape—for
us! We can't avoid discovery much longer. We
must get our plot to working! We've already
made William Brown's will, leaving you his money
and business. We must hustle off to Europe
now—and murder him there! . . . Then you—the
I in you—I will live with Margaret happily
ever after . . . She will have children by
me! . . . Anyway, that doesn't matter! Your
children already love me more than they ever
loved you! And Margaret loves me more! You
think you've won, do you—that I've got to
vanish into you in order to live? Not yet,
my friend! Never! Wait! Gradually Margaret
will love what is beneath—me! Little by
little I'll teach her to know—me, and then
finally I'll reveal myself to her, and confess
that I stole your place out of love for her,
and she'll understand and forgive and love
me! And you'll be forgotten! Ha! . . .
What's that? She'll never believe? She'll
never see? She'll never understand? You
lie, devil! . . . God have mercy! Let me
believe! Blessed are the merciful! Let me
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 their petals with life! . . .
Come with me while Margaret's bridegroom
dresses in your clothes, Mr. Anthony! I need
the devil when I'm in the dark! . . . Your
clothes begin to fit me better than my own!
Hurry, Brother! It's time we were home. Our
wife is waiting! . . . Come with me and tell
her again I love her! Come and hear her tell
me how she loves you! . . . I love you because
she loves you! My kisses on your lips are
for her! . . . Out by the back way! I mustn't forget I'm a desperate criminal, pursued by God, and by myself! . . .

There are two main ideas in these lines of Brown's. One is the metaphysical idea that love is a necessity to Brown, that he will find his fulfillment in Margaret's love. Certainly this is the most important object of Brown's search. His pretensions to artistry fail later in the play, and so the one chance he has to find fulfillment is in Margaret's love. Unfortunately this idea, vital to the plot, is overwhelmed by the trickery of masks. He and the audience both are interested in whether or not he can fool Margaret a little longer.

O'Neill seems to be aware of this weakness of the masks, for this scene serves two purposes. First, it should establish that the mask is unimportant because eventually Margaret will discover the truth. Therefore he must work quickly to fulfill his own plans. Secondly, it sets up for the next scene with Margaret.

Up to this point Brown has been trying subtly to win Margaret's love away from Dion to himself. As he talks to Margaret, he finds she is more deeply in love with Dion than she ever has been in her life. He sees that he has become a caricature of the very person he sought to replace. He finds that he plays the role of father and husband much better than Dion ever did, because he lacks that demon of
spiritual longing which drove Dion. Nobody will ever know that he is really Billy Brown. Margaret tells him about Brown making a pass at her, and how disgusted she was because of it.

BROWN: (with a show of tortured derision) Poor Billy! Poor Billy the Goat! . . . I'll kill him for you! I'll serve you his heart for breakfast!

MARGARET: (jumping up--frightenedly) Dion!

BROWN: (waving his pencil knife with grotesque flourishes) I tell you I'll murder this God-damned disgusting Great God Brown who stands like a fatted calf in the way of our health and wealth and happiness!

In Act IV Brown finally realizes that he can never win Margaret, and also realizes the truth about his own ineptitude as an artist. This knowledge leaves him with only the choice of how to remove himself from the action. There is no hope of any other solution.

The final scene finds Brown carrying out the last of Dion's predictions. It is a series of vignettes. At rise, Brown is humbly beseeching a god in heaven. He is praying. But there is no answer here for him.

The next vignette begins with the convenient arrival of Cybel. Being the earth mother, she is compassionate even to Brown, whom she calls, with infinite perception, "Dion Brown". We see the final merger of character has taken place: Dion Anthony and Billy Brown are now one.
Cybel has come to warn Brown, or as she mysteriously says "someone", of approaching danger. The fact that Cybel should accept all things on earth as reasonable, would seem to preclude this act; but somebody has got to do it. She says: "... You're naked! You must be Satan! Run, Billy, run! They are hunting for someone! They'll come here! I ran here to warn--someone! So run away if you want to live!"

This warning reminds us in perhaps too melodramatic a manner, of the fact that Brown has figuratively murdered Dion. But a real question exists in our minds as to whether or not it was Brown, or simply the disease that was life, which killed Dion. At any rate, the very real policemen are now outside in the garden with particularly real guns.

BROWN: (listening, puts out his hand and takes the mask of Dion—as he gains strength, mockingly) Thanks for this one last favor, Dion! Listen! Your avengers! Standing on your grave in the garden! Hahaha! (He puts on the mask and springs to the left and makes a gesture as if flinging French windows open. Gaily mocking) Welcome, dumb worshipers! I am your Great God Brown! I have been advised to run from you but it is my almighty whim to dance into escape over your prostrate souls! (Shouts from the garden and a volley of shots. Brown staggers back and falls on the floor by the couch, mortally wounded.)

CYBEL: (runs to his side, lifts him on to the couch and takes off the mask of Dion) You can't take this to bed with you. You've got to go to sleep alone. (She places the mask of Dion back on its stand ... a Squad of Police with drawn revolvers, led by a grizzly, brutal-faced Captain, run into the room ...)
CAPTAIN: (pointing to the mask of Dion—triumphantly) Got him! He's dead!

There is little enough justification for the shooting. The police have no corpus delicti. They may suspect a crime, but they would certainly not shoot down a dark, unarmed figure who was screaming, what was to them, meaningless words.

Nevertheless, this dramatically establishes that Dion has figuratively killed Brown. The drama moves into the denouement, with Margaret clutching Dion's mask and sobbing. All exit, while Brown makes his peace with himself and his world.

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! The Laughter of Heaven sows earth with a rain of tears, and out of Earth's transfigured birth-pain the Laughter of Man returns to bless and play again in innumerable dancing gales of flame upon the knees of God! (He dies.)

In retrospect one agrees with O'Neill, that this drama was an attempt to show the conflicting tides in man and the drama which is produced when these tides clash; both within a single man, and between two men. The difficulty lies in preventing the ideas and the symbolic devices, such as masks, to overwhelm the individuals—the warm, human, compassionate characters. If this occurs we have schematized abstractions, resulting in uninteresting characters and improbable events. This is what happens in the The Great God Brown.
O'Neil has attempted, has come close, but in the end has failed to accomplish serious, believable drama.

Lionel Trilling has pointed out the difficulty O'Neil found in presenting his ideas in convincing terms. He stated:

He is always moving toward the finality which philosophy sometimes, and religion always, promises. Life and death, good and evil, spirit and flesh, male and female, the all and the one, Anthony and Dionysus—O'Neil's is a world of these antithetical absolutes such as religion rather than philosophy conceives, a world of pluses and minuses; and his literary effort is an algebraic attempt to solve the equations.4
CHAPTER THREE: LAZARUS LAUGHED

O'Neill told Barrett Clark shortly after the manuscript of *Lazarus Laughed* was published that it was the:

... most successful thing I ever did. I think I've got it just right. It is, from my viewpoint. It's in seven scenes, and all the characters wear masks. And here I've used them right. In *Brown* I couldn't know beforehand how the scheme would work out. They were too realistic there, and sitting way back in the theater you couldn't be sure if the actors had on masks or not. I should have had them twice as large—and conventionalized them, so the audience could get the idea at once. In *Lazarus* I believe I've managed the problem of big crowds better than crowds are usually worked in plays. It's never quite right. My Jews all wear Jewish masks, and it's the same with the Greeks and Romans. I think I've suggested the presence and characteristics of mobs (by means of masks) without having to bring in a lot of supers. I also have a chorus of seven, who chant together, emphasizing and "pointing" the action throughout.

O'Neill hints at a sequel to *The Great God Brown* in the technical aspects of the production, i.e., the masks. That the masks were not the complete success he had hoped for in *Brown*, O'Neill readily admits. The parallels between *The Great God Brown* and *Lazarus Laughed* do not end here, but extend to the underlying metaphysical ideas, the tides which ebb and flow in men's souls. In both plays, the main idea is based upon developing a substitute for the old god. In *Brown*, the tides oppose one another, both within the characters and between characters. Therefore a struggle is
produced which makes the play to a certain extent dramatically interesting, though not, as has been shown, sufficiently so. In Lazarus the struggle and change is never within people but between people, not for what they are but for what they think. The result is an even more serious impairment of dramatic interest, than was the case with Brown.

