The Great God Brown Study Guide

The Great God Brown by Eugene O'Neill

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites".

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers".

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

When *The Great God Brown* opened at the Greenwich Village Theatre in New York on January 23, 1926, Eugene O'Neill presented the audience with a new kind of theatrical experience. Other playwrights had previously used masks on stage, but none had presented them in such an innovative way. While opening night reviews were mixed, the audience's appreciation of the play kept it running for 283 performances. Many viewers were excited by the play's bold expressionistic technique specifically O'Neill's experimental use of masks. The play focuses on the lives of three main characters: Dion Anthony, a failed artist; his wife, Margaret; and Billy Brown, a successful architect and friend to Dion and Margaret. Throughout the play, these characters wear masks that serve several purposes. They help the characters hide and thus protect their vulnerable inner selves while, at the same time, allowing them to project pleasing public images in an attempt to restore their confidence in themselves. Yet, ultimately, the tensions that result from not being able to reveal their true selves cause the characters to suffer and further isolate themselves from each other. *The Great God Brown* presents a penetrating study of the inner workings of the human psyche as it struggles to cope with betrayal, failure, and a search for identity.

Author Biography

Eugene O'Neill was born on October 16, 1888, in New York City, to James and Mary Ellen O'Neill. The O'Neills led a transient life as the family followed James' stage career. O'Neill's father was a celebrated actor who became famous for his performance in *The Count of Monte Cristo.* The constant traveling and the life of the theatre caused tensions between O'Neill's parents, exacerbated by Mary's addiction to morphine, a habit she started after her son's difficult delivery. Their decidedly dysfunctional family had an enormously negative effect on Eugene and his brother Jamie. After surviving his expulsion from Princeton, a suicide attempt, a bout of tuberculosis, and a failed marriage, O'Neill determined to devote his life to writing for the theatre. Familial tensions would become the subject of several of O'Neill's plays, including his most successful, *Long Day's Journey into Night*. In 1914, with his father's help, O'Neill published *Thirst and Other One Act Plays*. The first staging of one of his plays did not occur until after his involvement with the Provincetown Players in Massachusetts in the summer of 1916. Their summer theater premiered his *Bound East for Cardiff,* which enjoyed solid reviews.

O'Neill's successful playwriting continued for three decades and secured him the reputation as one of the world's greatest dramatists. He won the Pulitzer Prize four times: in 1920 for *Beyond the Horizon*, in 1922 for *Anna Christie*, in 1928 for *Strange Interlude,* and in 1957 for *Long Day's Journey into Night.* Other awards included the Gold Medal from the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1923, a Litt.D. from Yale University in 1923, the Nobel Prize in literature in 1936, and, for *Long Day's Journey into Night,* the New York Drama Critics Circle Award in 1957. He died of pneumonia on November 27, 1953, in Boston, Massachusetts.

Plot Summary

Prologue and Act One

The play opens on the night of the high school commencement dance. Billy Brown stands on the pier with his parents, who decide that Billy will go to college to study architecture and that he will eventually become a partner in his father's firm. Soon after the Browns leave, the Anthonys approach the pier. Dion walks behind them "as if he were a stranger." Mr. and Mrs. Anthony argue about sending Dion to college. His father says he doesn't believe in it, declaring, "let him slave like I had to!... College'11 only make him a bigger fool than he is already." However, when Mrs. Anthony tells him that Billy will be going to college to become an architect and afterward will work in the contracting firm he and Mr. Brown jointly own, Dion's father changes his mind, insisting that Dion will go to college and become a better architect or he will turn his son "out in the gutter without a penny."

Later, Margaret and Billy come out on the pier. Margaret takes off her mask, which is an accurate replica of her own face, and declares her love for Dion as Billy declares his own feelings for her. After she ignores his pronouncements, Billy feels despondent but wishes her happiness and insists that he will always be her best friend. The focus then shifts to Dion, standing alone. He takes off his mask, revealing "his real face . . . shrinking, shy and gentle, full of a deep sadness." He asks himself questions that reveal his sensitivity and insecurity. When Billy approaches and sees Dion, he is at first resentful and then becomes the "good loser." Dion admits to Billy his fear of loving Margaret since he doesn't know himself. When he removes his mask, a mocking reflection of Pan, his face appears "torn and transfigured by joy." He soon decides that her love will allow him to discard his mask. Yet later, when Margaret does not recognize him without it, he puts it back on.

After his father dies, Dion sells his share of the firm to Billy and marries Margaret. The two live for a time in Europe, where Dion tries but fails to become a successful artist. After seven years, they return home. Dion's failures have turned him into an alcoholic. While his "real face has aged greatly, grown more drained and tortured but at the same time, in some queer way, more selfless and ascetic, more fixed in its resolute withdrawal from life," his mask has become more "defiant and mocking, its sneer more forced and bitter, its Pan quality becoming Mephistophelian." Dion searches for spiritual consolation but finds none. Recognizing that her family, which now includes three children, is quickly running out of money, Margaret convinces Dion to take a job with Billy, who now runs his father's firm. Cybel, a young woman who finds Dion passed out on her doorstep, offers maternal support and comfort. Dion is able to remove his mask and reveal his true self when he is with her. Billy also turns to Cybel for comfort after Dion starts working for him.

Act Two

Dion's face behind the mask continues to get gentler and more spiritual over the next seven years. One evening, he tells Margaret that he is lonely and frightened, and is going away. He begs her to look at him when he tears off his mask, his face "radiant with a great pure love for her and a great sympathy and tenderness" as he asks her forgiveness for his lack of support for her and for their children. However, she cannot bear to look at his "ghostlike" face. Later that night Dion appears in Billy's library, insisting that he is "the devil come to conclude a bargain." Dion's masked face "has a terrible deathlike intensity, its mocking irony becomes so cruelly malignant as to give him the appearance of a real demon, tortured into torturing others." He relates his memory of an incident that occurred when he was four, when Billy, jealous over Dion's artistic talent, betrayed his friend's trust. Dion explains that from that moment, he became "silent for life and designed a mask of the Bad Boy Pan in which to live and rebel against that other boy's God and protect myself from His cruelty." At first he expresses anger toward Billy, but then begs him to take care of Margaret and the boys. Dion's face without the mask becomes that of a Christian martyr, and he dies. Believing that he could now gain Margaret's love, a triumphant Billy puts on Dion's mask and clothes and so assumes his friend's identity.

Act Three

One month later, Margaret appears in Billy's office looking for her husband. She no longer needs to wear her mask since Billy, in his guise as Dion, has made her feel secure and happy. When she asks Billy where Dion is, Billy breaks down and tears off his "Billy" mask, revealing "a suffering face that is ravaged and haggard... tortured and distorted by the demon of Dion's mask." When he declares his love for her, Margaret runs out of his office. Later that night, Margaret tells Billy (as Dion) that Billy had confessed his love for her. Billy responds,' Til murder this God-damned disgusting Great God Brown who stands like a fatted calf in the way of our health and wealth and happiness." When Margaret is shocked by his behavior, he tells her, "Don't worry, "Mr. Brown is now safely in hell. Forget him."

Act Four and Epilogue

One month later, Brown calls out to God to give him the strength to destroy himself. When Margaret and his clients appear in his office, Billy, in an increasingly frenzied state, changes back and forth from his mask to Dion's. When he disappears, his draftsmen go in his office, find Billy's mask, and declare him dead. All but Margaret assume that Dion killed him. Later that evening, the police come to his home and shoot him in Dion's mask. When Margaret arrives, she picks up Dion's fallen mask and grieves for her dead husband. As Billy dies, he tells Cybel he has found God. Four years later, Margaret and her children stand on the same dock where she and Dion had stood at the beginning of the play. She implores them to never forget their father and promises her husband her eternal love.

Prologue

Prologue Summary

The Great God Brown is a four-act play which follows the lives of the three main characters and their relationship with each other. The protagonist is Dion Anthony, a tortured, sensitive artist, who is married to Margaret, who assumes a motherly role toward her husband. The character for whom the play is named is Billy Brown; he is a lifelong friend of Dion's and Margaret's who becomes a successful architect.

As the prologue begins, it is a night in mid-June at a pier where nearby a high school commencement dance is in full swing. Mr. and Mrs. Brown stroll with their son, Billy and the family talks of Billy's future plans to become an architect and become associated with Mr. Brown's building firm. Mr. Brown is indignant because his own partner, Mr. Anthony, will not agree with him to expand the construction company they own.

After the Browns have strolled away, the Anthony family comes to the pier. In contrast to the Browns, the Anthonys seem like strangers to each other, remain separated and speak disjointedly. Dion's parents do not agree about Dion's future; Mrs. Anthony would like Dion to attend college and cultivate his artistic talents, but Mr. Anthony feels that college is a breeding ground for sloth and that Dion will only return one day to live off his father's efforts. Mr. Anthony changes his mind, though, after Mrs. Anthony reveals that the Browns intend to send Billy to college to become an architect for the company.

After the Anthonys return to the dance, Billy and Margaret, the girl Billy is very fond of, come out onto the pier. Margaret wears a mask that is an exact replica of her own face. Billy tries to make some awkward romantic gestures, but Margaret is in love with Dion and removes her mask to tell Billy of her true feelings. Billy realizes that he is beaten but vows enduring friendship.

Dion is seen at the pier and he also wears a mask, which is removed when he speaks to his best friend, Billy. Billy can see his friend's shy, sensitive nature and tells him that Margaret loves Dion and he will back out of the situation. Dion is pleased by this news and hopes that Margaret's love will remove his mask forever. When Margaret finds Dion on the pier, she does not recognize him without the mask so he is forced to put it back on. Margaret's one goal in life is to become Mrs. Dion Anthony and she vows to love Dion and all his insecurities.

