

**How does Eugene O'Neill depict
two or three aspects of split-natured protagonists?
—An Analysis of Linguistic Features
in Characterization in *The Great God Brown*—**

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INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to consider how Eugene O'Neill depicts two or three aspects of split-natured protagonists through the development of the speeches in *The great God Brown* (1926).

In *The Great God Brown*, the playwright tries to project both the internal and external conflicts of the protagonists visualized in the mask-face dichotomy. In the first half of the play (Prologue, Act I and Act II), the playwright uses both the naked face and masked face of Dion Anthony, the protagonist of the first half, in order to depict the internal struggle emanating from his two conflicting selves. In addition to this internal conflict, Dion is caught up in an external struggle with his rival, William Brown, a materialistic businessman. The first half develops its story through the vivid contrast of Dion's downfall, collapse and deterioration with his competitor's success, as well as via the contrast of the two central characters' personalities. After Dion dies out in Act II Scene iii, William Brown takes over Dion's mask, and in the second half of the play (Act III and Act IV), Brown is forced to lead a double life, divided into three selves symbolized by his naked face, Dion's mask and William Brown's mask. Consequently, Brown experiences the same conflicts and struggle as Dion wrestled with.

In regard to the use of masks by the two central characters, Floyd (1985: 308) thinks that the playwright is concerned with the problem of identity and believes that reality resides not in surface appearances or the masks a character wears but in the concealed suffering face. And Bogard (1972: 267) suggests that O'Neill uses the mask 'to reveal the human individuality as directly and profoundly as possible', whereas Bogard (267) mentions that 'the problem was not in the theatrically fascinating use of masks, but in the development of a language which could

accompany such a direct look into the soul'.⁽¹⁾ O'Neill himself (1926 [rpt., 1947: 105-6]) says that he tries to express 'the living drama of the recognizable human beings' through the 'background pattern of conflicting tides in the soul of Man'. As a result, the playwright faces the difficulty in this play of having to compose speeches reflecting two or three aspects of a character. Therefore it is worthwhile considering what components in the mask and face speeches contribute to the projection of the vividly contrasting characterizations of the protagonists' conflicting two or three aspects onto the stage.

This paper focuses on examining linguistic features, including the variance of the vocabulary and sentence structures, by means of an analysis of face and mask speeches uttered by the two protagonists. Through an investigation of the speeches, I hope to reveal what linguistic features carry out pivotal functions in the illustration of the stark contrast of the protagonists' two or three aspects, and what linguistic manipulation Eugene O'Neill may use to convey the conflicting two or three selves contained within the protagonists to the audience.

1. Analysis of Dion's Speeches

In the first place, I would like to look over the description about Dion's personality in the stage directions in the Prologue:

He(=Dion) is about the same height as young Brown but lean and wiry, without repose, continually in restless nervous movement. His face is masked. The mask is a fixed forcing of his own face—dark, spiritual, poetic, passionately supersensitive, helplessly unprotected in its childlike, religious faith in life—into the expression of a mocking, reckless, defiant, gayly scoffing and sensual young Pan. (Prologue, 475)⁽²⁾

What I want to consider here is how the playwright expresses the personality described in the stage directions through the protagonist's speeches, or in other words, how the playwright reflects the personality in the stage directions into the character's voiced speeches. First I'd like to take an example of dialogical speeches between masked Dion and William Brown from the Prologue:

[1]

BILLY—⁽¹⁾And I know damn well, underneath your nuttiness, you're gone on her.

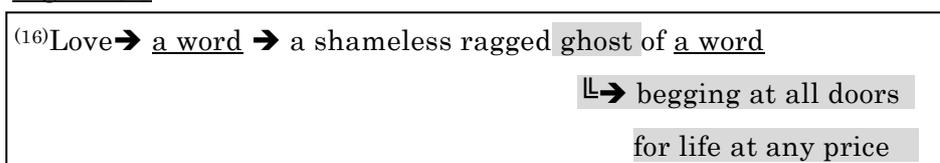
DION—(*moved*) ⁽²⁾Underneath? ⁽³⁾I love love! ⁽⁴⁾I'd love to be loved! ⁽⁵⁾But I'm afraid! (*then aggressively*) ⁽⁶⁾Was afraid! ⁽⁷⁾Not now! ⁽⁸⁾Now I can make love—to anyone! ⁽⁹⁾Yes, I love Peggy! ⁽¹⁰⁾Why not? ⁽¹¹⁾Who is she? ⁽¹²⁾Who am I? ⁽¹³⁾We love, you love, they love, one loves! ⁽¹⁴⁾No one loves! ⁽¹⁵⁾All the world loves a lover, God loves us all and we love Him! ⁽¹⁶⁾Love is a word—a shameless ragged ghost of a word—begging at all doors for life at any price!