The parallels in thought seem at first to be differences rather than similarities. But on closer examination there is a developmental continuity of ideas from Brown to Lazarus. The ideas seem different only because Lazarus begins where Dion and Brown left off. All three characters presumably have traveled in the same direction.

To explore this a bit further, we see that the continuity in thought between Dion and Brown has been established earlier. Dion was too weak psychologically to live life, so he fell by the wayside in defeat. In dying, Dion forces Brown to seek some metaphysical answer. Brown finds, just as Dion did, that men die, but Man does not. He also discovers that one should not fear death, but that in knowing life is, in a manner of speaking, Man may laugh. The germ of Lazarus Laughed was born in Brown’s last lines:

BROWN: 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! The laughter of Heaven sows earth with a rain of tears, and out of Earth’s transfigured birth-pain the laughter of Man returns to bless and play again in innumerable dancing gales of flame upon the knees of God!
Lazarus appears fully developed at the beginning of the play. As we shall see, he never changes or develops as did Dion and Brown. Nevertheless, he is their ideological heir. He is the next step in the metaphysical development begun in *The Great God Brown*. This step is predicated upon three metaphysical ideas. One: immortality is not an individual possession, but a biological fact of specie continuity. Men die, but Man does not. Two: individual men are capable of arriving at a super state. This is arrived at through unaided, individual effort; not through gods, nor miracles, but simply through one's own understanding. Three: one attains this super state by understanding that fear exists only because one is afraid to die, and one must eliminate it as a factor in one's life. Only one person demonstrates all of these ideas in practice—Lazarus. Other characters seem to understand for the moment, but they forget.

In considering the character of Lazarus, some basic questions arise regarding his nature. Why is Lazarus laughing, and what does he laugh at?

Since Lazarus is obsessed by the idea that one may only live if he accepts death, it seems reasonable to assume that he is laughing to show his disregard for death, and as a result, for fear. He laughs "exultantly" because he exults in life. It is important to note that Lazarus is not the only one who laughs. Everyone, even Miriam, laughs at one time or
another. But none but Lazarus can retain the knowledge that allows him to laugh. All the others forget.

A possible reason for this tendency to forget might be that man cannot comfort himself with the kind of world view that Lazarus offers. It simply does not work as a remedy for fear. Moreover, O'Neill seems to sense this, since he creates no characters who can remember, except Lazarus. In fact, this world view is negated by the rest of the play, which seems to say that humanity will not accept this solution.

This explanation of man's tendency to forget, within *Lazarus Laughed*, is simply speculation, for O'Neill fails to present any clear-cut explanation, due, mainly, to the schematized nature of the characters. We are not allowed to delve into their minds to determine why they forget. The question arises naturally, then; do they reject this solution because it is of little comfort, or is the idea itself too complex to remember?

Gassner levels a similar criticism at O'Neill:

O'Neill did not become the full-fledged tragic poet he evidently aspired to be. And want of language was only one reason. Another was his tendency to set up abstract personalities and issues, as most conspicuously in *Dynamo* and *Lazarus Laughed*, or to schematize characters and deprive them of possible range—this in order to develop a psychological conception or an argument.  

As to what this argument might be, Cyrus Day has established a tentative theory. He says that O'Neill is
dramatizing Nietzschean principles. The principle which is of most interest to us here, is that man can become a superman. Lazarus has achieved this super state through a process which is completed at the beginning of the play. Day describes what it means to be a superman, both in O'Neill's view and Nietzsche's.

Most men, O'Neill thought, are curs, dogs, roosters, pigs, swine, rats, jackals, and hyenas. Only a few have the strength to re-create themselves as supermen. Lazarus is able to do so, and to rise above the animal level, because (having experienced death) he understands two of the cardinal doctrines of Nietzsche's philosophy: *amor fati* and eternal recurrence.

*Amor fati*, or love of necessity, may be defined as the superman's attitude toward life and death. On the positive side it implies the joyful acceptance and affirmation of earthly life and of earthly suffering. On the negative side it implies the rejection of the Christian belief in personal immortality. "Remain true to earth," Zarathustra advises, "and believe not those who speak unto you of super-earthly hopes . . . Ye want to be paid besides, ye virtuous ones? Ye want reward for your virtue?" 4

This completed process is hinted at by O'Neill's description of Lazarus at the beginning of the play: "His face recalls that of a statue of a divinity of Ancient Greece in its general structure and particularly in its quality of detached serenity." The first scene in the play shows a banquet given by Lazarus's family in honor of his return from the grave, which suggest the superhuman qualities which he represents:
THIRD GUEST: . . . Jesus smiled sadly but with tenderness, as one who from a distance of years of sorrow remembers happiness. And then Lazarus knelt and kissed Jesus' feet and both of them smiled and Jesus blessed him and called him "My Brother" and went away; and Lazarus, looking after Him, began to laugh softly like a man in love with God! Such a laugh I never heard! It made my ears drunk! It was like wine! And though I was half-dead with fright I found myself laughing, too!

This same scene points out the special regard in which the people now hold Lazarus. He has become more than just an ordinary human being. He has returned from the grave. Also, he seems to have brought something back with him, a jubilant understanding of life. This puts him on a different plane, and if his understanding is real, on a higher plane, than the average person.

Lazarus himself seems to acknowledge that he is now a superman:

LAZARUS: (suddenly in a deep voice—with a wonderful exultant acceptance in it) Yes! (The guests in the room, the crowds outside all cry out in fear and joy and fall on their knees.)

CHORUS: (chanting exultantly)
The stone is taken away!
The spirit is loosed!
The soul let go!

LAZARUS: (rising and looking around him at everyone and everything—with an all-embracing love—gently) Yes! (His family and the guests in the room now throng about Lazarus to embrace him. The crowds of men and women on each side push into the room to stare at him . . . )

Here Lazarus expresses his understanding of life in the simple word "Yes!" Shortly thereafter, he demonstrates
his understanding more clearly by communicating it verbally to his audience. Everyone understands, everyone rejoices.

LAZARUS: (smiles gently and speaks as if to a group of inquisitive children) O Curious Greedy Ones, is not one world in which you know not how to live enough for you?

SIXTH GUEST: (emboldened) Why did you say yes, Lazarus?

FOURTH GUEST: Why did you laugh?

ALL: (With insistent curiosity but in low awed tones) What is beyond there, Lazarus?

CHORUS: (in a low murmur)
What is beyond there?
What is beyond?

CROWD: (carrying the question falteringly back into silence) What is beyond?

LAZARUS: (suddenly again--now in a voice of loving exaltation) There is only life! I heard the heart of Jesus laughing in my heart; "There is Eternal Life in No," it said, "and there is the same Eternal Life in Yes! .Death is the fear between!" And my heart:reborn to love of life cried."Yes!" and I laughed in the laughter of God! (He begins to laugh, softly at first, -- a laugh so full of a complete acceptance of life, a profound assertion of joy in living, so devoid of all self-consciousness or fear, that it is like a great bird song triumphant in depths of sky, proud and powerful, infectious with love, casting on the listener an enthralling spell. The crowd in the room are caught by it . . .

CHORUS: (in a chanting murmur)
Lazarus laughs!
Our hearts grow happy!
Laughter like music!
The wind laughs!
The sea laughs!
Spring laughs from the earth!
Summer laughs in the air!
Lazarus laughs!
LAZARUS: (on a final note of compelling exultation)
Laugh! Laugh with me! Death is dead! Fear is no more! There is only life! There is only laughter!

CHORUS: (chanting exultingly now)
Laugh! Laugh! Laugh with Lazarus! Fear is no more! There is no death!

From the foregoing scene, Lazarus can be seen to be a superhuman representation. The question naturally arises; what are to be the factors which face him and how can they be dramatically convincing? These questions and their answers determine the areas of conflict.

