

Objects and madness in Eugene O'Neill's drama

Nur Shereen Mohamed Rafi

2020

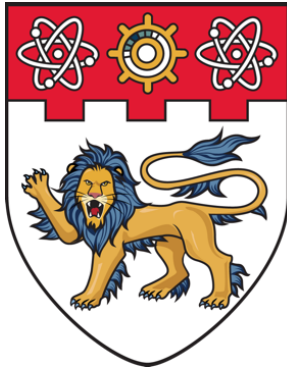
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**OBJECTS AND MADNESS IN EUGENE O'NEILL'S
DRAMA**

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SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES

2020

Objects and Madness in Eugene O'Neill's Drama

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School of Humanities

A thesis submitted to the Nanyang Technological University
in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts

2020

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SUMMARY

This thesis explores the link between objects and madness in American dramatist Eugene O’Neill’s plays. O’Neill was interested in the “abnormal mental conditions” (Stamm, “Dramatic Experiments” 9) of his characters, a theme he explored in numerous plays through realism and expressionism. O’Neill experiments with the “determining circumstances” (Stamm, “Faithful Realism” 244) of his characters with various tangible objects. The five plays analysed are *All God’s Chillun Got Wings*, *The Great God Brown*, *Dynamo*, *More Stately Mansions*, and *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, chosen as they are the best examples of plays which delve into the tragic consequences of mental illness. Throughout O’Neill’s plays, there is a tension between the seen and the unseen in terms of what causes the mad characters to succumb to madness – a tension that is at least partly paralleled in a tension considering how O’Neill’s plays are to be categorised. This thesis traces the evolution of O’Neill’s objects from mad objects that have power over the characters to objects that cause madness in characters due to the associations of their memories and beliefs with those objects. O’Neill experiments with different modes, objects, and types of madness to illuminate how, in each play, the most important element is the object. I will then consider whether classifying the plays as symbolist amplifies the influence of the object over the respective characters.

PART I: INTRODUCTION

Often regarded as the first major American dramatist (Shiach 13), Eugene O'Neill is credited with going "beyond the superficiality of surface realism to a level of psychological realism never before achieved in American drama" (Demastes 20). Realist theatre involves a dramatist putting "on the stage only what he could verify by observing ordinary life" and consists of "dialogue which avoided poetic flights and excessive sentiment" (Styan, *Realism* 5). While 'realism' and 'naturalism' are often used interchangeably, there are notable differences between the two. French novelist Émile Zola was the first to outline a theory of naturalism in literature (Styan, *Realism* 6). His philosophy of naturalist novel and drama was:

one of absolute objectivity, with setting, characterisation and dialogue rendered so close to actual life that an audience would be convinced by its illusion of reality. A playwright had only to reproduce man's environment, endow it with human life and show that one produced the other, and what had seemed small and insignificant could be important and urgent (Styan, *Realism* 8).

Naturalism in drama demonstrates how Man is altered by his environment, paying attention to specific forces, no matter how 'small and insignificant' they seem. By all accounts, O'Neill was both a realist and a naturalist as he employs both techniques in his works. For this thesis, though, I will refer to O'Neill's realist and naturalist plays as 'realist'.

O'Neill began his playwriting career in 1913, writing in the mode of realism whereby characters speak in prose rather than verse, and the plays are set in the real world. However, his plays do not function merely as demonstrations or replications of the observable world, intended to entertain audiences. Rather, O'Neill probes deeply into the psyche of his characters, exploring how the past influences the present and how these characters function in their environment, among other things.

Prior to realism, American theatre was struggling to develop a form of its own and to discover itself. Unlike Europe, America had little “literary and cultural heritage from which to draw” (Demastes 20). American theatre “had been largely given over to melodramas and lavish spectacle” (Shiach 10) as theatre favoured “time-tested box office successes or sensational, sentimental, and melodramatic audience-grabbers” (Demastes 11). O’Neill was thus “writing at the end of a period when a flamboyant, semi-professional style of acting ... had held the stage for nearly a century” (Bogard qtd. in Demastes 21). American theatre’s interest in realism started around 1889 (Demastes 18) as “Americans had finally begun to find native sources of material and to use native idioms in their presentations” (Demastes 19). Demastes asserts that “naturalism had become ‘American’ through O’Neill, who provided its flexibility and adaptability to the American scene” (22).

O’Neill developed his own brand of realism for the American theatre. Don Shiach notes that “Realism, for O’Neill, was restricted to dealing only with the ‘appearance of things’, whereas what critic Jean Chothia refers to as ‘real realism’, what O’Neill was drawn to as a dramatist, dealt with the ‘soul of a character’” (15). O’Neill focuses on the unravelling that goes on in the minds of characters, which is either verbalised or visualised on stage. Throughout his plays, things come to light that alter how the characters think, either about themselves or about those around them, provoking a crisis or reconsideration on their part – hence, dealing with the ‘soul of a character’. It is this ‘real realism’, this relationship between individuals and their community, which received the bulk of his attention.

His early plays were based on his experiences at sea, after being sent on board a ship by his father in 1910 (Dymkowski viii). From the 1920s, his plays focused more explicitly on people in relation to their family and society. His final plays include his most autobiographical works, although critics argue that most of his plays are based on his life; he even attempted to deal with his own personal traumas in some of them “in such a way as to

make them universal” (Nastic 199). Many of his characters are based on himself, his family, and friends; some characters bear the same names as those individuals. As so much is based on his lived experiences, O’Neill intended to portray what it meant to be human onstage.

Realism was the mode of choice for O’Neill when he began writing in 1913, and he adhered to realism until the publication of his first expressionistic play, *The Emperor Jones*, in 1920. Expressionism first took shape in painting “at the beginning of the 20th century in which artists, rather than attempting to create a version of ‘reality’, created a highly personal vision of the world that included distorted images symbolising inner psychological states” (Shiach 13). Expressionism is thus non-realist in the sense that it does not attempt to mimic the real world but rather employs these distortions as one means of manifesting a character’s internal state. Expressionist plays focus on the inner psychology of characters. Some expressionist techniques O’Neill employs in his plays include audible thinking in *Dynamo* and *More Stately Mansions* (whereby the characters voice their thoughts out loud) and masks in *The Great God Brown* (to highlight the various facets of a person’s identity, among other uses).

As American theatre derived its influences from Europe (Styan, *Realism* 109), the impact of European expressionism on the American scene was also profound. O’Neill was part of the Provincetown Players, a theatrical organisation that produced plays and staged his anti-realistic experiments (Styan, *Expressionism* 100). The first American expressionist plays were performed in the early 1920s, in the work of writers such as Sophie Treadwell, Elmer Rice, and O’Neill (Murphy, “McTeague” 23). Styan proposes a psychological reason for the American theatre’s interest in expressionism – that the “post-war years were troubled by an intellectual disillusionment, and the disintegration of the so-called ‘American dream’”. The stage thus became an avenue for O’Neill to express his disenchantment (*Expressionism* 100).

Expressionism allowed O’Neill “to explore inner conflicts with greater flexibility and clarity” (Whitman 158). To investigate the ‘inner conflicts’ of his characters, it was necessary to focus on aspects that would otherwise be ‘unseen’ on stage. The unconscious thoughts of characters are unseen, but through expressionism, particularly the technique of audible thinking, O’Neill’s characters voice their thoughts. O’Neill’s characters are progressively multi-dimensional as he portrays them as being conflicted with issues that plague ordinary individuals. However, it is not only in O’Neill’s expressionist plays that his characters are fleshed-out, but this attempt to get to the inner conflict of his characters is a central concern in his realist plays as well.

O’Neill is credited with being the first American playwright “to do profound battle with ideas” as he “wrestled with the fate of humankind and saw it as tragic. Human beings are powerless in the vast universe” (Sternlicht 36-7). He often depicts his characters as powerless in the sense that their fate is not in their hands, such that whatever actions are undertaken fail to improve their situations. To this end, in O’Neill’s plays, it is clear how various circumstances have shaped his characters’ present reality and that they have no option but to succumb to their destiny, which is what makes the fate of mankind so tragic.

Rudolf Stamm summarises O’Neill’s central theme – that of “Man in the closed circle of determining circumstances” (“Faithful Realism” 244). Stamm’s choice of ‘closed circle’ indicates how O’Neill isolates a select few from the social milieu, focusing on specific characters and the drama that goes on around them. Because the circle is small, there is the impression that O’Neill is zooming in on characters and revealing how they function in their environment. His works are reminiscent of a scientific experiment as he depicts each character in his or her environment and subjects them to external and internal influences. ‘Determining circumstances’ emphasises the powerlessness of these characters who are closely observed while their fate unravels.

In “The Experimental Novel”, Zola champions the need for science to enter “the domain of us novelists” of the nineteenth century, insisting that novelists should borrow from science because “[d]eterminism dominates everything” (Zola). Admiring the experimental method that physiologist Claude Bernard advocated, Zola adopts Bernard’s arguments in science for literature, asserting, “we can easily see that the novelist is equally an observer and an experimentalist. The observer in him gives the facts as he has observed them” while “the experimentalist appears and introduces an experiment”. The experimentalist “sets his characters going in a certain story so as to show that the succession of facts will be such as the requirements of the determinism of the phenomena under examination call for”. Zola’s claim that ‘the experimentalist appears’ implies that the experiment does not begin from the outset. Rather, what initially happens is observation, and the element of experiment is introduced as the novel, or in this case, play, progresses. Similarly, O’Neill observes his characters while subjecting them to experiments by introducing other characters or objects to provoke a reaction from these characters. As ‘experimentalist’, O’Neill ‘sets his characters going’ in the manner he chooses to prove the outcome of his experiment.

One noteworthy preoccupation O’Neill explores in his dramas – you might even call it a “Determining Circumstance” – was his “interest in abnormal mental conditions” (Stamm, “Dramatic Experiments” 9). O’Neill began exploring ‘abnormal mental conditions’ from the very beginning of his playwriting career, becoming a feature which reappeared in various forms throughout his work. For instance, his early 1919 play *Where the Cross Is Made* features Captain Bartlett, who is “possessed by the idea that he must get hold of a treasure-chest hidden on a far-off island” (Stamm, “Dramatic Experiments” 9).

This paper is concerned with the various mad characters in O’Neill’s plays, and how this madness is part and parcel of O’Neill’s commitment to getting at the inner conflict of his characters. To this end, I will be focusing on *All God’s Chillun Got Wings* (1924), *The Great*

God Brown (1925), *Dynamo* (1928), *More Stately Mansions* (1939), and *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1941) as the best examples of plays which delve into the tragic consequences of mental illness. While O'Neill's oeuvre is peppered with numerous mad characters, these plays are chosen as the mad characters in question are driven to insanity by tangible objects on stage. By extending upon the understanding that O'Neill's plays show 'Man in the closed circle of determining circumstances' (Stamm, "Faithful Realism" 244), this essay examines how certain objects drive characters mad, while other objects are subject to characters creating symbols out of them – which tragically results in madness.

In his 1961 book *Madness & Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, French philosopher Michel Foucault explores how societal perceptions of madness have changed through history, depending on how society views the insane. Some ways of viewing madness and the various types of madness that Foucault identifies are useful in defining O'Neill's mad characters and outlining why we regard them as mad. One way of viewing madness is that it is "not linked to the world and its subterranean forms, but rather to man, to his weaknesses, dreams, and illusions" as madness "insinuates itself within man, or rather it is a subtle rapport that man maintains with himself" (26). Madness is thus not external – it is not something situated in the outside world. Instead, madness is something internal that becomes externalised when a particular event triggers an individual. It is through one's words, gestures, and mannerisms that an individual comes to be regarded as mad. Therefore, insanity is a "determining circumstance", as is the external event that triggers the further expression of insanity. The focus on man's weakness, dreams, and illusions demonstrate how internal flaws have the potential to upset an individual to the extent that it causes them to behave and function abnormally.

A type of madness identified is that of "*desperate passion*" whereby "especially love deceived by the fatality of death, has no other recourse but madness" (Foucault 30). Foucault

asserts that “[a]s long as there was an object, mad love was more love than madness; left to itself, it pursues itself in the void of delirium” (30). Foucault’s use of ‘object’ here does not refer exclusively to objects on stage, which this thesis does; his use of ‘object’ is more philosophical. The important relationship here is between an individual and his or her perception of something. For instance, a character can love another so deeply and desire to possess them and their love so greatly that it results in madness. This understanding of madness is useful in analysing the case of Reuben Light in *Dynamo*, who so yearns to repossess the love of his dead mother that it drives him mad. Reuben’s obsession results in him seeing traits of his mother in a dynamo which he grows to worship. Here, an object plays a role in a character’s madness.

Objects on stage serve important functions within the *mise-en-scène* as they bear a burden of signification (Garner 56). Garner states that stage objects “function metonymically to designate the entirety of a dramatic world, signifying its fictional existence through specific points of actual materiality” (56). Garner emphasises the importance of objects in grounding an individual within his surroundings (57).

Bert States describes theatre as “a progressive colonisation of the real world” (36) – an idea that is particularly evident in realism and naturalism as both present a version of reality to audiences. States asserts that “theatre ingests the world of objects and signs only to bring images to life. In the image, a defamiliarized and desymbolized object is ‘uplifted to view’ where we see it as being phenomenally heavy with itself” (37). States essentially argues that “objects are always in danger of slipping from their semiotic moorings and piercing the image onstage with the assertion of their own claims to agency and subjectivity” (Monks 53). States proposes that we view “the stage object simultaneously as representing something else (the semiotic attitude) and as a thing-in-itself (the phenomenological attitude)” (Sofer 15). Thus, objects on stage are not simply what they are; a mask is not just a

mask, because the way it is treated gives it a new meaning and purpose. In all five O'Neill plays, objects cause various characters to descend into madness or exacerbate their already fragile mental state. These objects exist as props (the masks and the wedding gown) and as a part of the stage set (the dynamo and the summerhouse).

States emphasises the connection between objects and images; the physical object itself will always have a meaning, but what prevails is the meaning one derives from perceiving an object. In O'Neill's plays, objects often trigger the memory of an emotional circumstance, provoking the characters to respond in various ways that shape their destinies.

Foucault elaborates on the connection between objects and images: “[i]nside the image, confiscated by it, and incapable of escaping from it, madness is nonetheless more than imagination, forming an act of undetermined content” (94). It is the meanings that O'Neill's characters give to various objects that result in madness. The fact that an individual is ‘incapable of escaping’ from the image demonstrates the power of an image as it imprisons the individual, preventing them from seeing anything beyond it. The word ‘confiscated’ highlights how the individual is seized by what they believe is the truth that the image holds. However, that ‘truth’ is never the absolute truth, and is, rather, merely what they believe the image stands for. For instance, Deborah Harford and her son, Simon, in *More Stately Mansions* are both captivated by the summerhouse in Deborah's garden, albeit for very different reasons, an obsession causes both of them to descend into madness.

Arthur Nethercot notes how O'Neill explores the theme of mental unbalance in most of his plays. Nethercot classifies this mental aberration into three categories: firstly, madness as hereditary, which makes up a small portion of the plays. Secondly, “one in which the source is various physical causes from within the individual himself or from some abnormal external situation in which he finds himself” (262): plays which deal with how the physical

effects of an illness or a character's environment cause him to succumb to madness. Lastly, the largest and possibly the most important group:

attributes the mental disturbance to something in the inner character of the individual – to some obsession, compulsion, or fixed idea (a favourite expression of the time) which has taken possession of him and affects his thoughts and actions either temporarily or permanently (262).

The internal makeup of a character determines their madness as an obsession with something can easily cause one to descend into insanity.

Foucault highlights madness as something visible; as the asylum came into existence, madness became observable. Foucault asserts that madness “is responsible only for that part of itself which is visible. All the rest is reduced to silence. Madness no longer exists except as *seen*” (250). Just as ‘seeing’ madness in an asylum serves as proof of madness, the visibility aspect of madness is important especially when dealing with drama and theatre because what is shown on stage is what gives meaning to a performance. Conclusions are drawn based on what is heard and seen. By observing Ella Downey’s behaviour towards her husband and the African mask in *All God’s Chillun*, and Mary Tyrone’s behaviour at the end of *Long Day’s Journey*, one would readily agree that they are mad. What is unseen, on the other hand, can be regarded as questionable because there are no simple conclusions to be drawn based on what cannot be seen.

The significance of what is seen and visible is relevant to the realism of these plays, as realism is concerned with representing the external, observable world on stage. On the other hand, the ‘unseen’ is frequently represented via dramatic expressionism. Throughout O’Neill’s plays, there is a tension between the seen and the unseen in terms of what causes the mad characters to succumb to madness – a tension that is at least partly paralleled in a tension considering how O’Neill’s plays are to be categorised. At certain points, the cause of

a character's madness may seem obvious as its cause is 'seen', however, that is not always the case as there are unseen forces at work in the plays as well. For instance, there is a primitive African mask in *All God's Chillun* that appears as part of the decoration of the Black character Jim Harris' home. His wife, Ella Downey, is white, and is the mad character in question. As Ella enters a dialogue with the African mask, the unseen aspect of the mask that the audience is denied access to reveals itself, as only Ella sees this 'side' of the mask.

O'Neill explores the manifestation of madness in his characters through realism and expressionism in his plays. The five plays discussed cannot be cleanly categorised as either realist or expressionist because even a generally realist play like *All God's Chillun* contains expressionist elements in the form of its stage setting. O'Neill himself complained in a letter in 1925 that "to be called a 'sordid realist' one day, a 'grim pessimistic Naturalist' the next, a 'lying Moral Romanticist' the next, etc. is quite perplexing" (qtd. in Törnqvist, *A Drama of Souls* 28), highlighting his disdain at having his work categorised by critics.

Notably, O'Neill subtitled his early expressionist play, *The Hairy Ape*, "A Comedy of Ancient and Modern Life in Eight Scenes" (Connolly 77) which is a curious choice considering that the protagonist, Yank, dies at the end (Connolly 79). O'Neill did not subtitle all his plays, but this choice demonstrates how he intended the play to be read as a comedy even though Yank's suffering is not amusing. The message is: there is no simple way to categorise O'Neill's work. Therefore, I will classify the plays based on their most dominant characteristics. For this thesis, the realist plays will be *All God's Chillun Got Wings* and *Long Day's Journey into Night*, while the expressionist plays are *The Great God Brown*, *Dynamo*, and *More Stately Mansions*. This classification generally holds up among critics, although I will demonstrate why *All God's Chillun* and *Long Day's Journey* are not entirely realist.

This thesis traces the evolution of O'Neill's objects from mad objects that have power over the characters to objects that cause madness in characters due to the associations of their

memories and beliefs with those objects. O'Neill experiments with different modes, objects, and types of madness to illuminate how, in each play, the most important element is the object.

Considering the importance of objects in portraying madness, “[a]ll objects have the potential to be interpreted as meaningful symbols” as they are not “mere re-presentations; they are elements ready to be manipulated or orchestrated to convey something more than mere ‘pictures’ of life” (Demastes 2). Rather than being classified as either realist or expressionist plays, this thesis also considers whether viewing all these plays as symbolist do more justice to the role of the object in altering a character’s mental state.

PART II: THE UNSEEN SIDE OF THE PRIMITIVE MASK

Written in 1924, *All God's Chillun Got Wings* is a two-act realist play that spans fifteen years. It explores the relationship between an interracial couple and the tense race relations between whites and Blacks in early twentieth-century America. In a play where Blacks and whites are divided from the start, Ella Downey, a white woman, marries Jim Harris, a Black man. By the end of Act One, Jim and Ella leave for France, believing their union will be accepted there, only for Ella to go mad during their time there. They return to America two years later and Ella's madness becomes more pronounced upon seeing a traditional African mask in Jim's house. *All God's Chillun* explores how madness in a character can be exacerbated by a foreign object – one that has an unseen aspect to it.

Interestingly, it is initially hinted that Jim is more prone to madness than Ella. The play opens with Ella and Jim as children as they declare they like each other despite the hostilities between the races. Nine years later, Ella associates more with her fellow whites than with Jim, who she ignores. A further five years on, Ella has lost a child and is all alone. Jim is the only one who has been kind to her all these years despite the horrid way she has treated him. Still in love with her, Jim asks if she would ever marry him, to which Ella agrees. Thrilled, he declares, “I don't want nothing – only to wait – to know you like me ... to give my life and my blood and all the strength that's in me to give you peace and joy – to become your slave! – yes, be your slave, your black slave that adores you as sacred!” (294). The stage directions indicate that Jim “*has sunk to his knees. In a frenzy of self-abnegation, as he says the last words he beats his head on the flagstones*”. Ella is alarmed, exclaiming, “Jim! Jim! You're crazy! I want to help you, Jim – I want to help –” (294), after which the scene ends.

