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VARIATIONS ON A THEME: FOUR PLAYS

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No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a pebble were, as well as if a member of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

Beyond his physical and spiritual requirements, man needs to express his ideas and his emotions in the search for the answers

John Donne, "Devotions XVII," The Complete Prose and Selected Verse of John Donne and the Complete Poetry of William Blake, (New York, 1967), p. 132.

## Chapter One

### Introduction

Until man communicates, he feels a separation from others. He wants to know whether his experiences and his emotions are the same as others. The need to be aware of the beauty of the earth, of the smallness of man in the infinity of heaven, to recognize an unknown power greater than he, which he has called God, creates in man a desire to share this beauty, this power, this grandeur with someone. The loneliness of spirit is a part of man and it cannot be erased from his memory. It can be allayed, however, by a spiritual communion with others. It acts as a motivation for man to find reassurance that he is not alone: he needs the security of the knowledge that there are those who believe in him and love him. He also needs to try to understand his relationship to them and to God.

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.<sup>1</sup>

Beyond his physical and spiritual requirements, man needs to convey his ideas and his emotions in his search for the answers

<sup>1</sup>John Donne, "Devotions XVII," The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Donne and the Complete Poetry of William Blake, (New York, 1941), p. 332.

to an understanding of his world and his place in it. It is this need that Eugene O'Neill, Garcia Lorca, Archibald MacLeish, and Christopher Fry explore, and each finds his solution that answers the universal questions -- what is the reality of life and death? What is the essence of truth? Their answers are emotional ones; therefore we study the mood of the play to understand what the playwright is communicating.

as one of controlled emotion, erupting from time to time into unbridled love, hate and fear.

The alignment of the Bride and Leonards is horrifying to the Spanish peasant, whose whole life is built around a code of honor and has its roots in the institution of the Roman Catholic Church. The peasant lives on the soil, is a part of the soil; his outlook on life is governed by the aridity of the earth and the harshness of the elements; his sense of duty, honor, and love are as unyielding as its nature. His manner of living, which has been such the same for hundreds of years, forces him to find expression through practicing this code.

It is tradition which carries these people from generation to generation into marriages which in turn help to bring other marriages about... that is, since weddings.<sup>2</sup>

To wander from this rigid, unwritten set of rules is to commit an act against God and an act against the only source of pride in

<sup>2</sup>Anthony Arata, *Comedians*, "The Tragedies of Garcia Lorca," (Cam. 77, 1955), p. 473.

## Chapter Two

### Blood Wedding

Federico Garcia Lorca's BLOOD WEDDING has its roots in the life of the peasant. He has captured the passion, the honor, the poetry, and the quiet acceptance of his people through universal emotions and has presented them in a simple, direct, yet poetic style. The mood of this play and the daily life of the peasant is one of controlled emotion, erupting from time to time into unleashed love, hate and fear.

The elopement of the Bride and Leonardo is horrifying to the Spanish peasant, whose whole life is built around a code of honor that has its roots in the institution of the Roman Catholic Church. The peasant lives on the soil, is a part of the soil; his outlook on life is governed by the aridity of the earth and the harshness of the elements; his sense of duty, honor, and love are as unyielding as is nature. His manner of living, which has been much the same for hundreds of years, forces him to find expression through practicing this code.

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<sup>2</sup>Anthony Aratari, Commonweal, "The Tragedies of Garcia Lorca," (Aug. 12, 1955), p. 473.

his life. The Mother tells her son to go after his wife. To understand this concept is to understand the Spanish peasant, a man tied to the soil for his livelihood, yet needing to find a means of expression. His outlet of emotion is in his poetic manner of speaking. The Spaniard, like the Welshman and the Irishman, has an inbred sense of rhythm: Lorca illustrates this quality not only with his poetic images but also with the chorus-like, ritualistic songs in the wedding and funeral scenes, which contrast with the simple yet lyrical sounds of his everyday speech.

The greatness of Lorca is that, although we as Americans have never been exposed to peasant life and thought, we know and understand these people through Lorca's handling of character and circumstance. His symbolism is based on the superstition and folklore of the peasant. By analogy, the knife in cutting down the crops becomes the symbol of death. The Mother has had one son and her husband cut down by the knife, and she does not want her last son to use a knife, even to harvest the grain. Water symbolizes life and the flowing of her son's blood. The horse image in the lullaby foreshadows the death of Leonardo and his unconsummated love for the Bride. Leonardo is identified with his horse throughout the play, but the identification is expressed most strongly in the lullaby. Leonardo is the one who cannot drink from the stream, is killed by the dagger and drowns in the stream, which represents the Bride.