In determining the areas of conflict, it is well to determine protagonists and antagonists. Lazarus is obviously the protagonist. The action centers on him and revolves around his thoughts and actions. The antagonists include his entire family, Caligula, and virtually all of the Romans. Perhaps one might say any normal human being with hopes and fears and passions and other imperfections would be an antagonist to Lazarus. This is true because the other characters have not developed self-mastery to the point which Lazarus has. Therefore, while Lazarus can disregard fear or death or hunger or any of the exigencies of human existence, most men cannot. So the superhuman qualities of Lazarus place him in conflict with everyone around him. And this conflict is the backbone of the play.
No struggle exists in Lazarus' own mind; he has arrived. His ideas and self-mastery have evolved to a higher level at the play's opening.

This external conflict, moreover, is again schematized. Himself a representative of an abstraction, Lazarus struggles exclusively with other such abstractions. His opponents are all spokesmen for certain "positions". They are almost invariably doctrinaire Jews, doctrinaire Christians, doctrinaire pagans, doctrinaire materialists. They are not individuals. They are anthropomorphic orthodoxies. Lazarus, then, sweeps them out of the way with a flick of the poetic tongue and the presentation of a new and, in his view, better doctrine. It should be pointed out that Lazarus has a supernatural power working for him in these struggles which also lends plausibility to the belief that Lazarus is a superman. This power is his ability to infect his antagonists with laughter. Lazarus cannot communicate his philosophy in words, only in the inarticulate laughter. However, apparently no one can resist it.

Lazarus' laughter tends to convey the same, unchanging and obvious meaning. "Death is dead." This meaning is an important indicator of the structure of the play. Since the method of expression of the theme is constant, i.e., through choruses, Lazarus' speeches, and the absence of serious threats to Lazarus, it forces the play into an episodic mold.
The meaning of the term "episodic" here is best seen in the nature of the struggles through which Lazarus passes. His antagonists, each representative of a different view, present different objections to his new faith; but each, inevitably, must lose the struggle to Lazarus. This is neither good nor bad in itself, but it does underscore the oversimplified nature of Lazarus, and of the whole action, in that he easily sweeps aside his opponents and moves to the next episode, and in it, the next confrontation and the next easy victory.

There are three major episodes. The first deals with Lazarus versus his family and friends. The second one sets Caligula against Lazarus. Finally, Tiberius and his decadent society are set against Lazarus.

The characters in this first episode show the usual simplification. All are representations of religious belief rather than real humans. For instance, O'Nei1 has a "chorus of old men" as well as a chorus of "followers of Lazarus". Most of the characters have abstract names like the Orthodox Priest, and so on. Each individual or group states a traditional view of man, life and death.

ORTHODOX PRIEST: (... religious fanatic ... sixty or so) Ha--ha--(Tearing his beard ... with rage) Stop it, you fools! It is a foul sin in the sight of Jehovah! Why do you come here every night to listen and watch their abominations? The Lord God will punish you!
MARY: (echoing him—to her people) Jesus will never forgive you!

THE PRIEST: (angrily) Jesus? ... Did you hear her, friends? These renegade Nazarenes will soon deny they are Jews at all! They will begin to worship in filthy idolatry the sun and stars and man's body—as Lazarus in these ... the disciple of their Jesus, has so well set them the example! ... 

NAZARENE: ... You lie! Lazarus is no disciple!
He is a traitor to Jesus! We scorn him!

PRIEST: (sneeringly) But your pretended Messiah did not scorn him. According to your stupid lies, he raised him from the dead! And answer me, has your Jesus ever denied Lazarus, or denounced his laughter? No! No doubt he is laughing, too, at all you credulous fools—for if Lazarus is not his disciple, in the matter of the false miracle he was his accomplice! (This provokes a furious protest from the Nazarenes and insulting hoots and jeers from the Orthodox, penetrated by a piercing scream from Lazarus' mother, who, crushed in the crowd, sinks fainting ... The group of the Orthodox fall back from them ...)

It is true that people argue over ideas, and a scene is not overly schematized simply because it presents ideas. The danger is that one forgets about people and concentrates merely on ideas, as in the preceding scene. The Priest and the Nazarene are not people, but are simply spokesmen for an ideology.

The weakness of this mixing of styles can perhaps be seen more clearly by contrasting it with another scene, rare in the play, where it does not occur, at least not to the same damaging degree. The scene (Act I, Scene I) shows
us a clash between members of Lazarus' family. True emotion flares here, for these people are equals, and when they struggle, they bleed. At the same time, they are symbols. Lazarus, who ends this scene with a short homily, is by contrast coldly impersonal in his approach to living. His self-mastery allows him to survey the scene from Olympian heights, but vitiates the emotional intensity of certain short, but effective scenes like this one between the members of the family. The conflict is between the children and the parents, about religious belief. Mary has just proclaimed her belief that Jesus is the Messiah. The Priest says to the father:

PRIEST: (furiously) The Messiah! May Jehovah smite you in your lies! Step back among your kind! You defile us! ( . . . to the father) Have you no authority? She called him the Messiah—that common beggar, that tramp! Curse her!

FATHER: (confused . . . ) Wait! Go back, Mary! You chose to follow that imposter—

MARY: (defiantly) The Messiah!

MARTHA: . . . Sssh! Remember he is our father!

MARY: (fanatically) I deny him! I deny all who deny Jesus!

MOTHER: (tearfully) And me, darling?

MARY: You must come to us, Mother! You must believe in Jesus and leave all to follow Him!

FATHER: (enraged) So! You want to steal your mother away, to leave me lonely in my old age! You are an unnatural daughter! I disown you! Go, before I curse—
MOTHER: (beseechingly) Father!

MARSHA: (pulling Mary away) Mary! Jesus teaches to be kind.

MARY: (hysterically) He teaches to give up all and follow Him! I want to give Him everything! I want my father to curse me!

FATHER: (frenziedly) Then I do curse you! No--not you--but the devil in you! And the devil in Martha! And the great mocking devil that dwells in Lazarus and laughs from his mouth! I curse these devils and that Prince of Devils, that false prophet, Jesus! It is he who has brought division to my home and many homes that were happy before. I curse him! I curse the day he called my good son, Lazarus, from the grave to walk again with a devil inside him! It was not my son who came back but a devil! My son is dead! And you, my daughters, are dead! I am the father only of devils! (His voice has risen to a wailing lament) My children are dead!

What makes this scene so effective is that this is a family arguing over ideas, and the family is breaking up over these ideas. The ideas may be the cause of the split, but they are not the sole factor involved in this scene, as they were in the scene between the Priest and the Nazarene. Human beings defend their ideas here, while the Priest and the Nazarene were merely animated treatises.

Lazarus, then, halts the scene "... (his voice rings from within the house in exultant denial) Death is dead! There is only laughter! (He laughs ...)"

The effect of this scene among the family is largely canceled out by the mob scene which follows. Instead of being the central clash, the family scene is merely a momentary
digression into the specific from the generality of the rest of the act. Immediately after this the two choruses battle each other on highly abstract principles of ideology.

The voices of his followers echo his laughter. They pour in a laughing rout from the doorway onto the terrace . . . These Followers of Lazarus, forty-nine in number, composed about equally of both sexes, wear a mask that, while recognizably Jewish, is a Lazarus mask, resembling him in its expression of fearless faith in life, the mouth shaped by laughter . . .

CHORUS OF FOLLOWERS: Laugh! Laugh!
There is no death!
There is only laughter!

FOLLOWERS: There is only laughter!
Death is dead!
Laugh! Laugh!

CROWD: (the two groups of Nazarenes and Orthodox, on the appearance of the Followers, immediately forget their differences and form into one mob, led by their Chorus of Old Men, whose jeering howls they echo as one voice) Yaah! Yaah! Yaah! (But they cannot keep it up. The music and laughter rise above their hooting. They fall into silence. They again begin to feel impelled by the rhythm and laughter, their feet move, their bodies sway. Their lips quiver, their mouths open as if to laugh. Their Chorus of Old Men are the first to be affected. It is as if this reaction were transmitted through the Chorus to the Crowd.)