Jim's declaration that he will be Ella's 'black slave' is troubling considering his determination to become a lawyer and pass the bar exam to prove that a Black is capable of

such an achievement. Jim's willingness to label himself as a 'black slave' indicates his love for Ella as he disregards his professional ambitions for love. Foucault identifies "desperate passion" as a type of madness (30); for Jim to prioritise Ella over his desire to prove something on behalf of his race emphasises the extent of his love and readiness to sacrifice for her. Madness is voluntary in this case as Jim is driven by his feelings.

Jim behaves worryingly when he '*beats his head on the flagstones*'; the visual imagery of an individual doing such an action only reinforces one's assumption that he is mad because a sane person would not deliberately hurt themselves. By sinking to his knees before Ella, he puts himself in a submissive position and portrays himself as weak and needy – effectively disempowering himself out of love. Ella repeating that she wants to help Jim elevates her to a position of power. She asserts control over the situation as she offers Jim help, providing the impression that Jim needs her. Her exclamation that Jim is 'crazy' is the first reference to madness in the play and Act One Scene Three ends on this note.

The final words of the scene are spoken by Ella, who pleads with Jim before "*The Curtain Falls*" (294). Ella is cut off when the curtain falls on the scene, which suggests an abrupt interruption to it rather than a curated end to a scene. Susanne Langer posits that in drama "we do not have to find out what is significant; the selection has been made – whatever is there is significant" (qtd. in Kane 17). There is significance in why Ella's pleas to Jim are cut off, especially since it is not common for a scene in O'Neill's oeuvre to be cut off in such a manner. By interrupting such an emotionally charged scene, it remains in the minds of the audience much longer, inviting them to recall that Jim was the one behaving in an overdramatic manner whereas Ella was being sensible and urging him to stop.

This dramatic choice sets up the expectation that it is Jim who might descend into madness as the play progresses. That, however, is not the case as when the couple returns to New York two years later, Jim informs his sister, Hattie, about Ella's declining mental state

while they were living in France. Believing that Ella needed to avoid Americans, Jim had moved them to the countryside in France, only for Ella to avoid the French as well. Jim tells Hattie that Ella “lived in the house and got paler and paler, and more and more nervous and scarey, always imagining things, too – until I got to imagining things, too” (300). Jim’s choice of ‘paler and paler’ and ‘more and more nervous’ paint a picture of Ella’s gradual deterioration. Her ‘imagining things’ provides the first indication of her madness and suggests that it was perhaps contagious because Jim, too, begins imagining things because of Ella’s condition. This transmissibility demonstrates the extent to which Ella’s madness consumes the household. Ella’s seclusion from society stems from her shame of marrying a Black man. While the focus is on madness in O’Neill’s characters, it is impossible not to also pay attention to race relations as even in the play’s setting, where Blacks and whites are separated, issues of race pervade the play.

Ella’s insanity becomes more pronounced after seeing a primitive Congo mask in the parlour of Jim’s flat, which had been a wedding gift from Jim’s sister. Before this point, the audience might have been reluctant to take Jim’s words about Ella’s deteriorating state because there has been no visual evidence of Ella’s madness. Moreover, the fact that Jim’s last appearance had involved him beating his head on the flagstones does little to suggest he is a reliable character. When Ella first sees the mask, she immediately, “*gives a stifled scream*” (302). She attempts to suppress the scream, but that fails because of her sheer horror at viewing such an object. When Jim offers to put the mask in another room, Ella defiantly asserts, “No. I want it here where I can give it the laugh!” (303). Her desire for the mask to remain in its original place demonstrates her determination to conquer her initial fear upon perceiving it. However, it also worryingly suggests a sort of madness because she sees the need to give the mask ‘the laugh’. By wanting to give the mask ‘the laugh’, Ella implies that there is a certain dialogue going on between herself and the mask, one that is unseen and

unheard to readers and an audience. The reason for this provocation is not simply because the mask is a primitive, grotesque object. Rather, her desire to gain the upper hand over the mask suggests something far deeper than that.

In *The Stage Life of Props*, Andrew Sofer defines a prop as a “discrete, material, inanimate object that is visibly manipulated by an actor in the course of performance” (11). It then “follows that a stage object must be ‘triggered’ by an actor in order to become a prop” (11-12). Moving an object essentially transforms it into a prop (Sofer 12). One of the first things Ella does to the mask is to “*slap it contemptuously*” after declaring that it “looks ugly to me and stupid – like a kid’s game – making faces!” (O’Neill 303). By ‘visibly manipulat[ing]’ the mask, the mask shifts from being an object to a prop, elevating it to a greater role. The significance of such a change in the status of an object lies in one of the characteristics Sofer attributes to props; he asserts that “[p]rops motivate the stage action” (23), bestowing upon the humble mask the power to chart the course of the play.

The first indication that the mask has unseen properties is evident when Ella claims the mask is ‘making faces’ at her before she slaps it. She addresses the mask, “Pooh! You needn’t look hard at me. I’ll give you the laugh”, before returning it to its stand (303). Being a carved, inanimate object, there is no way the mask has more than one ‘face’. Ella, though, perceives that the mask changes and she speaks to it dismissively, telling it off for ‘look[ing] hard at’ her. The sense of superiority is evident in her tone as she disregards the mask’s value to the African culture by labelling it ‘ugly’ and ‘stupid’. When she insists that she will give the mask ‘the laugh’, she draws attention to the possibility that there is some unseen competition between her and the mask. While the audience views the physical mask, that is all they are privy to. The realist mode does not allow access to Ella’s point of view of the mask, emphasising one of realism’s limitations in terms of providing the full picture.

Bearing in mind the three types of madness that Nethercot describes in O'Neill's plays, he considers *All God's Chillun* a play whereby "racial differences can also easily become another form of environment" ("Madness" 265) – a perspective which explains Ella's resentment towards Blacks in general. Having grown up surrounded by whites who deem themselves superior to Blacks, this sense of superiority becomes ingrained in Ella. However, this play also falls in the third category whereby madness is attributed to "something in the inner character of the individual" (Nethercot, "Madness" 262) given that something about the mask provokes an internal reaction in Ella, speaking to concerns about her 'inner character'. Her obsession with the primitive mask is evident not only in her initial response to it but also in the stage setting whereby the mask dominates the stage space.

While the play is realist in terms of dialogue and stage directions, its expressionist set conveys the importance of the mask in relation to Ella's madness. Following Jim and Ella's return to New York, the next scene, Act Two Scene Two, takes place six months later. The stage directions reveal that the "*walls of the room appear shrunken in, the ceiling lowered, so that the furniture, the portrait, the mask look unnaturally large and domineering*" (305). Jim's home is presented as a stifling environment where the walls are caving in due to the tensions of a mixed-race marriage, as though society's disapproval is manifest in the setting itself. The portrait of his father and the primitive mask stand out, magnifying the 'Black' elements of the home. The portrait and the mask even appear to mock the viewer due to how much larger they appear compared to the rest of the objects in the room. These stage directions could be viewed as how the home appears to Ella; the stage space thus becomes a visualisation of the home from Ella's perspective, where the figures of the portrait and the mask loom so large that they overshadow everything else.

Using an expressionist set to convey Ella's inner character shows how the setting itself is an important element of the play. In realist plays, "stage sets serve purely scenic

functions. O'Neill, however, employs the set-as-actor, or as the agent, and not the place, of the action" (Basile 29). Rather than the stage being a mere background, 'set-as-actor' elevates the stage set to be just as essential as the characters in terms of dramatising the play's central preoccupations. Ella's interiority would not be adequately conveyed had the play adhered strictly to a realist set.

The final scene, Act Two Scene Three, takes place a further six months later and involves Ella engaged in an intense dialogue with the mask. Here, "*the walls appear shrunken in still more, the ceiling now seems barely to clear the people's heads, the furniture and the characters appear enormously magnified*" (311). The set is now so exaggerated that it becomes comical, with characters that are too large for their surroundings and a ceiling that scrapes their heads. Instead of sticking with the same set design as Act Two Scene Two, O'Neill amplifies the mask and brings in the walls and ceiling further to create a more claustrophobic environment. This choice stresses the increasing obsession Ella has with the mask as its effect on her state of mind worsens over time; the expressionistic stage setting serves as a landscape for Ella's mind.

Through its magnification of the mask, the expressionist set also prompts the consideration of the mask as a puppet – an idea that has not yet been explored in O'Neill studies. Puppets are a kind of "performing object", which Proschan describes as "material images of humans, animals, or spirits that are created, displayed, or manipulated in narrative or dramatic performance" (Bell 15). Similarly, the primitive mask has "*a grotesque face ... but beautifully done, conceived in a true religious spirit*" (O'Neill 297). While the mask lacks the rest of its anatomy, which puppets otherwise tend to have, its face is crucial as its features distinguish the mask from other props (chairs, pistols, etc.). The puppet is "so often a crude and disproportioned thing" and Gross highlights "its staring eye" (2), among other features – in line with the '*grotesque*' nature of the mask.

Puppets are a more specific type of prop, and while both seem similar, there is importance in classifying the mask as a puppet. The aspect of the puppet that is striking here is that “[o]ften as one watches the performers on a puppet stage, the tiny figures seem to grow bigger and bigger” and they become “more real in our minds. They can become, for a moment, more real than ourselves” (Gross 40). Gross refers to the psychological impact of watching a puppet show. On a realist stage, props do not have this impact.

As *All God Chillun* progresses, the primitive mask grows larger – a change that reflects the mask becoming more real in Ella’s mind. Not only does the mask’s presence consume her, but through the expressionist set, we see the mask from her perspective. Speaking about the puppet, Gross also remarks on “the need of a made thing to tell a story, to become a vehicle for a voice” (1). As a puppet, the mask gives voice to Ella’s fears and prejudices about Blacks. Ella endows the mask with agency as she regards it as an object that is capable of possibly hurting her.

The placement of the mask in this setting is telling. In his analysis of August Strindberg’s *The Father*, Kee-Yoon Nahm notes that a lighted lamp “sits on the table throughout the entire play, a silent yet omnipresent observer ...” (194). *The Father* is a naturalist play published in 1887; this was a period when modern drama was in full swing in Europe, beginning with Henrik Ibsen’s 1877 realist play, *The Pillars of Society* (Styan, *Realism* 1). Swedish modern dramatist Strindberg’s work was among O’Neill’s greatest influences (Demastes 21) and O’Neill regarded Strindberg as the father of expressionism (Blackburn 112). Even in his naturalist plays, Strindberg’s concern was about “how to render the world of spirit or the inner world of man’s soul using words and objects, how to render the intangible by means of the tangible” (Sprinchorn 115), highlighting how what is placed on the stage can convey interiority.

Similarly, the mask in *All God's Chillun* is situated at the left corner of the parlour and remains there throughout Act Two. Nahm's description of the lamp as 'silent yet omnipresent' draws a parallel with the primitive mask. The mask is silent. It only acquires meaning and significance through Ella, illustrating her descent into insanity as she imposes various meanings onto it. However, while Strindberg's lighted lamp remains unchanged, the same cannot be said of the mask which is 'altered' when it is magnified by the expressionist set, which indicates a growing presence that eventually overpowers Ella and becomes more real in her mind (Gross 40). Its silence becomes so loud that we are made painfully aware of the fact that it reveals nothing about itself, yet reveals so much about Ella.

This expressionist set magnifies the actions of the characters. With a smaller background, the characters and their responses to the objects around them are brought to the forefront as only the essential elements of the stage setting remain. In this scene, Ella enters with a carving-knife, the second time in the play she carries one. She addresses the mask, "I've been wanting to talk to you every day but this is the only chance – (*with sudden violence, flourishing her knife*) What're you grinning about, you dirty nigger, you? How dare you grin at me? I guess you forgot what you are!" (312). From the first moment she first saw the mask, Ella has been filled with a desire 'to talk to' it daily. Her desire to speak to the mask suggests that there must be an aspect of the mask that engages or even captivates her, despite her initial horror at viewing it. She brandishes her knife immediately upon speaking to it, demonstrating how provoked she is by the mask as she immediately gets violent, never allowing the mask to have its 'say'.

There is an immediate visual contrast with Ella in the previous scene, which took place six months earlier when she wears the same red dressing-gown. Ella is "*dressed in the red dressing-gown, grown dirty and ragged now*" (311); for Ella to enter in this last scene with the gown in tatters calls attention to her degraded mental state. The lack of care she has

for her physical appearance mirrors her psychological condition as we realise the full extent of her madness in this scene.

Ella's appearance and mannerisms amplify her insanity through the portrayal of her as a crazed woman lurking and prowling around the house. The stage directions reveal that Ella's "*eyes glow with a mad energy, her movements are abrupt and spring-like*" (311). The sudden movements indicate a character who is on edge and not in her proper frame of mind. Her 'spring-like' movements also suggest how easily provoked she is and how quickly her emotions can fluctuate. She "*looks stealthily about the room*" and stands before the mask "*her arms akimbo, her attitude one of crazy mockery, fear and bravado*" (311). The visual imagery of Ella looking stealthily about the room gives her the air of a predator, ensuring that she is alone before confronting the mask. This need to be alone intensifies the secrecy between Ella and the mask because we are privy to the fact that we are outsiders. Her animalistic movements also indicate the sinister quality of the mask; Ella constantly needs to be on her guard around it because she does not know what it might be capable of, reinforcing the mask's status as a mad object.

This air of mystery surrounding the mask is best explained by its uncanniness when regarded as a puppet. Freud defined the uncanny as the "class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (930). The uncanny lies in the resemblance between puppets and humans; the "smallness of a puppet is not fixed or simple; it is a bit mysterious, often as frightening or vulnerable as it is enchanting" because puppets are essentially human or humanlike creatures are shrunk down to a smaller scale (Gross 39). Ella's sneaky movements highlight how the mask has an unsettling effect on her to the point that she must be on her guard against it.

In her exchange with the mask in this scene, Ella considers the mask to be on the same level as a person, suggesting that it is not merely a stage object or puppet. Her first

words to the mask draw attention to its unseen characteristics, as she declares, “I’ll give you the laugh, wait and see!” (312), words she has repeated numerous times during the play. Ella equates the mask with another Black person; while speaking to it “*with sudden violence – flourishing her knife*”, she demands:

How dare you grin at me? I guess you forget what you are! That’s always the way. Be kind to you, treat you decent, and in a second you’ve got a swelled head ... why, it’s got so I can’t even walk down the street without seeing niggers, niggers everywhere (312).

While speaking to the mask, her resentment towards Blacks in general is apparent. Her chastising ‘I guess you forgot what you are!’ clearly degrades the Blacks, as the use of the term ‘what’ dehumanises them. The repetition of ‘niggers’ sums up her hatred and sense of superiority. Despite living in the same space as Blacks, she acts as if the streets ought to belong to her.

By equating the mask with Blacks in general, the mask is elevated; it is regarded as an entity unto itself – at least from Ella’s perspective. This distinction emphasises Ella’s degraded mental state to the point where she projects human qualities onto a non-living entity. Recalling how Stamm speaks to O’Neill’s focus on “Man in the closed circle of determining circumstances” (“Faithful Realism” 244), these circumstances present themselves in Ella conflating the mask with its real-life equivalent. Her mind is utterly fixated on this equation to the point that she feels the need to overpower the mask in the same manner she overpowers Jim.

Ella’s influence on Jim is obvious when he doubts whether he will pass the Bar exam despite studying incredibly hard for it. Ella does not want Jim to pass the exam because he is Black; even though he is her husband, she does not want him to achieve something ‘white’ – becoming a lawyer. When Ella worryingly enquires if he has passed, Jim responds while

chuckling and laughing in a rich Negro laughter between sentences and phrases, “Pass? Pass? ... Pass? Me? Jim Crow Harris? Nigger Jim Harris – become a full-fledged Member of the Bar! Why the mere notion of it is enough to kill you with laughing!” (313). Despite spending months studying for the exam, all the while nursing Ella and ensuring she is never left alone, Ella’s influence over him results in him questioning his own abilities. He even refers to himself as a ‘nigger’ despite his reluctance to use the offensive term earlier in the play.

Despite her sway over Jim, Ella’s lack of power and control over the mask troubles her, evident when we recollect that she let out “*a stifled scream*” (302) when she first noticed it. Her unfamiliarity with such a foreign object and its shock factor startled her, putting her in a vulnerable position. The expectations of realism are adhered to even during the ‘dialogue’ between Ella and the mask. Because Ella regards the mask as an entity, she speaks out loud to it in what she believes to be a two-way conversation; there is no monologue in this play. The invisible ‘battle’ between Ella and the mask is the important power-struggle in this play, and Ella appears to emerge victorious when she ‘kills’ the mask.

After learning that Jim did not pass his admission to the Bar test, Ella rejoices and views this moment as her opportunity to ‘murder’ the mask. Ella reinforces the idea of the primitive mask as an entity when she triumphantly ‘kills’ it. The stage directions indicate that she “*begins to laugh with wild unrestraint, grabs the mask from its place, sets it in the middle of the table and plunging the knife down through it pins it to the table*” before declaring, “There! Who’s got the laugh now?” (313). The stage directions portray Ella in a hysterical state as she laughs ‘*with wild unrestraint*’, marking the first instance in the play that she behaves in such a manner. It is almost as though the thought of being a ‘murderer’ brings out this wildness, demonstrating how the side of her that she had been repressing has finally been brought to the surface.

Her laugh also gets portrayed as a performance or an attempt to mock the mask, as her plan from the start was to “give [the mask] the laugh” (303). The manner she ‘kills’ the mask suggests that it is a deliberate act, like she had planned it in her head. Despite this apparent planning, her actions occur fluidly and swiftly, almost as if Ella needs the mask to ‘know’ that Jim did not pass the Bar exam before she ‘kills’ it. For while she might have killed it at any time, she waits for a specific moment because she believes that the mask is a living being capable of understanding. Finally, Ella asserts her dominance over the mask and regains the power and control she craves.

Brenda Murphy hails O’Neill’s realism in revealing Ella’s “obsession and its causes without violating the mimetic illusion” (*American Realism* 127). Murphy asserts that *All God’s Chillun* marks “a transition for O’Neill from the expressionistic dramatization of the psyche” which he employed in his earlier expressionist plays “to its dramatization within the conventions of mimetic realism. In [*All God’s Chillun*] he had found the means of objectifying psychic experience” (*American Realism* 127) through allowing a commonplace object (the mask) to carry symbolic significance. However, it is the play’s expressionist techniques that dramatise Ella’s madness more effectively. The expressionist set prompts the consideration of the mask as a puppet; this idea visualises Ella’s prejudices against Blacks and grants the mask more agency as a mad object.

The tension between the seen and unseen elements of the mask illustrates how a character is swayed by a foreign object. While realism has its limitations in terms of completely revealing those aspects of the mask which cause Ella’s madness, the expressionist elements of the play magnify Ella’s obsession with the mask. The object is the most important element in this play because of what it provokes Ella to do. While the mask has its roots in African culture, Ella gives it a whole new meaning and that marks the start of her demise. Although *All God’s Chillun* is generally regarded as a realist play, its expressionist

techniques allow greater access into Ella's interiority as we witness the exacerbation of her madness.

After 'killing' the mask, Ella regresses into a childlike state at the end of the play, transitioning from a ruthless woman who plunged a knife through the mask to a needy character. Ella chatters to Jim:

I'll put shoe blacking on my face and pretend I'm black and you can put chalk on your face and pretend you're white just as we used to ... only you mustn't all the time be a boy. Sometimes you must be my old kind Uncle Jim who's been with us for years and years. Will you, Jim? (315).

She refers to their childhood when Jim would paint his face with chalk to pretend he was white, and she did the same with shoe blacking. This scene occurring so soon after she kills the mask marks a striking juxtaposition of her two sides. Gross describes the puppet as a "thing that seems to *belong* to childhood, not just a child but the child's earliest possession, its toy or doll" (49). After killing the object that is associated with childhood, Ella herself regresses into childhood; this coincidence implies that the mask 'transfers' its qualities (in terms of its association with childhood) to Ella because she only behaves childishly after killing the mask. Such a reading portrays the mask to have agency as a mad object rather than merely being a puppet that exacerbates Ella's madness.