These images are woven in and out of the fabric of the play,

as is the star, which is used originally by the chorus to emphasize the purity of the Bride before her marriage. Afterward, the star is used by Leonardo's wife to describe the elopement of her husband with the Bride. She says, "With their arms around each other, they rode off like a shooting star."<sup>3</sup> The purity of the star's white light is created by the extreme heat. The star, therefore, represents not only purity but the passion of their love for one another. The irony of the symbolism is emphasized by Leonardo's wife telling of the flight, and by so doing, she sends out the party of men who will kill her husband. Again, honor is placed above love and life.

In the woods where two people are trying to find a haven for their love and others are trying to destroy that love, nature, in the form of the moon, is busy arranging the details for the deaths of Leonardo and the Bridegroom. The moon is in the guise of a simple wood-cutter, differentiated only by his pale face. His compatriot, Death, is also disguised, as a Beggar Woman. The moon desires their deaths in order to "enter a breast where I may get warm."<sup>4</sup> He makes sure there will be plenty of light to illuminate the woods so that there will be no chance of escape for Leonardo. Cold has always been identified by superstition with death, but

<sup>3</sup>Garcia Lorca, Three Tragedies of Garcia Lorca, (New York, 1955), p. 77.

<sup>4</sup>Garcia Lorca, p. 82.



Lorca extends the idea to include the cold of death warming the cold, blue light of the moon. The Beggar Woman, a representative of all the dirty old beggars found in every small town, slyly steals her way unnoticed through the lives of others, arranging their deaths. She is a figure too common to be noticed as being Death. She points the way to the lovers and, after the murders, goes to the house of the Mother to enjoy the sight of grief. Without her understanding it, however, a sense of dread and a feeling of foreboding that she brings a message of death pervades the house, and the young girls chase her away in fear.

This play is dominated by the two women, the Bride and the Mother. Each suffers a deep, unbearable grief, but each reacts to it in an entirely different way. The Bride is hysterical because her tragedy is not just the death of the two men, her husband and lover, but also the death of her youth and hope. She can no longer believe in the future; life will become, as it is to most peasants, a living from day to day, learning to accept life as she has been forced to accept death. She has fallen from the peak of excitement and desire:

and I'll sleep at your feet,  
to watch over your dreams.  
Naked, looking over the fields,  
as though I were a bitch.  
Because that's what I am! Oh, I look at you  
And your beauty scares me.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Garcia Lorca, p. 88.

to the depths of grief and unfulfilled passion:

Your son was my destiny and I have not  
betrayed him, but the other one's arm  
dragged me along like the pull of the  
sea, like the head toss of a mule, and  
he would have dragged me always  
always - even if I were an old woman and  
all your son's sons held me by the hair.<sup>6</sup>

The tragedy is that the Bride will never again feel that over-  
powering, magnetic pull of another human being. In time she will  
be like the Mother, living only from day to day.

The Mother is the stable Spaniard who longs for children to  
till the soil and brighten the home. She has lost a son and a  
husband in fights of honor; she desires to see her last remaining  
son married and with children, but her life-long desire cannot be  
fulfilled. Fate has destined him to be killed protecting his honor,  
killed by the same family that murdered his brother and father.  
The Mother's grief is inconsolable, and because it is, it is the  
contained, powerful grief of relief. No longer does she have to  
fear, for the worst has already happened. There will be no children,  
no new life, only silence and a permanent void of solitary existence.  
She is beyond feeling, beyond knowing anything but space. As the  
Bride screams at her to kill her, the Mother replies:

But what does your good name mean to me?  
What does your death matter to me? Blessed  
Be the wheat stalks, because my sons are  
under them; blessed be the rain, because it  
wets the face of the dead. Blessed be God,

who stretches us out together to rest.<sup>7</sup>

Here, the author has said all that can be said, and the curtain should slowly descend.

... through the retelling of the story of Job. He creates the mood of power and grandeur not by dramatizing the conflict between Job (J.B.) and God but through the struggle of Duss and Nickles to find what is real. This is the battle then, between truth and non-truth; between reality and non-reality. This is the way MacLain chooses to interpret the truth of Job and to apply it to today.

The setting is a circus, where Duss and Nickles, broken-down actors who assume the roles of God and Satan, reside at the top of a high platform. On the stage level Job lives out his story, while Duss and Nickles watch from above. This modern version of Job parallels the story of the book of Job, with minor adjustments for a modern audience. There are Job, his wife Sarah, the Comforters, and the tempter; the Greek chorus of Drones has been added to dramatize the various attitudes of the neighbors toward J.B. The play ends with the circus vendors, Duss and Nickles, entering and shaking their bags of balloons and popcorn to climb the ladder to their platform. After their wrestling for who will play whom, the story begins. Job is not an actor as they are: he is the real person living out the story. The opening of the play is a little too com-

<sup>7</sup>MacLain, *J.B.*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1958), p. 152.