It should be readily apparent that the absence here of three-dimensional characters hurts the presentation of ideas, for ideas are most effectively expressed through character. In this scene, as throughout the rest of the play, clash of character is sacrificed to clash of abstract,
ratefied, dehumanized doctrine. The result tends to be preachy and uninteresting.

Francis Ferguson, in exploring the play Lazarus Laughed, sustains this view. He states:

Mr. O'Neill, we find, is more interested in affirming his ideas than in representing the experience in which they are implied. The example of Elizabethan drama seems to prove that an unsatisfying philosophy may underlie a great play. But there the play is the thing, and the philosophy may at most be deduced from it as from a direct experience of life. In Lazarus Laughed, on the other hand, there is little or no play at all, for Caligula, the anti-Lazarus, is no more credible than Lazarus himself, and their conflicts fail entirely to move us. The burden of the play is carried by two elements: by Lazarus' philosophical arias, and by spectacular effects of crowd movements and colored lights.

We see that instead of action with a philosophical basis, we have philosophy with a minimum of action to sustain it. There is a great deal of talk, but very little is being done.

The metaphysical ideas in this play are not only over-emphasized, relative to the other elements of the play such as plot and character, but they themselves are too vague, too non-specific to be of any compelling interest to an audience. This failure to be effective is caused by the superimposing of O'Neill's formalized thought as evidenced by the philosophical "arias", over the rather skeletal character of Lazarus. O'Neill, of course, realized that philosophy alone would not carry the play. This perhaps explains his
use of certain melodramatic techniques. Some of these have been pointed out above; others will be. We should, however, not mistake these cliches for profundity. They could never be profound, for the simple reason that they have no roots in human experience. George Jean Nathan lanced this pretense in O'Neill, in his reviews of *Lazarus Laughed* and *Dynamo*. He writes:

Following the technic [sic] of Strindberg, O'Neill sets himself so to intensify and even hyperbolize a theme as to evoke the dramatic effect from its overtones rather than, as in the more general manner, from its undertones. The attempt, as I have said, is a failure. O'Neill, in such instances, always goes aground on the rocks of exaggeration and overemphasis. He rolls up his sleeves and piles on the agony with the assiduity of a coal-heaver. That method is the intensification of a theme from within. O'Neill intensifies his theme from without. He piles psychological and physical situation on situation until the structure topples over with a burlesque clatter.

It might be said that the theme is inadequate because the characters themselves are inadequate. For in the drama, ideas must come from people and actions. As Nathan says, the undertones are more important than the overtones. It is fair to suggest that no satisfactory theme or philosophy can come from Lazarus or any other character in this play because they are not living. They are simply automatons wired for sound. As Fergusson pointed out, they are lifeless megaphones.
Such a charge might be unfair, if it were not that all of Lazarus' ideas stem from incidents which occurred before the play opened. For instance, the meeting with, and miracle of Christ, and the realization that death is dead, that there is only life, happen not where we can see them, but before the play begins. Here, the dramatic flaw is in the characters telling us, rather than showing us, a truth.

To demonstrate the weakness of O'Neill's ideas, we should perhaps look more closely at them. Through examination of these ideas and their use in the play, we may determine their effectiveness. In Act I we hear:

LAZARUS: ... You laugh, but your laughter is guilty! It laughs a hyena laughter, spotted, howling its hungry fear of life! That day I returned did I not tell you your fear was no more, that there is no death? You believed then—for a moment! You laughed—discordantly, hoarsely, but with a groping toward joy! What! Have you so soon forgotten, that now your laughter curses life again as of old? ... That is your tragedy! You forget! You forget the God in you! You wish to forget! Remembrance with love!—with pride!—with laughter! This is too glorious a victory for you, too terrible a loneliness! Easier to forget, to become only a man, the son of a woman, to hide from life against her breast, to whimper your fear to her resigned heart and be comforted by her resignation! To live by denying life! ... Why are your eyes always either fixed on the ground in weariness of thought, or watching one another with suspicion? Throw your gaze upward! To Eternal Life! To the fearless and deathless! The everlasting! To the stars! ... See! A new star has appeared! It is the one that shone over Bethlehem! ... The Master of Peace and Love has departed this earth. Let all stars be for you henceforth symbols of Saviours—Sons of God who appeared on worlds like ours to tell
the saving truth to ears like yours, inexorably deaf! ... But the greatness of Saviours is that they may not save! The greatness of Man is that no god can save him--until he becomes a god! ... 

All three of the metaphysical ideas are expressed here. The last sentence demonstrates the first idea which is that any individual may become a superman. Immortality as the destiny of the species, rather than of individuals within it, is implied in Lazarus' condemnation of fear as he scoffs at "a man, the son of a woman". Finally, the acceptance of living, of understanding fear, we are told, is based upon "the fearlessness" which produces "the deathlessness". In presenting these statements O'Neill still leaves doubt as to the nature of a superman. All we really know is that he is fearless, and urges others to be. Several questions remain with us. Are there not some things which man should fear? Is not the absence of fear a possible sign of stupidity, as well as the ultimate in man's development? How are we to know the difference?

This is not to condemn O'Neill's ideas, entirely, but simply to suggest the inadequacy with which they are handled in the present context. These questions remain not only unanswered, but unmentioned. Fear is fear. Life is life. That is all you know, and all, according to O'Neill, you need to know. The meaning and truth of these abstractions are supposed to be self-evident. Unhappily, they are not.
The same sort of weakness can be seen in a similar passage in Act IV. Lazarus is now outlining his beliefs to Caligula, who at this point is Lazarus' antagonist. Caligula has been denying Lazarus and what he says. Lazarus says:

... You are so proud of being evil! What if there is no evil? What if there are only health and sickness? Believe in the healthy god called Man in you! Laugh at Caligula, the funny clown who beats the backside of his shadow with a bladder and thinks thereby he is Evil, the Enemy of God! ... Believe! What if you are a man and men are despicable? Men are also unimportant! Men pass! Like rain into the sea! The sea remains! Man remains! Man slowly arises from the past of the race of men that was his tomb of death! For Man death is not! Man, Son of God's Laughter, is! ... Is, Caligula! Believe in the laughing god within you!

CALIGULA: ... I believe! I believe there is love even for Caligula! I can laugh—now—Lazarus! Free laughter! Clean! No sickness! No lust for death! My corpse no longer rots in my heart! The tomb is full of sunlight! I am alive! I who love Man, I who can love and laugh! Listen, Lazarus! I dream! When I am Caesar, I will devote my power to your truth. I will decree that there must be kindness and love! I will make the Empire one great Blessed Isle! Rome shall know happiness, it shall believe in life, it shall learn to laugh your laughter, Lazarus, or I—

LAZARUS: ... Or you will cut off its head?

CALIGULA: (fiercely) Yes! I will—! ... Forgive me! I forget! I forget!

LAZARUS: Go out under the sky! Let your heart climb on Laughter to a star! Then make it look down at earth, and watch Caligula commanding Life under pain of death to do his will! ...
As in the first act, we find the three metaphysical ideas, and just as inadequate for human desires as they were then. Again, man has god within him. Men pass. Man remains. Fear of evil must be overcome before significant change takes place. The significant change in this case is Caligula's. He overcomes his evil momentarily and becomes a truly beneficent person. In fact, he decrees "Life" in all its divine implications, on pain of death. This is an interesting contradiction, but soon Caligula forgets. It would seem that man's salvation is an individual process. No savior such as Lazarus may redeem man, for man forgets.

The same criticism leveled at the first scene is pertinent here: what, precisely, is O'Neill talking about? The thought is schematized into the superman. He becomes a type instead of an individual. We are neither shown nor told clearly what the healthy god in man functionally is. We do know that this god is fearlessness within man. Then begins the circular questioning again. What is fear? Bentley attributes this flaw to O'Neill's attempting to cover too much ground:

But the more he attempts, the less he achieves. Lazarus Laughed and The Great God Brown and Days Without End are inferior to The Emperor Jones and Anna Christie and Ah, Wilderness! O'Neill has never learned this lesson. The idea of big work lured him out into territory where his sensibility is entirely inoperative. Even his most ardent admirers have little to say in favor of Dynamo, the only play where he frontally assails the problem of the death of an old God and the failure of science.
A hundred novelists have dealt more subtly with hidden motives than O'Neill did in his famous essay in psychological subtlety, *Strange Interlude*, a play that is equally inferior as a study of upper-class Americans. Then there is his desire to recreate ancient tragedy. Although no one is more conscious than he that America is not an Athens, the Greek dream—the desire to be an Aeschylus—has been his nightmare.