This return to a time of innocence is crucial because it is a time of playing games and pretending to be someone else. As children, they challenged reality by each pretending to be of another race, while in the present, Ella is so far out of her mind that she is unable to distinguish reality from make-believe and Jim sees no choice but to play along. Ella wanting Jim to be her 'old kind Uncle Jim' is a plea repeated at the end of the previous scene, the only difference being that the play ends with Ella in this childlike state, exactly as she is when the

play begins. There is thus a cyclical aspect to the play, hinting at the never-ending nature of the sufferings of two characters struggling with society's expectations.

PART III: DION ANTHONY'S MAD MASK

The idea of the primitive Congo mask as an entity that causes a character's madness is taken one step further in O'Neill's expressionist play, *The Great God Brown*, completed in 1925. While the mask in *Brown* initially seems to be a prop, it is elevated to the status of a person by numerous characters in the play. The mask becomes a character that other characters interact with and speak to. Billy Brown becomes mad after inheriting the mask from Dion Anthony, demonstrating how madness is transferable in the form of an object. Moreover, without his mask, Dion is not as mad or impulsive as he is when he is wearing it; this observation would seem to indicate that it is the mask itself which is mad, rather than Billy or Dion. The mask has its own distinct identity which Billy yearns to possess. However, Billy does not anticipate how powerful the mask is. While *All God's Chillun* highlights Ella's personal madness, *Brown* is a study of shared madness. The expressionism in *Brown* illuminates otherwise unseen aspects relating to madness such as its transference of traits and the consequent mental and physical degradation of the various characters.

As a response to realism, expressionism provided access into the aspects of theatre that realism failed to illuminate. Theatre scholar Ronald Waincott informs us that an "antirealistic aesthetic permeates the writing and illustrations" of 1920s American theatre (117). American film producer Kenneth Macgowan, who worked with O'Neill in producing his plays, justifies the prevalence of antirealism in American drama in the 1920s, asserting that "[t]here is something in the nature of the theatre that makes Realism a natural and a thoroughly unsatisfactory method of expression ... [e]specially when the heart of the whole business is an elaborate pretense that there really isn't any actor, and there really isn't any theatre" (qtd. in Waincott 117). Macgowan's assertion about realism as 'a natural' yet 'thoroughly unsatisfactory method of expression' reinforces realism's inability to adequately

convey certain attributes such as a character's thoughts or motives, a failure that gave rise to other methods meant to express those elements that realism could not do sufficient justice to.

O'Neill himself championed expressionism and its numerous techniques, including the use of masks. In his 1932 essay "Memoranda on Masks", he declared that:

the use of masks will be discovered eventually to be the freest solution of the modern dramatist's problem as to how – with the greatest possible dramatic clarity and economy of means – he can express those profound hidden conflicts of the mind which the probings of psychology continue to disclose to us (qtd. in Valgema 120).

O'Neill considered the use of the mask to be the solution whereby a character's inner state and psychology can be revealed to the audience. Starting with *The Hairy Ape* in 1922, O'Neill adopted the use of masks in a number of his expressionistic plays for various purposes.

Billy and Dion are the two main characters in *Brown*, a four-act play which spans eighteen years. In the Prologue, Dion and Billy have just finished high school. Both their fathers work in an architecture firm and the sons are destined to follow in their fathers' footsteps. Billy has a crush on Margaret, a schoolmate, but Margaret is in love with Dion. The masks are first introduced in the Prologue, though not all the characters possess masks; of the seven characters in the Prologue, only Dion and Margaret don masks. Dion's mask is described as a "*fixed forcing of his own face – dark, spiritual, poetic, passionately supersensitive, ... – into the expression of a mocking, ... young Pan*" (475). Meanwhile, Margaret's "*face is masked with an exact, almost transparent reproduction of her own features, but giving her the abstract quality of a Girl instead of the individual, Margaret*" (477). They take their masks off at various points in the Prologue when speaking to certain characters. Interestingly, Margaret only recognises Dion when he is masked.

Act One takes place seven years later in Dion and Margaret's home and illustrates Dion's unsuccessful endeavours after squandering a great deal of his family inheritance. His mask has also changed, with its "*Pan quality becoming Mephistophelean. It has already begun to show the ravages of dissipation*" (484), highlighting how the characters' masks change with time and even reflect their internal state. Dion's excessive ways are manifest in the '*ravages of dissipation*' evident in his mask. Margaret proposes that Dion work for Billy, who is in his family's architecture business. Dion and Billy's fathers were business partners. Dion, though, did not follow this same path as he dreamt of being a successful artist. Because he is too proud to ask for Billy's help, Margaret takes that task upon herself and Billy agrees to let Dion work at the company. A further seven years on, Dion's mask is "*terribly ravaged*" (498) and he confesses to Cybel, his friend who is a prostitute, that Billy steals his ideas and wants everything that he owns, including Margaret (500).

Dion confronts Billy in Act Two Scene Three, barging into Billy's house and declaring that he is the brains behind the company because he came up with the designs (508). After Billy admits that he has always loved Margaret, Dion insists, "No! Brown loves me! He loves me because I have always possessed the power he needed for love, because I am love!" (510). Dion's references to power and possession highlight precisely what Billy wishes to have for himself. Having loved Margaret since he was a teenager, he seeks to possess her and everything else Dion owns. Billy even 'buys' Cybel from Dion, even though Dion and Cybel continue to see each other as friends.

Following the logic that Billy seeks everything Dion owns, Dion anticipates that Billy will take his place after he dies and even provides his blessings. Before dying in Billy's presence due to his weak, degraded state, Dion declares, "My last will and testament! I leave Dion Anthony to William Brown - ... for him to become me" (510). By asserting that Billy will 'become' him, Dion implies that Billy will literally take his place, both in his marriage to

Margaret and at work. What is unclear at this stage is whether Billy will inherit Dion's traits and talents as well. Moments after Dion dies, Billy is struck by an idea and picks up Dion's mask (511). Margaret knocks on the door, looking for Dion, and Billy pretends to be Dion, effectively passing for Dion as Margaret does not suspect anything.

Readings of *Brown* have often been guided by O'Neill's letter to the press regarding the play's symbolism and the motivations of his characters, such as Dion Anthony's name being a reference to Dionysus and St. Anthony, and Margaret being "the modern descendant of the Marguerite of *Faust*" (Tedesco 115). Other readings centre around the play as a "criticism of modern American life" (Stamm, "Dramatic Experiments" 13), the links between the characters of Dion and Billy to O'Neill himself and his elder brother, Jamie (Black 287), the motivation for splitting the characters (Black 380), and the "duality of the human condition" (Dubost 190), to name a few. Numerous articles have debated the true intention of the masks, with one prominent O'Neill scholar noting that the masks are "dramatically confusing" (qtd. in Richardson 20-21) as they do not serve one specific purpose. Taking a different route, this reading of *Brown* focuses on the transferability of madness in the form of an object. In modern drama, no playwright had "used the mask in its essential function as the focus of dramatic action" (Light qtd. in Dowling, "Parade" 9); the mask in *Brown* propels the plot.

The mask transfers traits from one character to another, a phenomenon that is physically highlighted after Billy claims Dion's mask after his death. A month after having taken on Dion's mask, Billy's once-handsome face becomes hideous. He now possesses a mask of his own, which is "*an exact likeness of his face as it was in the last scene*" (515) – that being the scene of his confrontation with Dion. It is only after taking on Dion's mask that Billy requires a mask of his own. The stage directions indicate that Billy "*tears off his mask and reveals a suffering face that is ravaged and haggard, his own face tortured and distorted*

by the demon of Dion's mask" (516) during a conversation with Margaret in his office. He pleads with her, "Think of me! I love you, Margaret! Leave him! I've always loved you! Come away with me! I'll sell out here! We'll go abroad and be happy!" (516). With this blatant confession to Margaret, Billy shows that he has become as impulsive as Dion had been. All his sentences end in exclamation marks, indicating the emotionally charged nature of this exchange as Billy abandons all the restraint and composure he had once possessed. The short sentences highlight how this outburst is out of character, as though he is blurting out his thoughts in the order which they enter his mind.

The stage directions reveal how Billy's face is '*tortured and distorted by the demon of Dion's mask*'. It is not simply the guilt of stealing something that does not belong to him that takes a toll on him; his facial features become physically altered as Dion's mask morphs its way onto his face. As madness "is responsible only for that part of itself which is visible" (Foucault 26), the transference of traits from Dion to Billy demonstrates how madness is passed on from one character to another, emphasising the physical spectacle of the change. While this transfer is never verbally voiced by the characters themselves, it is done visually to highlight the importance of props such as the mask in illuminating the characters' shared madness. The '*tortured and distorted*' face that lies beneath Billy's mask is something that realism would not be able to visually convey as that is an 'unseen' effect of taking on Dion's mask – 'unseen' in the sense that it occurs beneath the surface. Expressionism brings Billy's internal state to the surface and establishes a contrast between his internal and external state.

Explicitly stating that Dion's mask is the cause of Billy's facial transformation removes the need to consider other factors. O'Neill fully intended his readers to be aware of the agency the mask possesses. Moreover, Billy tearing off his mask signals the desperation he inherited from Dion. Billy had always been proper and professional prior to this scene, highlighting how Dion's mask is undeniably the cause of Billy's madness. Billy becomes

unrecognisable from the character he once was in terms of his actions and mannerisms, serving as a physical demonstration of how the traits once deemed negative in Dion have manifested themselves in another character. Shared madness is visualised through the props and Billy's desire to obtain Dion's identity.

Sofer asserts that props "are haunted mediums" as they are "possessed by the voices of the past" (27). Citing examples from modern drama such as the speaking tube in Strindberg's *Miss Julie* and Krapp's tape recorder in Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, Sofer highlights that both instances "ventriloquize an absent, offstage subject, which is the reason I label such objects mediums". The prop is therefore "treated as a mute stand-in for the absent subject" (27). Dion's mask stands in for the character Dion was when he wore his mask; this character gradually morphs its way into Billy's personality, emphasising how madness is mediated and shared through an object. While Billy possesses Dion's mask and believes it will help him achieve a desired identity, the mask is a haunted medium; its effects on Billy are visualised as Billy nearly becomes Dion because of his desire to possess Dion's talent and family. Madness and psychological torment become visible not simply through dialogue but are also etched on a character's face when Billy's face becomes contorted after wearing Dion's mask.

Billy's self-destruction is apparent through his "*suffering face that is ravaged and haggard*" (516) from wearing Dion's mask. Billy made a conscious decision to take on Dion's mask, hence his self-destruction. Recalling O'Neill's theme of exploring Man "in the closed circle of determining circumstances" (Stamm, "Faithful Realism" 244), Dion willingly gave himself to Billy when he declared, "My last will and testament! I leave Dion Anthony to William Brown" (510). While this handover is crucial, what happens next is just as important, because mid-sentence, Dion "*stops as if paralysed, and drops on his knees by Brown's chair, his mask falling off, his Christian Martyr's face at the point of death*" (510).

While Dion leaves himself to Billy, he does not state what it is specifically that he wishes for Billy to inherit. Dion's mask falls off his face unintentionally when he drops on his knees, so it will never be clear whether Dion truly intended for Billy to have his mask as Dion dies soon after. Had Dion's mask not fallen off his face after making that statement, the thought might not even have crossed Billy's mind to take it. In this circle of circumstances, the object presented itself to Billy to adopt as his own; the idea of the experiment resurfaces. O'Neill's potential hypothesis would have been: if I give Character A an object that defines Character B, then Character A would eventually fully morph into Character B.

One reason O'Neill uses masks to convey and demonstrate madness lies in what the masks symbolise. Tedesco asserts that "[w]hat the use of masks does for the stage is to place the drama immediately on a symbolic level and preclude any demand for verisimilitude by a realistic style which often results in a photographic superficiality according to O'Neill" (117). The masks probe beyond the 'photographic superficiality' and examine the inner struggles of the characters. Based on the sheer impact of the masks on characters, evident when Billy goes mad due to Dion's mask, perhaps masks should be considered as characters themselves.

Bearing in mind Sofer's definition of a prop as a "discrete, material, inanimate object that is visibly manipulated by an actor in the course of performance" (11), the mask easily falls into this category. Something else Sofer asserts regarding props is that "[a]lthough they can and do take on some of the functions and attributes of subjects, which accounts in part for their uncanny fashion on stage, props remain objects, not subjects" (20). By extension, the mask in *Brown* can never become a subject like a character because props do not become "truly animate" (20). That would seem to be the case because O'Neill does not list the masks as Characters. However, that perspective is challenged in *Brown*.

Rather than simply being an object, the mask is perhaps best regarded as another character, having received much the same treatment that a character does. In Act Three Scene

Three in Billy's home, Billy speaks to Dion's mask "*in a bitter, mocking tone*" (518). This short scene comprises of a 'dialogue' with Billy and the mask engaging in a two-way conversation, as Billy "*bends down to the mask as if listening – torturedly*" (519). Billy's tortured expression reveals, without the mask ever needing to 'speak' out loud, the fact that the mask 'whispers' things to Billy. Billy repeats what the mask says to the audience: "What's that? She'll never believe? ..." (519). On the one hand, Billy voicing the words of the mask is a means of proving to readers and the audience that the mask does speak, only that they are unable to hear it. In an expressionist play, such an idea is more conceivable. On the other hand, Billy's dialogue with the mask could simply be additional proof of his insanity and that the voices he hears are all in his head. Whatever the case, the mask becomes a distinct character.

Having a mask function as a character was an idea that confused audiences, which seemingly contributed to the play's popularity. *Brown* "enjoyed a run of 8 months in 1926 when it was first produced" (Waith 187) and O'Neill even claimed it was his favourite play (Waith 188). Styan reports that the "audience was confused by the double personality of the masks" (*Expressionism* 109) – a confusion that did not deter theatregoers. Edna Kenton, a fellow member of the Provincetown Players, informs us that O'Neill "cared about the reaction of the audience to monologue, trick shocks, and trick relief" (Dowling, *Eugene O'Neill* 149). In this instance, Billy's dialogue with the mask – or monologue, if you wish – serves as O'Neill's experiment to gauge the possibility of having an inanimate object function as a character. The trick occurs when the mask seemingly whispers things to Billy. Although these whispers from the mask are not audible, Billy's interaction with the mask demonstrates the attempt made at making this a believable scene instead of an absurd moment.

The mask in *Brown* is taken to stand for an individual by other characters, reinforcing its idea as a character. In Act Four Scene One, when Billy is believed to have been murdered by Dion at his office, the men from the committee carry “*the mask of William Brown, two on each side, as if they were carrying a body by the legs and shoulders*” (529). Billy’s mask is brought in respectfully and is given the same treatment that a dead body would receive. Richardson asserts that the power of the mask “grows until it rivals that of the characters; the masks then transcend and supplant the actual human beings on the stage, virtually relegating them to the status of supernumeraries” (22). Richardson’s declaration that the mask ‘supplant[s] the actual human beings on stage’ suggests that the mask plays a greater role than the characters themselves.

Regarding the mask as a character – and a mad one, at that – takes *Brown* a step further than *All God’s Chillun* as the mask plays a more active role in visualising Billy’s madness. Expressionism brings to the surface how madness is contained within an object or character – depending on how one chooses to regard the mask. Initially a prop and then a character, the mask’s status increases as the play progresses. This fluidity of its status also serves as an experiment on O’Neill’s part; the mask’s shifting status highlights the precarious situation Billy finds himself in after taking Dion’s mask, as the mask is more powerful than anyone could have anticipated. By creating confusion around the status of the mask, there is no easy way to categorise what it is.

The mask embodies madness and transfers it from one character to another, rendering it the most important element in the play. The play may be called *The Great God Brown*, but if Billy had not experimented by taking on Dion’s mask, none of these circumstances would have occurred. By contrast, the primitive mask’s power in *All God’s Chillun* is never visibly revealed to the audience. Ella sees the mask making faces at her, but the audience has to take her word on it, as there are no corroborating witnesses as there are in *Brown*. The primitive

mask is only shown to exacerbate Ella's madness because of its unseen factors. The primitive mask's power is suggested at the end when Ella regresses into a childlike state, especially when we consider the mask as a puppet and acknowledge its ties to childhood. Meanwhile, in *Brown*, the explicit association of Dion's mask with madness and Billy's strong need for the mask highlights how objects become addictive enough to cause madness.

O'Neill emphasises the addictive aspect of the mask by likening it to a drug, as once Billy takes possession of the mask, he cannot escape its lure. During his dialogue with the mask in Act Three Scene Three, the stage directions reveal that "*in a sudden panic of dread, [Billy] reaches out for the mask of Dion like a dope fiend after a drug. As soon as he holds it, he seems to gain strength and is able to force a sad laugh*" (519) after the mask seemingly tells him that Margaret will never love him. The action of reaching for the mask '*like a dope fiend after a drug*' reinforces the mask's addictive properties; it casts a spell upon whoever possesses it. The very mask Dion created for himself caused his downfall, only for Billy to possess it and suffer as well. Billy's '*sad laugh*' draws attention to his true internal state; he is not happy, even though the mask does provide him with some sort of relief and even pleasure. Billy gaining strength from Dion's mask emphasises that the more time he spends in contact with the mask, the more like Dion he becomes. However, when we consider the mask as a character, it appears that Billy needs the mask simply to survive. His increase in strength dramatises how dependent he has become on this 'character' to give him life; Billy lives solely to attain the desired identity he believes the mask will give him.

O'Neill's objects possess unprecedented power to the point that characters do not realise the trap they have fallen into. Miliora informs us that O'Neill's characters "become possessed by the greed as if it were a drug to which they become addicted. Therefore, they are compulsively driven to obtain what they seek and are blinded by the implications of their actions" (90). She describes these behaviours to be that of "addicts" (90), highlighting the

extent to which characters become dependent on something just to live. Just as Dion needed that side of him in the form of the mask he created, Billy, upon taking Dion's mask for himself, soon grows to need the mask just as desperately as Dion had. In *Brown*, the mask is something the characters desire to become. Furthermore, Miliora's assertion that the characters 'are blinded by the implications of their actions' speaks to the way in which Billy never anticipated the extent of his dependence on the mask purely to live.

Although the mask causes Billy's madness, Dion raises the importance of unseen factors that shape the wearer. During their confrontation before Dion's death in Act Two Scene Three, Dion shows up at Billy's house in an agitated state accusing Billy of stealing his talent. Dion proclaims, "I'm interested in that germ which wriggles like a question mark of insecurity in his blood, because it's part of the creative life Brown's stolen from me!" (508). At the core of Dion's fury is that much of the company's creative ideas are his, and Billy does not give him credit for that. Dion's interest in the 'germ which wriggles' in Billy's blood emphasises the body. The focus on the body, and the suggestion that what goes on inside that body – all that is unseen – is what determines how people act is an important idea in *Brown*.

Rather than *Brown* supporting the idea that the mask is fully responsible for Billy's madness, an unseen reason is postulated during this exchange. Two reasons for madness in *Brown* are put forth: firstly, a tangible object (the mask), and in this exchange, something within the body. Dion argues that Billy is the way he is because of an invisible, subsurface 'germ'. The difference between the plays so far is that in *Brown* we see a competition between the seen and unseen forces in shaping an individual, which serve at least in part as an explanation for a character's madness. Meanwhile, in *All God's Chillun*, it is largely the unseen aspects of the mask that are responsible for Ella's insanity. The lack of conclusion in *Brown* as to which cause bears more responsibility for madness emphasises expressionism's

inability to provide all the answers, despite its ability to probe further beneath the surface than realism. Instead, more questions than answers are raised as O'Neill illuminates the complications of the human condition by exploring both the seen and the unseen aspects of his characters and the mask.

Despite the mask 'latching' onto Billy, altering his personality, and causing him to spiral into madness, Dion's mask is ultimately regarded as distinct and separate from everything. After Billy is believed to have been murdered and his mask is carried out as though it were a dead body, Billy flees to his home. In Act Four Scene Two, Dion's mask is placed on the table, facing the front (529). Cybel enters and "*looks from Brown to the Dion mask, now with a great understanding*" and exclaims, "You are Dion Brown!" (530). By taking on Dion's mask, Dion has become a part of Billy's life to the point that they cannot be separated. When the police arrive moments later and shoot Billy from the window, he is wearing Dion's mask. However, Cybel takes Dion's mask off as Billy lays dying on the floor, telling him, "You can't take this to bed with you. You've got to go to sleep alone" (531). Cybel's use of the terms 'can't' and 'got to' suggests a law that needs to be followed.

By informing Billy that he cannot die with Dion's mask, Cybel implies that the mask is distinct on its own. The mask may be an object or a prop, even a character, but Billy never fully owns it – and neither had Dion, given how easily Billy took possession of it. Returning to the idea of O'Neill experimenting with his characters' determining circumstances, Cybel plays an important role in the experiment with the masks. Cybel concludes the experiment when she tells Billy that the mask has served its purpose and that he must now give it up. The mask's independence of the characters, especially at this final stage, reinforces how the mask is more like a character than a prop.