Prologue Analysis

O'Neill introduces the theme of contrast of acquiescence against independence early in the play with the Browns deciding what Billy's future should be. Billy seems compliant in deference to his parents, in stark contrast to Dion, who rebels against whatever his parents have in store for him. There is unity of purpose in the Brown family as

evidenced in the way they walk arm-in-arm while the Anthonys are disjointed and restless, another important contrast.

Probably the most important message of the play is that of individual identity. Billy's future is planned and it is clear that his has been a childhood of security and love while Dion is restless amid the tension of his parent's marriage. Coupled with his turbulent background, Dion's artistic nature makes him dissatisfied with most of the world around him. Neither young man is free to express his real intentions and goals and Dion is even more tortured and must wear a mask so the world will not see his insecurities and pain. Even Margaret, the girl Dion loves, does not recognize Billy without his mask of compliance. Margaret, too, wears a mask of a young woman whose life is planned out to the last detail with the main purpose that of marrying Dion Anthony.

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

It is now seven years later and Dion and Margaret are at home in a conventional house. Dion's mask has now aged and is almost evil looking in its intensity while Margaret's mask remains the same. Dion had sold his share of his father's company when Mr. Anthony died and Dion and Margaret had lived in Europe for a few years. Dion has not succeeded at his career as an artist and the couple has exhausted their savings and has settled into a suburban life complete with monotony and three children.

Margaret's desperation grows as Dion does not pursue employment and the family's resources have dwindled to an uncomfortable state. Margaret tells Dion that she has run into Billy who suggested that he and Dion meet to discuss Dion's working at Billy's firm. Dion is furious that Margaret has dragged Billy into their problems and leaves the house.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

Dion's life has sunk into the quiet desperation of an artist forced to live in a conventional scenario. His despair and depression cannot even be disguised by his own mask, which reflects his desperate state of mind. Margaret's mask features have not changed but it is her pattern to persevere without any real emotional angst. Dion's desperation has even led him to seek spiritual guidance but he finds no comfort there either and leaves to find solace in liquor.

Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

Margaret is meeting Billy at his office where it is clear that he is quite successful. Since the deaths of Mr. Brown and Mr. Anthony, Billy has operated the company on his own and has established himself as a fine architect. It is clear that Billy is still smitten with Margaret and he tries to spare her dignity during their discussion of the dire financial situation in the Anthony household. Margaret confides that she intends to take a job at the library, at which point Billy strongly suggests that Dion be convinced to come to work at Billy's firm. Margaret is visibly relieved and leaves with Billy vowing to himself to reprimand Dion very soon.

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

Even though Margaret's mask has not changed, she has personally transformed into a weary mother and wife exhausted from propping up an emotionally crippled husband. Margaret's love for Dion supersedes her pride, though she visits Billy to intervene on Dion's behalf.

Act 1, Scene 3

Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

Dion is asleep on the couch in a parlor of a young woman named Cybel. Apparently, Dion had passed out drunk on her front step and Cybel brought him inside to avoid any interference from the local police. Dion wakes and is startled at first because he does not recognize Cybel, but he is taken in by her maternal gestures and he is able to remove his mask as she strokes his brow. When the doorbell rings, Cybel dons a mask painted to mimic the face of a hardcore prostitute.

Billy is at the door and wants Dion to leave with him so they can discuss something important. Dion is irritated that he has been tracked down by his old friend but finally relents and allows Billy to make the proposition of a job. As the resignation of convention settles over Dion, he removes his mask and launches into a monologue about the devastating loss of his mother in his life. Billy encourages Dion to shake off the melancholy and Dion agrees to work for Billy, whom he now calls The Great God Brown.

Act 1, Scene 3 Analysis

The death of Dion's mother has left him wounded in ways that Margaret cannot or will not reach so Dion is comforted by Cybel, a prostitute who does not pass judgment on Dion's insecurities and inadequacies. Cybel also wears a mask, hers being that of a hardened whore, but in actuality she is a sensitive, caring person with much sympathy for those who are in vulnerable states. It is interesting that Dion is comfortable enough with Cybel that he can remove his mask without fear of reprisal. Reality jerks Dion back, though, when Billy arrives to pull him into the world of responsibility and convention. Dion would rather have divine intervention but right now Billy is the one offering help and Dion realizes that he needs it.

Act 2, Scene 1

Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

Seven years later, Dion and Cybel play solitaire in Cybel's parlor. The furnishings are more expensive than earlier and the two characters have aged and softened. It is clear that Cybel represents the maternal, nurturing characteristics that he needs and does not receive from Margaret. During the course of their conversation, it is revealed that Billy supports Cybel yet does not know that Dion continues to spend time with her.

Dion admits that his health is almost exhausted and that his heart is bad. Cybel encourages Dion to go home to Margaret and the boys, but Dion is enraged over the fact that his life is waning and Billy has taken credit for all his creativity and hard work over the years. Billy finally stands to leave, kisses Cybel goodbye and dons his mask.

Billy arrives soon afterwards and surprises Cybel so that she does not have time to put on her mask. Billy does not recognize Cybel, who introduces herself as Cybel's sister. Billy knows that Dion has just left and thinks that Dion is coming to see the woman he thinks is Cybel's sister. Cybel never corrects Billy and agrees never to see Dion again, for which Billy is very grateful.

Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

Billy's drive and ambition cannot make up for what he lacks in creativity and his career has been bolstered by Dion's efforts. Billy is envious of everything that Dion has: creativity, a wife and children; and even Cybel. Consequently, Billy attempts to destroy Dion because he can't possess what Dion has. The theme of identity is still very strong with the use of the masks hiding the characters' real personalities although Dion's mask does disintegrate into the demonic characteristics of age and exhaustion. Billy, who characterizes the typical American dream, is obtuse and cannot even recognize Cybel without her mask of prostitution.

Act 2, Scene 2

Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

Later that same night, Margaret finds Dion at the office and chastises her husband for drinking and staying away from home for the past two days. Dion is in a destructive mood and can only refer to himself in the third person as he speaks to Margaret so as not to be too emotionally vulnerable. Dion rages about his betrayal at Billy's hand, even at the age of four when Billy destroyed a sand drawing Dion had made and laughed at Dion's distress. Dion is finished with this life of betrayal and lashes out, causing Margaret to faint. Dion's sons arrive and he tells them that he is leaving and asks them to take care of their mother. He then leaves for Billy's house.

Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

Dion's emotional exhaustion at the hand of Billy's lifelong betrayals has won out and not even Margaret can infuse him with the vitality he needs. His life has not been authentic to his mind and he must end the charade. Dion not only feels betrayed by his friend and his wife, but also by God, who Dion feels has abandoned him in every hour of need. Dion has nothing more to cling to and realizes that Margaret and the boys will be better off without him. It's possible that if Dion were out of their lives, Billy could step in fully and provide them with the life they had truly deserved.

Act 2, Scene 3

Act 2, Scene 3 Summary

Billy is at home in the sumptuous library when he is rudely interrupted by Dion's presence. Dion announces himself as the devil that has come to conclude a bargain. Dion then challenges Billy on all the betrayals, especially the ones related to the abuse of Dion's creativity in the business for which Billy takes all the credit. According to Dion, Billy lives the American dream, but he has achieved that success by capitalizing on Dion. Billy suggests that Dion is drunk from celebrating the firm's success at winning the job to build a cathedral. However, Dion angrily tells Billy that it is his own work that won the contract, that Billy would not know how to construct any such structure.

Dion begins to fade, his heart giving way, but he still continues to deride Billy for taking everything that Dion ever loved: Margaret, his creativity and even Cybel. The two men engage in a struggle until Dion collapses on the floor, willing himself and his family to Billy as his last testament. Dion's mask falls away, revealing a tortured soul. Billy begins to try on Dion's mask when he is interrupted by the doorbell. Margaret has arrived looking for Dion to which Billy replies that Dion is there and is asleep after swearing off liquor tonight. Billy leaves the room under the pretense of waking Dion.

Billy re-enters the room, this time dressed in Dion's clothes and mask. He embraces Margaret, who is amazed at Dion's renewed strength, which she credits to his newfound sobriety.

Act 2, Scene 3 Analysis

There is significant religious symbolism in this scene beginning with Dion's announcement that he is the devil who has come to conclude a bargain. Dion had sold his soul years ago to work in Billy's business for the sake of Margaret and the boys and now he is finished and it is time for Billy to pay. Dion also challenges Billy on the contract to build the cathedral, saying that Billy wouldn't even know how to begin on such a structure. The implication is that Billy is soulless and devoid of any redeeming qualities to build anything of any spiritual value, whether it be a building or a purposeful life.

Act 3, Scene 1

Act 3, Scene 1 Summary

Two draftsmen in Billy's office discuss Dion's whereabouts now that Billy has fired him. The two men are amazed to see Margaret appear, asking for Dion who has not been seen at the office for several weeks. Billy intervenes and tells Margaret that Dion is hard at work on the plans for a new state capitol and cannot be disturbed. Billy tells Margaret that he loves her and wants to confess to Margaret about what he has done to Dion, but even when he tears off his mask, all Margaret can say is that he looks ill. Billy puts the mask on again and tells Margaret that he's been on the verge of a breakdown for a while and promises never to act inappropriately again. As Margaret leaves, a man enters the office and tells Billy that the plan the firm has developed for the man's new home seems devoid of warmth and the man would like Billy's old partner, Dion, to work on it instead of Billy.

Act 3, Scene 1 Analysis

Billy mistakenly thinks that by assuming Dion's identity that his own life will be improved but his sense of guilt begins to gnaw at him especially when confronted by Margaret. When the client asks for Dion's work because of Dion's reputation for style and warmth, Billy realizes that Dion really was the spiritual energy behind the business, in which Billy provided only structure.