The one thing O'Neill does achieve in this second sermon is dramatic dialogue. This adds a small amount of the theatrical over the previous sermon. Now, two characters stimulate one another's thinking to arrive at their thoughts. This is considerably better than one character directly addressing the audience, because audiences come to the theatre not to hear public addresses, but to witness clashes between characters, and actions. Dialogue, then, is ordinarily the better form in which to present these clashes.

This heightened dramatic effect merely serves to underscore the apparent absence of validity of the thoughts. Caligula is only temporarily affected by the thought. Lazarus, a short while later, says: "They forget! It is too soon for laughter!" Even Lazarus is not profoundly affected. Neither character is moved by this scene and for good reason. There is serious doubt as to whether or not the words mean anything to Caligula and anyone else who is not a superman as Lazarus is. Furthermore, there is no doubt at all that Lazarus cannot communicate with other human beings, save on the most rudimentary levels. Then, finally, men forget.
Nathan, as quoted earlier, points to a series of flaws within the framework of O'Neill's middle period of work. These flaws are overly melodramatic devices which overshadow the thought and characters. They are a prime cause of failure in these plays. We see, for instance, in Lazarus Laughed that the sure-fire device of a triangular relationship between Pompeia, Lazarus, and Miriam, is ultimately resolved by rather conventional means. Pompeia kills Miriam, only to discover that Lazarus' love can never be specific, and it must include all human beings. The thing that makes this situation overly melodramatic instead of serious is that we do not know why. Why does Pompeia love Lazarus? She needs love; a rather conventional reason. The trouble with this is O'Neill's apparent disregard for the human reasons for action. He is concerned only with abstract philosophical treatises, rather than inner realities and motivations of his characters. This world remains largely unexplored. O'Neill uses melodramatic devices to substitute for understandable and recognizable psychological realities.

Pompeia is certainly the catalyst in the action in this scene. She causes all things to happen, and her only motivation is that of all the men in the Roman Empire, including the Emperor himself, only Lazarus has a certain attraction. This, perhaps, is an unbelievable motive, as well as being too vague.
The scene begins after the death of Miriam. Lazarus is alone in a room in the palace, when Pompeia enters.

POMPEIA: (who has crept to his feet, kisses his hand . . . ) I love you, Lazarus!

LAZARUS: (stops laughing, and looks down at her gently) And I love you, woman.

POMPEIA: . . . You? (she stares up into his eyes doubtingly, raising her face toward his) Then-- put your arms around me. (He does so . . .) And hold me to you. (He presses her closer to him.) And kiss me. (He kisses her on the forehead.) No, on the lips! (He kisses her. She flings her arms about his neck passionately and kisses him again and again--then slowly draws away--remains looking into his eyes a long time, shrinking back from him with bewildered pain which speedily turns to rage and revengeful hatred) No! No! It is my love, not Love! I want you to know my love, to give me back love--for me--only for me--Pompeia--my body, my heart--me, a woman--not Woman, women! Do I love Man, men? I hate men! I love you, Lazarus--a man--a lover--a father to children! I want love--as you loved that woman there . . . that I poisoned for love of you! But did you love her--or just Woman, wife and mother of men? . . . Liar! Cheat! Hypocrite! Thief!

This scene can be divided into three major sections. The first is the expectation by an apparently three-dimensional Pompeia. She wishes the love of a man. She expresses herself conventionally, to be sure, but we see the potential for a meaningful experience between two people. This could have been, had O'Neill wanted it to be, a demonstration of the effects of love upon man's quest for self-mastery, i.e., the super state. But Lazarus, unfortunately, has arrived at
this state and apparently is incapable or not desirous of specific love. He is above this. He simply loves everyone and everything. The new life Lazarus offers us carries with it a superiority to specific love, a transcendence of the need for specific love. This is another reason why Lazarus' new life is unacceptable to the mass of men, human love being one of the few comforts extant. This fact takes us out of the specific and schematizes the concept of love, and this brings us to the second section of the scene.

Pompeia, upon this revelation, brought about somewhat melodramatically by her interpretation of Lazarus' kiss, becomes angry because of her frustration. This frustration forces her to delve into her own character. The anger reveals her disappointed expectations. She spews forth vituperation, and at the same time, achieves, it would seem, a very real and vibrant relationship with the audience. Here is a wounded being, and empathy is established. Unfortunately, her love is insufficiently motivated to be anything but melodramatic.

From this series of events we see Pompeia as the central figure in this scene. She is testing not only Lazarus but herself. The audience, who, by this juncture, know the nature of Lazarus and have identified his not-of-this-world control, realize he will not be swept up by this whirlwind of passion. They expect, and justifiably so, the result of the scene to be stated in terms of Pompeia's life and
consciousness. It is, but to a melodramatic end rather than a serious one, for Pompeia acts as The Woman Scorned and orders Lazarus' death. This act, in the long run, affects the action of the play much more than Pompeia's character. This then, is the third section. It serves the purpose of moving the play toward some pivotal action, the death of Lazarus. At the same time it neatly prevents any of the characters from becoming anything but abstract figures setting off pyrotechnics of emotion to support action. We still do not know why.

There are at least two other scenes which might be mentioned, in that they demonstrate the same tendency toward disappointing melodrama. The first of these is the death of the Followers of Lazarus, which piles emotion on emotion. The conversion of the Legionaries is the second such scene.

Both of these scenes promise at the outset to present a re-creation of supermen. We have characters who have fulfilled the requirements to become supermen, in that they no longer fear death, and they believe, or have the necessary faith. In short, all of the criteria O'Neill has established for his supermen are met by these characters, and yet all they can say is incoherent and inadequate for human purposes:

Laugh! Laugh!
There is only God!
Life is His Laughter!
We are His Laughter!
Fear is no more!
Death is dead!
The Legionaries are still alive, and they unfortunately "forget", so they are not supermen. But perhaps in O'Neill's mind the Followers have become supermen, for they are dead. If this is so, they do not tell us very much about what it means to be a superman. They give us empty action which, though dramatically impressive, is inadequate philosophically.

LAZARUS: ... (He turns, throwing back his head and stretching up his arms, and begins to laugh low and tenderly, like caressing music at first but gradually gaining in volume, becoming more and more intense and insistent, finally ending up on a triumphant, blood-stirring call to that ultimate attainment in which all prepossession with self is lost in an ecstatic affirmation of Life. The voices of his Followers from beyond the wall, at first one by one, then several at a time, then multitudes, join in his laughter. Even the Senators are drawn into it. Now everyone of these is standing up, stretching out his arms toward Lazarus, laughing harshly and discordantly and awkwardly in his attempt to laugh. Terrific flashes of lightning and crashes of thunder seem a responsive accompaniment from the heavens to this laughter of thousands which throbs in beating waves of sound in the air. Mingled with the laughing from beyond the wall comes the sound of singing and the music of flutes and cymbals. Miriam has crawled on her knees to the edge of the portico where her black figure of grief is outlined below and to the left of Lazarus, her arms raised outward like the arms of a cross.)

The validity in philosophical terms is not heightened appreciably by the flashes of lightning and blood-stirring calls of intense music. The pulse rate may pick up a beat or two, but that is the only result.

Fergusson has identified the use of crowds as a factor in this lack of validity. He points out:
A good regisseur may of course get artistically satisfying effects with well-trained crowds and carefully calculated light and sound effects—too often at the author's expense. When an author resorts to it, it usually means that he has ceased to be interested in mastering the medium of the stage. This is certainly true in *Lazarus Laughed*; the stage becomes Mr. O'Neill's lifeless megaphone. Nothing stands between the audience and Mr. O'Neill, shouting his views. For his relation to his ideas, in these prophetic plays, is the same as his relation to his characters in his middle period: they are emotionally significant to him, they play a part in his equilibrium as a man. Attaining no vision outside himself, his plays remain attached to him by his eternal immaturity.