The mask ultimately has an identity of its own that is associated with Dion's creativity and the madness that came along with it. Cybel may have labelled Billy 'Dion

Brown', but in the end, the mask survives while Billy does not. The mask is not only seemingly immortal, but it also outlives Dion, its creator. The expressionist techniques in *Brown* demonstrate how Dion's mask serves as a container of traits that causes one character to inherit another's madness. Expressionism also allows the mask to be taken seriously as a character, something that would not be possible through realism because such a scenario is not commonplace.

The primitive mask and Dion's mask are both objects created by others for a specific purpose, and both end up engaging in completely different roles from what they were initially intended for. Lukacs asserts that significance is assigned to objects, that "[t]he object is made a symbol" (qtd. in Begley 342). Ella turns the primitive mask into a symbol when she equates it with Blacks and projects her fears onto it; the mask has power over her because of what she turns it into in her mind. Rather than Dion's mask simply representing his dual nature, it becomes a symbol when Billy takes it on; the mask then symbolises something Billy wishes to become. As an object with agency, it is also an accessory to madness. Both masks are mad objects that determine the fate of the characters.

The two mask plays demonstrate how O'Neill "has attempted to make symbolic the action, the characters" instead of allowing "his symbolism to be an underlying current felt under the smooth surface of an otherwise straight-forward drama" (Parks 443). By giving the objects agency to alter a character's mental state, O'Neill makes the symbolic the action. Considering the masks as a puppet and character respectively also emphasise how the masks are not simply objects. Their status increases as the plays progress and that changing status has implications on the characters. Regarding these plays as symbolist would highlight O'Neill's attempt in transforming an otherwise ordinary object into "the focus of dramatic action" (Light qtd. in Dowling, "Parade" 9).

PART IV: THE GREAT MOTHER DYNAMO

Written in 1928, *Dynamo* is a three-act expressionist play centering on the religious Light and the atheist Fife families. By the end of Act One, Reuben Light abandons his Christian God. He loses his faith after being betrayed by his mother and fooled by the Fife family because of his love for Ada Fife, the Fifes' teenage daughter. Reuben undergoes a drastic change in Act Two when, after disappearing for fifteen months, he returns as someone hard and cynical, who worships electricity. He also learns that his mother passed away during his absence, which upsets him immensely as they used to be very close. His madness peaks in Act Three, which takes place exclusively at the Hydro-Electric Power Plant owned by Mr. Fife. Reuben finds a substitute for his dead mother in the form of a dynamo at the plant, which he addresses as "the Great Mother" (874) and prays to.

Much analysis of *Dynamo* has been based on its connection to another O'Neill play, *Days Without End*, as both plays "accentuate the search for a relationship with a divine being" (Dubost 193). O'Neill scholar Stephen Black explains that the "thesis of *Dynamo* was that people deprived of God or gods will make gods of scientific icons" (354), a condition that is exemplified by Reuben when he begins to worship electricity. O'Neill himself stated in a letter that with *Dynamo*, he intended to "dig at the roots of the sickness of today as I feel it – the death of the old God and failure of science and materialism to give any satisfactory new one..." (qtd. in Whitman 153). However, O'Neill also acknowledged, "[n]o one seems to have gotten the real human relationship story, what his mother does to the boy and what that leads to in his sacrifice of the girl to a maternal deity in the end" (qtd. in Dubost 57). O'Neill is referring to Reuben's betrayal by his mother, which ultimately results in Reuben sacrificing the girl he loves, Ada, to the dynamo at the end of the play.

Reuben is introduced as a seventeen-year-old who "*speaks timidly and hesitatingly, as a much younger boy might*" with a natural voice that "*has an almost feminine gentleness*"

(824). Upon his reappearance in Act Two Scene One following his mother's betrayal, Reuben is nearly nineteen, looking "*tanned and weather-beaten*" with "*his manner ... now consciously hard-boiled*" (855). Reuben has lost all his gentle boyishness and in place of his timid character has become tough and cynical. The greatest change lies in his eyes which have become "*chilled and frozen*" (856). This physical change is also accompanied by an internal change. Nethercot describes Reuben as "a good example of O'Neill's habit of making his characters undergo their emotions in extremes" because "Reuben shifts from piety and modern chastity to scepticism and aggressive sexuality and then, under the influence of his new obsessive religion, the worship of electrical energy, back to self-accusing chastity" ("Madness" 273). Reuben experiencing his 'emotions in extremes' draws a parallel with Ella in *All God's Chillun*, particularly when she stabs the primitive mask. At this early stage, there is the possibility that Reuben has a tendency towards unstable behaviour.

Reuben's betrayal by his mother is often considered the primary contributing factor to his madness because of how close they were. *Dynamo* "depicts parental betrayal of an adolescent that is experienced as traumatic. The betrayal provokes murderous rage, self-destruction, and madness" (Miliora 92). Miliora explains how this trauma causes Reuben to "distance himself from his feelings of maternal adoration" (94), emphasised by his eyes that are "*chilled and frozen*" (O'Neill 856). Through the stage directions, O'Neill portrays Reuben as someone who deliberately attempts to disregard his feelings. While Miliora provides a strong argument for the effect of familial relationships on Reuben's madness, one thing she does not consider is the dynamo's influence on Reuben's madness.

At the end of Act Two, Reuben regards a dynamo at the hydro-electric plant and draws sensual comparisons between it and his mother. The stage directions reveal the dynamo to be "*huge and black, with something of a massive female idol about it*" (871).

Alone, Reuben stands before the dynamo, admiring how “below it is like a body ... not a man’s ... round like a woman’s ... as if it had breasts ... but not like a girl ... not like Ada ... no, like a woman ... like her mother ... or mine ... a great, dark mother! ... that’s what the dynamo is! ... that’s what life is! ...” (871). This initial connection between the dynamo and Ada’s mother can be easily explained because he had recently seen her. However, he soon thinks of his mother as well, who he regards sensually when he admires the dynamo’s body, provoking the possibility that he had also admired his mother’s body when she was alive.

His declaration that the dynamo is ‘a great, dark mother’ highlights how the tension between the dynamo and his now-unseen mother causes him to replace one with the other. Reuben first carefully observes the dynamo before he gets excited by the connection he makes between his mother and the dynamo, as he exclaims ‘that’s what the dynamo is! ... that’s what life is!’. Due to the similarities he draws in his mind between his mother and the dynamo, the dynamo becomes ‘life’ to him – which is what his mother had been. She had given him life and was his closest companion before their fight. Similarly, the dynamo is a source of life to Reuben because it generates electricity, which he now worships.

Reuben has bestowed certain qualities upon the dynamo and has his own expectations of it. In Act Two Scene One, Reuben mentions the dynamo three times to three different characters. He first asks Mrs. Fife, “Did you ever watch dynamos?” (857), before asking Ada and his father the same question. The manner he poses that question differs in the three situations. To Mrs. Fife, he asks the question “*strangely*” after a pause (857). While no stage directions reveal how he phrases the question to Ada, she “*stares at him, frightened and fascinated, and shakes her head*” (859). Ada feeling ‘*frightened and fascinated*’ indicates how she is taken aback by Reuben’s obsession with the topic. From her response alone it can be garnered what an unusual question it is to pose to someone, especially given that Reuben had just been talking about how “all life comes down to electricity in the end” (859).

Meanwhile, Reuben poses the same question to his father “*mockingly*” (865), a manner easily explained because his father is a strict and overbearing minister. His repetition of the exact question to numerous characters reveals a quality in the dynamo that he feels is enough to convert another individual to adopt his mindset. Reuben’s self-absorbed nature is evident when he asks the other characters if they have ever seen a dynamo, which implies that he regards himself as superior and more informed given his capacity to be altered by a dynamo.

Foucault’s assertion that certain individuals become confiscated by an image explains Reuben’s preoccupation as “[m]any persons, not to say all, succumb to madness only from being too concerned about an object” (Sauvages qtd. in Foucault 94). Reuben, with his newfound respect for electricity and its power, becomes confiscated by the image of the dynamo to the extent that he believes others ought to feel the same way about the dynamo because of its hold on him. Reuben’s inability to escape from the dynamo’s power highlights how his glorification of the dynamo imprisons his thoughts. Unlike the previous two plays, *Dynamo* explores a character’s madness due to the association of one’s memories with an object. The dynamo is not a mad object like Dion’s mask, nor does it have the sort of influence that the primitive mask does over Ella.

Reuben’s madness is illustrated when he both speaks and prays to the dynamo. Before he does this, Reuben had been best regarded as a character obsessed with dynamos and electricity. In Act Two Scene Three, which takes place exclusively at the hydro-electric plant, Reuben regards the dynamo sensually before he “*gets down on his knees and prays aloud to the dynamo*” (872). He says, “Oh, Mother of Life, my mother is dead, she has passed back into you, tell her to forgive me, and to help me find your truth!” (873). After that, he pauses briefly, then feels calm and relief. He thinks, “Yes, that did it ... I feel I’m forgiven ... Mother will help me ... I can sleep ... I’ll go home...” before he slowly walks off (873). His delusion is apparent as he fully believes that his mother has returned to the dynamo after

dying; not just any dynamo, but this exact one. This belief is supported by the fact that his father had informed him that his mother's final words were "Don't be a fool!" (855) – words that Reuben wrote numerous times in postcards he sent his parents during his fifteen-month absence, in his attempt to convert them into worshippers of electricity. Reuben's belief that the dynamo can help him to find a truth and even communicate with his mother emphasises his insanity because the truth he seeks is all in his head. The sense of calm that Reuben is overcome by after begging the dynamo for forgiveness on his mother's behalf indicates how deeply absorbed he is with the idea that the dynamo is a god. Reuben's feeling of serenity supports the point that he now lives in that ideal he has invented, reinforcing Foucault's claim about individuals being so confiscated by an image that they start to live in it.

Ironically, Reuben acknowledges his madness, demonstrating a sense of awareness on his part. Shortly before Reuben begins to worship the dynamo, he tells Ada that he had been at his mother's grave earlier. There, he realised there was nothing to pray to since he had denounced his Christian God. He then retorts, "You can't pray to electricity unless you're foolish in the head, can you? (*then strangely*) But maybe you could, at that – if you knew how!" (868). Mad behaviour is acknowledged by the character himself as Reuben poses this rhetorical question to Ada. However, such is the extent of Reuben's belief that his mother and the dynamo are connected that he eventually goes on and prays to the dynamo in any case, an irony that would not be lost on the audience. Moreover, the fact that Reuben says '*strangely*', 'But maybe you could', indicates the power the image of the dynamo holds over him as he begins to consider such a possibility, defying his common sense.

Describing Reuben as a narcissist, Quirk asserts that Reuben, like any narcissist, craves heroism and that "[e]lectricity is the symbol that sustains Reuben's narcissism and provides his sense of limitless and everlasting life" (208-9). Quirk claims that following "his mother's betrayal, Reuben simply transferred his material needs onto another figure of

worship, the dynamo, which in his deluded mind he thought would make him immune to death” (214). While Quirk makes a strong case for Reuben’s narcissism and his seeking immortality, he does not consider the extent of Reuben’s love for his mother and how that love, which Reuben attempts to hide, reveals itself.

While Reuben believes he has certain ambitions to achieve, the truth of his preoccupations lies in what he unconsciously reveals to others. Act Three opens with Reuben’s declaration to Mrs. Fife that he will become a lover to the dynamo, after which the secret of truth will be revealed to him and he will become a savior to all humanity. Reuben proclaims to Mrs. Fife:

I’m going to be that savior ... I know the miracle will happen to me to-night because I had a message from my mother last night. I woke up and saw her standing beside my bed – just as she used to when she came in to kiss me goodnight – and she smiled and held out her arms to me (874).

His use of absolutes such as ‘going to be’ and his insistence that the miracle ‘will happen’ tonight demonstrate his certainty that he is the chosen one. Reuben fully believes he will become a savior simply because he dreamt it, but we know that dreams are not prophecies. His declaration that he will become a lover to the dynamo is just as troubling because, firstly, the dynamo is an object. Secondly, his conflation of the dynamo with his mother hints at potentially incestuous thoughts.

Reuben’s submission to the dynamo is driven by his desire to repossess his mother’s love and attain her forgiveness. Losing his mother steers him to madness to the point where he replaces the dynamo with her. This longing for his mother is evident when he recounts to Mrs. Fife how his mother ‘came in to kiss me goodnight’. In terms of conveying the message that he is the chosen one, there was no need for Reuben to include this sentimental detail. However, his choice to do so demonstrates that what he truly yearns for is to have his mother

back, which is something he has not yet realised at this point in the play because he is overcome by his ambition to be the chosen one of his new 'religion'.

Reuben's obsession with his mother is best explained by Foucault's "desperate passion" whereby "especially love deceived by the fatality of death, has no other recourse but madness" (30). While it seems odd to discuss a son-mother relationship in terms of 'desperate passion', it has been established through his audible thoughts that Reuben possesses somewhat incestuous thoughts when he thinks of his mother. Reuben had returned to his home solely to see his mother, only to be denied that closure after finding out she had died. As a result, in the words of Foucault, Reuben had 'no other recourse but madness', and this madness is spotlighted in the inescapable "closed circle of determining circumstances" (Stamm, "Faithful Realism" 244). Within this closed circle, two primary events combine to determine Reuben's destiny: finding out he has lost his mother and his encounter with a dynamo.

Miliora argues that "possession and madness are related; what is desired and possessed extends beyond material wealth to include knowledge, power, and people" (104). Therefore, the "desire for possession is narcissistic" (Miliora 104) and Reuben's narcissism is evident from his dream. Reuben desires power; his insistence to Mrs. Fife that he is "going to be that savior" who "will bring happiness and peace to men" (O'Neill 874) reveals how he has elevated himself to a position of one who saves the rest of mankind. He casts himself alongside Jesus Christ in that sense, and this belief that he is special and different from others amplifies Reuben's narcissism as he seeks glory. At this point, Reuben's narcissism still appears to drive his actions as he yearns to be remembered as a savior.

Reuben's desire to repossess an absent character prompts him to replace this unseen character with the dynamo. In *Dynamo*, the audience sees Reuben's mother in Act One before she dies. She becomes an unseen character from Act Two onwards – hinting at a void

in Reuben's life that he must fill with something else. Robert Byrd defines the unseen character as one living or dead, "who is never seen but who nonetheless causes onstage reactions and can even become a presence-in-absence" (20). Reuben's mother becomes a 'presence-in-absence' when Reuben associates her with the dynamo. This association provokes Reuben to respond fatally, as we will see in the play's conclusion.

Sofer describes props as haunted mediums that are "possessed by voices of the past"; a prop can be "treated as a mute stand-in for the absent subject" (27). Reuben makes the dynamo a haunted medium when he imposes his own meaning onto it, which makes the play more symbolist. The dynamo, though, cannot be regarded as a prop due to its sheer size. It is a stage object and is best described as part of the set. Unlike the masks, the dynamo is not "an object that goes on a journey" (Sofer 2) because it remains immobile. Instead of going on a physical journey, the dynamo nonetheless goes on a journey in the sense that meaning is imposed on it; it shifts from being a mere device in a factory to being personified and worshipped. O'Neill's objects that contribute to madness are not typical prop fare; these objects are part of the *mise-en-scène* that are remotivated or animated as objects. By giving these objects new meaning, madness becomes more associative and even symbolic.

Reuben's association of the dynamo with his mother demonstrates an object standing in for a character, much like the mask in *Brown*. One notable difference is that in *Dynamo*, only Reuben associates the dynamo with his mother whereas in *Brown*, the mask is treated as a distinct character with an identity by the other characters as well. Considering Reuben's sense of betrayal and his deep adoration for his mother, it may be possible that he is seeking a replacement maternal figure in the dynamo. Such a reading draws attention to Reuben's psychological state and the trauma that he has since gone through – presenting Reuben in a more sympathetic light. A crucial function of the unseen character is to "heighten empathy between audience member and onstage character. When an onstage character is haunted by

an unseen figure, living or dead, the seen character is relating not to a real person but to the contents of his imagination” (Byrd 24). Reuben’s desire to have his mother back illustrates how haunted he is by his memory and love for her to the point where he sees his mother’s qualities in the dynamo. Reuben is relating ‘to the contents of his imagination’ because the audience sees his mother in Act One, and possibly realises the absurdity of the comparison Reuben draws between her and the dynamo. At the same time, the audience is aware that they are faced with a character who is emotionally and psychologically affected by the loss of his mother.

The dynamo has an addictive, unseen aspect to it that is felt by both Reuben and Mrs. Fife – Ada’s mother. Reuben keeps going back to it, and both he and Mrs. Fife are entranced by it. Mrs. Fife’s love for dynamos is first revealed in Act Two when she tells Reuben dreamily, “I love dynamos. I love to hear them sing. They’re singing all the time about everything in the world!”, to which she “*hums her imitation of a dynamo’s whirring purr*” (857). By personifying the dynamo and claiming that they sing, she demonstrates a sort of understanding and emotional connection with dynamos. Mrs. Fife’s action of imitating a dynamo’s ‘whirring purr’, while it may come across as comical, also highlights her appreciation for these machines.

She reinforces her attachment to dynamos in Act Three Scene Three as she sits in the dynamo room and stares “*dreamily at the front dynamo, humming to herself, her big body relaxed as if she had given herself up completely to the spell of its hypnotic, metallic purr...*” (882). The visual imagery of a character completely in her own world ‘*humming to herself*’ reinforces the hypnotic effect of an object on an individual. O’Neill’s choice of including such an image in the play’s final scene serves as a testament to the lure of the dynamo. The dynamo’s ability to hypnotise not just Reuben, but another character as well, indicates that the dynamo has a druglike effect on certain individuals. Like the mask in *Brown*, the dynamo

is a case study of shared madness. In *Brown*, the mask is the definite cause of Dion's and Billy's madness as the mask is a mad object that infects both characters. However, unlike the mask, the dynamo does not have agency despite its entrancing effects on Reuben and Mrs. Fife.

The inclusion of another character as captivated by the dynamo as Reuben demonstrates it is not simply the dynamo itself that leads to madness. Both Mrs. Fife and Reuben are captivated by the dynamo, but their circumstances are wholly different. While Mrs. Fife comes from a relatively trouble-free family, Reuben is tormented by the loss of his mother and is conflicted over his love for Ada because his mother had hated her. An object remains an object until meaning is imposed upon it; as "theatre ingests the world of objects and signs only to bring images to life" (States 37), the image of the dynamo that is brought to life is the various ways in which Reuben and Mrs. Fife respond to it. To Mrs. Fife, the dynamo is a source of beauty and this quality hypnotises her. To Reuben, the dynamo embodies beauty in how he associates it with his mother. The addictive aspect of the dynamo highlights the inescapability of the situation Reuben has gotten himself into.

The likening of the dynamo to a drug draws a parallel between it and the mask in *Brown*, particularly when Billy speaks to Dion's mask and "*reaches out for the mask of Dion like a dope fiend after a drug*" (519). Since "[m]adness no longer exists except as *seen*" (Foucault 250), Reuben and Billy perform their madness through their interactions with the dynamo and the mask respectively. By highlighting how his characters respond to objects, O'Neill explores why these characters need these objects. Shared madness in *Brown* and *Dynamo* both involve an object that is addictive, whereas Ella's personal madness in *All God's Chillun* features an object that both captivates and horrifies her.

In Billy's case, his need for Dion's mask is largely narcissistic as he seeks Dion's talent and his wife. By contrast, Reuben's entrancement with the dynamo is generally due to

the significance he imposes on it and its links to electricity. After declaring at the beginning of Act Two that, “The only God I believe in now is electricity” (857), Reuben clearly holds the dynamo in high regard because it is a source of electricity. Yet, Reuben does not make that connection between the dynamo and his mother until he views the dynamo at the power plant at the end of Act Two; it is at that exact moment that the dynamo begins to attain a new symbolism for Reuben as a stand-in for his dead mother. Subsequently, he speaks to and prays to the dynamo. His insanity becomes more pronounced once he makes that connection in his mind. The dynamo enchants Reuben to the point that he needs it and yearns to be in its presence in much the same manner that Billy needs Dion’s mask to give him strength.