Act 3, Scene 2

Act 3, Scene 2 Summary

Later that night Billy is alone once again in his library but this time the mask of Dion stares at him from its place on a table. Billy confides to the mask that the deceit was almost discovered today when Margaret appeared unannounced at the office. Billy tells Dion's mask that the plan is to have Billy leave for an extended vacation in Europe where his death will be faked. He will leave everything to Margaret. Billy will then return from Europe, assume the personality of Dion and live with Margaret and the boys as if nothing ever happened. The aura of Dion's mask taunts Billy that the plan will be discovered. This sends Billy into an outrage. All Billy can do now is put on Dion's identity and go home to Margaret..

Act 3, Scene 2 Analysis

O'Neill shines an uncomfortable light on the mindset of a powerful person who thinks he has the right to anyone in his world, even assuming the other's identity and life. Unfortunately, Billy's forceful nature will not allow him to assume the role of the insecure Dion for very long and the risk of being found out is imminent. Billy also teeters on the edge of madness in his quest to possess everything he wants, as evidenced in his conversation with the lifeless mask to which he has assigned life.

Act 3, Scene 3

Act 3, Scene 3 Summary

Billy, disguised in Dion's mask, returns home to Margaret whom he kisses passionately. Margaret confesses that she is happier now that she has ever been in the course of their marriage. When Margaret tells Billy that she had been in the office today and ran into Billy, the Great God Brown, the man seemed very strange and confessed that he had always loved her. Billy, as Dion, can only comment that Brown is a confused old man and changes the subject, so that he can do some work he brought home from the office.

Act 3, Scene 3 Analysis

The climax is nearing for Billy, as his joint roles as Billy and Dion have placed him in a duplicitous situation. O'Neill reminds us that it is easy to teeter on the verge of achievement of the American Dream and suggests the dire path when common sense and integrity are abandoned.

Act 4, Scene 1

Act 4, Scene 1 Summary

Billy is in his office and prances maniacally, as the plans for the new state capitol building have just been completed. Margaret arrives to see Dion and Billy exits to another room to change masks. Margaret comments on the same clothes and Billy, as Dion, passes it off as the fact that he and Billy are so close now they even dress alike. His behavior becomes increasingly more frantic, especially when the state capitol committee members arrive.

Billy can no longer maintain the façade and breaks down, tearing up the capitol blueprints. He runs to the next room to put on Dion's mask and runs away down the staircase. Soon after, one of the younger draftsmen finds Billy's mask in a side room and it is declared that Dion has killed Billy. Margaret proclaims Dion's innocence but the police are called in for an investigation.

Act 4, Scene 1 Analysis

Billy has reached his peak of madness and has manipulated the scenario so that it looks as if Dion has killed Billy. Margaret's true feelings are revealed when the news of Billy's death is announced by the draftsman; she worries about Dion's safety and not that of Billy's death.

Act 4, Scene 2

Act 4, Scene 2 Summary

Soon after the scene at the office, Billy is home alone, naked except for a piece of cloth over his loins. In his madness, Billy cries out to God for mercy and forgiveness and tells Dion's mask that the two of them will die together. Cybel arrives and tries to comfort Billy, who explains that he is Dion's murderer and also Dion, the murdered. Cybel tries to reassure the tormented man, who puts on the Dion mask, stands, spreads his arms and is shot by a police officer outside the window.

Cybel moves Billy to the couch, removes the Dion mask and tries to comfort the dying Billy. Margaret rushes in, sees the Dion mask and grieves for her dead husband. As Billy lies dying, he tells Cybel that he has found God and she urges him to go to sleep. After Billy dies, the police captain asks Cybel his name and she replies Man. The police captain makes a note on his pad.

Act 4, Scene 2 Analysis

The deception and torment are now over for Billy and Dion. Billy's greed and thirst for power have ruined everything he ever loved and he never learned that it is impossible to possess people as if they are objects. It is wiser to accept individual talents and allow others to exercise theirs. Billy finds God and some sort of spiritual guidance; too late for any help in this lifetime, but perhaps his redemption will be in the acknowledgement of a power greater than he. O'Neill is resigned to this pattern of greed, obsession and vulnerability repeating itself for time immemorial when Cybel names the tormented, dead Billy simply "Man."

Epilogue

Epilogue Summary

Four years later, Margaret and her sons are back at the same pier where Dion had declared his love for her. Margaret tells this story to the boys who are anxious to get back to the dance being held inside. Warm memories flood Margaret and she sends the boys back to the festivities with a sense of pride for a job well done and some regret that her job will soon be over. She asks the boys to always remember their father and they swear to her that they will. Margaret gazes into the summer sky and tells Dion that he will always live under her heart and will continue to live as long as she is alive.

Epilogue Analysis

True love is eternal, as evidenced by Margaret and her undying fidelity to Dion. Margaret's love for Dion has allowed her to raise their children with respect for his memory and created in them the love he would have shown had he lived. O'Neill reminds us that the patterns of life repeat, that time does move on, but love never dies when it is pure and authentic.

Characters

Dion Anthony

O'Neill introduces his protagonist, Dion Anthony, as "lean and wiry, without repose, continually in restless nervous movement." When he first appears at the dock, Dion's 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, gaily scoffing and sensual young Pan." The audience discovers later that Dion began wearing the mask after his friend Billy Brown betrayed him. He explains that from that moment he became "silent for life and designed a mask of the Bad Boy Pan in which to live and rebel against that other boy's God and protect myself from His cruelty." Throughout the play his insecurities tear at him and cause him to hide behind a mask of cruel indifference. At one point he asks himself a series of questions that reveal his anguish:

Why am I afraid to dance, I who love music and rhythm and grace and song and laughter? Why am I afraid to live, I who love life and the beauty of flesh and the living colors of earth and sky and sea? Why am I afraid of love, I who love love? Why must I pretend to scorn in order to pity? Why must I hide myself in self-contempt in order to understand? Why must I be so ashamed of my strength, so proud of my weakness? Why must I live in a cage like a criminal, defying and hating, I who love peace and friendship. Why was I born without a skin, oh God, that I must wear armor in order to touch or to be touched.

Several times he tries to remove the mask and reveal his true self to Margaret, but she is unable to gaze at his acute vulnerability. As a result of his artistic failings and Margaret's inability to accept the reality of his suffering, he tries to harden himself against life.

Throughout the play, Dion fights a battle between his sensitive nature and his growing cynicism about life. He often prays to God for salvation but is not able to find it. At one point when he reads from the Bible, "Come unto me all ye who are heavy laden and I will give you rest," he cries out, "I will come but where are you, Savior?" He feels forsaken by all, including God. He explains, "I got paint on my paws in an endeavor to see God. But that Ancient Humorist had given me weak eyes, so now I'll have to foreswear my quest for Him and go in for the Omnipresent Successful Serious One, the Great God Mr. Brown, instead." His cynicism and bitterness often emerge in his dealings with Billy whom he blames in part for his suffering. Ultimately though, his kind, sensitive nature allows him to forgive Billy and ask, "God forgive me the evil I've done him." When he tells Cybel that he lacks strength to endure his suffering on his own, she insists, "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 alcoholism ravages his body, he dies like a "Christian martyr," asking Billy to take over his role as husband and father.

Margaret Anthony

When the play opens, Margaret, almost seventeen, is a "pretty and vivacious, blonde, with big romantic eyes, her figure lithe and strong, her facial expression intelligent but youthfully dreamy." Like Dion, Margaret also wears a mask, but hers is "an exact almost transparent reproduction of her own features." The mask gives her "the abstract quality of a Girl instead of the individual, Margaret." She loves Dion deeply but is not strong enough to look beneath his mask and face his vulnerabilities. She regards Dion as a "crazy child" and attempts to mother him. When she insists that he has the talent to be a great painter, Dion says of her, "her blindness surpasseth all understanding or is it pity?" After enduring Dion's failures and his inattention to her and their three sons, Margaret's mask and face change. Her mask becomes "the brave face she puts on before the world to hide her suffering and disillusionment." When Dion dies, Margaret swears her love for him will be eternal.

Mr. Anthony

Mr. Anthony is a "tall lean man of fifty-five or sixty with a grim, defensive face, obstinate to the point of stupid weakness." Dion admits that he and his father were "aliens" to each other. Dion's estrangement from his father becomes apparent at the beginning of the play when he walks alone behind his parents "as if he were a stranger." His father's critical nature and lack of support for his son surface when he initially rejects his wife's pleas to send Dion to college. Mr. Anthony insists, "let him slave like I had to.... College'11 only make him a bigger fool than he is already." However, after Mrs. Anthony reveals Billy Brown's plans for college and his future in the company owned jointly by the Anthonys and the Browns, Mr. Anthony's ambition causes him to change his mind. He now declares that Dion will go to college and become a better architect than Billy, or, he warns him, "I'll turn you out in the gutter without a penny."

Mrs. Anthony

Mrs. Anthony is a "thin frail faded woman, her manner perpetually nervous and distraught, but with a sweet and gentle face that had once been beautiful." Dion's supportive mother continually tries to build up his confidence in his artistic talent. During the opening conversation among the family on the pier, she proudly tells Dion, "you've always painted pictures so well." Yet, she shows weakness in not defending her son more forcefully against his father's verbal abuse. Dion alludes to both her pride and her weakness when, after his father insists that he will go to college, he declares, "I thank Mr. Anthony for this splendid opportunity to create myself in my mother's image, so she may feel her life comfortably concluded." Dion describes his mother as "a sweet, strange girl, with affectionate, bewildered eyes as if God had locked her in a dark closet without any explanation." Her death becomes almost unbearable for Dion since, he admits, "her hands alone had caressed without clawing."