The schematization of the characters is brought about by O'Neill's apparent desire to make them larger than life. For instance, Lazarus is not just pleased, or excited, or happy, he is exultant. He is not even a superman, he is the superman. Or a Caligula is not simply a bad person. He is the bad person, by default. For, though there are other evil people, they disappear, leaving the stage to Caligula. Even Pompeia, we see, is simply a device to condemn Lazarus. This seems to be the result of O'Neill's desire to go beyond mere individuals, to transcend the ordinary in an effort to reach the eternal truths. Instead of accomplishing this, he succeeds in giving us insubstantial, if sometimes superficially thrilling, actions.

In general, *Lazarus Laughed* fails to come to grips with the problem of replacing the old god with something specifically better. Of course, if we could be supermen,
the problem would presumably cease to exist, but the odds against such an occurrence, at best, are too long for serious consideration. The value of this idea, becoming supermen, must be in a mode of thinking which will comfort us or give solace as the ancient icons used to do. The concepts are unacceptable, however, for the thematic expressions come not from believable people engaged in believable actions, but from the author himself. O'Neill seems to be saying, "Believe me and all will be well." It might indeed, but the evidence is wanting.

Cyrus Day has summed up the failings found inside schematization of characters. He says:

And so we are back at the point where we started. The Great God Brown, we suggested, is about Dion Anthony's reactions to an idea; it is not, strictly speaking, about the idea itself. The two halves of Dion's personality are pitted against each other in mortal combat, and the idea that divides and conquers him (and his successor Brown) is presented in the form of a dilemma. Dilemmas, having two horns, are the sort of stuff dramatic conflict is made of.

Lazarus Laughter, on the contrary, is a play about an idea rather than about a human being's reactions to an idea. Lazarus is an integrated, undivided character, and the idea he advocates is presented in the form of the undivided truth. Effective drama cannot be erected on such foundations. Lazarus Laughter 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.
CHAPTER FOUR: DYNAMO

The major flaw in this cycle of plays has been the schematization of character. This schematization is invariably brought about by theme weighing down individual characters and truncating their believability. This is again the case in Dynamo.

The characters begin the play as more or less real people with emotions and hopes, attachments for each other based upon more or less recognizable human qualities. These qualities are suggested by O'Neill, rather than explicitly mentioned, but they are reasonable ones. For instance, the families establish personal relations between the members. The members react to each other because of real or imagined attributes, in the beginning. But this soon changes. The human characteristics become secondary factors, and part of the themes each character represents becomes primary in his motivation. The characters cease reacting to other people because of what those people are, and what they do. Instead the reactions evolve from what the characters represent.

Each character rather obviously represents a figure in an old story, the story of youth searching among false gods for some truth about man's existence. It is found throughout the bibles of Christianity and Hinduism. It is
roughly the same in its many retellings. Boy rejects god of his father. Boy seeks among the beliefs of other men; materialism, atheism, paganism, or what have you. Boy comes back to old religion, repentant of his evil ways.

All of these things happen in *Dynamo*, with a slight twist at the end, which comes as close to subtlety as anything in the play. The boy, Reuben, rejects one brand of fundamentalism at the beginning of the play. After trying the other answers represented by the other characters, he arrives at the opposite extreme of scientific fundamentalism. This irony is not sufficient to redeem the weaknesses of the play.

The schematizing in *Dynamo* appears to have been brought about by a belief in the necessary dichotomy of science and religion, the belief that man must either be religiously oriented or scientifically oriented, and that he cannot be both. Ever since the Renaissance, religion has, in the minds of most men, progressively surrendered more areas of human action to science. As most modern religious leaders are willing to admit, science finds the facts, determines evident truths about the universe, and religion's function is to interpret the facts and truths into moral and spiritual behavior. Carl Dahlstroem states, in a recent article:

The views are, of course, wholly untenable when we think of religion as an enterprise devoted to human meanings and values, and science as an enterprise devoted to the factual understanding of the continuum of occurrence. When we realize that the
essential business of science is the accumulation and ordering of objective fact, we note that the two represent different areas of human endeavor. The confusion of the either-or situation or of identity is then dispelled by the rationale of the both-and situation.

O'Neill's confusion on this point permeates Dynamo and prevents the play from coming to grips with believable human problems. Man can believe in both science and religion, and accommodate both in his approach to life. Therefore, Reuben Light struggles with a medieval misconception which is no longer relevant to modern culture, the Scopes trial notwithstanding. Although pockets of ignorance exist in every era, they do not provide a source of intellectual insights into that era. The solution of Reuben's problem in this play is painfully obvious: he must arrive at a rationalization of his beliefs into a scientific religion, as most modern men have done. Reuben Light largely fails to interest an audience because his problems are not theirs.

The characters in Dynamo show the false dichotomy in a relatively clear-cut attitude toward life. This represents different stereotypes for each, but it highlights their schematization. In the following scene Reverend Light is revealed as the representative of the life-denying Christianity, and Mrs. Light of material comfort.

LIGHT: I have decided. He shall follow in my footsteps--mine and those of my father before me and his father before him. It is God's manifest will! . . .
MRS. LIGHT: (Thinks scornfully) He is always so sure of what God wills! . . . But Reuben'll never be a minister if I can prevent it! . . . I'd rather see him dead than go through the poverty and humiliation I've had to face! . . . Reuben's got to go to college . . . then into business . . . marry a nice girl with money . . . he doesn't care anything about girls yet, thank goodness! (She speaks in a meek, persuasive tone.) Each of us must judge about Reuben according to the light vouchsafed by God. He doesn't feel any call to the ministry and I think it would be a great sin if--

LIGHT: (His voice booming) And I tell you, Amelia, it is God's will!

In this scene, the two characters are not only shown to represent two "terms" in the discussion, but to be personally involved with each other also. The father wants his son to follow him toward Jehovah by becoming a minister. The mother says no, because he would not make enough money. These are personal conflicts as well as philosophical ones. They introduce a human dimension to these people which goes aglimmering for want of subsequent development. The father disappears from view with no resolution. The mother dies, and in dying embraces her son's faith in the dynamo. This is not resolution, however. It is merely the end of materialism in Reuben's gallery of possibilities.

The first act presents all of the possibilities which Reuben might embrace in his search. The Fife family contains the atheism of Ramsay Fife, the sensual pagan acceptance of May Fife, and the total abandon of romantic love in Ada Fife.
The atheist taunts Reuben, creating doubts and fears:

FIFE: What's the trouble, young fellow? Are you afraid of a bit of lightning? Don't worry about me. The devil looks after his own! But a minister's son has reason to worry, maybe, when he's in a den of atheism, holding intimate converse with a damned man! I'm thinking your Jehovah might aim a thunderbolt at me but Lucifer would deflect it on to you—and he's the better electrical expert of the two, being more modern in his methods than your God!

But Ramsay Fife is also used as a human. He is a worried father. This vitiates both his symbolic and his human sides. He is not completely successful at either. Like Reverend Light, he simply drops out of sight, finding no resolution. His purpose was to present atheism to Reuben, after which he has no purpose. Accordingly, O'Neill forgets him.

May Fife is similar to Cybel in Brown, though they are not identical. Cybel is an active participant in living. She goes out after life, and submerges herself in it. May Fife is different.

MRS. FIFE: ( . . . dreaming sentimentally of the past) When I first met Ramsay he was a linesman . . . I loved him at first sight . . . he was so romantic looking with those steel climbing things on his legs . . . and he wore a colored handkerchief round his neck just like a cowboy . . . Pa and Ma warned me linesmen were no good . . . they just ruined you and went their way . . . they were wrong about Ramsay . . . Except he did ruin me . . . I said, why is it wrong when I love him? . . . Pa yelled to get out, I'd disgraced the family . . . I never
expected Ramsay'd marry me . . . he was the roving kind . . . but as soon as he knew he'd got me into trouble he spoke right up . . . "Oh, hell, then I guess I've got to marry you" . . . and I said yes, and I was awful happy . . . and five months after Ada was born and he was crazy about her from the first . . . and we've all been happy ever since . . . (She sighs contentedly.)