<sup>7</sup>Garcia Lorca, p. 97.

### Chapter Three

#### J.B.

"He does not love. He is."<sup>8</sup> The power and grandeur of God -- this is the feeling MacLeish invokes through the retelling of the story of Job. He creates the mood of power and grandeur not by dramatizing the conflict between Job (J.B.) and God but through the struggle of Zuss and Nickles to find what is real. This is the battle then, between truth and falsehood; between reality and non-reality. This is the way MacLeish chooses to interpret the truth of Job and to apply it to today.

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<sup>8</sup> Archibald MacLeish, J.B., (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1958), p. 152.

trived. One can almost sense the attempt to try for a believable, if not realistic, situation. The setting of the circus suddenly becomes, with references to "they," a finite theatre where Zuss can call for lights and snap them on and off at a command, where suddenly a life is lived under the yawning hollow of the circus tent. These contrivances detract from the play, but we can still feel the inner quality of the man, J.B., and his ability to accept life as it is and God as He is. We can also feel the utter frustration of Nickles: his discovery that Hell is to see and to know; his inability to accept each day as it comes, and to accept God as He is.

Although it is J.B. who lives out his story, Zuss and Nickles are the commentators. We have said that they are struggling to find what is real. By characterizing them as broken-down actors, failures in life, MacLeish reinforces the idea that they are seekers of reality, not the reality. Their search is most evident when they are unable to distinguish the Voice of God. Each accuses the other of having spoken, (The audience, at times, has the same problem of distinguishing who is really speaking.) because each is unable to understand the difference between illusion and actuality. These are powerful characters with a certain simplicity, a certain faith. MacLeish succeeds in creating a mood, an emotion, because his people are so beautifully drawn; and as a result, his characters, through the purity of their speeches, come alive as deep, many sided individuals.

In spite of his tendency to be repetitious and melodramatic,

the quality of power shows itself in such speeches as:

Children know the grace of God  
 Better than most of us. They see the world  
 The way the morning brings it back to them,  
 New and Born and Fresh and Wonderful.<sup>9</sup>

MacLeish has managed to capture the zest and vitality of children, and to compare this vigor with something the adult can understand: the joy of watching the sun rise, of seeing a new day begin. This speech is from one of the magically magnetic scenes, the dinner scene, where we have our first glimpse of J.B.; and before the end of it, we know what kind of a man he is. He knows that the power and grandeur of God does not lie solely in God's omniscient might but, also, in the beauty of his creations, in the overwhelming glory of the gold of the forsythia, the green of the trees, the purple of the mountains, and the blue of the sky. His wife lovingly teases him throughout the scene for spending all his time watching the sun come up and fade again into night. The family shares the story of Patrick Sullivan, who did not understand that the answer to being successful is not luck, but faith in God. J.B. knows, though, and his faith in God shows through in his love for his wife and his children.

When J.B. goes through the crises in his life, we see this faith, or rather his acceptance of God, manifest itself. No one can understand him, neither the Comforters, nor Sarah, because their

<sup>9</sup>MacLeish, p. 31.

God is the Puritan God, the God of Justice, the God of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. No such God could kill innocent children, destroy a city and leave a man nothing but what faith he could cling to; so Sarah leaves him, the Comforters try to give advice and the Cronos laugh at him; J.B., however, remains faithful throughout, for his is the quiet acceptance of God. As he says, "To be, become and end are beautiful."<sup>10</sup>

Nickles, however, cannot accept this conception of God. In his struggle for what he believes is right, he is the most human of all characters. His bitterness is feigned. His sardonic wit hides only the deep pain of mental confusion. With a shrug, he accepts the role of Satan, but what he sees once he has looked out of the assumed mask forces him to strengthen the mental wall around him. When he cries out to J.B., he is expressing his hurt and anger at the world for being what it is. He is like J.B. in his weakness and in his yearning to understand the nature of God. Yet he cannot, he is a man subject to all the human weaknesses. His rather incomplete foil is Zuss. We say incomplete because Zuss is neither truly God-like nor human. Since he plays the role of God, he must show a certain inner peace; yet he is unable to recognize the Voice of God. Somehow, we never conceive a clear picture of Zuss, partly because we have difficulty sympathizing with an intolerably good man, and partly because, as a man, Nickles is the stronger, and, as Satan, is the more interesting character. Zuss

<sup>10</sup>MacLeish, p. 43.

exists and plays an integral part but never reaches the spiritual complexities of Nickles.