Billy Brown

See William Brown

Mr. Brown

Readers only get a glimpse of Billy's parents at the beginning of the play. Billy's father "is fifty or more, the type of bustling, genial, successful provincial business man, stout and hearty in his evening dress." He owns an architect firm with Dion's father. His wife's lack of respect for his business angers him. He has set goals for his son that he expects him to follow without question.

Mrs. Brown

Billy's mother appears as "a dumpy woman of forty-five, overdressed in black lace and spangles." Her insistence on addressing her son only in the third person reveals her lack of maternal instincts. When she is discussing Billy's future with his father, Billy stands "like a prisoner at the bar, facing the judge." Her words reveal her "yearning for the realization of a dream." She announces her determination that Billy will go to college and study for a profession, and then she gains agreement from her husband. Her primary concern appears to be her social status. She has been disappointed in her role in life and so pins her hopes to move up in society on her son. When Billy joins the firm as an architect, the company and the family will gain higher status in the community.

William Brown

When readers are first introduced to Billy Brown, he is a handsome, tall, and athletic boy of nearly eighteen. He is blond and blue-eyed, "with a likeable smile and a frank good-humored face, its expression already indicating a disciplined restraint. His manner has the easy self-assurance of a normal intelligence." Throughout the play, he harbors an intense love for Margaret that she returns only when he "becomes" Dion by putting on his mask. After he takes over his father's business and expands it through his talent as an architect, he grows "into a fine-looking, well-dressed, capable, college-bred American business man, boyish still and with the same engaging personality." Billy's unrequited love for Margaret and his jealousy over Dion's artistic talents, however, become the impetus for his moral collapse. His betrayal of Dion when the two were boys is one of the primary causes of Dion's vulnerability and thus his subsequent failures. After Billy talks Dion into working with him, Billy takes credit for his friend's creativity. He also tries to weaken him in an effort to win Margaret's love. Knowing that Cybel offers Dion much needed comfort, Billy tries to persuade her to stop her contact with him. He also offers the alcoholic Dion drinks. Toward the end of the play, Dion tells Billy that he is "unloved by life ... a successful freak, the result of some snide neutralizing of life forces a spineless cactus." When Billy insists that he is satisfied with

his life, Dion contradicts him, arguing that Billy has "piled on layers of protective fat, but... he feels at his heart the gnawing of a doubt!"

After he assumes Dion's identity, Billy is forced to face his own shortcomings. His own "suffering face" has become "ravaged and haggard ... tortured and distorted by the demon of Dion's mask." He admits, "you're dead, William Brown, dead beyond hope of resurrection. It's the Dion you buried in your garden who killed you, not you him." Later when Margaret tells him as Dion that Billy confessed his love for her, Billy laments, "Poor Billy, Poor Billy the Goat. I'll kill him for 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." When Margaret becomes apprehensive about his response, he tells her not to worry since "Mr. Brown is now safely in hell. Forget him." Eventually Billy turns, like Dion had, to God for comfort and salvation. He asks, "Why must the demons in me pander to cheapness then punish me with self-loathing and life-hatred. Why am I not strong enough to perish or blind enough to be content. Give me the strength to destroy [the mask] and myself and him and I will believe in thee." At one point he loses faith, claiming, "God has become disgusted and moved away to some far ecstatic star where life is a dancing flame!" Yet, as he is dying, he appears to find peace when he tells Cybel that he hears God speak to him.

Cybel

Cybel is a "strong, calm, sensual blonde girl of twenty or so, fresh and healthy." She brings Dion into her home after he passes out on her steps. Although she wears the mask of a prostitute, beneath it she is "like an unmoved idol of Mother Earth" who offers maternal comfort for Dion and Billy. When she and Billy are together, they are each able to take off their masks.

Themes

Identity

In O'Neill's masterpiece, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, Mary Tyrone insists, "None of us can help the things life has done to us. They're done before you realize it, and... they make you do other things until at last everything comes between you and what you'd like to be, and you've lost your true self forever." Like *Long Day's Journey into Night, The Great God Brown* focuses on the search for identity and the devastating consequences for those who are unable to discover a true sense of self.

Betrayal

Dion loses his sense of self at a young age when his best friend, Billy Brown, betrays him. He explains that when he was four, Billy "sneaked up behind when I was drawing a picture in the sand he couldn't draw and hit me ... and laughed when I cried." Consequently, his trust in his friend and humanity was shaken and, as he notes, "I became silent for life and designed a mask of the Bad Boy Pan in which to live and rebel against that other boy's God and protect myself from His cruelty." Ironically though, the mask further isolates Dion and prevents him from allowing others to gain a glimpse of his inner self. The act of betrayal turns an ashamed Billy into "the good boy, the good friend, the good man." The two also commit acts of betrayal against themselves. When they wear masks that project false, public personalities, they essentially betray their true natures.

Success and Failure

While Dion and Billy experience public success, they both suffer with inner failures, which eventually destroy them. Dion's dream is to gain divine inspiration and to become a successful artist. Yet, he considers himself a failure as he notes to his mother when she tells him "you've always painted pictures so well." He responds, "why must she lie? Is it my fault? She knows I only try to paint." At that point, he has some confidence in his future as an artist, admitting that "some day" he will be able to produce works of art. He returns from Europe, however, despondent over his lack of success and drowns his sorrow in alcohol.

American Dream

Billy's vision of success is tied up in the American Dream. He achieves his goal of being a successful architect and grows into "a fine-looking, well-dressed, capable, college-bred American business man." However, his unrequited love for Margaret has prevented him from establishing a lasting relationship. He also has become soulless as noted by Dion who tells him he is "unloved by life ... merely a successful freak, the result of some

snide neutralizing of life forces a spineless cactus." When Billy insists that he is satisfied with his life, Dion points out that "he's piled on layers of protective fat, but... he feels at his heart the gnawing of a doubt."

Billy convinces Dion to join his firm and gain his own piece of the American Dream to provide a better life for Margaret and his sons. Ironically, Dion's artistic talent causes him to be a successful architect, but joining "The Great God Brown" in his materialistic quest leaves him with a sense that he has sold out, which ultimately destroys him.

Change and Transformation

All the main characters, and often their masks, go through transformations during the course of the play. Dion's despondency over his artistic failures and his subsequent withdrawal from her and their family has transformed Margaret from "a pretty and vivacious" young girl to a world-weary woman with "an uncomprehending hurt in her eyes." Consequently, her mask has also changed to a "brave face she puts on before the world to hide her suffering and disillusionment." Dion's inability to gain divine inspiration in his art changes him outwardly into a satanic figure filled with a "cruelly malignant, mocking irony." Yet beneath the mask, he becomes "gentler, more spiritual, more saintlike and ascetic." Unfortunately, Margaret is unable to face the vulnerability of his true self, which contributes to his eventual destruction. Billy tries to take on the most radical change when he impersonates Dion. After he puts on Dion's mask, his own face becomes "ravaged and haggard" as he faces his own shortcomings. Adopting Dion's identity forces Billy to look into his own soul, and, as a result, he becomes filled with "self-loathing and life-hatred," which ultimately becomes unbearable for him.

Style

Combining Realism and Expressionism

O'Neill combines elements of realism a style that makes things look like they would in real life and expressionism a style that distorts things to look like they might come from the point of view of the characters in *The Great God Brown*. Expres-sionistic plays often employ masks to either hide the characters' inner emotions or reflect them. The masks used by the main characters in the play objectify the public images they want to portray and at the same time hide their inner psychological and emotional turmoil. The masks also work effectively to isolate the characters from each another. George H. Jensen, in his article on O'Neill for *Dictionary of Literary Biography,* writes, "The mask is a defense, a pose, a lie that a character presents to the world to protect the vulnerable self beneath it. Only rarely can a character feel secure enough to unmask and reveal his true self. The mask, O'Neill felt, was an unfortunate necessity. It protects the self, but maintaining a mask (the strain of living a lie) dissipates, haunts, and isolates the self." Dion and Billy are ultimately destroyed by wearing masks.

O'Neill employs these nonrealistic devices in a realistic setting. For example, when Billy assumes Dion's identity, he not only starts wearing his mask, he also dresses in his friend's clothes. Billy's wearing of Dion's clothes helps him fool people in the office. The nonrealistic device is set in a realistic setting where realistic events occur. O'Neill also forces Billy to frantically switch back and forth between his own identity and that of Dion's. When Margaret appears at the office, she will not discover what has happened to her husband. It would be unrealistic if everyone in the office just accepted Billy as Dion when he wasn' t wearing Dion's clothes.

Symbolism

O'Neill uses mythological symbolism in *The Great God Brown* to illustrate the psychology of his characters. Dion Anthony and William Brown represent two opposite figures in Greek mythology: Apollo and Dionysus. Apollo was the messenger of the gods and the presiding deity of music, medicine, and youth. Dionysus was the god of vegetation and wine. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, Nietzsche used the terms Apollonian and Dionysian to note the distinction between reason and culture (Apollonian), on the one hand, and instinct and primitiveness (Dionysian), on the other. Many authors in the twentieth century were influenced by Nietzsche's discussion of these opposing forces. D. H. Lawrence, for example, employed Apollo-nian/Dionysian symbolism in his works to illustrate the theme of intellect versus instinct. O'Neill uses this tension of opposites in his representation of the relationship between Billy and Dion. Billy represents the controlled intellect that is incapable of experiencing any kind of creative inspiration. Dion, whose name echoes Dionysus, symbolizes instinct and the liberation of the senses in an effort to release divine creativity.