Mrs. Fife is passive. She drifts along, not caring too much about the death of the old god nor seeking a new one. She is content with life as she finds it. Reuben cannot embrace this answer, and apparently never considers doing so. He must continue to search. May sends him on his way to the dynamo in this scene:

REUBEN: . . . I'm studying a lot of science. Sometimes I've gone without eating to buy books--and often I've read all night--books on astronomy and biology and physics and chemistry and evolution. It all comes down to electricity in the end. What the fool preachers call God is in electricity somewhere. (He breaks off--then strangely) Did you ever watch dynamos? What I mean is in them--somehow.

MRS. FIFE: (Dreamily) I love dynamos. I love to hear them sing. They're singing all the time about everything in the world! (She hums her imitation of a dynamo's whirring purr.)

REUBEN: . . . "Singing all the time about everything in the world" . . . she gets them all right . . . listen to her . . . she's caught the sound . . . ( . . . puts down his books and walks up to Mrs. Fife) Say, you're all right! (He takes one of her hands in his clumsily--then lets go of it, grinning awkwardly.)
Next, Ada is the representation of those who love, and in their love find all they need of spiritual value. She is a legitimate offspring of her mother's type. May Fife has not found love, but Ada may, in Reuben. Mrs. Fife works toward that end, and Ada is killed by Reuben for the love she bears him. To Reuben, love is sin and he must atone for sin.

The action of the play is, as originally pointed out, the old story of the searcher among the false gods. This search suffers, however, from such schematization as to eliminate validity in the dramatic sense. Most of the components are so overdone that they become mere hollow theatricality, with no basis in genuine symbolism or realism.

The play begins in the home of the Light family. We have seen the conflicts and tensions that reflect a real, as well as symbolic, plane of existence. Reuben, we see, is involved with Ada, but fears his father's reaction to this affair:

REUBEN: (Hearing his father's voice . . . )
What's he shouting about? . . . has he heard about Ada and me? . . . he'll raise the roof! . . . but Mother'll take my side against him . . . she's always sided with me . . .
(Then resentfully) What do I care about him anyway? . . .

Later, Reuben meets Ada secretly and is followed by his mother. Ada takes Reuben to see her father, who intends to prove Reuben is "yellow". Fife tells Reuben
a trumped up story which, if true, would incriminate Fife.
Reuben is sworn to secrecy.

Confused and worried, Reuben confesses the assumed
truth about Fife to his mother. It is overheard by Reverend
Light, who rushes out to tell the police. Reuben has been
betrayed by everyone, and his faith has been compromised.

The scene that destroys the Light family and Reuben's
faith is highly emotional, suggesting personal as well as
symbolic complications:

LIGHT: Let this put back the fear of God into your
sinful heart, Reuben! (He brings the belt down
heavily across Reuben's back. Reuben quivers
but not a sound comes from his lips. At the
same moment there is a glaring flash of
lightning and Light cringes back with a
frightened exclamation)

REUBEN: . . . (Then stealing a glance up at his
father's face) He looks scared! . . . it
was that lightning! . . . I'll never be scared
of lightning again!

LIGHT: . . . I must hurry. I want to get to the
police station before the rain.

REUBEN: (Staring after him with the same look of
defiance—calls jeeringly) Look out for the
lightning! (Then he turns to his mother with
a sneer—contemptuously) Picture my being
scared of that boob all my life! What did you
ever see in him, to marry him? He's yellow!

MRS. LIGHT: . . . How dare you talk so disrespect-
fully—!

REUBEN: But you're yellow, too. And I'm yellow.
How could I help being? It's in my blood.
(Harshly) But I'll get him out of my blood,
by God! And I'll get you out, too!
Unfortunately, the personal side of the characters is never fully developed. Before it can be, Reuben is forced into his quest for new and more satisfying gods. This is not to say O'Neill forgets the Light family altogether. The resolutions do, however, take place off stage and we are either told about it or assumed to be indifferent.

Reuben, with his back to the old god, represented by his father, cannot find refuge in the atheism of Ramsay Fife. For atheism is primarily negative and Reuben must have some object of faith. Fife's certainty in his beliefs is a disturbing factor in Reuben's life. This leads him to the rather obvious goal of Fife's dynamo.

On the way to the dynamo, Reuben must face Ada and the romantic love she represents. Ada thought at one time that he was "yellow" and had told him so. Reuben loved her and this had created doubt in his mind about "love". Coupling this with the insane idea that love was a sin against his mother and later a factor in the way of his discovering the secret of the dynamo, this spiritual haven is closed to him.

Relentlessly Reuben is drawn toward the dynamo, again rather obviously, like the moth to a flame. Mrs. Fife is no comfort or help for she, like her husband, offers only a negative outlook. She passively accepts and cares nothing
about meanings. Reuben must have a positive substitute for the old dead god of his father. With an almost incredible absence of subtlety, enter the dynamo.

Reuben is insane at the end of the second act. His lines suggest that it is the result of intense guilt over the death of his mother. Reuben says: "That I was living in sin—that Dynamo would never find me worthy of her secret until I'd given up the flesh and purified myself! (Then proudly) And I found the strength to do it! It was hard! I was beginning to really love Ada."

The schematization of the play is further shown in the death of Reuben. There are elements of both the realistic and the symbolic which work against each other to produce a weakening of the final scene. Reuben is dying because his guilt has driven him insane and he is dying because man cannot find salvation in pure science. The strong presence of private circumstance weakens any symbolic application the death might have had to the general plight of modern man, while the very attempt to make such an application greatly weakens any effect the death might have had as an exhibition of a merely personal plight. The two tend to cancel each other out.

The action throughout the play tends to be too obvious for effective drama. It lacks the subtlety and mystery that captures the imagination of an audience. Little
is left to the imagination, and the result is that the characters have no individuality. They are almost entirely the rather obvious tools of the playwright who uses them to represent the figures in Reuben's search. They have no existence beyond what they symbolize. The resulting schematization weakens the play.

The action of the play, which is too gross in itself, is further schematized by the blatant symbolism which O'Neill adds, apparently, to insure that we do not miss the message the theme holds for us.

For example, Reuben's last name is Light, which would appear to symbolize his search for metaphysical light. In fact, Reuben's first name is found in the Bible, representing a similar character. Also, there is the irony of intellectually blind Reverend Light being named Light. Reverend Light is also frightened by the thunder and lightning which, to him, represents the vengeful god. The fundamentalism, already discussed, is based upon a kind of blindness to fact, as Reuben sees when talking to Fife. God does not work the way the Lights think:

REUBEN: . . . when Fife took out his watch and said if there was a God let Him prove it by striking him dead in five minutes, why was it nothing happened? . . . I should think if . . . (He looks around uneasily, afraid of where his thoughts are taking him. A faint flash of lightning from the distant storm flickers through his window. He starts guiltily and hastily makes a reassuring declaration of faith)
Of course there's a God . . . He wouldn't pay any attention to a fool like Fife, that's all . . .

This is indicative of Reuben's own fears as well as his father's. Reuben, too, is a fundamentalist to the core. Therefore, when he seeks a new god, it must meet the old criteria. It must be as jealous and vengeful as the old god.

The dynamo, as the object of Reuben's faith, represents science. O'Neill inadvertently adds a touch of the burlesque when he makes it appear as a gigantic idol:

... brilliantly lighted by a row of powerful bulbs in white globes set in brackets along both walls, there is a clear view of a dynamo, huge and black, with something of a massive female idol about it, the exciter set on the main structure like a head with blank, oblong eyes above a gross, rounded torso . . . The air is full of sound, a soft overtone of rushing water from the dam and the river bed below, penetrated dominantly by the harsh, throaty, metallic purr of the dynamo.