Torn between his feelings of love and indifference towards Ada, the dynamo and its associations prove too strong as Reuben shoots Ada in the final scene of the play in his quest to become the savior. Reuben’s mother had always despised Ada, even labelling her a “little harlot” (847) in Act One. In the final scene, Reuben is a picture of calm with the revolver, his audible thoughts revealing: “I won’t be a murderer ... I’m your executioner, Mother ... that’s why I’m so calm” (883). He then fiercely shouts “Harlot!” at Ada before shooting her twice in the breast (884). His use of ‘Harlot’ demonstrates how in shooting Ada, he is acting on behalf of his mother, as he uses his mother’s words to do what he assumes his mother would have done. He reinforces the purpose of his action when he considers himself as an executioner on his mother’s behalf. Reuben essentially does the dirty deed for his mother, seemingly to absolve himself of blame because he was acting for someone else. Despite being absent since Act One, his mother’s presence is felt throughout because of the connection Reuben makes between the dynamo and his mother, and through his audible thoughts where he believes his mother is speaking to him. Her “presence-in-absence” (Byrd 20) thus grants her great power not only over Reuben but throughout the play because her absence drives Reuben’s destructive actions.

Despite Reuben's initial narcissistic desires to become the savior to the dynamo, his true feelings are confirmed at the end of the play. After shooting Ada, he runs towards the dynamo, pleading, "I don't want any miracle, Mother! I don't want to know the truth! I only want you to hide me, Mother! Never let me go from you again! Please, Mother!" (884). Reuben then flings himself onto the dynamo, and there "*is a flash of bluish light about him and all the lights in the plant dim until they are almost out and the noise of the dynamo dies until it is the faintest purring hum*" (884) before the lights in the plant return to their full brightness (885). The stage directions convey the dynamo's indifference to Reuben's death. Having the visual image of him kneeling to pray before the dynamo on numerous occasions only for the dynamo to resume functioning as usual after his death serves to mock Reuben's actions. A dynamo is ultimately a machine, despite Reuben's attempts to personify it into the "Great Mother" (874) and imbuing it with female qualities.

Despite previously pursuing the truth and his desperation to be the savior, he declares, 'I don't want any miracle', effectively renouncing the intentions that had driven him for much of the play. His plea 'I only want you to hide me, Mother!' emphasises his insecure, childlike state as the use of the term 'only' reveals what he truly wants. His final words to the dynamo are a plea to his mother to 'never let me go from you again' and all his final sentences end with exclamation points, emphasising his emotionally charged state. Reuben seems to be aware that he has shot Ada, and all he wants after committing this crime is to go back to his mother where he feels he will be safe and be forgiven in her arms.

Reuben's desire to become one with his mother is apparent when he literally becomes one with 'her' when he throws himself at the dynamo. Reuben shifts from first regarding the dynamo as "a great, dark mother!" (871) in Act Two Scene Three, to finally labelling it "Mother!" (884) in the last scene; the dynamo moves from being a replacement figure for his mother to becoming his actual mother. The sexual overtones that were hinted at earlier and

the argument for Reuben's "desperate passion" (Foucault 30) for his mother are most evident in this scene. Having previously compared his mother to the full-breasted dynamo, Reuben's obsession with her is undeniable. When he throws himself at the dynamo, the stage directions reveal that "*Reuben's voice rises in a moan that is a mingling of pain and loving consummation, and this cry dies into a sound that is like the crooning of a baby and merges and is lost in the dynamo's hum*" (884).

Despite the immense pain of being electrocuted, Reuben finds a sort of pleasure in the experience, evident from the 'moan' that is a mixture of 'pain and loving consummation', revealing how he does not regret this suffering. Rather, he embraces it because he finally gets what he wants, evidenced by the term 'loving consummation' where he fully becomes one with his mother through an act of 'penetration' by flinging himself at the dynamo. With the specific 'crooning of a baby' sound, it is as though time has been rewound and Reuben returned to infancy, a time when he would have been fully dependent on his mother. There is a juxtaposition between Reuben the adult and his final sounds being childlike and needy. In his state of madness, what we will remember Reuben for is his desire to return to the past before he abandoned his mother and his unresolved feelings towards her. The tension between his unseen mother and the visible dynamo demonstrates how the absence of one causes a spiral into madness whereby Reuben seeks to reclaim his mother by latching onto whatever object reminds him of her.

Reuben's act of suicide demonstrates his realisation that he cannot live without his mother. Thierry Dubost argues that the only way out for O'Neill's characters such as Reuben, "if they want to find peace, consists in definitively breaking free from the world in which they continue to survive, that they might put an end to their suffering..." (134). Dubost's use of 'continue to survive' suggests that these characters have no true purpose in life because all they are doing is keeping themselves alive. Reuben thus had no option other than death. After

all, he had contorted the real world to fit into that ideal, only to realise at the end, after shooting Ada, that that was not the case because nothing will bring his mother back.

In a similar vein, Billy Brown in *Brown* had to die to be free of the chains he got himself tangled in. Dion's mask had altered his personality and appeared to be giving him what he wanted such as Dion's talent and his wife. However, inheriting the mask also came with unwanted baggage such as Dion's insanity, so that Billy was never truly happy. In *Dynamo*, Reuben's suicide portrays him as a broken character who has nothing left to cling to because his one true wish to repossess his mother and her affection is unattainable. While it seems that Reuben's willingness to end his life by throwing himself onto the object that has caused him to view the world through a warped lens signals his defeat, instead it demonstrates his triumph over the false world he was living in. And while it is a tragic means to attain peace, it was his only way out. Reuben thus ends the 'experiment' which served to illustrate the effect of personal attachments to objects when he ends his life.

PART V: TWO VERSIONS OF THE SUMMERHOUSE

O'Neill's *More Stately Mansions* is an expressionist play that utilises audible thoughts. Written from 1936 to 1939, *Mansions* is a four-act play spanning ten years. The main characters are Simon Harford, his wife Sara, and his mother Deborah. Sara's greed drives her to demand Simon be a successful businessman, despite his dream to write a book, which he abandons out of love for her. Deborah is not pleased with Sara's influence over Simon and continues to remind him of his old ambitions, resulting in tension between the two women who both desire to possess Simon and his love. The women even hate each other, with Deborah labelling Sara a slut on numerous occasions. Deborah's apparent madness is hinted at throughout the play and is seemingly confirmed by Simon and Sara in the fourth act. However, Simon more fully succumbs to madness before Deborah does due to his desire to return to the past which he shared with his mother and also due to a fairytale Deborah told him as a child which he has never forgotten. At the centre of both Simon and Deborah's madness is a summerhouse, which means something different to both characters.

O'Neill intended *Mansions* to be part of his proposed eleven-play cycle, which he had planned to call "A Tale of Possessors Self-Dispossessed" (Selmon 554); the cycle was to portray "the material, psychological, and spiritual history of a family" (O'Neill qtd. in Miliora 103). However, only one complete play, *A Touch of the Poet*, survives from this cycle (Eisen 107) as *Mansions* itself is an unfinished work (Selmon 554). O'Neill even "intended to destroy [*Mansions*] and believed he had destroyed it" (Black 396). Writing about the state of his country, O'Neill believed that "possession and greed ... had destroyed the soul of America" (Berlin 82), which was the theme of this cycle.

Due to *Mansions* being a part of that cycle, most readings of the play concern the theme of greed such as Simon's drive to make his company entirely self-sufficient. Other readings involve the power struggle between the women for Simon, the links between

Mansions and O'Neill's life and how the play is O'Neill's attempt to mourn his mother (Black 413), Simon's oedipal complex (Black 410), and how dreams and ghosts pervade this play as well as numerous other O'Neill plays (Nethercot "Mansions" 161). *Mansions* remains one of O'Neill's lesser-studied dramas today, as Carpenter informs us in his 2009 article which tracks articles and parts of books written concerning O'Neill's plays. From 1966 to 2009, only 45 studies on *Mansions* were published (81).

The characters in *Mansions* mention the asylum as a threat numerous times toward the end of the play. The asylum has negative connotations as it is a place "where madness becomes severely distinct from reason" (Foucault 249) and where madness becomes observable. Nethercot notes that Simon and Sara speak of the "asylum" or "madhouse" five times when discussing Deborah and her mad tendencies ("Madness" 278). The association of the asylum as a place without reason casts a divide between the characters; Simon and Sara demonise and ostracise Deborah by identifying her with the asylum and the madhouse, in turn influencing the audience to adopt the same perspective of Deborah. While these references to the asylum occur toward the end of *Mansions*, madness is introduced as a theme early in the play.

Deborah is first introduced in Act One Scene Two as she rambles alone onstage at a log cabin before Simon arrives to meet her for the first time in four years. Displeased at having to wait for Simon, Deborah sneeringly reveals her elaborate fantasies of being a passionate lover and how her summerhouse is a "Temple of Love the King has built as an assignation place where he keeps passionate tryst with you, his mistress" (315-6), referring to herself. She then chastises herself about these fantastical dreams:

Really, Deborah, this latest day dream is the most absurd of the many ridiculous fantasies in which you have hidden from yourself! I begin to believe that you truly must be more than a little mad! You had better take care! One day you may

lose yourself so deeply in that romantic evil, you will not find your way back (316).

In the first sentence, she addresses herself in the third person, in what appears to be an attempt at distancing herself from her corporeal self. She speaks as an outsider observing her situation, highlighting her awareness of her mad dreams. Her assertion that 'I begin to believe' demonstrates how this instance is not the first time that she has considered the possibility that she might be insane. She foreshadows her eventual descent into madness when she determines that '[o]ne day you will lose yourself so deeply' in these dreams that she will end up living in them. This statement could also be regarded as a threat to herself, potentially highlighting her fear should she become insane. She also speaks to herself with the pronoun 'you' rather than the more obvious 'I', indicating a sense of detachment as she chides herself for her naivety.

The expressionist technique of audible thoughts provides access to the thoughts of the characters in *Mansions*, just as it did in *Dynamo*. With his extensive use of soliloquies in an earlier expressionist play, *Strange Interlude*, O'Neill embarked on "a major effort to represent thought as a process" (Mandl 24). Similarly, O'Neill presents Deborah's thoughts as a process whereby she dissects what she knows about herself and uses deduction to infer the possibility that she might be insane. She first acknowledges that her 'latest day dream is the most absurd' one she has had yet before she evaluates that such a dream would render her mad. She then urges herself to 'take care'. Finally, there is the threat that she would 'lose herself so deeply in that romantic evil' that she will no longer recognise reality. Through this process, Deborah puts a great amount of consideration into her situation when she considers the potential outcomes.

Deborah is the second character who is conscious of potential madness, after Reuben in *Dynamo*. While Deborah raises her concern through audible thoughts, Reuben does so in a

regular conversation when he asks Ada, “You can’t pray to electricity unless you’re foolish in the head, can you? (*then strangely*) But maybe you could, at that – if you knew how!” (868). Deborah’s evaluation of herself indicates a greater fear of succumbing to madness compared to Reuben. Because of the effort Deborah makes at dissecting her thoughts, she invokes sympathy as the audience feels her genuine fear of insanity. Deborah’s audible thoughts convey her loneliness, emphasising how she has no one to confide in. Reuben recognises mad behaviour when he acknowledges that it is foolish to pray to electricity. Then, the idea of praying to electricity possesses him as he ‘*strangely*’ considers the possibility of doing so. His remark is also dismissive, which portrays him less sympathetically than Deborah. Deborah’s alarm at the thought of insanity demonstrates her awareness of her state of mind, indicating that she will do her best to avoid succumbing to madness because she is conscious of what might lead her down that road.

The object in question, the summerhouse in Deborah’s garden, is introduced as the place where Deborah dramatically abandons her ‘old’ self. After her husband dies with heavy debts, Deborah is forced to consider reconnecting with her then-estranged son, Simon, and his family. Deborah had stopped contacting Simon following their meeting at the log cabin after Simon laughed at one of her dreams, which deeply hurt her feelings. Deborah is adamant that she can make Sara and her grandchildren love her, and that to do so, she must abandon her old self. In her garden in Act Two Scene Two, which takes place four years after the incident at the log cabin, Deborah informs her husband’s lawyer, Gadsby, that:

I will cast out my devil, the old Deborah – drag her from her sneering place in my mind and heart – (*she makes a movement with her arms and hands of pulling something out of her head and heart and pushing it from her*) and push her back where she belongs – in there – in perpetual darkness (355).

She then advances up the steps and shoves her ‘old’ self into the summerhouse before shutting and locking the door (355).

Although it is part of the *mise-en-scène*, which would make it a piece of property, the summerhouse is best regarded as a stage object. Unlike typical houses that are part of the stage set, no one occupies this summerhouse; no one physically enters the summerhouse until the end of the play. When Deborah opens and shuts the door of the summerhouse, she uses it to prove a point (by abandoning her old self) instead of making use of it as part of the stage set. While it is far too big to be regarded as a prop, one characteristic of props is that they “absorb dramatic meaning and become complex symbols” (Sofer 24), which the summerhouse does throughout *Mansions*. This similarity suggests that the summerhouse functions more like a stage object rather than simply being part of the *mise-en-scène*.

In European modern drama, the “naturalistic home on the stage, as conceived by Zola and realised by Ibsen, figures both the outer world that surrounds it and the interiority of the private lives it houses” (Greene 2). The interior thus reflects “the psychological condition of those who occupy them” (Greene 2) or speaks to society at large, represented by the audience watching the plays at the time. In O’Neill’s work, he portrays homes in much the same manner; Jim’s home in *All God’s Chillun* is presented as hostile to Ella, an outsider. In *Mansions*, the same reasoning cannot be applied; the summerhouse does not reflect any character’s interiority because it is not occupied, nor does it mirror the experience of characters and the then-contemporary audience (Greene 2). Therefore, like the dynamo, the summerhouse is part of the *mise-en-scène* that O’Neill animates into an object to illustrate a character’s madness.

Deborah makes it appear easy to abandon her old self by simply casting it out. By asserting ‘I will cast out’, she places herself in a position of power and gives the impression that she is abandoning her old self of her own accord. She even refers to her old self as ‘my

devil', implying that she has more than one personality. Due to her tendency to imagine fantastical scenarios, one should also consider the possibility she is simply acting a role whereby she believes a 'devil' exists within her, since the dramatic action of pulling her 'old' self out of her body portrays her as comical. Deborah casts this old self into the summerhouse in the garden and it is at this point that the summerhouse becomes a place that harbours the 'unseen'. Another characteristic attributed to stage objects is that they are haunted mediums (Sofer 27); by casting an old version of herself into the summerhouse, Deborah remotivates the summerhouse into a haunted medium because it contains her old 'devil'.

The summerhouse is a place that Deborah associates with her past, which shows her determination to abandon her mad tendencies. In Act Three Scene Two in her garden, Deborah explains to Simon that she never felt anything truly belonged to her as everything in the house was all her husband's property. She claims, "I naturally desired one place, no matter how tiny, that would be mine alone, where I could be free to dream and possess my own soul and mind" (442). The summerhouse has a personal significance to Deborah as she regards it as her own. Her association of the summerhouse with a place where she can 'dream' demonstrates her tendency to get lost in her imagination and conjure fantastic scenarios, in line with her quirky personality. Moreover, her assertion that she was able to 'possess my own soul and mind' in the summerhouse paints it as a place of refuge for her as it is a place where she can be at peace. By casting her 'devil' into that summerhouse, she intends for no one else to ever see that old self, or even for that self to be freed. Since she claims the summerhouse as her own, it seems that there is no risk that the old Deborah will resurface.

O'Neill presents the summerhouse as an object that holds some mysterious, unexplainable power because the summerhouse influences Simon as well. In Act Three Scene One, when Simon and Sara discuss keeping their children away from Deborah, Sara reveals

that she used to consider Deborah crazy. Deborah had informed Sara that “she’d got to the point where she didn’t dare go in that summerhouse of hers for fear she’d never come out again” (406). Sara then asks Simon, “[t]hat’s crazy, isn’t it?” (406). The stage directions indicate that Simon replies “*strangely*”, declaring, “Who knows? It all depends – Do you know if she ever goes in that summerhouse now?” (406). Sara uses logic to deduce that it would be impossible for Deborah to not come out of the summerhouse again. The reference to the summerhouse, however, casts a spell over Simon as he is unsure about whether Deborah would come out of the house, responding, ‘Who knows?’. Simon’s uncertainty about a seemingly straightforward situation demonstrates that the summerhouse is a place of mystery to him; it may even have a sinister quality, despite it being merely a summerhouse to outsiders like Sara and Gadsby. Moreover, Simon cuts off his original train of thought when he asks Sara ‘– Do you know if she ever goes in that summerhouse’, emphasising his need to know the answer to that query. Simon’s captivation by the summerhouse portrays it as an enchanting and mysterious object.

The emotional reasons behind Simon’s attachment to the summerhouse hint at his possessiveness. At the log cabin, when Deborah tells Simon that she had invited her other son, Joel, to the garden, Simon responds with jealousy, “Why? What could you want with him?” (322) and then remarks resentfully that Joel “must have been out of place” (323). Simon’s certainty that Joel ‘must have been out of place’ suggests that no one else belongs in Deborah’s garden except for him. Nethercot posits that the summerhouse “represents to Simon the desire to return to the peace and happiness of his childhood with his mother” (“Mansions” 167). Simon’s reluctance to even share that experience with others, evident from his envy at what he considers Joel’s intrusion into the garden, emphasises his greed. While Simon has emotional reasons to be attached to the summerhouse as it is intimately connected to his past, the images he associates with the summerhouse and the role of the

unseen in terms of the world he constructs around the summerhouse play a far greater role in his obsessive attachment to it.

Simon's recollection of the summerhouse is tinged with bitterness as he remembers how he had been betrayed by Deborah. Alone in his office in Act Three Scene One, Simon's extended audible thoughts shed light on his love-hate relationship with his mother. He reveals Deborah's:

nonsense about the summerhouse— that was her way of showing me— and she took pains to point it out to me by implication that day she deliberately made up the fairy tale about the exiled Prince and the magic door— Yes, I never knew peace or faith in life again from that day— (*angry at himself*) Damnation! (394).

Simon blames Deborah for causing him to lose 'faith in life' because of a fairy tale. Despite labelling Deborah's talk about the summerhouse as 'nonsense', which on the surface indicates his nonchalance, he is undeniably affected by it. Simon does not elaborate on the fairy tale at this point, but the dashes demonstrate how interrupted his thoughts are; these interruptions reveal the emotional impact which comes with recalling his childhood. Simon feels betrayed by Deborah and the fact that he exclaims 'Damnation!' is telling because Simon makes a connection between what Deborah did and how he is being condemned eternally in his own hell – one created by his mother's betrayal.

The situation of a son betrayed by his mother parallels Reuben in *Dynamo*. Highlighting the instrumental role of mothers in O'Neill's works, Dubost regards this as "the absolute power of the mother who will decide on the subject's potential entry into the adult world" (57). Dubost's use of 'potential' implies that the subject will not necessarily enter 'the adult world'. In fact, that would make it possible for the subject to always remain in what would be regarded as a childish or childlike world. The characters would resume living in the past despite already being adults – which Reuben exemplifies as he desires to repossess his

mother's love. Reuben's betrayal by his mother results in his inability to let go of the past, prompting him to personify the dynamo and bestow maternal qualities upon it. Simon insists on blaming Deborah when he claims that she 'deliberately made up the fairy tale'. By casting Deborah as an individual who would invent a story to torment her son, Simon paints her in a negative light while seeking empathy. At this point, it is not revealed whether Deborah truly did invent the fairy tale on purpose, but what unites Reuben and Simon is that both characters blame their mothers for their predicament. Even when Reuben's mother is absent from Act Two onwards, her presence still looms large as Reuben continues to refer to the dynamo as a 'Mother'. Similarly, Deborah is not present in all scenes in *Mansions*, yet her presence is felt even in her absence.

The sheer power that mothers wield over their sons allows for a new way of looking at *Dynamo*, one whereby Reuben's mother possibly had some influence over his eventual madness in terms of how he associated her with the dynamo. While his mother could not control what particular object he would associate her with, her indifference to Reuben's feelings in the scene where she betrays him is what he remembers resentfully. Similarly, the indifference of the dynamo, as a non-living thing and in terms of its portrayal, is something that Reuben would have subconsciously associated with his mother as well, even though the betrayal brings back painful memories. In the final scene when Reuben throws himself at the dynamo, the dynamo's indifference to his situation is most apparent. Reuben's mother's traits in their final meeting are something he remembers and is drawn to, as that was the last that he recollects of her.