Another Greek god O'Neill symbolizes in his play is Pan, the pastoral god of fertility and mischief. In Greek mythology, he was depicted as a sometimes merry, sometimes ill-tempered jokester with the horns and the legs of a goat. Later, he became associated with Dionysus. Dion's mask represents the figure of Pan, and when he and Billy wear it, they take on his personality. This Pan-like mask, however, takes on Mephistophelian characteristics as Dion's artistic ambitions are continually thwarted. When Billy takes the credit for Dion's architectural creativity, his growing sense of betrayal prompts him to condemn his friend. Yet, as the mask increases its satanic distortion, Dion's face becomes more spiritual. Here O'Neill begins to employ more Christian symbolism. Dion's last name, Anthony, suggests Saint Anthony, who, according to tradition, resisted every temptation the devil could devise for him. By the end of the play, Dion becomes a martyred Saint Anthony, rejecting the temptations of alcohol and the urge to punish Billy for his betrayal of him.

Historical Context

The Emergence of the American Theatre

At the end of the nineteenth century, a group of playwrights, which included James A. Herne, Bronson Howard, David Belasco, Augustus Thomas, Clyde Fitch, and William Vaughn Moody, started breaking away from traditional melodramatic forms and themes. Consequently, American theatre began to establish its own identity. These and other playwrights in the early part of the twentieth century were inspired by the dramatic innovations of Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, and George Bernard Shaw. During this period, experimental theatre groups made up of dramatists and actors encouraged new innovative American playwrights. In 1914, Lawrence Langner, Helen Westley, Philip Moeller, and Edward Goodman created the Washington Square Players in New York, and playwright Susan Glaspell, in 1915, helped start the Province-town Players in Massachusetts. The most important member of this latter group was Eugene O'Neill, who wrote plays with a uniquely American voice. George H. Jensen, in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, notes that "before O'Neill began to write, most American plays were poor imitations or outright thefts of European works." Jensen insists that O'Neill became the "catalyst and symbol... of the establishment of American drama."

Realism

In the late nineteenth century, playwrights turned away from what they considered the artificiality of melodrama to a focus on the commonplace in the context of everyday contemporary life. Their work, along with much of the experimental fiction written during that period, adopted the tenets of realism, a new literary movement that took a serious look at believable characters and their sometimes problematic interactions with society. In order to accomplish this goal, realistic drama focuses on the commonplace and eliminates the unlikely coincidences and excessive emotionalism of melodrama. Dramatists like Henrik Ibsen discarded traditional sentimental theatrical forms as they chronicled the strengths and weaknesses of ordinary people confronting difficult social problems, like the restrictive conventions suffered by nineteenth-century women. Dramatists who embraced realism used settings and props that reflected their characters' daily lives and realistic dialogue that replicated natural speech patterns.

Expressionism

Dramatists during the early decades of the twentieth century also adopted the techniques of another new literary movement. Expressionism eschewed the realists' attention to verisimilitude and instead employed experimental methods that tried to objectify the inner experiences of human beings. Influenced by the theories of Freud, playwrights like August Strindberg used nonrealistic devices that distorted and sometimes oversimplified human actions in order to explore the depths of the human

mind. Eugene O'Neill's long career reflected the shifting styles of the American theatre at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. His early plays were unsuccessful attempts at melodrama. He then turned to realistic depictions of men at sea and later of the interactions between family members. In the 1920s, he experimented with expressionism, most notably in *Emperor Jones* and *The Great God Brown.*

Critical Overview

When *The Great God Brown* premiered on January 23, 1926, at the Greenwich Village Theatre in New York, the opening night reviews were mixed. Many critics praised O'Neill's daring experimentalism and psychological themes in the play. Others, though, found fault with those same qualities. Public response was strong enough to run the play for 283 performances. Since then, assessments of the play have remained mixed.

On opening night, E. W. Osborn in his review for *New York World* praised the play's bold innovations, commenting that "the unexpected is again introduced and spells wonderful." In his *New York Times* opening night review, Brooks Atkinson ignores claims that the play was at times confusing but applauds O'Neill's experimentalism. A few years after the play debuted, Barrett H. Clark in *Drama* argues that *The Great God Brown* is the "highest development of O'Neill's genius we have seen. Like all poets, he writes ahead of us." Clark thought that the play should be awarded the Pulitzer Prize. Focusing on O'Neill's technique, Rose Bogdanoff writes in *Drama,* "O'Neill's use of the mask is the finest in modern theatre, as much a part of the play as the lines themselves."

Other reviewers, however, find fault with O'Neill's technique in the play. In her opening night review for *Women's Wear Daily,* Kelcey Allen writes, "The transfer of personality is unacceptable, and far-fetched Expressionism and symbolism must have some relationship to the sphere of logic; there is mask switching to the point of strangulation. A laboratory experiment not good for the theatre." J. S. Metcalfe in the *Wall Street Journal* adds another criticism of the play's technique, commenting, "the masks hinder instead of help, making some speeches seem laughable." Thus, Metcalfe concludes, "O'Neill is no longer the great dramatist of realism and low-life characters." Robert Coleman faulted the play's presentation of themes, insisting that it is an "ineffective and tedious psychological study," and the 'despairing dirge of a puzzled pessimist."

Most critics praised O'Neill's attempts at experimentation but argued that the play achieved only a partial success. David Carb in *Vogue* writes that the play is a "subtly conceived symbolic tragedy, finely imagined, written with glowing loveliness. It fails to succeed only because of a physical device." A reviewer in *New York Graphic* finds a "strength and beauty of lines," but warns theatergoers that they will "go home mystified and bored." Frank Vreeland in *New York Telegram* writes that the play reveals "O'Neill at both his best and his worst." John Anderson echoes this assessment in his review for the *New York Post*, commenting, "O'Neill has ventured everything and achieved a superb failure.... The play eventually drowns magnificently in the seething theories of the writer." Don Carle Gillette, who writes about the play for *Billboard,* notes that O'Neill is an acquired taste for audiences and calls the play a "glorious confusion." John Mason Brown in *Theatre Arts* agrees with this assessment but insists that the first two acts are successful, and that "in an otherwise dull season, this comes as an utterly different experiment." In his review for the *New York Sun,* Gabriel Gilbert admits to being "hot but troubled" for O'Neill's "most poetic and penetrating play," and insists that the author "does not write for popularity but for posterity. One will remember the play whatever he thinks of it."

Some scholars discuss the play in comparisons of O'Neill's work with that of other dramatists. Brooks Atkinson, in his article on Ibsen and O'Neill for *the New York Times,* finds similarities in the two writers' plays, especially in their "emotional sensitiveness and philosophy," but ultimately concludes that *The Great God Brown* is almost "unintelligible." In her article, "Masks, Their Use by Pirandello and O'Neill," Grace Anschutz compares the style of the two writers and determines that Pirandello's use of masks is more successful than O'Neill's.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Perkins, an Associate Professor of English at Prince George's Community College in Maryland, has published articles on several twentieth-century authors. In the following essay, she examines The Great God Brown *as an illustration of Friedrich Nietzsche's theory of the Apollonian and the Dio-nysian impulses in human nature.*

In the closing pages of Thomas Mann's novel, *Death in Venice*, Aschenbach, the main character, condemns the role of the artist and the artistic impulse: "the training of the public and of youth through art is a precarious undertaking which should be forbidden. For how, indeed, could he be a fit instructor who is born with a natural leaning towards the precipice?" In *The Great God Brown*, O'Neill offers a more sympathetic view of his main character than does Mann, but he communicates a similar portrait of the artist "leaning towards the precipice." Dion Anthony, in fact, falls into this void of despair and self-destruction, his super-sensitive artistic soul unable to cope with the hostile world he inhabits. The psychological theory O'Neill tests in *The Great God Brown* (as did Mann in his novel) is based on Friedrich Nietzsche's paradigm of the two opposing "gods" in human nature: the Apollonian and the Dionysian. O'Neill illustrates these forces in the play through the characterizations of Dion Anthony and Billy Brown. Each character expresses only one impulse. Billy represents the controlled voice of reason through much of the play, while Dion expresses the emotionality and creativity of the artist. Each man is ultimately destroyed by his inability to develop and embrace the opposing impulse and thus strike a harmonious internal balance.

According to Nietzsche, an ideal state can be achieved by a balancing of these two conflicting impulses the Dionysian irrational, creative, primal being controlled by Apollonian order, reason, and repose. However, O'Neill suggests that the two main characters in *The Great God Brown* have been unable to develop this duality in their natures and, as a result, are unable to fulfill their dreams. George H. Jensen, in his article on O'Neill for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* explains, "Surrounded by disappointment, O'Neill acquired what might be termed a 'tragic sense of life' that people are doomed to suffer intensely, mocked by dreams they cannot attain." O'Neill transferred this tragic sense to the characters in his plays.

Dion Anthony's extreme sensitivity and inability to find a reasoned order for his life prevent him from coping with the failure of his dream to become a successful artist. Since he was a child, Dion, whose name echoes Dionysus the Greek god of vegetation and wine has tried to focus his artistic talents but has been continually thwarted by others' lack of consideration for his needs as well as his own fragile sensibilities. The first obstacle Dion faced occurred when he was four. He explains that Billy:

sneaked up behind when I was drawing a picture in the sand he couldn't draw and hit me on the head with a stick and kicked out my picture and laughed when I cried. It wasn't what he'd done that made me cry, but him. I had loved and trusted him and suddenly the good God was disproved in his person and the evil and injustice of Man was born. Everyone called me crybaby, so I became silent for life and designed a mask

of the Bad Boy Pan in which to live and rebel against that other boy's God and protect myself from His cruelty."