By setting before us so concrete a representation of science and endowing it so heavily with aspects of divinity, O'Neill makes his point with unfailing clarity. But that very clarity all but destroys any validity the point might have had. For although modern man might be said to have turned to science as to a god, he has not been so foolish as to actually kneel in prayer before a great purring hulk of steel and flashing lights. Thus, when Reuben does so, we can only view him as a curiously demented child, a special
case of unusual aberration—not a representative of modern man in search of god.

Robert Benchley, too, laments O'Neill's lack of humor as a factor in his failure in Dynamo. He says:

In wishing that Mr. O'Neill had a sense of humor we do not mean that we want him to write humorously or gag up his plays. Nine-tenths of the value of a sense of humor in writing is not in the things it makes one write but in the things it keeps one from writing. It is especially valuable in this respect in serious writing, and no one without a sense of humor should ever write seriously. For without knowing what is funny, one is constantly in danger of being funny without knowing it.

According to O'Neill's apparent plan for the dynamo, it must represent not only science to the sane Reuben, but it must also be the Great Mother. This brings in the next set of symbols, which are more or less Freudian in nature.

The father-hate and mother-love of the Oedipus complex is all too patent in Act I.

REUBEN: (Clinging to her) I love Mother better'n anything in the world . . . she always forgives me . . . I wish I could tell her . . . she'd know what was right . . . (There is a bright flash of lightning. He shrinks closer to her and blurts out) I'm scared, Mother! I'm guilty! I'm damned!

Reuben's guilt upon hearing of his mother's death produces a strange religious attachment to the dynamo, which becomes his mother. He transfers all his old fears of god and mother-guilt to the dynamo. This insanity weakens the
effectiveness of Reuben, for insanity is an end of flesh and blood people, not symbols. This highlights Reuben’s schematic nature still more.

Theatricality is not lost because of these symbols, however. The events themselves are, it would seem, calculated to produce the required emotions. Reuben prays to the dynamo and seeks truth. Reuben must purge himself of guilt, the dynamo tells him. Reuben says: "She won’t answer me . . . there must still be something I’ve got to do . . . . (Then guiltily) Maybe she feels I haven’t killed all desire for Ada yet? . . . that I ought to face her and conquer the flesh once and for all . . . " He plans to meet Ada at the temple of the dynamo and kill her as a sacrifice to the new god. Then, with gunfire still in our ears, Reuben destroys himself because life is a sin: "I don’t want any miracle, Mother! I don’t want to know the truth! I only want you to hide me, Mother! Never let me go from you again! Please, Mother!"

With Reuben transfixed on, and electrocuted by the dynamo, " . . . as though on a cross", May Fife enters. She says: "Reuben, are you hurt bad? (to dynamo) What are you singing for? I should think you’d be ashamed! And I thought you was nice and loved us! (Mrs. Fife pounds the dynamo in . . . anger) You hateful old thing, you!"

Perhaps this short scene is not as obvious as it appears, but it seems to say that the people like May Fife
who represent a passive acceptance of life, simply cannot understand the essence of a searcher like Reuben. However, it could cause the audience to laugh at a most inopportune moment. They should be reflecting on the ominous nature of man's destiny. Unfortunately, O'Neill takes too much for granted, for this scene is not strong enough to sustain irony, nor are the characters. It is simply incongruity that the audience sees. "Reuben, are you hurt bad?" Indeed, he is hurt.

Like Reuben, the entire play is weakened by a tendency to abridge the individuality of character. The characters begin as real human beings, and as the play progresses, become merely spokesmen for various false gods, as O'Neill conceived them, which man encounters in his quest for a new god.

The dramatic validity in this play is based upon the courage and the integrity of the individual as he struggles with his nature, to find a replacement for the god on whom he turned his back. Theoretically, then, Reuben should be tested on the bases of personal courage, personal philosophies, and personal strengths, as should all the characters. The battleground, the ideas over which they struggle, should be relatively unimportant. The outcome, in terms of human values, should be the important thing.

In Dynamo, only one character, Reuben, has an "outcome". Everyone else either fades away with no resolution, or is
arbitrarily liquidated, as in the case of Ada. Therefore, the only character of possible dramatic interest is Reuben, but his struggle and ultimate death has no basis in personal values. The outcome is as dehumanized and impersonal as could be. That is not Reuben on the dynamo, but Man. The schematization is the factor that produces death. Reuben's psychological complex has little to do with it. The important, even decisive factor, is the impersonal, symbolic search for a metaphysical truth.

We are further disappointed by the insufficiency of the views set forth in the play. Dahlstroem points this out:

The fate of Reuben in Dynamo might seem to suggest that O'Neill understands the insufficiency of all the views set forth in the play, those of Fife as well as those of the boy and his clergyman father. But we have no evidence actually to support such an opinion. If anything, we must assume that O'Neill leans strongly toward Fife, for there is more sympathy for the perspective of the practical engineer than for Reuben's mad worship of the dynamo, and none at all for the Reverend Light's faith.

Dynamo fails to produce effective drama primarily because of a philosophically truncated base, predicated upon schematized characters which are incapable of sustaining the necessary interest in the play.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

In this cycle of plays, O'Neill sought to dramatize modern man's quest for an acceptable substitute for the supposedly dead god of orthodox, institutionalized Christianity. Though the plays have this theme in common, they differ one from another in two ways: in the nature of the new god "found", and in the techniques employed by O'Neill in his dramatization of the quest.

The Great God Brown shows perhaps the closest approach to a group of individuals solving their own problems and generating empathy within the audience for Dion and Brown. O'Neill comes closest here to real people struggling with forces which they do not comprehend, producing a type of drama. The characters, unfortunately, are lost in the devices and schematization of the play. We stay with the two protagonists emotionally for a time; then we lose them in masks and figurative murders, and clever disguises and hidden identities, and prolonged death scenes which serve to alienate us first from Dion, and then from Brown. All of this trickery is insufficient to camouflage the basic hollowness, in dramatic terms, of their struggles. The accumulation of stylizations finally destroys the drama in a welter of overgeneralizations. The human quality is thus lost.
The masks and the chorus reappear in *Lazarus Laughed*, but to serve an altered purpose. No longer plumbing the depths of man's psychological condition, O'Neill plumbs the spirit to discover the Super Man. The masks become sociological designations, rather than psychological. O'Neill denominates the seven types in the seven types of man; The Simple, Ignorant; The Happy, Eager; The Self-Tortured, Introspective; The Proud, Self-Reliant; The Servile, Hypocritical; The Revengeful, Cruel; The Sorrowful, Resigned; through use of the masks. The chorus is composed of these types, chanting in unison the recurrent theme "Death is dead!"

O'Neill forsakes the individual solution to the problem of faith and seeks a greater truth in the biological fact of human continuity. With this in mind, the functions of mask and chorus must change in *Lazarus Laughed*. Unfortunately, this play, too, loses touch with individuals, and mere human beings are lost in the face of the vastness of the themes, impersonal actions, and cold, nonhuman crowds.

The cycle reaches its finale in *Dynamo*. O'Neill apparently realizes that he has not entirely succeeded in the first two plays. Perhaps he even realized that the cause lay in the overwhelming of individuals with weighty themes. For in *Dynamo*, O'Neill seems to try to show more of the psychology of his characters and uses realistic scenery in
what seems a further attempt to bring the action "down to earth". Unfortunately, these devices only serve to underscore the extreme schematization of character, and thus destroy the validity the play might have had on a philosophical level.

These three plays, The Great God Brown, Lazarus Laughed, and Dynamo, are a cycle of plays which hold in common certain theatrical and literary devices used to seek metaphysical truths. The methods and devices which serve as the cohesive factor so overpower the characters that no recognizable human action of any dramatic consequence takes place upon the stage.
NOTES

Chapter one


4. Gassner, p. 100.

Chapter two

1. Clark, p. 104.

2. Clark, p. 104.


Chapter three

1. Clark, p. 118.

2. Gassner, p. 255.

Chapter four


3Dahlstroem, p. 228.
LIST OF REFERENCES

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_________. The Playwright as Thinker. New York, 1946.


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