While Zuss and Nickles, in their assumed roles, manipulate J.B.'s private tragedies, the Messengers observe each one of them and are compelled to relate the details to J.B. There are physical and mental similarities between the First Messenger and Zuss and between the Second Messenger and Nickles. The First Messenger is a large, blustering man, as is Zuss, and the Second Messenger has the thin body, and the introverted personality of Nickles. The Second Messenger, like Nickles, is a much stronger character than the first, and is the one who must say: "I only am escaped alone to tell thee." It is he who suffers with J.B., and cries out, as do J.B. and Nickles, "Why?" The first Messenger states the facts with little sympathy and Zuss has much the same cold, impersonal manner. These Messengers retain the same personalities, regardless of their clothing (which changes with the scenes). By the device of the ceremony of putting on the masks and of changing their clothes, each becomes a different character but retains his individual personality throughout the play. Zuss and Nickles use the Biblical language when the masks are on, but there is no basic alteration in their attitudes. The Messengers, then, are the earthly embodiment of God and Satan.

Just as these Messengers represent God and Satan on earth, so the Comforters symbolize the modern rationalization of God. Their excuses, and that is what they are, are monotonously reiterated in



an attempt to explain why we are created, why we endure from day to day and what responsibilities we have to others, to ourselves, and to God. These apologies encompass "Guilt is a sociological accident,"<sup>11</sup> "Guilt is reality -- the one reality there is!"<sup>12</sup> and "God is history...History has no time for innocence."<sup>13</sup> The comforters -- the poets, the novelists, the preachers -- daily offer their excuses, which they use to solace themselves and to feed their own egos. Boris Pasternak understood this compulsion when he spoke of the Comforters as the

mediocre publicists who have nothing to say to life and the world as a whole, petty second-raters who are only too happy when some nation, preferably a small and wretched one, is constantly discussed -- this gives them a chance to show off their competence and cleverness and to thrive on their compassion for the persecuted.<sup>14</sup>

The Cronas, the poor, uneducated gossips found the world over, also make excuses, which are not sugared with years of education, but are based, instead, on their own necessities. They are unable to conceive of J.B. as the truly humble man of the dinner scene, because, in their ignorance and poverty, a man who eats while they starve is incapable of a deep spiritual emotion. The women live from hand to mouth, so that they cannot understand that a man who

<sup>11</sup>MacLeish, p. 121.

<sup>12</sup>MacLeish, p. 122.

<sup>13</sup>MacLeish, p. 120.

<sup>14</sup>Boris Pasternak, Doctor Zhivago, trans. Max Hayward and Manya Harari, (New York, 1958), p. 122.

has plenty will take the time to realize that it was God who gave him his wealth and to thank Him for it. These Cronos must rationalize their world just as the Comforters do; for to them, J.B. deserved to be more wretched than they, for he had possessed riches.

Having analyzed the characters that MacLeish has drawn, we can see how he also reinforces them through the use of certain technical devices, such as the height of the God-platform, the use of the God-mask and the Satan-mask, the characterization of the Messengers as Zuss and Nickles on earth, and the parallel of the Cronos with the Comforters. Zuss and Nickles climb the ladder to assume their roles: they never play God and Satan from any level but the highest, but when Nickles talks to J.B. he comes down from the platform because it is Nickles the man, not Nickles the devil, who is speaking. MacLeish uses masks in somewhat the same way Eugene O'Neill uses them in LAZARUS LAUGHED. There is great ceremony in putting them on and discarding them, almost to the point of over-emphasizing their symbolic value, which reminds us too often that Nickles and Zuss are only actors playing God and Satan. Again our concentration is strained by the shifting of the focus of attention from heaven to earth, and by so straining it, MacLeish destroys our empathy. With J.B., this is not a planned device as it is with Brecht in his theory of alienation, but it is heightened by the bareness of the stage and the division of the acting areas. The purpose of the bare platform stage is to emphasize the universality of Job's story, but, in reality,

it breaks into the intensity of the mood by forcing us to identify with more than one character; MacLeish, therefore, does not always succeed with his devices. Often he begins to draw a metaphor but leaves it before the shading is added: that is, his scenes are not thoroughly completed nor are his characters always fully developed. This contrived quality is apparent when he compares Zuss and Nickles with the Messengers. The comparison of Nickles with the Second Messenger almost succeeds: the Messenger needs only a little more compassion for J.B. In the scene in which the Messengers are reporters who manage to get a picture of Sarah just as she is told that her children are dead, MacLeish tries to say too much and in criticizing the press, he loses the comparison of the Messengers to God and Satan.