(Prologue, 480-81)

In this example, as Brown mentions Dion's true feeling or inside, Dion is 'moved' as described in the stage direction and utters his true feeling that he's anxiously seeking for love in sentences (2) to (4). In the Prologue, even when the protagonist wears his mask, he utters his own true feelings, those that barefaced Dion mentions in the following acts, especially when there are descriptions about his mind in the stage directions, such as 'moved'.

However, after the 'aggressively' in the stage direction suggests a change in Dion's mind to that of 'scoffing Pan quality', from sentence (6) to (15), the words become more and more mocking and ironic. And masked Dion concludes these dialogical speeches with the words that 'Love is a word—a shameless ragged ghost of a word—begging at all doors for life at any price!'

Figure [1]



As Figure [1] shows, in sentence (16), masked Dion regards 'Love' as 'a word', and then he deals with this 'word' as a kind of a personified entity as 'ghost', to which he gives a strong negative impression by adding two adjectives with negative denotations, 'shameless' and 'ragged'; the first adjective, 'shameless' conveys a negative mind set for the word 'ghost', and the other adjective, 'ragged', a negative image of the state of this 'ghost'. Moreover, in the following participial phrase, masked Dion demeans the image of this 'ghost' with the additional words of 'begging' and 'at any price'. Two attributive adjectives, 'shameless' and 'ragged', and the following participial phrase

function in an extended and disdainful image of the word ‘love’ and its metaphoric expression ‘ghost’. One of the most interesting things in this example is that, while in the first four sentences masked Dion utters his true feeling about seeking for love, which the protagonist usually reveals via his real face, in the development of the dialogue, masked Dion utters more and more defiant and scornful words, which oppose the inner compulsion that barefaced Dion usually expresses, so that masked Dion finally comes to verbalize the Pan quality represented by his mask.

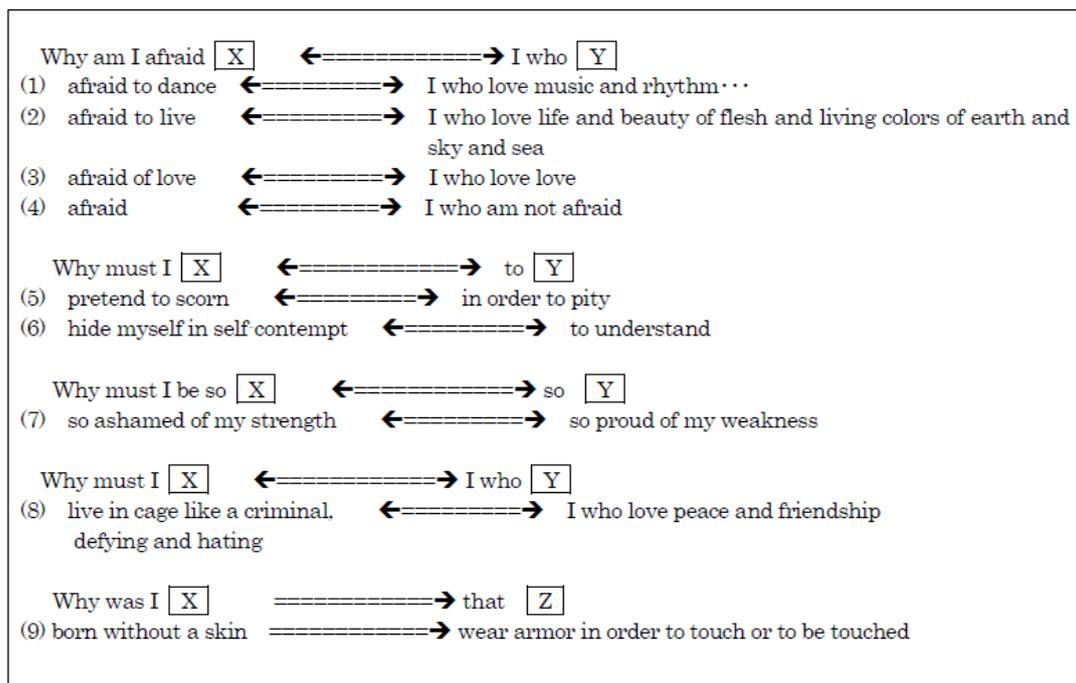
As we have seen an example of dialogical speeches by masked Dion, now we will turn to an account of a monologue uttered by naked-faced Dion in the following extract:

[2]

Dion—(*with a suffering bewilderment*) ⁽¹⁾Why am I afraid to dance, I who love music and rhythm and grace and song and laughter? ⁽²⁾Why am I afraid to live, I who love life and the beauty of flesh and the living colors of earth and sky and sea? ⁽³⁾Why am I afraid of love, I who love love? ⁽⁴⁾Why am I afraid, I who am not afraid? ⁽⁵⁾Why must I pretend to scorn in order to pity? ⁽⁶⁾Why must I hide myself in self-contempt in order to understand? ⁽⁷⁾Why must I be so ashamed of my strength, so proud of my weakness? ⁽⁸⁾Why must I live in cage like a criminal, defying and hating, I who love peace and friendship? (*clasping his hands above in supplication*) ⁽⁹⁾Why was I born without a skin, O God, that I must wear armor in order to touch or to be touched? (Prologue, 479-80)

This extract gives us a good example of the reflection of the protagonist’s inner personality as described in the stage directions that I showed you in the previous section. Reading this monologue, we may notice an obvious variation in its sentence structures and a repeated rhythm. Roughly speaking, in addition to the fact that all the sentences in this monologue are rhetorical questions, the first four sentences consist of a ‘Why am I afraid’ structure, and the next four sentences are composed of a ‘Why must I’ structure. The repeated or similar use of these sentence structures enables the playwright to strengthen the repetition of the rhythm. In addition to this, in sentences from (1) to (8), the playwright locates mutually contrasting words between component X and Y, except for sentence (9), as Figure [2] below shows:

Figure [2]

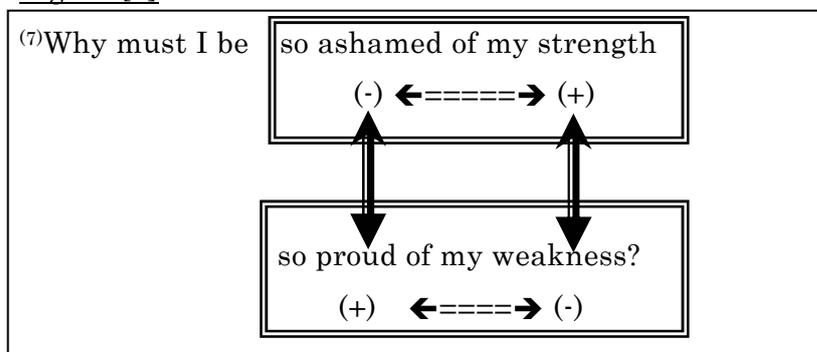


Looking at these sentence structures, it is worthwhile examining both the sentence structures and constituents of X and Y components in each sentence. In sentence (1) and (2), component X consists of the adjective 'afraid', which reflects a negative personal mind set, followed by a 'to Verb phrase', as in 'afraid to dance' or 'afraid to live', whereas the following component Y's mental verb 'love', denoting a positive mind set, followed by 'music and rhythm . . .' or 'life and beauty . . .', and through this the playwright tactfully juxtaposes mutually contrasting meaning units between the components X and Y in these two sentences. In similar ways, component X and Y in the following four sentences are composed of mutually contrasting meaning unit patterns; in sentence (3), 'afraid of love' in X and 'love love', in Y component; in sentence (4), 'afraid' in X and 'not afraid' in Y; in sentence (5), 'scorn' in X and 'pity' in Y; in sentence (6), 'hide myself' in X and 'understand' in Y.