Simon reveals the fairy tale in full in Act Three Scene Two when he is alone with Deborah in her garden, highlighting how he links the fairy tale with the summerhouse even though that was never Deborah's intention. The tale tells of a King robbed of his land by an enchantress, banished to wander the world in search of a magic door (443). After the King

finds the door, the enchantress tells him that she may have lied to him, and if he does open the door, he might find that his happy kingdom is now a barren desert. She ends the tale with a seeming threat by asserting that “as long as you stay where you are you will run no risk of anything worse than your present unhappy exile befalling you” (444). Simon equates that magic door with the door of the summerhouse because Deborah never allowed anyone else to enter it, giving the summerhouse an air of mystery. Just as the King will never know what lies beyond the door if he never opens it, the summerhouse and what lies beyond the door are inaccessible to Simon. Rather than the summerhouse simply being a place Deborah calls her own, Simon forces a different meaning upon it, making the summerhouse his own in his mind.

Deborah’s fairy tale is powerful and enchanting because it emphasises the power of words to instigate an individual to make connections between the seen and the unseen. Crucially, Simon tells Deborah that the door “has the meaning our minds have given it” (533). As something invented, the fairy tale was entirely Deborah’s creation. When she tells Simon the tale, he links the magic door to the summerhouse door, which appears to be a logical link because both are inaccessible doors. Dubost asserts that “[w]ords, the final fortress against the truth, will allow each character to reconstruct the world around himself” (150). Similarly, Simon reconstructs that fairy tale around his life; he rebuilds and reorganises his life, and the only way he can find sense in his life is through the connection he establishes between the two doors. By locating the abstract fairy tale in the real world, he identifies the summerhouse door as the magic door that he is not allowed to open. Due to that connection, and because Deborah denies him access into that summerhouse, he “never knew peace or faith in life again from that day” (O’Neill 394). Rather than the summerhouse representing Simon’s “desire to return to the peace and happiness of his childhood with his mother” (Nethercot, “Mansions” 167), it is the world Simon constructs around the

summerhouse that captivates him more. *Mansions* demonstrates how an object causes madness due to the associations of one's beliefs with an object.

Mansions differs from *Brown* whereby an object itself, in the form of Dion's mask, causes madness. Billy inherits Dion's mask, only for that mask to drive Billy insane as well. In *Mansions*, the unseen that lies beyond the summerhouse and the impossibility of knowing the truth eventually drives Simon mad at the end of the play as his desire to possess that knowledge drives him to his fate.

Using *Mansions* to provide a new perspective of reading *Brown*, it is worth considering whether Billy desired to understand the unseen aspects of Dion and if that longing fuelled his desire to possess Dion's mask. Just as Simon attaches meanings to the summerhouse which make it more important to him, there are unseen things which Billy associates with Dion that he desires to understand. During a conversation with Cybel, Billy enquires, "Tell me – I've always been curious – what is it that makes Dion so attractive to women – especially certain types of women, if you'll pardon me?" (502). To which Cybel responds, "He's alive!" (502). Billy's confession that he has 'always been curious' reveals how this issue gnaws at him because it is something he cannot comprehend. Cybel herself alludes to something unseen when she replies that Dion is 'alive'. There are undeniably unseen aspects associated with being 'alive' because the idea of someone being attractive for being 'alive' is not something universal.

In *Mansions*, there is a battle between Deborah's power over Simon and the lure of the summerhouse in terms of which casts a greater spell over Simon. Simon returns to Deborah's garden for the first time in years in Act Three Scene Two, and Deborah speaks fancifully and dramatically to Simon as if she were acting a role. After Simon tells Deborah that she has been a bad influence on his sons, Simon recalls how much he misses the time

spent in the garden with Deborah, and she beseeches him to visit her every day. Simon retorts:

(stiffly) I wish you would not speak so fancifully, Mother. Please remember we are dealing with reality now and not with romantic dreams. *(then eagerly under his awkward formality)* In reply to your request, I shall be delighted to drop in and keep you company here for a while each afternoon on my way home (437-8).

The quick transition from stiffness to eagerness suggests that Deborah wields great power over Simon as her fanciful speech influences Simon's response. O'Neill illustrates Simon's hidden conflicts when confronted with the summerhouse and Deborah; although Simon attempts to speak sense into Deborah, he ends up falling under a spell.

In addition to Deborah's influence, the appearance of the summerhouse also enchants Simon. It is described as an octagonal summerhouse that is surrounded by shrubs that are "*all clipped into geometric shapes, cones, cubes, cylinders, spheres, pyramids*" and such which "*give the place a curious, artificial atmosphere*" (338). Its door is "*painted a Chinese lacquer red*" (338). The artificial, polished feel of the garden interferes with Simon and Deborah's thoughts, although not all the characters who enter the garden feel the same way. Gadsby, the lawyer, and Joel, Deborah's other son, are not affected by the childlike atmosphere of the garden. Laurin Porter contends that "[t]he door to the summerhouse, painted a Chinese lacquer red, functions as a kind of liminal space, marking the border between sanity and madness" (166). The unseen that lies beyond the summerhouse, in terms of the ideas constructed about it, are created by Simon and Deborah and that is where madness lies. For Deborah, madness literally lies in the summerhouse because that is where she abandoned her old self. Sanity exists outside the summerhouse as long as the door is closed and the characters do not fully give in to their ideals of the summerhouse.

The first sign of Simon's madness is hinted at in Act Three when he reveals that he sometimes considers Deborah and Sara to be one woman. In a conversation with his estranged brother, Joel, about the situation at home between Sara and Deborah, Simon confesses that he feels Deborah has "taken possession of Sara in order to make of my wife a second self through which she could live again" (391). Simon believes that Deborah's clever scheming has resulted in her transforming Sara into another version of Deborah, where she can discard her old self and embrace the new Deborah – one who is a loving and devoted grandmother without her mad royal fantasies. Simon thinks Deborah is tricking Sara into murdering the old Deborah, which he says would then leave him "motherless", and when Deborah transforms into Sara, that would leave him "wifeless" (391). His confusion regarding his wife and mother is troubling because, physically, the two women are completely different.

Simon even questions his own sanity during a conversation with Sara at the end of Act Four Scene One, raising the possibility that he might be even more prone to madness than Deborah. In Simon's office, Sara desperately tries to claim Simon for herself, urging him to forget Deborah's influence over him. Simon then blames Sara for always bringing Deborah up when they speak and accuses the two women of hating him more than they hate each other. He then blurts out, "But you had better not go on with your plot – because I warn you – it will be I who –" before he "*checks himself, his eyes gleaming with a wild threat*" (501-2). He does not finish his sentence as he stops abruptly, leaving his threat up to speculation. One way of reading this threat is that he worries that the women colluding behind his back will drive him to madness. His initial confusion between the two women has driven him to such a state that he suspects that they have ulterior motives and he is constantly on edge.

Notably, these two examples of Simon's possible madness are not linked to the summerhouse. Various reasons for Simon's potential madness are presented in the "closed circle of determining circumstances" (Stamm, "Faithful Realism" 244). O'Neill experiments with these determining circumstances by presenting a variety of reasons that potentially contribute to Simon's madness. These circumstances battle with each other to establish which factor ultimately triumphs.

This speculation over Simon's mental state is disrupted when the other characters establish that Deborah is insane. Earlier in Act Four Scene One, Simon and Sara construct Deborah as a mad woman, building up the expectations of the appearance of a mad Deborah. Deborah, however, does not even appear in this act, and as a result, more anticipation is built for her eventual re-entrance in the following act. In Simon's private office, Sara informs Joel that Deborah is "failing rapidly in her mind, poor woman, growing childish and living altogether in her dreams" (479). Bearing in mind Deborah's childishness and fantastical dreams, one is left to wonder how much farther she has fallen into those fantasies to prompt Sara's declaration that Deborah is 'living altogether in her dreams'. Later in the scene, Simon tells Sara that Deborah's "mind is far gone in second childhood" (487). This assertion seems to confirm Deborah's descent into insanity, as Simon suggests that there is no returning from the state Deborah is in. Although at the end of this scene, Simon hints at the possibility that he will go mad, his madness is not confirmed; it is more impactful when two characters report on Deborah's condition. After all, Sara would have no reason to lie to Joel regarding Deborah, and Simon would gain nothing from lying about Deborah's mind 'far gone in second childhood' when Sara can easily confirm that when she visits Deborah.

In this instance, corroboration is a kind of evidence, which is also apparent in *Brown* when other characters acknowledge the mask as a character. In *Brown*, corroboration was necessary to establish the mask as a character because it is an expressionist play; the idea of a

mask as a character is believable and central to the plot. However, no corroboration occurs in *All God's Chillun* as the other characters do not react to the primitive mask the same way that Ella does. Because realism focuses on the visible, the realism of *All God's Chillun* requires that the other characters do not see what Ella sees in the mask, as that difference establishes her as the central mad character in the play. *Mansions*, despite its audible thoughts, is generally realist in terms of its plot; the setting and action of *Mansions* are something a dramatist "could verify by observing ordinary life" (Styan, *Realism* 5). While *Mansions* is considered an expressionist play, its realist techniques are also important because corroboration in this scene with Simon, Sara, and Joel is necessary for dramatic surprise.

Despite this expectation that a mad Deborah far gone from reality will appear in the next act, it is Simon who descends more fully into madness before Deborah does. In Act Four Scene Two, set in Deborah's garden, Deborah's appearance has altered considerably as her "small, immature, girlish figure has grown so terribly emaciated that she gives the impression of being bodiless, a little, skinny, witch-like, old woman" (503). O'Neill's description of Deborah as 'bodiless' suggests that her corporeal self has shrunk to the point where she is no longer fully anchored in reality; her self seems to belong elsewhere. However, the way she acts is little different from the Deborah of earlier scenes, as she still wonders distractedly why Simon is keeping her waiting in the garden. Simon takes a long time to arrive, which increases Deborah's anxiety that Simon has abandoned her. She becomes absorbed in a fantasy and is about to enter the summerhouse when Sara appears and stops her out of pity. The women argue before Simon finally shows up and chastises them, "I heard you from my study quarrelling out here, clawing and tearing at each other like two drunken drabs fighting over a dollar bill! God, it becomes disgusting! ..." (519).

Later in the scene, Simon's madness is established as he no longer recognises Sara. Wanting to get Sara out of the garden so that he can be alone with his mother, Simon lies to

Sara that one of their children is ill. Simon then informs Deborah that he has chosen to be with her over Sara and begs Deborah to open the door to the summerhouse. He pleads with Deborah that he has waited since he was a boy to enter the summerhouse (531). When Sara returns after suspecting that something is amiss, Simon does not recognise her anymore, and “starts and turns his head to stare at Sara without recognition ... His face has a strange, mad, trance-like look”. Deborah asks if Simon remembers who Sara is and he murmurs obediently, “No, Mother” (538). He then addresses Sara sharply, “Who are you! What do you want? How dare you trespass here and start making a disgusting scene? Do you think my mother’s garden is the parlor of a brothel?” (538). The description of his face as ‘*strange, mad, and trance-like*’ highlights how far gone into madness he has fallen. The fact that he ‘*murmurs obediently*’ reveals that he is no longer in control of his thoughts. In his final question, Simon adopts Deborah’s impressions of Sara as a slut, a change which indicates that Deborah has possessed

Simon’s thoughts are reminiscent of Reuben in *Dynamo*, who labels his girlfriend, Ada, a harlot before he shoots her in the final scene. Reuben’s mother hated Ada and called her a harlot on a few occasions, much to Reuben’s anger. However, the dynamo’s influence over Reuben triumphs his feelings for Ada, just as Simon’s desire to know the truth of the summerhouse proves too strong for him to overcome. “Inside the image, confiscated by it, and incapable of escaping from it” (Foucault 94), Simon and Reuben ultimately become mad due to them associating their memories and beliefs with an object despite the love they had for Sara and Ada respectively.

The irony that Simon succumbs to madness before Deborah invites a comparison with Ella Downey in *All God’s Chillun* in terms of how it disrupts audience expectations. At the end of Act One Scene Three of *All God’s Chillun*, Jim beats his head on the flagstones while professing his love for Ella. While Ella pleads with Jim to stop, the curtains fall, signalling

the end of the scene (294); the purpose of Ella being cut off is dramatic irony. Similarly, expectations were set for Deborah to be the sole mad character in the final scene, only for those expectations to be subverted. In Ella's case, the unseen properties of the primitive mask, which realism was unable to grant the audience access to, exacerbates her madness. The initial worry over Jim's madness never materialised as he turned into a doting husband. In *Mansions*, Simon's desire to know what lies beyond the door and his association of that door with the fairy tale, which was all in his head, result in him imagining a false world where he invents his own truth. The unseen factors triumph over the real world in both cases, functioning as a cautionary tale of the dangers one's mind can have on an individual if left unchecked.

Although his wife and mother play some part in Simon going mad, the summerhouse speaks once again to the role of objects in O'Neill's plays. *Mansions* differs from the earlier plays because numerous causes for madness are presented. In *Brown*, two reasons for madness were presented: the mask and unseen genetic factors. However, the second possibility was only suggested and not enacted. In *Mansions*, O'Neill presents different possibilities for insanity and we see the effects these have on Simon. Simon may love his mother and wife, but they do not break him; it is Simon's belief that the summerhouse has something that lies beyond its doors that causes his madness. The summerhouse is at the centre of O'Neill's experiment to evaluate how mentally strong a character can be.

Like Ella Downey, Simon regresses into an infantile state at the end of *Mansions*. Simon calls out desperately to Deborah for them to enter the summerhouse: "Mother! Someone is calling me! I'll have to go! I cannot remain back here much longer! Hurry, Mother! Hurry!" (541). His multiple exclamations emphasise his urgent need to enter the summerhouse. Moreover, the fact that he is unwilling to enter the summerhouse alone hints at his possible fear of it, further highlighting his childlike state. There is a cyclical aspect to the

idea of a return to childhood, one which suggests the inescapability of avoiding one's fate. O'Neill's plays have demonstrated how characters struggle to change their fate – Jim tries to pass the Bar exam but fails, Dion tries to be a better husband but fails, a part of Reuben wants to be with Ada, but he fails. Although these characters strive for something, they do not get what they want. Similarly, there are negative connotations to returning to childhood, yet that is inescapable for Ella and Simon, stressing the tragic, unalterable condition of O'Neill's characters.

Despite the expectation that both mother and son will enter the summerhouse together, Deborah eventually shoves Simon aside violently and enters the summerhouse alone. She declares before Simon and Sara, "I am my own! Ah, how could I have ever been so weak as to allow you to intrude on my dream ... I, if I had been born in a nobler time, could have had the love of a King or an Emperor!", before she informs Simon "*with hatred*" to "get back to the greasy arms of your wife where you belong" (543). She then enters the summerhouse only to return moments later fully living one of her dreams, believing that her garden is "the Emperor's gift to me" (545). She does not recognise either Simon or Sara, as by entering the summerhouse, she reunites with her old 'devil'. Deborah's hateful tone and strong language (such as 'greasy arms of your wife') demonstrate her reluctance to share her ideal of the summerhouse with anyone else. By telling Simon that he belongs in Sara's arms, what she really means is that he has no place in her summerhouse.

The inaccessible things that lie within the summerhouse are what ultimately drive Deborah insane. She believed that she had locked her old self in the summerhouse and avoided it. Yet, the lure it presented was too great to resist in the end as her association of the summerhouse with her past and her invented fantasies eventually triumph over her desire to be with her son. Her decision to enter the summerhouse alone despite initially agreeing to go in with Simon emphasises how she does not wish for her ideal of the summerhouse to be

tarnished by someone else. Had Simon entered with her, he would have brought along his own associations of the summerhouse, and it would no longer be Deborah's. This perspective comes into focus as Deborah declares, 'I am my own!' as she effectively disregards anyone else. Deborah thus preserves the 'unseen' of the summerhouse in her mind as she keeps it exclusively for herself, reinforcing her desire to possess what she has made her own. Both Simon's and Deborah's madness are connected to the presence of the summerhouse and the respective meanings they bestow upon it, revealing the symbolic power of an object to drive seemingly sane characters insane.

Rather than focusing on a single mad character, O'Neill explores how one object drives two characters insane for different reasons. By experimenting with three reasons that would potentially cause Simon's madness, and then to ultimately attribute this madness to the impact of an object demonstrates how something seemingly innocent can entrap an individual. It initially appears that *Mansions* explores shared madness because Simon and Deborah's madness is linked to the same object. However, *Mansions* is an exploration of two characters' personal madness as they both have their own beliefs and associations with regard to the summerhouse.

Unlike the previous three plays, *Mansions* involves an object that is not addictive; neither Simon nor Deborah is actively drawn to the summerhouse. Deborah even spends much of the play avoiding the summerhouse because it reminds her of a side of herself that she wishes to forget. While Simon wants the truth of the summerhouse revealed, he is not addicted to it in the same way that Reuben is to the dynamo, or Billy is to the mask. Even Ella, though she feared the primitive mask, was drawn to it. Props (or stage objects, to suit the summerhouse) "absorb dramatic meaning and become complex symbols" (Sofer 24). Simon and Deborah turn the summerhouse into a symbol in their minds; *Mansions* explores their individual madness as they are so preoccupied with a belief that it drives them insane.

Despite Deborah's insistence on avoiding the summerhouse, her turning it into a symbol was what ultimately drew her back to it.

Parks asserts that O'Neill "has often refused to allow his symbolism to be an underlying current felt under the smooth surface of an otherwise straight-forward drama ... but has attempted to make symbolic the action, the characters, and even the artificial devices of the theatre" (443). In *Dynamo* and *Mansions*, O'Neill animates parts of the mise-en-scène as objects, demonstrating how objects one would not typically regard as significant can have a profound effect on individuals. Rather than an object simply representing something in these set plays, madness is associative. Hence, regarding these works as symbolist amplifies the role of the objects in altering the characters' state of mind.

In the previous three plays, the objects become people of sorts: Ella regards the mask as a Black person, Dion's mask stands in for a character, and Reuben considers the dynamo as his mother by the end of the play. However, the summerhouse never gets regarded as (or even compared to) a person. The closest it comes to representing an individual is when Deborah believes she has locked her old self in the summerhouse – but even then, the summerhouse serves more as a container of her old self. Instead of being associated with an individual or being personified, the summerhouse remains independent. This departure seems to argue that an object does not necessarily need to be associated with a person for it to intimately affect the characters. Moreover, having two characters turn the summerhouse into a symbol without equating it with a person suggests O'Neill's intention to highlight that words alone (particularly in Simon's case) is enough to create a false reality to the extent one ends up living in it.

As symbolism is concerned more with the immaterial world than the material world (Tisdell 228), the tales constructed around the summerhouse can have an equally profound effect on the characters. *Mansions* visualises how the summerhouse causes madness due to

one's belief about it; what the summerhouse symbolises to Simon and Deborah respectively emphasises the play's concern with the immaterial world.

In *All God's Chillun*, *Dynamo*, and *Brown*, madness was attributed to a single character – or object, in *Brown*'s case. O'Neill pits characters against each other to determine what factors would cause a character to succumb before another. In *Mansions*, the characters are progressively multi-dimensional, not solely due to *Mansions* being a lengthy play but due to its expressionist technique of audible thoughts. While this technique in *Dynamo* reveals Reuben battling his feelings of betrayal, love, and his yearning for power, *Mansions* goes a step further by highlighting Simon and Deborah's respective individual torment and emphasising their plotting against each other. It is in these battles that their true preoccupations and desires become apparent.

Once again in O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*, an object contributes to a character's madness. However, *Long Day's Journey* differs from the earlier four plays in that the influence of the object is questioned from the beginning of the play, and it is only at the end that the object is finally brought on stage in what appears to be an experiment to test its influence over the central mad character.

PART VI: QUESTIONING THE INFLUENCE OF THE GOWN

From 1918 to 1920, O'Neill published five major plays in the realist mode. During his extremely productive period from 1920 to 1933, eight out of seventeen of his plays were expressionist. There is a notable six-year gap between *Days Without End* (1933), an expressionist play involving the use of masks, and *The Iceman Cometh* (1939), which marked O'Neill's return to realism. Following *The Iceman Cometh*, all of O'Neill's remaining works are realist. This return to realism is surprising given that O'Neill complained about the inadequacy of realism in "objectifying soul states and inner conflicts", stating that "[w]e have endured too much from the banality of surfaces" (qtd. in Blackburn 112). *Long Day's Journey into Night* is generally a realist play with a realist dialogue, characters, setting, and time frame. Despite the 'banality of surfaces' often associated with realism, *Long Day's Journey* scrapes beneath the surface in terms of the access granted to the characters' thoughts and the role of an object in illuminating a character's true feelings.