Also in the scene where Zuss and Nickles leave, there is a failure to follow through with the metaphor of the circus. This points up the contrived quality of the first scene. When they pick up their trays and abandon the God-platform and the stage, they convey the idea that God and Satan have finished their roles and that J.B. and Sarah no longer need their aid. The play should have ended here if the metaphor is to be carried out to its logical conclusion. The relationship of Zuss, Nickles, and the circus to the story of Job is lost with their exit. They leave as mortals yet retain the personalities assumed with their masks. Now, their game is over and J.B. and Sarah, who were not actors but people, must continue to live out their lives.

Sarah has run away from J.B. at the time of his greatest need for her. She has been unsuccessful in convincing him that there can be no justification for what they have suffered, and she deserts him when everything is gone -- children, money, even his health. When she returns to Job, she humbly asks forgiveness: "Look, Job, the forsythia, the first few leaves...not leaves though... petals."<sup>15</sup> In that one speech MacLeish captured the frustration, the despair, the loneliness of Sarah as well as her loss of pride, her humility, and her deep love for J.B. She ran away because she could not understand this God who could take everything; she returns to find acceptance, even hope, in her deep love for her husband. She uses the forsythia as a symbol of renewed hope to try to explain her love for him and why she ran away. Up to this point, Sarah has always received comfort from J.B.; she has never given it. Her love for him was evident, but she seemed incapable of giving him comfort. She deserted him because she could not help him: "You wanted Justice, didn't you? There isn't any! There's the world...."<sup>16</sup> By deserting him, though, she gained a new understanding and an acceptance of life. The play ends with J.B. cradled in her arms and with soft, melancholy words of hope on her lips. "Blow on the coal of the heart and we'll know...we'll know."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup>MacLeish, p. 149.

<sup>16</sup>MacLeish, p. 151.

<sup>17</sup>MacLeish, pp. 151-152.

Does Job's suffering have meaning? The answer is a complex one, for man can never understand God. We have seen the difficulty that he has in communicating the little that he knows: he can only accept. The reality is that God exists. J.B. cries out, as does all mankind, to find God, and to find an answer to life, and he succeeds - he sees and understands God. We realize that he understands when Sarah returns and J.B. says brusquely:

J.B.: Get up!

Sarah: Where shall I go?

J.B.: Where you went!  
Wherever!<sup>18</sup>

but he immediately softens as he asks "where?" The two of them must struggle to find a way to live with this new knowledge, but the tenderness of their reaffirmation of love illustrates that together they have found one plateau of acceptance and understanding and are ready to look for another. J.B. has gained new insight into the meaning of life. His suffering is not illusion but reality, the reality that God is Love.

<sup>18</sup>MacLeish, pp. 144-150.

Eugene O'Neill, *Jesus Christ, Mary and Joseph*, p. 476.

## Chapter Four

### Lazarus Laughed

There is Eternal Life in No, and there  
is the same Eternal Life in Yes! Death  
is the fear between!<sup>19</sup>

Lazarus returns from the grave, laughing in the exultation that there is no death, that life is eternal. While Lazarus is with them, the people of all nationalities and all walks of life drop their facades of scorn and hatred, which really conceal their fears; and under the infectious and hypnotic spell of Lazarus, they laugh. While he is with his followers they joyfully kill themselves so that the Romans will not have to kill them; while the Roman soldiers, also intoxicated with the laughter, leave their swords and hail Lazarus as Caesar. The moment Lazarus leaves them, however, they forget his laughter and sink back into their anxieties. The next day the soldiers return to recover their swords and, forgetting that it was not they who had killed them, loot the bodies of the dead followers.

When Lazarus preaches eternal life, he does not mean that man lives forever, but rather that life, incorporating all mankind, past, present, and future, is eternal. He says: "O man, fear not life! You die - but there is no death for man!"<sup>20</sup> We wonder how Lazarus can say that there is no death, since men do; nevertheless, Lazarus

<sup>19</sup>Eugene O'Neill, Lazarus Laughed, in *Nine Plays by Eugene O'Neill*, (New York, 1954), p. 387.