Dion wears a cynical, ironic mask throughout most of the play in an effort to shield himself from the harsh realities of his life. Jenson argues that in the play "The mask is a defense, a pose, a lie that a character presents to the world to protect the vulnerable self beneath it. Only rarely can a character feel secure enough to unmask and reveal his true self. The mask, O'Neill felt, was an unfortunate necessity. It protects the self, but maintaining a mask (the strain of living a lie) dissipates, haunts, and isolates the self." In his book on O'Neill's plays, Travis Bogard notes the irony in the author's use of masks in *The Great God Brown,* as they "reveal the human individuality as directly and profoundly as possible. The mask being removed from Dion Anthony, what the spectator is supposed to see and what O'Neill astonishingly set himself to characterize is the human soul itself." Yet Dion's soul is too fragile, even as he hides behind his mask.

When the play opens, the audience gains a glimpse of Dion's vulnerable nature and his efforts to shield that nature. He appears on the stage walking separately from his parents, "as if he were a stranger." O'Neill illuminates the probable cause of this tension when the audience hears his father verbally abuse him. In this scene, Dion also reveals his insecurity about his artistic abilities coupled with a capacity for hope. When his mother insists that he has "always painted pictures so well," he counters with, "Why must she lie? Is it my fault? She knows I only try to paint. But I will some day."

Dion expresses his sensitive artistic soul in a private moment that night. When he takes off his mask, he reveals "his real face ... shrinking, shy and gentle, full of a deep sadness." He questions his need to withdraw from his world, asking:

Why am I afraid to dance, I who love music and rhythm and grace and song and laughter? Why am I afraid to live, I who love life and the beauty of flesh and the living colors of earth and sky and sea? Why am I afraid of love. Who loves love.... Why must I hide myself in self-contempt in order to understand. Why must I be so ashamed of my strength, so proud of my weakness? Why must I live in a cage like a criminal, defying and hating, I who love peace and friendship. Why was I born without a skin, oh God, that I must wear armor in order to touch or to be touched."

When he challenges Margaret to accept his true self without its armor, she does not recognize him and glares at him contemptuously when he tells her he loves her. Even after the two marry, Margaret refuses to peer beneath his mask, unable to face his intense vulnerability.

After failing to gain artistic success in Europe, Dion cannot find a reasonable order or purpose for his existence and, as a result, drowns himself in alcohol. Recognizing his failures as a husband and a father, Dion considers himself to be "sniveling, cringing, [and] life-denying." Finally, under Margaret's prompting, he attempts to gain success as an architect. While working with Billy in their fathers' firm, Dion releases his artistic energies and gives life to Billy's designs. However, when Billy takes all the credit for the

work and Dion feels he has sold out to the god of materialism, Dion falls into the void of despair.

Billy also is unable to temper the dominant impulse of his nature. When the play opens, his parents reveal their plans for his future, which include him eventually becoming a partner in his father's firm. While he agrees with his parents, he appears in their presence "like a prisoner at the bar, facing the judge." Yet, his expression already indicates "a disciplined restraint." Billy adopts his parents' vision of the American dream and becomes a successful architect, evolving into "a fine-looking, well-dressed, capable, college-bred American business man."

Billy, however, is not content with his life. Bogard notes that "Brown cannot create, for creation depends on vision, and Brown moves in the dark." He has been unable to develop a creative sensibility, which causes him to envy that quality in Dion. Bogard comments, "What [Billy] cannot possess, he destroys, as in childhood he destroyed Dion's sand castle, and as he finally destroys himself." Billy's unrequited love for Margaret and his jealousy over Dion's artistic talents become the impetus for his moral collapse. After Dion begins working in the firm, Billy takes credit for his friend's creativity. Then, when Dion dies, Billy tries to assume his identity in an effort to win Margaret's love and to develop a creative energy in his work. Yet trying to adopt Dion's persona only forces Billy to recognize his own shortcomings. A "ravaged and haggard" Billy calls out to God at the end of the play, asking "Why must the demons in me pander to cheapness-then punish me with self-loathing and life-hatred. Why am I not strong enough to perish-or blind enough to be content."

Jensen echoes reviewers' mixed assessment of *The Great God Brown* when he praises O'Neill's innovations in the play but ultimately considers it to be a "failed experiment." Yet, most critics applaud the play's psychological intensity. O'Neill's poetic presentation of Nietzsche's theory of the Apollonian and the Dionysian impulses and the consequences of a lack of balance between those impulses illuminates the complex inner workings of the human psyche.

Source: Wendy Perkins, in an essay for *Drama for Students,* Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay. Bogard analyzes how O 'Neill perceives "man as a prisoner in his body" and presents how that relationship is shown in The Great God Brown.

In The Great God Brown, O'Neill sees man as a prisoner in his body. His only escape is in an inner direction toward the roots of God he holds in himself. In all the world, there is no human being he can comprehend or whose comprehension enables him to unmask himself, and thus be freed of loneliness....

In *The Great God Brown,* however, such a union is seen to be impossible, and man is condemned to the cell of self until his death.

To the outer, hostile world, he must turn a face that will not startle by revealing the terrifying agony within him. It must be an expressionless face, bland and unchanging except as it is inevitably eroded by the ravages of his hidden struggle. Wearing the mask is not a matter of choice. Like the Mask Maker in Marceau's great pantomime, man is trapped in the mask, by circumstances, by his own fear and inhibitions, by his need to find some communion with the world beyond his cell. Edmond Dantes telegraphed by tapping on the rocks of his prison wall. In a prison that is not physical, the mask is man's only means of communication, its mouth the only means of crying across the void that separates him from all other human beings. Only by his mask may he be known....

In *The Great God Brown*, however, the mask is used to attain precisely the opposite value, to reveal the human individuality as directly and profoundly as possible. The mask being removed from Dion Anthony, what the spectator is supposed to see and what O'Neill astonishingly set himself to characterize is the human soul itself. This use of the mask is O'Neill's innovation, one which, as he suggested, follows necessarily from the development of psychological theories in the twentieth century, but one which was not characteristic of the theatre of his time.

The consequences of experimentation in this direction were severe. The problem was not in the theatrically fascinating use of masks, but in the development of a language that could accompany such a direct look into the soul. What O'Neill means by a "drama of souls" is really not communicable directly by any verbal device. The "soul" is subverbal, and the great dramatist can do little else than to suggest it by the referential qualities of his poetry. Nietzsche's claim that the mask is a way of expressing the inexpressible essence of nature sheds significant light on O'Neill's use, where, once the mask is removed, the essence itself must be projected. O'Neill's mistrust of the superficial and misleading "surface symbolism" of realism is a sign that he wishes now to present directly on his stage *without symbolism* the naked essence of being. In *The Great God Brown* there are no important symbols, if a symbol is to be taken as a referential device for the expression of an inexpressible truth. Instead, the drama of souls is enacted before its audience as if it were a realistic drama, an impossible state of affairs since once the inexpressible is expressed, it is without meaning.

The Great God Brown, despite its devices, is tied to the realistic theatre. It moves in space and time in a coherent and essentially realistic way, and its setting is sociological, rather than psychological, a space, complete with doors, windows, telephones and all the other accoutrements of daily living. O'Neill, indeed, reveals at several points a certain strain in handling his characters in the realistic context of the play. For instance, in III, i, Margaret must be brought to Brown's office for the crucial scene, in which Brown, unmasked, declares his love for her. As she enters the office, however, O'Neill is forced to have her develop a reason for her presence, a necessity only to a totally realistic drama: "I forgot to tell him something important this morning and our phone's out of order." A similar problem develops in IV, i, when Brown switches frantically between his own mask and that of Dion's, which he has usurped. Brown, as Brown, rushes from the room and returns wearing Dion's mask, but there has been no time for a costume change for the actor. As a realist, O'Neill worries about the matter and has Margaret note the fact that Brown and the supposed Dion are dressed alike: "Why, Dion, that isn't your suit. It's just like ..." Evidently, if its concern for the color of Brown's pants is an indication, *The Great God Brown* is something less than a "drama of souls." There is here a reminiscence of the quick change of disguise and the dashing in and out of doors of a bedroom farce or of such melodramas as *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. At best the play is a realistic, somewhat overwrought narrative complete with a police chase. Whatever they were intended to do, the masks play a not completely fulfilled part.

In his early play, *Bread and Butter*, O'Neill had treated the same subject matter, indeed had there written what might well be considered a first draft of The Great God Brown. The 1914 version considered the fate of the artist in a small Connecticut town. Its hero, John Brown, is a thinly disguised self-portrait, and the play's narrative is a conventional piece of autobiographical speculation that extrapolated certain domestic possibilities lying before the young O'Neill into a condemnation of marriage and of American philistinism that combined the most obvious aspects of Strindberg and Sinclair Lewis.

In *The Great God Brown*, O'Neill altered the story of *Bread and Butter* it is no longer so directly autobiographical but he kept most of its essentials. The play's statement is only superficially enlarged by the addition of the masks or of the Nietzschean material. In the earlier work, the hero's confidant was his teacher, the painter Eugene Grammont, a wise and sympathetic counselor. The role is retained in *The Great God Brown* but given to the prostitute Cybel, who makes explicit the sensitive hero's desire to reach the creative core of nature itself a point implied in the early work by Brown's painting, particularly a seascape and a landscape, the sole vestiges of his artist's life that he retains in his marital bondage. The Faustian implications of *Bread and Butter,* suggested in the hero's willingness to sell his artistic soul for the sake of a woman, are developed more fully in the religious implications of Dion Anthony's name a combination of Dionysus and St. Anthony and in the name of Margaret, by which O'Neill wished to recall the Marguerite of *Faust.* The parallels with *Faust* are augmented by the gradual transformation of the Pan mask of Dion into the mocking face of Mephis-topheles, at the same time as his true face becomes more saint-like and ascetic.