Long Day's Journey is a four-act autobiographical play set on a single day in August 1912. Though O'Neill completed it in 1941, the play was first published and performed posthumously in 1956, three years after O'Neill's death. The four main characters are based on members of O'Neill's family – the father James Tyrone, the mother Mary Tyrone, and the sons, Jamie, and Edmund. O'Neill kept the names of his father and brother the same, while 'Mary' is part of his mother's name. Although Edmund is the name of O'Neill's older brother who was born before him but died aged eighteen months (Lachmann and Lachmann 235), the character is based on O'Neill himself. The play comprises a single day when Edmund is diagnosed with consumption – and the men discover that Mary has resumed her morphine addiction – after having stayed clean for two months after returning home from a sanatorium.

Mary is mad and hints of her instability are evident as the play progresses. Her erratic behaviour began when a doctor prescribed her with morphine after she gave birth to her

youngest son, Edmund. Throughout the play, Mary expresses a deep longing to return to her past as she fondly recollects how happy she had been. Rather than attributing Mary's madness to the cumulative effects of morphine that she consumes throughout the play, it is her wedding gown that contributes to her final descent into madness as she ends up living entirely in the past by the end of the final act.

Long Day's Journey has been hailed as O'Neill's greatest work by many critics for a variety of reasons, one of which is its "universal quality" (Berlin 91). O'Neill was posthumously awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *Long Day's Journey* in 1957 (Dymkowski xvi), a testament to the greatness of the play. The play is a family drama about love, blame, regret, secrets, and confession, among other themes. The characters are arguably the most fleshed-out of all of O'Neill's characters; because so little action occurs onstage, more attention is given to characterisation. The audience learns about each character's fears, hopes, and dreams.

As a generally realist play, there is nothing elaborate in terms of stage setting or dramatic action; the play is set entirely in the living room of James Tyrone's summer home. Törnqvist informs us that it "would be difficult to find a drama in world literature that is more leavened with autobiographical facts" than this play ("Long Day's Journey" 197). Numerous details of the O'Neill family's lives are immortalised in this play, including Eugene O'Neill's days at sea and his suicide attempt, James O'Neill's acting career, Mary's morphine addiction, and Jamie's alcoholism – to name a few – and, a substantial amount of criticism has been based on these connections. While Mary's character has undoubtedly been the focus of much analysis, little has been written about the role the wedding gown plays in altering her state of mind.

Mary behaves in an unstable and somewhat turbulent manner throughout the first three acts, suggesting the possibility of mental imbalance. Mary's second son, Eugene, had

died after contracting measles from Jamie, who was then seven. Mary's guilt stems from her wish that she had never left her children under the care of her mother to join Tyrone on the road, who was an actor. She swore that after Eugene died, she would never have another child. However, Tyrone convinced her to have another, and Edmund was born (O'Neill 50). A heated exchange between Tyrone and Jamie early in Act One reveals how Mary's morphine addiction began after Edmund's birth when the doctor gave her morphine (19).

From the outset, Mary behaves erratically, apparent through hands which do not keep still (24) and numerous distracted thoughts. During a conversation with Tyrone and Jamie where they discuss cutting the hedge in front of the house, Mary informs them to:

take advantage of the sunshine before the fog comes back. (*Strangely, as if talking aloud to herself.*) Because I know it will. (*Suddenly she is self-consciously aware that they are both staring fixedly at her – flurriedly, raising her hands.*) Or should I say, the rheumatism in my hands knows. It's a better weather prophet than you are, James. (*She stares at her hands with fascinated repulsion.*) Ugh! How ugly they are! Who'd ever believe they were once beautiful? (20).

In response, the men "*stare at her with a growing dread*" (20) as they realise the possibility that she has started consuming morphine again. It is not evident from the start that Mary has relapsed into her morphine addiction and the men find out one by one that she has relapsed. Mary's declaration 'I know it will' is said more as a soliloquy rather than as a statement to either Jamie or Tyrone. Following the utterance, she immediately realises that the words had slipped out without her intending to say them. In such instances where she voices her subconscious thoughts, she is at her most vulnerable. She does not regard the fog as it simply is, but rather, as something that symbolically holds a deeper meaning. When Jamie and Tyrone '*star[e] fixedly*' at her, their reaction prompts the audience to direct their focus onto

Mary as well, who is held by the gaze of both characters and audience. Mary herself replicates this gaze as she scrutinises her hands with '*fascinated repulsion*', as though seeing them for the first time. In keeping with the realist mode, sight is introduced early in the play – Mary's drifting in and out of topics, her focus on her hands, and even the manifestation of one's subconscious onstage suggest a preoccupation with the visible.

While it is tempting to attribute Mary's inability to control her thoughts to her mental state, much of Mary's behaviour is caused by the effects of morphine. Steven F. Bloom discusses the prevalence of alcohol and morphine in the play, explaining how the various characters' symptoms correspond to real-life addicts. With regards to Mary, Bloom informs us that "O'Neill has carefully incorporated effects of 'opioid withdrawal' that are, in fact, identifiable from the outset" (164). Citing the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Bloom notes that the diagnostic criteria for "opioid intoxication" include "drowsiness, slurred speech, and impairment in attention and memory" along with "interference with social or occupational functioning, and failure to meet responsibilities" (qtd. in Bloom 164-5). In her response to Jamie and Tyrone, Mary exhibits the symptoms of impaired attention as well as a failure to meet responsibilities, which will be more apparent further on in the play when she abandons her duties as a mother to Edmund. Her thoughts flit from one topic to another, emphasising her inability to focus. Her preoccupation with her hands reveals her awareness of the effects of morphine on her physically as her beauty has deteriorated over time. There is thus a distinction between the effects of addiction and what would otherwise be known as mental instability, which the characters of earlier plays have been shown to have.

While the characters in the above sections had their behaviour visibly altered by tangible objects, it appears that Mary is ruled by something intangible: her past. Mary reveals her preoccupation with her past through her soliloquies. Despite her evident love for Tyrone,

Mary confesses in Act Three that she was happier before she met him. While the play is generally considered realist, there are numerous occasions when Mary speaks out loud on stage – in a soliloquy. Mary only voices these thoughts because she is under the influence of morphine, highlighting the limitations of realism to illustrate a character’s preoccupations. Alone on stage, she bitterly explains to herself, “You were much happier before you knew he existed, in the Convent when you used to pray to the Blessed Virgin. (*Longingly.*) If I could only find the faith I lost, so I could pray again!” (63). She speaks to herself with the pronoun ‘you’ rather than the more obvious ‘I’, demonstrating a sense of detachment as she chides herself for having made a mistake in leaving the Convent and getting married. This detachment is necessary as there must be a distance before she can determine whether she made the right or wrong decision.

Additionally, this statement can be read as her attempt to convince herself that she had been happier before she met Tyrone. Her abrupt switch from a bitter tone to one of longing is accompanied by a switch in the pronoun when she returns to using ‘I’. The sincerity in her tone returns and her desperation to reconnect with the past is apparent. Mary’s burning desire to ‘find the faith’ she had lost, emphasised by her change in tone and pronoun, highlights her preoccupation with this intangible element. This ‘faith’ is located solely in the past, and Mary’s desire to return to the past becomes increasingly obvious as the play progresses. Her soliloquy suggests that it is only when Mary is alone onstage, away from the suspicious eyes of her family who suspect that she may have resumed taking morphine, that she can be true to herself.

Mary’s switching of pronouns in her soliloquies invites a comparison with Deborah in *Mansions*. In Deborah’s first soliloquy of the play, she chastises herself:

Really, Deborah, this latest day dream is the most absurd of the many ridiculous fantasies in which you have hidden from yourself! I begin to believe that you truly must be more than a little mad! You had better take care! (316).

By referring to herself in the third person, she appears to distance herself from her actual self. Similarly, Mary switches between pronouns and addresses herself from a distance in the same way that Deborah does. The fact that both characters chide themselves both in their soliloquies and from a distance entails a kind of mask as they are aware that they behave in a certain manner in front of the other characters, repressing how they truly feel. Törnqvist notes that there are “three straight soliloquies” in *Long Day’s Journey*, all of them spoken by Mary (“Long Day’s Journey” 191), emphasising just how much of her thoughts she keeps to herself.

It is only in Mary’s morphine-intoxicated state that she verbalises her thoughts on stage. Had it not been for morphine, these thoughts, which reveal so much of what we know about her, would never surface. While both *All God’s Chillun* and *Long Day’s Journey* are realist plays, O’Neill’s use of an intoxicated character enables him to probe into these subconscious thoughts without the play departing too far from the laws of realism.

In line with this intangible object of the past that Mary yearns to regain and is influenced by, she eventually goes so far as to convince others that she had been pious before she met Tyrone in an attempt to bring herself closer to her intangible past. In Act Three, the men have gone out and Mary is in the living room with the family servant, Cathleen. By then, she has consumed even more morphine and speaks frankly to Cathleen. Since Tyrone was an actor, Cathleen enquires why Mary never became an actress. Though it is a simple question, Mary takes offence, informing Cathleen resentfully, “[b]efore I met Mr Tyrone I hardly knew there was such a thing as theatre. I was a very pious girl. I even dreamed of becoming a nun. I’ve never had the slightest desire to be an actress” (59). Mary’s resentful tone is surprising

considering how innocent Cathleen's question is, which highlights something that Mary is unable to forgive in herself. Mary's labelling of theatre as 'such a thing' reveals her sense of superiority as she considers herself above that – which is ironic considering how taken she was by Tyrone, an actor, when she first met him. She emphasises that she was 'very pious' and supports that by informing Cathleen of her dream to become a nun. However, to dream of something does not equate to achieving it, although Mary attempts to make up this shortcoming by starting her sentences with the pronoun 'I' to reassert her determination. Mary insists that she ought to be defined by those dreams.

Aside from convincing others, Mary also attempts to convince herself of her piousness. Her resentful answer demonstrates a defensiveness on her part, as she justifies what else she would prefer doing instead of being an actress. Barbara Voglino analyses the literal games such as the game of cards Tyrone and Edmund play in Act Four, and the various roles Mary plays. Voglino asserts that one role Mary plays is that of a pious girl (98). The purpose of labelling Mary's actions as a 'game' gives the impression that Mary will either win or lose – an outcome that she is not sure of. After all, games involve more than one person, and their outcome is never certain. By engaging in this 'game' of attempting to convince Cathleen, and herself, of her piousness, Mary is taking a risk because of her uncertainty of what she wants – an uncertainty that plays a bigger role at the end of the play.

Mary remembers her wedding to Tyrone as a happy occasion, highlighting her inconsistent thoughts. In a conversation with Tyrone in Act Three, with Edmund present, Mary utters pitifully, "I want to remember only the happy part of the past. (*Her manner drifts back to the shy, gay convent girl.*) Do you remember our wedding, dear? I'm sure you've completely forgotten what my wedding gown looked like" (67). The first thing that Mary highlights about their wedding is her gown. It is noteworthy that her manner becomes one of a '*shy, gay convent girl*' while she recalls her wedding, given that a Convent girl would not

have gotten married. This conflict demonstrates how she cannot make up her mind whether her marriage or her convent days make her happier. Eugene Waith notes that “Mary’s backward movement into drug-addiction ... dominates the play, and the stages of her regress give the play its structure” (189-190). Waith refers to her relapse into drug addiction as each time Mary goes to the spare room upstairs to take morphine, her condition deteriorates. However, there is also another aspect to this regression: the more Mary speaks of the past, the further she retreats into the past with each act. Earlier in Act Three, she brought up her Convent days with Cathleen, and now, she asks Tyrone about their wedding. In this conversation, she brings up the object that ultimately causes her to exist solely in the past – her wedding gown.

Mary describes her wedding gown in great detail, hinting that it might hold a greater significance that extends beyond it simply being a memorable object that reminds her of her past. To Edmund and Tyrone, Mary reminisces about the gown:

It was made of soft, shimmering satin, trimmed with wonderful old duchesse lace, in tiny ruffles around the neck and sleeves, and worked in with the folds that were draped round in a bustle effect at the back. The basque was boned and very tight. I remember ... My father even let me have duchesse lace on my white satin slippers, and lace with the orange blossoms in my veil. Oh, how I loved that gown! It was so beautiful! Where is it now, I wonder? I used to take it out from time to time when I was lonely, but it always made me cry, so finally a long while ago – (*She wrinkles her forehead again.*) ... (68).

In this passage, Mary has her most descriptive lines in the entire play. The alliteration at the beginning of the passage provides a poetic quality to her recollection, showing how taken she is by her gown in how she speaks so fancifully of it. She demonstrates remarkable attention to detail as she recalls the materials, especially the small details in the first line as well as in

her attention to the accompanying shoes and veil. Mary then wonders where the gown is. It comes as a surprise that Mary would misplace an object so valuable to her, one she remembers so vividly. One possible explanation lies in her revelation that the gown ‘always made me cry’. Although she never reveals what this reason is, it could be due to the bittersweet nature of remembering the past.

Mary’s attention to detail regarding her wedding gown is crucial as Voglino notes that “nowhere in [Mary’s] detailed recollections does she ever cite a single name or activity involving a friend” (“The Question of Blame” 150). Indeed, in Act Two Scene Two, Mary tells Tyrone that after she married him, “all my old friends either pitied me or cut me dead” (49) yet she does not elaborate or name them. The lack of detail is surprising considering how hurtful being abandoned by her friends must have been for Mary, as she was left all alone. Her reminiscing about the wedding gown is a type of “pseudo-soliloquy”, which is “a situation in which a character seemingly addresses one or more other characters but actually, hardly aware of their existence, is thinking aloud” (Törnqvist, “Long Day’s Journey” 193). Törnqvist also notes that Mary engages in more pseudo-soliloquies the more she consumes morphine. Without these pseudo-soliloquies, it is unlikely that Mary’s preoccupations would be known.

Act Four, the final act, is the longest and begins with Tyrone alone onstage around midnight. Edmund joins him, returning from the doctor’s where he has learned that he has consumption, and they play cards while talking about the past. All the while, the men are worried that Mary will come downstairs in her drugged state. They drink and get more intoxicated; Jamie comes home and drinks even more than he already has. It is only toward the very end of the act, an estimated forty-five minutes of playing time (Bloom, “The Mad Scene” 232), that Mary finally appears onstage.

The manner in which Mary announces her return after a long spell offstage comes as a shock to both the characters and the audience, effectively heightening the tension. The stage directions read: “[s]uddenly, all five bulbs of the chandelier in the front parlour are turned on from a wall switch, and a moment later someone starts playing the piano in there” (105). For the stage to suddenly go up to almost full brightness resembles a flash, which would come as a shock to both the characters and the audience. There is also the sudden auditory disturbance of a Chopin simple waltz on the piano, when all this while, the only sound heard offstage had been the foghorn. This shock occurs before Mary even enters the stage, almost as if the stage needs to be reset before she appears in the flood of brightness.

Mary’s delayed entrance is accompanied by her most startling transformation in the play. After she plays the piano offstage, the stage directions continue as follows:

For a moment [the men] listen frozenly. The playing stops as abruptly as it began, and MARY appears in the doorway. She wears a sky-blue dressing gown over her nightdress, dainty slippers with pompons on her bare feet. Her face is paler than ever. Her eyes look enormous. They glisten like polished black jewels. The uncanny thing is that her face now appears so youthful. ... Over one arm, carried neglectfully, trailing on the floor, as if she had forgotten she held it, is an old-fashioned white satin wedding gown, trimmed with duchesse lace (106).

Throughout the earlier acts, Mary’s constant references to her Convent days, her childhood, and her wedding culminate in her appearing as a younger version of herself. She also carries an object from her past; her wedding gown is exactly as she had described it to Tyrone in Act Three. Despite her earlier adoration of the gown, she now carries it neglectfully as it trails on the floor. The disregard of the gown is alarming considering what a prized possession Mary regards it to be. The indication that ‘*she had forgotten she held it*’ emphasises the extent of

her drugged state; Mary is in such a stupor that she does not even realise her careless treatment of her gown.

The appearance of a youthful-looking Mary hints at something she has been unable to let go of. Byrd posits that O'Neill's plays "dramatise how people can be haunted by earlier versions of themselves" (24). Byrd's use of 'haunted' shows something unintentional – the character in question might never have meant or expected to be tormented by something from their past – it just happens. A younger version of Mary is manifested at the end of *Long Day's Journey* and the stage directions of "[h]er face is paler than ever" (106) amplifies the ghostliness of this version of Mary, who comes from a prior period. Earlier in the play, Mary had made numerous references to the past, occasionally blaming others for her predicament. It is only in this final appearance where we understand how haunted she is by an earlier version of herself, even as she becomes that earlier version of herself.

The wedding gown draws attention to Mary's personal madness as her handling of it reflects her interiority. Alice Rayner asserts that objects in drama "particularly in the form of possessions, are extensions of an individual self and body: they define, enlarge, and extend individual corporeality beyond the limits of the body" (79). The term 'enlarge' encourages us to view the gown in the bigger picture in terms of how it is being treated and how this treatment reflects upon Mary's physical and mental state. Mary's neglectful attitude toward the gown symbolises how she feels she is being treated; her madness appears to have a reason behind it, in that her feeling neglected has exacerbated her mental state to the point of madness. Earlier in the play, she complains that Tyrone had never provided her with a proper home as he was always touring as an actor, serving as one of the reasons behind her deteriorated state.

As a prop like the primitive mask and Dion's mask, the wedding gown is "an object that goes on a journey" (Sofer 2). The gown can also be viewed as a haunted medium,

although instead of merely being “possessed by the voices of the past” (Sofer 27), the gown conjures a character from the past. The gown is also a “fetishized prop”, which Sofer describes as a prop “endowed by the actor, character, or playwright with a special power and/or significance that thereafter seems to emanate from the object itself” (26). This object thus becomes “the focus of a character’s projected desire, fear, or anxiety” (Sofer 26). While the gown does not have agency like Dion’s mask, it possesses a symbolic power because of its sentimental value and Mary’s memories of it. The gown is thus similar to the primitive mask as both are endowed with a special power that seems to emanate from the prop itself. Ella endows the mask with significance when she projects her fears onto it; in *Long Day’s Journey*, O’Neill himself endows the gown with a special power. O’Neill presents the gown to have a profound effect on Mary, and intentionally draws our attention to the symbolic power of a personal object on an individual.

The first words following Mary’s dramatic entrance are spoken by Jamie, who bitterly and self-defensively says, “The Mad Scene. Enter Ophelia!” (106). Edmund then slaps Jamie across the mouth for his disrespectfulness. Jamie references William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, where Ophelia, the female character, goes mad and dies by drowning. Jamie invents this stage direction (Bloom, “The Mad Scene” 235), however, as those precise words do not appear in *Hamlet*. By uttering stage directions and drawing a parallel between Mary and Ophelia, Mary does not even have to speak before she is regarded as mad.

The performance that follows involves a Mary that lives entirely in the past. When Mary finally speaks, she does so “*aloud to herself, not to them*” (106) in what is another pseudo-soliloquy. Mary says that “Sister Theresa will give me a dreadful scolding. She’ll tell me it isn’t fair to my father when he spends so much money for extra lessons...” (106). Throughout the play, her desire to repossess her past culminates in this moment whereby she lives entirely in the past and looks towards the ‘future’. Despite her living in the past, she is

aware of her present state as she observes her hands, crippled from rheumatism, with alarm. She observes worryingly, “something horrible has happened to my hands” (107). The fact that she does not know what has happened indicates that her memories have stopped at a certain point, and this idea of her memory stopping at her Convent days is reinforced when she does not even recognise her wedding gown.

The wedding gown highlights the tension between Mary’s love for Tyrone and her desire to be a nun from her time at the Convent. Tyrone asks Edmund in a stifled voice, “What’s that she’s carrying, Edmund?” (107), to which Edmund replies that he supposes it is her wedding gown. Tyrone immediately approaches Mary to take the gown, assuring her to let him take it so she does not “get it dirty dragging it on the floor” (107). Mary responds to Tyrone “*with the shy politeness of a well-bred young girl toward an elderly gentleman who relieves her of a bundle*” before she “*regards the wedding gown with a puzzled interest*”. She says, “It’s a wedding gown. It’s very lovely, isn’t it? ... I remember now. I found it in the attic hidden in a trunk. But I don’t know what I wanted it for. I’m going to be a nun ...” (107). Since Mary currently ‘exists’ during the time of her Convent days, she has no idea that the gown she carries is her own, as the wedding had not happened yet. She refers to it as ‘a wedding gown’ rather than using a personal pronoun to claim ownership of it. Her description of it as ‘very lovely’ comes across as the type of remark one might make about a pretty object. Considering her extensively descriptive reminiscing about her gown in Act Three, it is surprising that she cannot recognise it as hers. Mary recalls that she found the gown in a trunk, which explains the sounds from upstairs the men hear throughout Act Four as Mary compulsively searched for her gown. However, Mary then claims she does not know why she wanted the gown, and it is at this stage where the power the object emanates is questioned.