<sup>20</sup>Eugene O'Neill, p. 476.

maintains that there is peace and in that peace there is happiness. His laughter comes from the overwhelming joy of knowing that there is nothing to fear in death because there is no death. What follows death is ambiguous, as it needs must be, but O'Neill comes close to defining it when he says:

But as dust, you are eternal change, and  
 everlasting growth, and a high note of  
 laughter soaring through chaos from the  
 deep heart of God! Be proud, O Dust!  
 Then you may love the stars as equals! <sup>21</sup>

Since Lazarus does not fear death, he grows ever younger in his love of life; there is almost an inhuman quality about him as he grows younger and ever younger, and becomes a Christ figure who finally burns to death on a cross. He does not cry out, as did Jesus. He laughs in his pain, and, while he is burning, Caligula and the chorus beg him to tell them what is beyond life and he answers: "Life! Eternity! Stars and dust! God's Eternal Laughter!"<sup>22</sup>

The mood of the play alternates between uncontrolled joy and the deepest despair. Lazarus almost convinces us that there is nothing to fear but fear itself, but man, being human, doubts. He can never take the word of Lazarus and he can never be certain until he has experienced death; hence the pinprick of doubt grows until fear of the unknown overpowers hope and faith. Just as Lazarus fails in his mission, so does Eugene O'Neill fail in writing a moving drama.

<sup>21</sup>Eugene O'Neill, p. 417.

<sup>22</sup>Eugene O'Neill, p. 477.

The character of Lazarus is too static. Philosophically, he remains the same throughout the play. Only the people around him change their ideas. The repetition of the action, i.e. Lazarus hypnotizing a following and then losing it, and the style of the writing detract from the meaning of the play. O'Neill seems to be attempting something half-way between prose and poetry. His dialogue is verbose and awkward; the play, therefore, seems talky for all its action: parts of the chorus are very moving and exciting, but again, the repetition of ideas diverts attention away from the theme.

The concentration of the attention of the audience is broken by O'Neill's use of such experimental theatrical devices as the masks, the wire wigs, and the crucified lion. Of these the masks are the most successful: they serve to hide the insecurities of mankind and to represent the seven stages in life: Boyhood (or Girlhood), Youth, Young Manhood, Manhood, Middle Age, Maturity, and Old Age. They also show seven general types of personalities: the Simple, Ignorant; the Happy, Eager; the Self-Tortured, Introspective; the Proud, Self-Reliant; the Servile, Hypocritical; the Revengeful, Cruel; the Sorrowful, Resigned. The idea is a good one, but O'Neill carries it to the extreme by having many of the masks double lifesize, which creates problems of adequate maneuverability and proper voice quality. Another possible hindrance to the expression of the meaning is the melange of crimson, purple, and gold wire wigs in the palace. The audience would probably be completely distracted by the startling effect of the multicolored wigs. Another objectionable device in this sense is the broad overstatement of having



the lion crucified on stage. Although O'Neill achieves his point of showing the complete falseness of the Roman court, all of this distortion makes the action of the play difficult to follow.

As in J. B., the characters with the greatest depth are those who doubt. They are the ones who, in the final analysis, cannot accept the truth Lazarus would have them know. One of these is Caligula who has taught himself, out of fear for his life and a childish pride in being Caesar's heir, to hate and to kill. He is, however, a sensitive man, and he wants to believe in Lazarus. When he is finally able to laugh, it is a pure, rich joy that understands the pettiness of men and the infinity of God's world, but it is not a remembered joy, and he, too, forgets. In a blind, jealous rage because Lazarus laughs with his murderer and thus shares himself with Tiberius, Caligula kills Tiberius and allows Lazarus to die, but repentance and self-pity immediately follow. The old doubts and fears return because he cannot hold on to the image of fearlessness which Lazarus gave him. By killing the man who offered him spiritual freedom, Caligula kills himself. Despite all his brutality, we identify with Caligula because he symbolizes mankind: he is a man struggling to escape his own protective wall, which he has erected to keep others from knowing his weaknesses. Unlike Tiberius, he does not discover faith and die. He is left, instead, in a darker world because he has glimpsed the light of salvation, but it was gone before he could comprehend its meaning.

The other complex character is Miriam. Unable to understand the new Lazarus, yet following him in faith and love, she is torn between

her love for him and her inability to accept what he preaches. She grieves, when Lazarus would have her laugh. There can be no laughter for a mother who has watched her children die one by one and watched her husband sink into death out of sorrow and self-pity. Even though she has seen him come from the tomb with laughter in his heart, she cannot forget the pain of his death. She knows with a wife's instinct that his love is different: it is now a love for all mankind; the man she married is not the same who arose from the tomb. She wants to return to the protective warmth of their home in Bethany, to the cleanliness of the open air. She is afraid of death, not for herself, but for Lazarus, and she is ready to die when Pompeia and Tiberius force her to eat the poisoned peach:

Is it time at Last? My love has followed  
 you over long roads among strangers and each  
 league we came from home my heart has grown  
 older. Now it is too old for you, a heart  
 too weary for your loving laughter. Ever  
 your laughter has grown younger, Lazarus!  
 Upward it springs like a lark from a field,  
 and sings! Once I knew your laughter was my  
 child, my son of Lazarus; but then it grew  
 younger and I felt at last it had returned to  
 my womb - and ever younger and younger - until,  
 tonight, when I spoke to you at home, I felt new  
 birth-pains as your laughter, grown too young  
 for me, flew back to the unborn - a birth so  
 like a death!<sup>23</sup>

Yet in dying she discovers that there is only life, and her laughter is the sweet laughter of a young girl.