The most important change in the later play was O'Neill's development of the character of the materialist, William Brown. In his earlier treatment of such figures, in Andrew

Mayo or the cartooned Marco Polo, O'Neill had seen him chiefly as what might be called an "anti-poet," the adversary of the sensitive self-portraits. Now, O'Neill developed fully what the figure of Marco Polo had partly suggested to him: the anguish of the uncreative man, the despair of the man who cannot dream. As its title suggests, *The Great God Brown* holds the materialist up to crucial inspection and shows that like the poet, he has a capacity to suffer. Suffering comes to him, when, with the death of Dion, he moves into the play's focal position, attempting to live his life in Dion's mask. As O'Neill explained this turn in his drama:

Brown has always envied the creative life force in Dion what he himself lacks. When he steals Dion's mask of Mephistopheles he thinks he is gaining the power to live creatively, while in reality he is only stealing that creative power made self-destructive by complete frustration. This devil of mocking doubt makes short work of him. It enters him, rending him apart, torturing and transfiguring him until he is even forced to wear a mask of his Success, William A. Brown, before the world, as well as Dion's mask toward wife and children. Thus Billy Brown becomes not himself to anyone. And thus he partakes of Dion's anguish more poignantly, for Dion has the Mother, Cybele and in the end out of this anguish his soul is born, a tortured Christian soul such as the dying Dion's, begging for belief, and at the last finding it on the lips of Cybel.

The explanation both of Dion and of Brown leaves something to be desired. O'Neill described Brown as "the visionless demi-god of our new materialistic myth a Success building his life of exterior things, inwardly empty and resourceless, an uncreative creature of superficial preordained social grooves, a by-product forced aside into slack waters by the deep main current of life-desire." In conceiving of Brown as a "by-product" of the "life-desire," O'Neill has somewhat altered his view of the materialist. Both Andrew Mayo and John Brown became what they were because they denied their rightful heritage. Billy Brown, however, is created without a soul, and there is no explanation for this deformity. In truth, it appears, that O'Neill began by using Brown as a typical opposition for Dion, feeling no need to explain an epitome. Only when he began to concentrate on Brown as his protagonist in the latter half of the play did he ask the important questions about him, and then he did not always find the essential answers.

Source: Travis Bogard, "The Great God Brown," in *Contour in Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill*, Oxford University Press, 1972, pp. 264-73.

Critical Essay #3

Berlin talks about the significance of the mask and it's underlying theme in the play.

The Great God Brown (written 1925, produced 1926) is O'Neil's first play of the late twenties, and the last play to be produced by the triumvirate of Kenneth Macgowan, Robert Edmond Jones, and O'Neill, thereby ending their five-year association. The play mystified its audience because of O'Neill's complex use of masks, but managed to please many reviewers, even those who found the play puzzling, and ran for 283 performances. Because the audiences and reviewers did not understand the play, O'Neill presented many comments on the play's meaning, explaining what he intended to accomplish. The gap between his intentions and the play's accomplishment is very wide indeed, and the reasons for this gap are not difficult to discern.

O'Neill's use of the mask, the play's most important dramatic device, became a kind of 'cause' for O'Neill, who was very much influenced by the book of his fellow producer, Macgowan's *Masks and Demons,* which emphasized the importance of masks for theatre as well as religion. O'Neill believed that masks 'can express those profound hidden conflicts of the mind which the probings of psychology continue to disclose to us.' They allow for 'a new kind of drama.' For O'Neill the new psychology was essentially 'a study in masks, an exercise in unmasking.' Not satisfied, it seems, with 'a realistically disguised surface symbolism' that is, the kind of symbolism he himself used in his realistic plays O'Neill wished to present more directly 'a drama of souls.' In *The Great God Brown* he literally offers 'an exercise in unmasking,' whereas in the realistic and expressionistic plays that preceded it, the 'unmasking' was more subtle, more indirect. The device of masks in *The Great God Brown* too explicitly bares the human soul on stage, trying in vain, as Travis Bogard suggests, to express the inexpressible. Admittedly the conflicts within the human soul or psyche have been directly dramatized in morality plays of the past, but those anonymous dramatists of the Middle Ages never attempted to present believable human characters at the same time that they presented the psychomachia. O'Neill's intention, as he explained to a bewildered public in a newspaper article, was to present 'recognizable human beings' within the larger context of conflict 'in the soul of Man,' but this was misunderstood by audiences who paid more attention to the scheme and the large context than to the 'human beings.'

In *The Great God Brown* O'Neill confronts Mystery head-on, but he does so with the aid of 'expressionistic' masks (which objectively present inner reality) on a realistic stage; the result is confusion. The play provokes a multitude of questions, but not the questions produced by rich ambiguity; rather, the questions arising from genuine puzzlement. What exactly are we to think of Dion Anthony? A 'recognizable human being' or the allegorical representation of Dionysus and St. Anthony? Both? When William Brown, now wearing Dion's mask, is killed at the end of the play, is it a double death, or is it the death of one 'Man,' to use Cybel's word, the two sides of whom are Dion Anthony and William Brown? Or should we recognize three sides to Man because Dion Anthony himself has two sides, Dionysus and St Anthony? Does the equation work in both allegorical and human terms? And how does the composite of Woman Margaret

and Cybel fit into the pattern? And is William Brown the empty materialist O'Neill intends him to be? Doesn't he seem more 'alive' than Dion, who is praised for being alive? Are we meant to take Brown as a satirical portrait of American business? Does the allegory, therefore, have a social as well as a philosophical dimension?

All along, of course, even if we concede that the allegory works and that these questions, and many more, can be answered with some assurance, the audience is engaged in a cerebral exercise, trying to fit together pieces of a puzzle *while* witnessing the 'living drama' of 'recognizable human beings.' O'Neill's *literal* exercise in unmasking produces much thought, but little emotion. We pay attention to the 'philosophy' but we do not respond emotionally to the people. We receive Nietzschean messages and we know something profound and big, even mystical, is being confronted, but we have no deep interest in the bearers of those messages. We see the mask, but it covers no recognizable face, it responds to no beating heart. The mask points to the 'vision' of a serious, sincere dramatist who seems more interested in his thesis, in his ideas on Life and God, than in the characters who present the ideas. In short, *The Great God Brown* is an artistic failure because 'the drama of souls' is essentially undramatic.

O'Neill was especially fond of *The Great God Brown*. 'Of all the plays I have written, I like *The Great God Brown* best. I love that play.' He wrote to Macgowan that the play was 'grand stuff, much deeper and poetical in a way than anything I've done before.' His enthusiasm undoubtedly reflects his belief that *The Great God Brown,* by means of masks, successfully placed Mystery within the reach of the stage. His autobiographical closeness to the play may also explain his fondness for it. The qualities he gave to the poet-artist Dion Anthony were his own alone, sensitive, unable to reveal his true 'self to the world, ever aware of the masks people wear to protect themselves from others and from themselves, always in need of a Mother (what both Cybel and Margaret represent), 'born with ghosts in your eyes,' as Cybel tells Dion. Another reason for his enthusiasm is that he uses his favorite source, Nietzsche, more directly in *The Great God Brown* than in any of his other plays, with the possible exception of Lazarus *Laughed. Nietzsche* hovers over the play not only in the Dionysian aspects of Dion Anthony's character, but also in the doctrine offered by Cybel near the play's end 'Always spring comes again bearing life! Always again! Always, always forever again! Spring again! life again! summer and fall and death and peace again! ... but always, always, love and conception and birth and pain again spring bearing the intolerable chalice of life again! ... bearing the glorious, blazing crown of life again!' and in O'Neill's general preoccupation with mystery. O'Neill considered Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* the 'most stimulating book on drama ever written.' His use of quotations from that book in the playbill of *The Great God Brown* testifies to its importance, and probably helps to explain O'Neill's stated confidence in the play's depth. But neither O'Neill's enthusiasm for the play nor his explanations of the meanings he intended can erase the judgement that *The Great God Brown* is a bold but bewildering experiment which does not work, what the reviewer *of Billboard* called 'glorious confusion.'

Source: Normand Berlin "The Late Twenties," in *Eugene O'Neill*, Grove Press, 1964, pp. 85-89.

Critical Essay #4

In The Great God Brown *O'Neill attacks the "materialism of modern society." Carpenter examines this aspect through O'Neill's use of symbolism throughout the play.*

The Great God Brown magnified this American dualism of the materialistic and the romantic to universal proportions. William A. Brown like his contemporary American, George F. Babbitt became the "god" of our materialism. But in rejecting this false American "god," O'Neill's hero again rejected American democracy: Dion turned away from "the rabble" because "he hated to share with them fountain, flame and fruit." That is, his romantic idealism became wholly negative. Like other Americans, he even began to worship the devil because God would not grant him his absolute ideal: "When Pan was forbidden the light and warmth of the sun he grew sensitive and self-conscious and proud and revengeful and became Prince of Darkness." And so Dion the romantic dreamer turned against the American world in which he lived. . . .

After completing *Desire Under the Elms*, O'Neill worked simultaneously on two plays; but he completed *The Great God Brown* before *Marco Millions*, and the play was both published and produced first. Both plays carried forward his attack on the materialism of modern society. Brown (as O'Neill specifically explained) "is the visionless demi-god of our new materialistic myth a Success building his life on exterior things, inwardly empty. ..." *Marco Millions* would translate this "new materialistic myth" to the ancient Orient. But "Billy Brown" was one hundred percent American.