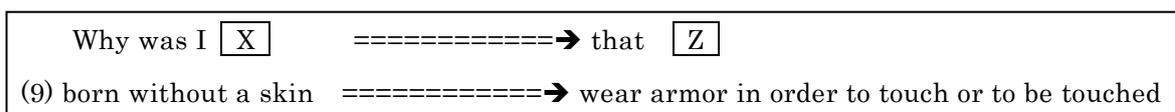
In sentence (7), both X and Y components consist of slightly more complex meaning units. Adjective phrases, 'so ashamed of' in X and 'so proud of' in Y, reveal the mutually contrasting mind sets of the speaker. In addition, looking at each word in the components, we quickly notice that a negative mind set adjective precedes a positive seeming noun while positive mind set adjective precedes a negative seeming noun: in component X, negative mind set adjective 'ashamed' precedes the positively viewed noun 'strength', while in component Y, the positive mind set adjective 'proud' precedes the negative sounding noun 'weakness', from which we may notice twin

contrasts in this sentence: one is the contrast between the X and Y components; the other is the contrast within each component, as Figure [3] shows:

Figure [3]



Sentence (8) has a X and Y contrast structure, similar to the previous examined sentences. However, sentence (9) has slightly different sentence structure, the usual X component of 'Why was I born' precedes 'that Z CLAUSE', as in Figure [2] shown previously:



In this sentence, Dion utters a self-direct question in component X, but in component Z, he laments his present state in which he 'wears armor in order to touch or to be touched'.

In quotation [2], barefaced Dion asks himself a sort of rhetorical question in component X, and in the following component Y, he expresses his self-image which he perceives in his heart but hides from the outer world, and through this image Dion shows the dark and spiritual personality contained in his inner self. A series of repeated or similar sentence structures lends these nine interrogative sentences not only emphasis or emotive heightening but a touch that is semi-poetical. Taking these things into consideration, quotation [2] gives us a good example of the protagonist verbalizing his inner personality which is described in the stage direction as 'dark, spiritual, poetic, passionately supersensitive, helplessly unprotected'.

As the play proceeds, Dion's real face becomes '*more strained and tortured, but at the same time, . . . more selfless and ascetic*'(484) in Act I, and in Act II, his face

changes into ‘*that of an ascetic, a martyr*’(497). In response to these descriptions in the stage directions, in Act I, naked-faced Dion seeks for God after quoting a line from the Bible, and in his last words in Act II Scene iii, he prays for his rival Brown’s happiness and quotes from the Bible again:

[3]

DION—(*suddenly reaches out and takes up a copy of the New Testament which is on the table and, putting a finger in at random, opens and reads aloud the text at which it points*) “Come unto me all ye who are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” (*He stares before him in a sort of trance, his face lighted up from within but painfully confused—in an uncertain whisper*) I will come—but where are you, Savior? (Act I Scene i, 484)

[4]

DION— . . . (*He begins, stops as if paralyzed, and drops on his knees by Brown’s chair, his mask falling off, his Christian Martyr’s face at the point of death.*) Forgive me, Billy. Bury me, hide me, forget me for your own happiness! May Margaret love you! May you design the Temple of Man’s Soul! Blessed are the meek and the poor in spirit! (*He kisses Brown’s feet—then more and more weakly and childishly*) What was the prayer, Billy? I’m getting so sleepy. . . . (Act II Scene iii, 510)

Concurrently the mask of Dion is also attaining ‘*a diabolical Mephistophelean cruelty and irony*’(498). The following quotation [5] provides a manifestation of the devil-like personality contained within the masked Dion:

[5]

BROWN— . . . (*then with forced good-nature*) ⁽¹⁾Well, Dion, at any rate, I’m satisfied.

DION— (*quickly and malevolently*) ⁽²⁾No! ⁽³⁾Brown isn’t satisfied! ⁽⁴⁾He’s piled on layers of protective fat, but vaguely, deeply he feels at his heart the gnawing of a doubt! ⁽⁵⁾And I’m interested in that germ which wriggles like a question mark of insecurity in his blood, because it’s part of the creative life Brown’s stolen from me!

BROWN—(*forcing a sour grin*) ⁽⁶⁾Steal germs? ⁽⁷⁾I thought you caught them.