When Miriam laughs her understanding back to Lazarus, one knows - if there has ever been doubt - that there is no death. With the death

<sup>23</sup>Eugene O'Neill, p. 453.

of Lazarus, however, one knows that man is not yet ready to believe in eternal life and to keep his responsibility to God by living as if there were no death. The triumphant note reached with the deaths of Miriam and Lazarus fades away, as does the laughter, until only the void of silence is left.

This play is closely connected with music. The constant laughter, varying in its innuendos, is musical and could probably be handled better in cinematic form, where music and voices could be blended so that it would be difficult to tell one from another. Without the aid of music, the strain on the actors probably would be unbearable. To make the play successful, Lazarus and the chorus must be able to laugh for minutes at a time and to produce fine shadings of meaning in their laughter; a tighter, more cohesive structure than a stage production could be brought about by the electronics of movie making.

Regardless of its failures, Lazarus Laughed is a noble experiment, one that has moments of success, most notably the speeches of Miriam and Caligula. Its failures may be attributed partly to the inability of man to convey the emotions of the soul.

## Chapter Five

### The Lady's Nor For Burning

The joy of life, the communion of people and the humor of circumstances - these are the ideas Christopher Fry conveys through the delightful story of a man, Thomas Mendip, who wants to be hanged, and a young woman, Jennet Jourdemayne, who is to be burned as a witch though she pleads innocence. Fry gathers together a group of people of varying ideas and personalities, mixes them together with his poetic wit and serves up a concoction that is delectable and full of wisdom for those of us who would find it.

Thomas and Jennet are two slightly eccentric people who are trying to establish themselves in the world. Thomas thinks he finds his ideal in death:

A world unable to die sits on and on  
In spring sunlight, hatching egg after egg,  
Hoping against hope that out of one of them  
Will come the reason for it all; and always  
Out pops the arid chuckle and centuries of cuckoo-spit.<sup>24</sup>

and so he fights to throw off the shackles, the realities of life. Through Jennet, who represents the importance of love and the mutual sharing of ideas, he finds a new reason for living, a realization that he was searching for communication with someone, but not finding it, he chose another form of expression, hence his death wish. Until Jennet appeared, he was a lonely man searching for meaning and finding only bitterness. When both realize and admit their love for each other, no hollow promises are made that they will change their personalities.

<sup>24</sup>Christopher Fry, The Lady's Not For Burning, (New York, 1963), p. 13.

Their love is representative of the uncertainty of life, that which is neither wholly good nor wholly bad. Their relationship is based on the premise that living is a daily mystery to see if the circumstances and people one meets are able to counteract the bitterness and loneliness, but if their love should fail, lack of communication and isolation would result. This is the uncertainty, to discover if their love is strong enough to be their reality. We feel that Jennet and Thomas have found an answer, for through their love, they have discovered that life is a daily living, made pleasurable and exciting by the act of sharing it with another human being.

Love is the central theme in this play, so that it is important that we understand the kind of love Jennet and Thomas share. It is a feeling that springs from the communication of two people. Through the inner qualities of the mind and spirit they find that they can share the same emotions. There is no need, therefore, for passion: they need not even look at each other when speaking; in fact, not looking at each other heightens the magnetism of their attraction.

There are other kinds of love, however, represented in this play, but these attractions are entirely different from that of Jennet and Thomas. Humphrey and Nicholas Devize fall in and out of love, each enjoying his infatuation only while he thinks the other brother is interested in the woman. Their maneuvers to be alone with first Alizon and then Jennet are the pranks of two little boys showing off to win favor. The lure of the unknown attracts them: they are fascinated by Jennet because they think she is a witch. Humphrey, the older brother, even goes so far as to offer Jennet a chance at freedom

if she will sleep with him. He is only mildly hurt when she says she would prefer to die, and he soon tires of trying to convince her. Humphrey and Nicholas have no conception of deep love; they are only dabbling in something new. Richard and Alizon, Humphrey's fiance, experience a deep, lasting love, however, that has all the freshness of youth and innocence. Alizon has just left a convent to marry Humphrey. Because she has never really met any men, she seems to regard them as a totally different breed of animal. Her amazement at discovering that men are almost human, coupled with the myriad happenings in the first scene, leave her confused and a little dizzy. She seeks shelter with Richard, who is enamored of her sweetness and naivité. She finds in him a warm human being who understands her. As Alizon says:

I have become  
 A woman, Richard, because I love you, I know  
 I was a child three hours ago. And yet  
 I love you as deeply as many years could make me,  
 But less deeply than many years will make me.<sup>25</sup>

The only jarring note of this idyllic romance is that Richard and Alizon ran away. This is an immature answer to the problem. They return to bring Old Skipps, the man that Jennet is accused of turning into a dog, but they leave again to find happiness with each other.