The Great God Brown is one of the most interesting but also one of the most confusing of O'Neill's plays. It contains some of his most challenging dramatic ideas and some of his most original characters. Moreover, it achieved success at the time of production, and it was both praised and reproduced throughout the civilized world. It marks a milestone in O'Neill's career, and it also prepared the way for his later triumphs. But it remains a strangely artificial play. Mixing dramatic experimentation with self-conscious poetry, genuine insight with bookish theory, this play attempted everything, but achieved final success with nothing. At the time it seemed greater than *Desire Under the Elms*, but now its fireworks seem contrived.

The element of artificiality in *The Great God Brown* is illustrated by the simple summary of its plot. The first two acts describe the tragedy of Dion Anthony the sensitive artist who finds himself in conflict with a materialistic society. He has married, and the need of supporting a wife and three sons has forced him to give up his painting and he takes to drink. His wife gets him a job as a draftsman in the architectural office of his old classmate, William A. Brown. But he feels humiliated, and seeks solace and understanding in the arms of Cybel, the eternal prostitute. Lacking the true love of his wife and the true appreciation of his old friend and employer, he finally drinks himself to death.

The second two acts then describe the second tragedy that of William A. Brown. After Dion's death, Brown assumes the "mask" of his former friend and employee, Dion

Anthony. And with this mask he inherits Dion's ability to create, so that his architectural designs win him even greater success than before. With the mask he also wins the love of Dion's wife, who identifies him with her husband. But with the mask he tragically inherits Dion's bitter honesty and insight into the truth. And this honesty compels him to denounce the artistic falsity of his own architectural designs and to recognize the inner duplicity of his own divided personality. Finally, abandoning the "mask" of the insensitive William A. Brown, he also flees to the arms of Cybel, where the police find only the "mask" of Dion Anthony, whom they now accuse of "murdering" Billy Brown. The eternal artist and the eternal materialist have destroyed each other. At the end the police captain asks: "Well, what's his name?" And Cybel, the Earth Mother, replies: "Man!"

Taken together, Dion Anthony and Billy Brown represent the divided personality of modern man. They are, in one sense, two separate and opposing characters; in another, they are the conflicting aspects of the single character, "Man." Both the complexity and the confusion of the play lie in its uncertainty concerning these two alternatives. Dion Anthony and Billy Brown are brothers under the skin. But do they have two skins, or one? Are they really two people, or are they the conflicting halves of one person? And does *The Great God Brown* really consist of two plays, of two acts each? Or is it one play of four acts?

The Great God Brown became famous for its daring use of masks to suggest the conflicting personalities of each of its characters. Earlier *The Hairy Ape* had painted on masks to emphasize the artificial "faces" of people in "Society." And later *Lazarus Laughed* used formal masks to define type characters. But in *The Great God Brown* all the characters used masks to dramatize the contrast between their external, or public selves, and their inner, or private selves. And this new use of masks suggested psychological complexities beyond the scope of the old, realistic drama.

But the trouble with *The Great God Brown* lies in the confusing ambiguity of its use of masks. At the beginning Dion's ' *'mask is a fixed forcing of his own face."* But as his tragedy develops, this mask becomes (first) the mask of "Pan," and (finally) the mask of "Mephistopheles." And after his death, Brown is able to assume at will Dion's "mask" (which one?). Meanwhile Brown wears no mask at first, but (at the end of the second act) he assumes Dion's; and (at the end of the fourth act) he discards his own ' *'mask of William Brown,"* and permanently assumes Dion's. Thereupon his associates proclaim that "Mr. Brown is dead!" And they ' *'return, carrying the mask of William Brown, two on each side, as if they were carrying a body by line legs and shoulders."* If this seems brilliantly imaginative, it is also dramatically confusing. The manipulation of a variety of masks tends to become mere hocus-pocus.

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

Saint Anthony; "Cybel" is a mixture of the goddess Cybele, the earth mother, and the eternal prostitute; and Dion's wife Margaret is a modern embodiment of Faust's Margaret. At its best, the play partly realizes a modern myth; at its worst, it becomes a self-conscious allegory.

But if *The Great God Brown* suffers from artificiality of plot, from confusing use of masks, and from self-consciousness of allegory, it manages finally to make a virtue of these very faults. In the last analysis, the play achieves its moments of tragic greatness by means of its very incongruities and confusions. Cybel, for instance, *"chews gum like a sacred cow forgetting time with an eternal end."* And this grotesque mixture of incongruous metaphors suggests the confusion of the modern world which, of course, the title of the play also suggests. Finally, a speech by Billy Brown, after he has "murdered" his former self, also suggests the final insight of the play into the confusion of the modern world: "Sssh! This is Daddy's bedtime secret for today: Man is born broken. He lives by mending. The grace of God is glue." The final "grace" of *The Great God Brown*, perhaps, lies in its symbolic joining of dissociated fragments of experience by the glue of the creative imagination.

Source: Frederic I. Carpenter, "The Pattern of O'Neill's Tragedies," and "From *The Ape* to *Marco:* Reaction," in *Eugene O'Neill,* Twayne Publishers, 1964, pp. 70-71,109-12.

Topics for Further Study

Research Freud's theories on the subconscious, especially his definition of the ego, the id, and the super ego and apply them to the characters and their use of masks in *The Great God Brown.*

Investigate the history of the use of masks in the theater. Explain whether O'Neill's use of masks in the play is traditional or innovative.

Read O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* and compare its themes to those in *The Great God Brown.*

Explore biographical details about O'Neill, especially those that concern his relationship with his family. What autobiographical elements can you find in the play?

Compare and Contrast

1926: Joseph Stalin becomes dictator of the Soviet Union. His reign of terror will last for twenty-seven years.

1991: On December 17, President Mikhail Gorbachev orders the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and a new Commonwealth of Independent States is formed by the countries that formerly made up the Soviet Union.

1926: *The Theory of the Gene* by Columbia University zoologist Thomas Hunt Morgan lays the groundwork for future genetic research.

1984: Veterinarian Steven Willadsen divides sheep embryos and, as a result, clones a sheep.

1926: *Don Juan*, starring John Barrymore becomes the first film to be accompanied by electrically recorded sound. This process, called Vitaphone, is created by Western Electric.

1980: Videocassettes recorders are a hot item for American consumers. As a result, the rental and sale of videocassettes generate a profitable industry.

What Do I Read Next?

In the philosophic essay *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) Friedrich Nietzsche outlines his vision of the tensions between the Apollonian and Dio-nysian impulses and discusses the uses of masks in Greek tragedy (paperback editions from Dover and Oxford University Press).

August Strindberg's surrealistic *A Dream Play,* which opened in 1902, became the forerunner of modern expressionism and influenced a new generation of dramatists, including Eugene O'Neill (widely available).

A collection of Sigmund Freud's work can be found in T*he Ego and the Id (The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud)*. This volume presents Freud's theories of the subconscious (in paperback from W. W. Norton, 1990).

Long Day's Journey into Night, first performed in 1956, is O'Neill's finest study of domestic interaction and offers insight into O'Neill's own tragic relationship with his family (widely available).

Further Study

Anderson, John, Review in *Literary Review of the New York Evening Post,* April 10, 1926, p. 2.

Anderson offers a mixed review of the play in his focus on O'Neill's technique.

Cohn, Ruby, "Eugene O'Neill: Overview," in *Reference Guide to American Literature,* 3rd ed., edited by Jim Kamp, St. James Press, 1994.

Cohn examines the tragic nature of O'Neill's plays.

Marsh, Leo, Review in *New York Telegraph,* January 25,1926.

Marsh examines the play's "clinical experiment" in structure.

Review in *New Yorker,* Vol. 1, February 6, 1926, p. 26.

This reviewer criticizes O'Neill's use of masks but praises the play' s presentation of a "nutritious fluid of a deeply digested idea."

Bibliography

Allen, Kelcey, ''*Great God Brown* by O'Neill Unique," in *Women's Wear Daily*, January 25, 1926.

Anderson, John, "Another O'Neill Play Comes to Town," in *New York Post,* January 25, 1926.

Anschutz, Grace, "Masks, Their Use by Pirandello and O'Neill," in Drama, Vol. 17, April, 1927, p. 201.

Atkinson, Brooks, "Ibsen and O'Neill," in *New York Times,* January 31, 1926, p.l.

Atkinson, Brooks, "Symbolism in an O'Neill Tragedy," in *New York Times,* January 25, 1926, p.26.

Bogard, Travis, *Contour in Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill,* Oxford University Press, 1972.

Bogdanoff, Rose, "Masks, Their Uses Past and Present," in *Drama*, Vol. 21, May, 1931, p. 21.

Brown, John Mason, "Doldrums of Midwinter," in *Theatre Arts,* Vol. 10, March 1926, pp. 145^6.

Carb, David, "The Great God Brown," in Vogue, Vol. 67, March 15, 1926, p. 106

Clark, Barrett H., "Fin de Saison on Broadway," in Drama, Vol. 16, May, 1926, pp. 289-90.

Coleman, Robert, "God Brown Tedious," in *New York Mirror,* January 25, 1926.

Gilbert, Gabriel, "All God's Chillun Got Masks," in *New York Sun*, January 25, 1926.

Gillette, Don Carle, "The Great God Brown," in *Billboard,* Vol. 38, February 6, 1926, p. 43.

Jensen, George H., "Eugene O'Neill," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume?: Twentieth-Century American Dramatists,* Gale, 1981. pp. 139-65.

Metcalfe, J. S., "A Plea in Defence," in *Wall Street Journal,* January 25, 1926.

Osborn, E. W., "The Great God Brown," in *New York World,* January 25, 1926.

Review in *New York Graphic*, January 25, 1926.

Vreeland, Frank, "The Masked Marvel," in *New York Telegram*, January 25, 1926.

BOOKRAGS

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Drama for Students*.

Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Drama for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535