DION—(*as if he hadn't heard*) ⁽⁸⁾It's mine—and I'm interested in seeing it thrive and breed and become multitudes and eat until Brown is consumed!

(Act II Scene iii, 508)

At first glance, this dialogue can be seen to contain rather interesting adjectival usage. Generally speaking, four of the five adjectives in this example ('satisfied', 'interested'[used twice] and 'creative') bear positive connotations in most everyday speech. However, in this dialogue, Dion uses them to convey malicious ideas about William Brown. As we know, the adjective 'satisfied' denotes a positive state of mind in many cases. But in sentence (3), masked Dion uses 'satisfied' in a negative sentence so that he can refute Brown's claim of his own satisfaction made in the preceding utterance. The adjective 'creative' is also used to describe a positive quality in many cases. This 'creative life' in sentence (5) would, if left by itself, have a positive meaning, but looking at the following relative clause, '(that) Brown's stolen from me', we may notice that the antecedent 'creative life' and the following relative clause form a sort of negative context as a whole, in which masked Dion succeeds in attacking Brown's behavior. In addition to these two adjectives, two uses of the adjective 'interested' provide quite interesting examples that reveal to us masked Dion's diabolical internal aspect. Thus it would be beneficial to our argument to give careful consideration to these two uses of 'interested' at this juncture.

In sentence (4), masked Dion mentions 'the gnawing of a doubt' in Brown's mind. In sentence (5), Dion turns this 'doubt' into a slightly more abstract expression 'germ', in which the protagonist is 'interested'. In everyday speech, the adjective 'interested' usually has no negative connotation by itself, and in the two uses in (5) and (8), by themselves only actually show Dion's interest. However the fact is that his interest lies in 'that germ' of 'the gnawing of a doubt' in Brown's mind, and in the hope that the 'germ' devours his rival. As a result, although these two 'interested' in sentences (5) and (8) carry superficially positive denotations, they, in sum, express the protagonist's diabolical Mephistophelean aspect, essentially by locating the 'germ' as the object of his interest and giving a description of the course of its development in the following constituents. Moreover in the description of the development of the 'germ' in the following relative clause in sentence (5) and the bare infinitive phrase in sentence (8), Eugene O'Neill subtly uses several verbs to let his protagonist express the extension of the malignant quality of the 'germ'. In the relative clause, Dion

describes ‘the germ which wriggles like a question mark of insecurity’. And in sentence (8), he delineates the vigorous development of this ‘germ’ as in ‘seeing it thrive and breed and become multitudes and eat until Brown is consumed’. What matters here most is that, through varying the verbs from ‘wriggle’ to ‘eat until Brown is consumed’, the playwright intends these verbs and speeches to be presented in their order of increasing semantic weight so that the speeches achieve mounting dramatic effect. Through collocating the malicious development of the ‘germ’ as the target of the adjectives ‘interested’, Eugene O’Neill succeeds in verbalizing the ‘positively evil’ aspect in masked Dion described as being ‘*diabolical Mephistophelean cruelty and irony*’ in the stage direction.

2. Analysis of William Brown’s Speeches

As we have focused on the characterization of Dion Anthony, the protagonist of the first half, it is now necessary to give quick consideration to that of the protagonist of the second half, William Brown, who takes over Dion’s mask in Act II Scene iii, and is divided into three selves: one that is Brown wearing William Brown’s mask, and one that pretends to be Dion by wearing his mask, and finally the naked faced Brown. Firstly, I’d like to consider Brown’s speeches in Act I and those for which Brown wears William Brown’s mask in Act III:

[6]

BROWN—(*acutely embarrassed*) Well, I—I just meant—you know, if you needed—(*A pause. He looks questioningly at her averted face—then ventures on another tack, matter-of-factly.*) I’ve got a proposition to make to Dion—if I could ever get hold of him. It’s this way: business has been piling up on me—a run of luck—but I’m short-handed. I need a crack chief draftsman darn badly—or I’m liable to lose out. Do you think Dion would consider it—as a temporary stop-gap—until he felt in the painting mood again?

MARGARET—(*striving to conceal her eagerness and relief—judicially*) Yes—I really do. He’s such a good sport and Billy and he were such pals once. I know he’d be only too tickled to help him out.