O'Neill explores the hidden conflicts that arise in a character when confronted with a meaningful object. In the earlier four plays, the objects in question had a great influence over the characters – a control that lasted till the very end until they were either destroyed in the case of the mask in *All God's Chillun* or given a new meaning such as Dion Anthony's mask in *Brown* when Cybel does not allow Billy to die with it. In *Dynamo* and *Mansions*, the dynamo and summerhouse held their influence over Reuben, and Deborah and Simon, respectively. However, in *Long Day's Journey*, the wedding gown seemingly lacks a similar power over Mary. There is thus the question of what “determining circumstances” (Stamm, “Faithful Realism” 244) have the upper hand in causing Mary's insanity. We know the gown was important to her because she was scrambling to find it upstairs in the dead of the night. When she descended the stairs, she is already living in the past – which means that something must have triggered that regression into the past. Holding an object from the past causes Mary to regress into the past, demonstrating the symbolic power of the gown as a fetishized prop to propel a character into a different time period. However, the fact that she ends up in a past before the time of her marriage is telling.

Based on Mary's inability to recognise her wedding gown, one possibility is that her desire to become a nun could possibly have triumphed over the symbolic power of the gown. After praising the gown and announcing that she is going to be a nun, Mary repeatedly searches for something she has lost. She looks around her, seeking “[s]omething I miss terribly” and “[s]omething I need terribly. I remember when I had it I was never lonely nor afraid” (108). It is never explicitly revealed what Mary is looking for, although it appears to be her lost faith. Earlier in her soliloquy in Act Three, Mary wishes longingly, “[i]f I could only find the faith I lost, so I could pray again!” (63). In Act Four, the irony of the situation is that although she has psychologically gone back to her days at the Convent, she is still unable to find her faith.

Of the objects discussed, the gown is the only personal possession. Personal possessions suggest how characters hold on to an ideal moment from their past and how time is held in objects. Time is held in the gown because it transports Mary to the past. Ella, Reuben, and Simon also regress to a childlike state at the end; the difference between them and Mary is that Mary is transported to a particular period in her life. It is not the event itself (her wedding) that she returns to, but the moment in her life when she had to choose between two things that mean very much to her. It is not simply time that is held in her gown but her memories as well. Since the primitive mask, the dynamo, and the summerhouse do not hold time and are not personal possessions, the respective characters merely regress into a childlike state rather than get transported to a particular moment in their past like Mary.

Ultimately, only at the very end does Mary gradually advance beyond her time at the Convent. In her final pseudo-soliloquy, Mary rambles dreamily and shyly about how much she loved Mother Elizabeth and yearned to be a nun. Mary reveals that Mother Elizabeth insisted that Mary ought to be certain that she wanted to be a nun, suggesting that Mary first enjoy herself like other girls by going to parties and dances. For her part, Mary reveals:

I never dreamed Holy Mother would give me such advice! I was really shocked. I said, of course, I would do anything she suggested, ... After I left her, I felt all mixed up, so I went to the shrine and prayed to the Blessed Virgin and found peace again because I knew she heard my prayer and would always love me and see no harm ever came to me so long as I never lost my faith in her. (*She pauses and a look of growing uneasiness comes over her face. She passes a hand over her forehead as if brushing cobwebs from her brain – vaguely.*) That was in the winter of senior year. Then in the spring something happened to me. Yes, I remember. I fell in love with James Tyrone and was so happy for a time (110).

Mary then “*stares before her in a sad dream. TYRONE stirs in his chair. EDMUND and JAMIE remain motionless*” (110) after which the play ends. This excerpt confirms that what Mary had been searching for was her faith, as praying to the Blessed Virgin is what gives her peace. Immediately after she speaks about this faith, she pauses and feels uneasy. What was meant to be a heartwarming recollection has caused something troubling to surface in Mary – because she then remembers that her subsequent actions had prevented her from becoming a nun. O’Neill’s choice of having Mary appear to be ‘*brushing cobwebs from her brain*’ is both an odd and extremely specific stage direction; there is the need to visually demonstrate this recollection, as though she must literally gently push away her memories of the Convent before she can access the memories that follow.

Mary finally exits her psychological entrapment in her Convent days as she remembers her happiness at falling in love with Tyrone. Mary’s explanation that ‘something happened to me’ with regard to Tyrone suggests her passive state; her insistence that she was taken by surprise becomes important. All this time she was determined to be a nun and was not expecting to fall in love, yet it had happened in any case. By presenting herself to be passive, she re-emphasises her devotion to her dream of being a nun in a final attempt to convince herself of her true dreams. This attempt explains the ‘*look of growing uneasiness*’ which comes over her face, as she clings on to the innocent Mary.

However, even after recalling Tyrone, she does not recognise him because she makes no personal address to him. She speaks as though narrating a story when she declares, ‘I fell in love with James Tyrone’. The play then ends with a tableau, immortalising the moment of Mary remembering the time of her life which made her so happy, even if it was just ‘for a time’. This freezing of time serves – ironically – to halt Mary’s progress into the future. Throughout the play, Mary had been regressing further and further into the past, first through her constant references to the past, and later when she literally appears more youthful than

ever. At the end of Act Four, she finally remembers what had happened after her Convent days, when she ‘fell in love with James Tyrone’. However, from what she has revealed throughout the play, her marriage was not entirely happy – potentially presenting another instance of Mary recalling bitter events. It is only through a tableau that Mary can be stopped before recalling the more upsetting parts of her marriage. Since the other three main characters are unable to stop Mary, it is left to a dramatic device to halt her.

Byrd’s assertion that O’Neill’s plays “dramatise how people can be haunted by earlier versions of themselves” (24) proves useful in explaining the influence of the wedding gown, even though it is never mentioned again after Tyrone takes it from Mary. Mary’s uneasiness when she “*brush[es] cobwebs from her brain*” (110) is due to her regret with the decisions she made following her Convent days. This uneasiness explains her desire to cling on to this ‘pious Mary’ that she tries to convince others she is. Moreover, the stage directions indicate that Mary recalls how she fell in love with Tyrone “*vaguely*” (110). While this tone can be explained by Mary gradually recalling the event, it might also hint at her initial belief that marrying Tyrone would bring her immense happiness – only that it did not. This earlier version of Mary haunts her because of that misplaced belief. Consequently, when a youthful Mary reappears on stage carrying her wedding gown, it is that very Mary, and not the pious girl from the Convent, that truly haunts Mary. Her abandoning her dreams to become a nun for love is a regret she must live with.

It is also worth considering what it means that Mary’s pseudo-soliloquy at the end might have gone on for much longer, as she had only just begun her recollection of Tyrone when O’Neill ends the play. Travis Bogard asserts that in Mary’s morphine trance, she regresses to a happier time. Her wedding dress serves “a symbol of something that never was a substantial reality” (*Contour in Time*). While her wedding was meant to be a delightful occasion, the fact remains that the expectation of a ‘substantial reality’ never materialised for

Mary. By extension, the wedding gown becomes associated with what could have been rather than with Mary's happiness. Bogard's assertion would seem to suggest that O'Neill's choice to end the play when he did was meant to preserve the wedding gown's ability to propel Mary into the past due to her associating it with a pivotal moment in her life. Her final statement 'I fell in love with James Tyrone and was so happy for a time' serves as her invented 'substantial reality'.

By ending the play at this point, O'Neill experiments in an intriguing way with the "closed circle of determining circumstances" (Stamm, "Faithful Realism" 244) that shape Mary. Mary's circumstances included dealing with Edmund's consumption, her family's excessive concern over her, her morphine addiction, and her gown. The mad characters in the previous four plays were all greatly influenced by the respective objects, yet the reaction Mary has to her wedding gown is perhaps more simply understood as non-recognition. This response provokes the question of why the gown was even brought on stage.

Mary even comes to triumph over the power of the object with her neglectful handling of it and when she disregards it. While this response undermines its influence over Mary, it simultaneously reinforces the power the gown emanates; despite Mary speaking about her Convent days the entire time (which would seem to indicate that that is the point at which her memories stop), she does, finally, recall Tyrone. The stage directions convey how Mary is forced to face the events that follow her abandoning her dreams – her uneasiness and the vagueness with which she speaks draws attention to the difficulty, and a possible reluctance, of broaching the subject. Since the gown is "a symbol of something that never was a substantial reality" (Bogard, *Contour in Time*), her time at the Convent also becomes associated with 'something that never was a substantial reality'. Mary never became the pious girl she wished to be; it was only ever just a dream. Rather than simply representing her wedding, the gown encompasses all the failures of Mary's life because it represents

something she yearned for – a happy marriage in the case of the gown – but was not to be fully achieved.

PART VII: CONCLUSION

From *All God's Chillun Got Wings* to *Long Day's Journey into Night*, O'Neill explores the effect of various objects on his characters to determine what in their "closed circle of determining circumstances" (Stamm, "Faithful Realism" 244) causes them to succumb to madness. The reasons are not always obvious, and at times, such as in *All God's Chillun* and *Mansions*, the character initially more prone to madness is not the one who descends into insanity. O'Neill focuses on the social milieu and how his characters respond in this environment when particular objects are introduced; his objects on stage evolve from mad objects (in the mask plays) to objects that result in characters' madness due to the associations of their memories and beliefs with those objects.

O'Neill was not content with merely showcasing how an object triggers a character's madness, however. He also sought to explore the hidden conflicts that arise in his characters when confronted with a new or familiar object by illustrating their torment. For O'Neill, the seen and the unseen aspects of objects demonstrate the complex relationship between the character and the object. Since drama is constrained by time, not everything can be shown. Every action, word, setting, and stage direction is a dramatic choice a playwright makes when it comes to choosing what to reveal and what not to. Like the objects they interact with, the characters have seen and unseen sides; expressionism often brings that unseen side to the surface, as do the effects of drugs and alcohol in the case of *Long Day's Journey*. When accessed, the unseen side of objects and characters prove invaluable because it is often in these hidden corners that difficult truths often lie, which reveal how complex the characters are.

Madness is either personal or shared depending on the addictiveness of the object in question. *Brown* and *Dynamo* illustrate shared madness; Dion's mask and the dynamo were entrancing objects that reflected what the respective characters craved. Billy's desire to

possess Dion's identity fuelled his addiction to the mask. As a mad object, Dion's mask 'infects' whoever possesses it, functioning as a case study of shared madness through an object. The dynamo attracts Reuben and Mrs. Fife as they revel being in its presence. While Reuben succumbs to madness due to him associating the dynamo with his mother, the dynamo's druglike effect on two characters highlights its ability to mesmerise.

O'Neill explores personal madness through a character's response to an object. Ella is terrified yet captivated by the primitive mask, a foreign object she has never seen before. Its uncanniness prompts her to project her prejudices against Blacks onto it, revealing her subconscious fears. In *Mansions*, the certainty of one's beliefs and convictions result in both Simon and Deborah succumbing to madness for different reasons. Lastly, the symbolic associations of the wedding gown with Mary's memories result in her living in the past.

In examining objects and madness, all four plays are realist in their attachment to materialism in the form of objects. They are also expressionistic in the sense that they refer to unseen things. The influence of an object over an individual is not always undeniable, which O'Neill shows through experimenting with the various factors that result in insanity. Both realist and expressionist plays have their advantages and disadvantages. In *All God's Chillun*, the realism of the work hindered full access to Ella Downey's thoughts, as we never knew what caused her to be so enraged by the primitive Congo mask. Even so, the expressionist set serves as a reflection of Ella's state of mind in terms of conveying her obsession with the mask. It is in the play's expressionist techniques where we glimpse much of the mask's influence on Ella. The expressionist set and the amplifying of the mask as the play progresses also prompts the consideration of the mask as a puppet. As a puppet, the mask has more agency as a mad object compared to its status as a prop.

The expressionism of *Brown* enables the mask to be regarded as a mad character that infects first Dion, its creator, and then Billy, who took Dion's mask after his death. Rather

than a character succumbing to insanity due to various factors, the object itself embodies madness. Madness is “not linked to the world and its subterranean forms, but rather to man, to his weaknesses, dreams, and illusions” (Foucault 26). Billy’s ‘weaknesses, dreams, and illusions’ prompt him to take Dion’s mask, even though Dion never specifically gave it to him. The opportunity presented itself, and Billy took it. The object plays a more active role in *Brown* than in *All God’s Chillun*, revealing O’Neill’s intention of immersing the object more deeply in the play to analyse its effects on his characters.

Dynamo presents another kind of madness, that of “desperate passion” (Foucault 30), as Reuben desires so immensely to repossess his mother’s love that he bestows upon a non-living object various female and maternal traits. *Dynamo* reveals how associating one’s memories with an object prompts Reuben to abandon what he believes were his dreams – wanting to be a savior and know the truth – to the extent that he only wants to be with his mother again. The dynamo also illuminates Reuben’s human condition despite his madness, showing how his suicide ought to be regarded as a personal victory rather than a tragedy. The object is explicitly shown to be entrancing, but its effects on Reuben were far more profound and his obsession with the dynamo extended beyond mere admiration. His personification of the object also subconsciously reveals what he truly wants.

Mansions functions as an experiment exploring whether Simon or Deborah would succumb to madness first, owing to their obsession with the same object. The summerhouse means something different to both Simon and Deborah, but O’Neill experiments with whose circumstances are more potent to cause them to surrender to madness first.

Finally, *Long Day’s Journey* differs from the other four plays in various ways. Firstly, it is set on a single day whereas the other plays span years. Next, the object is only brought out at the very end, unlike the earlier four plays where we witness the effects of the object on the respective mad characters. Thirdly, the gown’s influence over Mary is questioned until

the end of the play. It initially seems that Mary's Convent dreams triumph over the gown's influence, thus demonstrating the powers of one's imagination to escape their dreaded state. Recalling Dubost's argument about Reuben in *Dynamo* that the only way for O'Neill's characters to find peace "consists in definitively breaking free from the world in which they continue to survive, that they might put an end to their suffering..." (134), Mary finds another way out than death. She escapes into her ideal moment in her history. However, her escape into the past is tainted by the power of the wedding gown, which does not allow her to live in her peaceful, Convent days.

While *Long Day's Journey* is the most realist of the plays discussed, the symbolism of the wedding gown sheds light on Mary's fears and preoccupations. Despite realism having its limitations such as O'Neill's complaint that "[w]e have endured too much from the banality of surfaces" (qtd. in Blackburn 112), it is possible to explore the human condition through realism. O'Neill illuminates Mary's interiority through the symbolism of the gown, while her use of morphine results in her soliloquies where she confesses her true feelings. We know more about Mary's fears than we do of Ella's in *All God's Chillun*, despite the expressionistic devices that reinforce how tormented Ella is by the primitive mask. This observation reveals how expressionist techniques are not always better than realist techniques in terms of probing beyond the surface.

Perhaps, then, all five plays ought to be considered symbolist when we consider how the respective objects are powerful enough to cause a character's mental instability due to their connotations. Styan explains that in symbolist drama "an object or a situation can immediately suggest an idea or a feeling that is greater than itself" (*Symbolism* 3). The respective objects in all five works 'suggest an idea ... that is greater than itself' as the objects are not simply what they are. The primitive mask in *All God's Chillun* highlights Ella's white superiority and her need for control, the mask in *Brown* as a character

illuminates the dangers of addiction, the dynamo emphasises Reuben's obsession with his mother as his defining trait, the summerhouse demonstrates how the tension between the seen and the unseen results in a warped view of reality, while the wedding gown encompasses all Mary's failures. Rather than the respective realist and expressionist techniques in these plays, it is quite possibly the symbolic meanings behind these objects that are most important as they highlight the preoccupations which ultimately shape a character's destiny.

These plays were discussed in chronological order and they reveal a pattern. In the mask plays, the status of the object was altered: Ella destroys the primitive mask, and Cybel does not allow Billy to die with Dion's mask, suggesting the mask's independence of anyone. In the set plays, the dynamo and the summerhouse remain unaltered. In *Long Day's Journey*, O'Neill not drawing attention to the gown after Tyrone takes it from Mary seems to suggest that characters do not even need an object to cause them to become mad. In the end, it could possibly be Mary's inability to choose between two momentous events in her life that causes her madness.

It seems that after the masks turn the respective characters mad, they have fulfilled their function and are granted an exit. This reading reinforces the idea that the masks have agency because they have a role to play. In the set plays, having both objects remain unchanged suggests that O'Neill intended to convey the symbolic power of these objects; they may be part of the stage set, but he remotivates them and animates them as objects that chart the characters' fate. The dynamo and summerhouse function as cautionary tales illustrating the dangers of being too preoccupied with an object. *Long Day's Journey* is among O'Neill's final plays and it is his last play whereby an object contributes to a character's madness. Thus, the ultimate ditching of the gown can even be viewed as a theatrical signing-off; instead of being altered like the masks or featuring strongly at the end of the play, attention is diverted from the gown while we take in Mary's madness. Mary's

human condition becomes more important than the object that contributes to her madness; we finally understand how she has become the character she is and how she is the sum of all her decisions and mistakes. Throughout his career, O'Neill sought to convey his characters' inner conflicts; nowhere does he do that more effectively than through Mary.

Mary is also O'Neill's most powerful female character. Judith Barlow asserts that:

[t]hroughout his plays O'Neill created patriarchal worlds into which women could fit only by assuming the narrow roles in which the male characters sought to cast them. All too rarely, however, did O'Neill critique such worlds through a female character like Mary (174).

Though Mary is a wife and mother, she refuses to be defined solely by those roles.

Throughout the play, she pushes to be respected as a woman with a dream and she does not allow anyone to forget that. She strives to live in her ideal past right up to the very end, thereby critiquing the limiting role the men seek to cast her in.

While Barlow claims that O'Neill's female characters fit in their respective plays by assuming the narrow roles in which they were cast by the male characters, the other female characters discussed, Ella and Deborah, provide compelling critiques of their world. Ella refuses to be relegated to the role of a wife and exerts a considerable amount of influence over Jim. She even challenges the primitive mask and though she is afraid of the mask, she refuses to be cowed into submission. Her act of 'killing' the mask reinforces her desire to assert her authority. Similarly, Deborah is not satisfied with just being a mother and grandmother; she wants more. Initially, she wanted control over Simon, before realising her greater dream; she yearns for a world of her own untouched by anyone else – one that she finally achieves when she enters the summerhouse alone.

Ella, Mary, and Deborah find peace by "definitively breaking free from the world in which they continue to survive" (Dubost 134), but the same cannot be said for Billy and

Reuben who must die to find peace; the mask and the dynamo skewed their view of the world. Billy inherited madness when he took possession of Dion's mask, before gradually morphing into Dion. Once that experiment was underway, there was no way out. Once Reuben made the association between the dynamo and his mother, it was impossible for him to live while the dynamo existed. He believed that the dynamo would replace his mother, but that did not happen. Unable to live with that, and needing his mother's love, he throws himself onto the dynamo.

Finally, I turn to Zola to conclude – “An experimentalist has no need to conclude, because, in truth, experiment concludes for him” (Zola). These experiments conclude for O'Neill because they highlight the complicated relationship between humans and their world. Our ability to attribute qualities to objects do not make us more powerful than the object, but instead, we are at the mercy of the object because these meanings cannot be contained. O'Neill is not consistent in his various experiments with “the closed circle of determining circumstances” (Stamm, “Faithful Realism 244) and that inconsistency is crucial because it, too, speaks to what it means to be human as every character is influenced by different factors.

No character has the same ending; Ella and Reuben regress to a childlike state, but Reuben dies; Mary and Deborah live in their own world in the end, but only one truly has peace. In each case, the object triumphs because once a character becomes preoccupied with it: “[i]nside the image, confiscated by it, and incapable of escaping from it, madness is nonetheless more than imagination, forming an act of undetermined content” (Foucault 94). Madness takes over the individual entirely as one is unable to escape from the world they have constructed around that image. *Long Day's Journey* serves as a final testament to this idea; while *Long Day's Journey* attempts to show the power of an individual's dream over the object, that object ultimately reasserts its power because of its symbolic value; it encompasses Mary's past. The wedding gown encapsulates her failed dreams and desires,

thereby haunting her through the years. Seemingly innocent on stage, objects are never as they are; in all five plays, they are the most important element on stage.

CITATION

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