(Act I Scene ii, 491)

[7] [Brown wears William Brown's mask]

MARGARET—(*coldly*) I'd like some explanation. . . .

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

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

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

(Act III Scene i, 516)

In both quotation [6] and [7], we may notice one common diction or speech pattern, in which Brown argues with plausible logic as he tries to convince Margaret to agree to his proposal. In quotation [6], Brown explains his situation about how business being so prosperous that he has a need for a master draftsman, and asks Margaret in a modest tone whether Dion would accept his job offer 'as a temporary stop-gap'. In a similar way, in quotation [7], Brown in William Brown's mask persuades Margaret not to come to the office through a seemingly reasonable argument that it is all for Dion's sake, and that the design he is working on is absolutely vital to his 'whole future'.

In contrast to his speeches in William Brown's mask, when he wears Dion's mask, Brown gives free expression to his viciousness as in the following excerpt [8]:

[8] [Brown wears Dion's mask]

BROWN—(*with a show of tortured derision*) ⁽¹⁾Poor Billy! ⁽²⁾Poor Billy the Goat! (*with mocking frenzy*) ⁽³⁾I'll kill him for you! ⁽⁴⁾I'll serve you his heart for breakfast!

MARGARET—(*jumping up frightenedly*) ⁽⁵⁾Dion!

BROWN— (*waving his pencil knife with grotesque flourishes*) ⁽⁶⁾I tell you I'll murder this God-damned disgusting Great God Brown who stands like a fatted calf in the way of our health and wealth and happiness!

(Act III Scene iii, 522)

In this excerpt, as he pretends to be Dion in front of Margaret, Brown actually abuses and denigrates his original self. In this excerpt, he uses two verbs with extremely violent connotations, 'kill' and 'murder', which he never resorted to in the first half of the play nor when he wears William Brown's mask. Although the verb 'serve' itself has no negative denotation, it is framed in sentence (4) to convey a maliciously negative impression by placing 'his heart for breakfast' in object position to the verb 'serve'. In sentence (6), in addition to using the verb 'murder', Brown as masked Dion scorns Brown himself by collocating the negative meaning 'God-damned disgusting' with the 'Great God', which, when used, emerges as sarcasm in this context, and in the following relative clause, he derides Brown's existence as being that of 'a fatted calf' obstructing their happiness. By using such strong negative verbs and the sarcasm emitted by the collocation of positive and negative adjectives, Brown in Dion's mask has a style of speaking much different to that which he has in William Brown's mask.

Although Brown in Dion's mask utters malignant speeches, naked-faced Brown, confronting the agony of the disintegration of three egos, questions himself for the first time and prays to God as Dion did in the first half of the play:

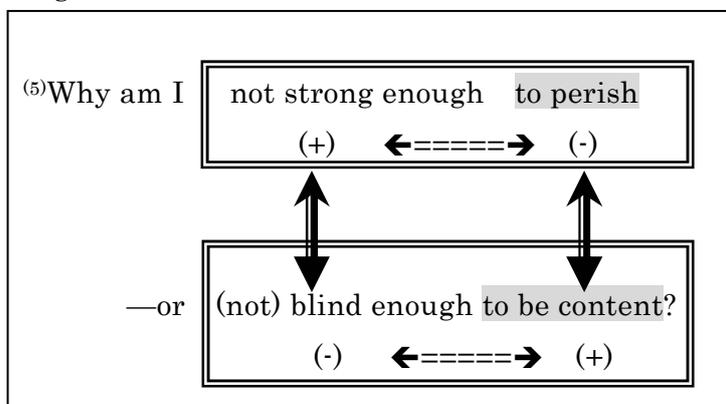
[9] [Naked-faced Brown]

BROWN— . . . (*He takes off the Dion mask and reaches out for the William Brown one—then stops, with a hand on each, staring down on the plan with fascinated loathing. His real face is now sick, ghastly, tortured, hollow-cheeked and feverish-eyed.*) ⁽¹⁾Ugly! ⁽²⁾Hideous! ⁽³⁾Despicable! ⁽⁴⁾Why must the demon in me pander to cheapness—then punish me with self-loathing and life-hatred? ⁽⁵⁾Why am I not strong enough to perish—or blind enough to be content? (*to heaven, bitterly but pleadingly*) ⁽⁶⁾Give me the strength to destroy this!—and myself !—and him!—and I will believe in Thee!

(Act IV Scene i, 524-5)

First three adjectives, ‘Ugly! Hideous! Despicable’, reveal naked-faced Brown’s evaluation of the design that he draws when he wears Dion’s mask, and these three pejorative adjectives reveal that naked-faced Brown rejects what he creates while pretending to be Dion, and he feels conflict between his ego as masked Dion and his own true identity which still resides in his heart. In sentences (4) and (5), which take similar sentence structures to Dion’s monologue in quotation [2], naked-faced Brown expresses self-doubt for the first time. In interrogative sentence (5), we may notice twin contrasts again: one between the two components and the other within each component, as Figure [4] below shows:

Figure (4)



In addition to this self-questioning, naked-faced Brown prays to God for the first time in sentence (6), although he had no need to pray in the first half of the play because of his self-assurance which gave him the unshakeable quality of having an unquestioning faith in his destiny to be successful. However, naked-faced Brown in the second half is divided into three selves, and confronts a profound conflict among those three egos. Finally in Act IV, naked-faced Brown prays for mercy, as quotation [10] below shows:

[10] [Naked-faced Brown]

BROWN—Mercy, Compassionate Savior of Man! Out of my depths I cry to you!
 Mercy on thy poor clod, thy clot of unhallowed earth, thy clay, the Great
 God Brown! Mercy, Savior! (Act IV Scene ii, 529)

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have tried to consider how Eugene O'Neill depicts the several aspects of a split-natured protagonist through the development of speeches by means of an examination of the variance of the vocabulary and sentence structures both in the naked-faced and masked speeches. In speeches by naked-faced Dion, by using a series of repeated or similar sentence structures, the playwright succeeds in giving both a semi-poetical touch and emphasis or emotive heightening to the protagonist's monologue. In addition to the sentence structures, by collocating mutually contrasting components within a self-questioning utterance, the playwright can depict the conflicts that the protagonist's inner self faces. Through this conflict Eugene O'Neill carries out the projection of the protagonist's dark and spiritual personality in the development of a series of self questionings. In contrast to speeches by naked-faced Dion, Eugene O'Neill uses different variations of the vocabulary in masked Dion's speeches, such as use of the positively connoted adjective 'satisfied' in a negative sentence, and the collocation of the pernicious development of the 'germ' as the target of the adjective 'interested', and by positioning verbs in the order of their increasing semantic weight. In the speeches by Brown's three different selves, while Brown in William Brown's mask argues with plausible logic, Brown in masked Dion deploys a deeply vicious choice of vocabulary such as 'kill' and 'murder', and adopts a different style of speaking which utilises biting sarcasm. However in speeches by naked-faced Brown, the playwright lets Brown use another speech pattern similar to that which naked-faced Dion uses, featuring the collocation of positive and negative vocabulary and the contrast of two components within a sentence. Through these linguistic variations, Eugene O'Neill succeeds in depicting his two protagonists' personalities' contradictory aspects.

NOTES

- ⁽¹⁾ Since the first performance, the mask device in this play has attracted much attention among O'Neill scholars. Some (e.g., Sogliuzzo 1966; Törnqvist 1969; Smith 1984) are concerned with the problem of 'mask-before-the world'. Others (e.g., Törnqvist 1969; Floyd 1985; Dubost 1997) mention the role of the protective façade of the mask. Still others (e.g., Yamanouchi 1964; Sogliuzzo 1966; Wainscott 1988) give consideration to the characteristic usage of removing or donning the

mask. Bogard (1972) and Floyd (1985) suggest that the mask is used as a means to show the transfer of personality from one man to another. Törnqvist (1969) and Floyd (1985) argue that the mask device seems requisite for manifesting the struggle visualized in the mask-face dichotomy.

⁽²⁾ All quotations here from *The Great God Brown* are cited from *Eugene O'Neill: Complete Plays 1920-1931*, ed., Travis Bogard (New York: The Library of America, 1988), 468-535. Henceforth, only the page is indicated in the brackets. All thought asides here are underlined.

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