All of the characters have this romantic quality, though. The Chaplain wants Jennet and Thomas to dance, but cries when he finds he cannot play his instrument well enough. He drinks to forget that Jennet is going to burn. The Mayor locks himself in his study to be

<sup>25</sup>Fry, p. 76.

with "his convictions." He also watches Jennet on her last night of life. These characters are simple, happy people. They expect to find contentment in life and, therefore, are relaxed and unworried. Margaret, who knows her sons, pays little attention to their flights into fancy. When Nicholas says he has murdered Humphrey, Margaret merely tells him to go and get his brother; this he meekly does. The Mayor also reflects this relaxed attitude when Thomas says he wants to be murdered.

I suspect an element of mockery  
 Directed at the ordinary decencies  
 Of life...  
 A sense of humor  
 Incompatible with good citizenship  
 And I wish you a good evening.<sup>26</sup>

Fry's style of writing reflects his ideas about his characters. There is a simplicity that makes it easily understood, in spite of his long metaphors. He is able to weave comedy, tragedy, and beauty in and out to create an illusion. His characters are real people, although their speech is poetry.

Out here? Out here is a sky so gentle  
 Five stars are ventured on it. I can see  
 The sky's pale belly glowing and growing big,  
 Soon to deliver the moon. And I can see  
 A glittering smear, the snail-trail of the sun  
 Where it crawled with its golden shell into the hills.  
 A darkening land sunken into prayer  
 Lucidly in dewdrops of one syllable,  
 Nunc dimittis. I see twilight, madam.<sup>27</sup>

Jennet displays the same quality of gentleness mixed with an inner strength. Although she knows the beauty of living and has found

<sup>26</sup>Fry, p. 18.

<sup>27</sup>Fry, p. 48.

an outlet for her emotions in being with her animals, she has been unsuccessful in her communication with human beings. She is one of those rare people society cannot destroy. She represents for them beauty and faith and hope. Through her honesty and sincerity, none of those who condemned her can bear the idea of her burning, because there is a vitality in her youth that is irresistible. While others wander in their search for solutions to life's riddles, Jennet knows what reality is, and needs only to find the person to share that answer with her. She finds that person in Thomas Mendip.

When all the problems are solved and the play ends, we inwardly cry for more; we want to live a little longer in this half-world, where truths are being uttered with every line. We are enthralled not only by the uniqueness of the situation but also by the pleasantness of the statement of the problem and the answer. Fry does not belabor us with the degradation of man; yet what else is he discussing when he pictures these blind folk believing in the superstitions of black magic? A young woman fights for her life against the charge of witchcraft while we, the audience, sit and smile at the beauty of the plot. Fry not only provides a happy answer to what reality is; ~~but~~ he also conveys a feeling of inner contentment that makes an evening in the theatre with him most enjoyable.



## Chapter Six

### Conclusion

The thread that runs through these characters and plays is the playwrights' search for the answers to what is death, reality, truth. They find their solutions through love, love of an individual, of mankind, or of God. Love, therefore, is the highest form of communication, one necessary to the emotional survival of man.

The appeal of these characters and these plays lies in a similarity of experience, of emotion, in the search for meaning. They communicate a feeling that others have experienced and therefore can share and understand. Besides fulfilling his own need for self-expression, each playwright also comments on the necessity of communication. By writing a play about a character who ponders one of the universal questions and finds an answer, an author is indirectly discussing the need for communion with his fellow man. As he has done, so the actor must study the ways in which the playwright has developed his characters and his ideas in order to present them before an audience. This, then, is what the writer has done. She has studied these characters and prepared to present them in order to express herself, while commenting on the need for that expression.

The writer's purpose in writing this paper was to analyze the plays and the characters so that she could be intellectually prepared to create these people on stage. Words on a printed page, however, cannot properly describe an emotion, such as grief, hatred, fear, love. There is no vocabulary, but it lacks the force and meaning without the voice quality and bodily movement to project it. Each character has his own individual

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voice quality for the same emotions, and it is this difference in personalities that makes acting interesting to me and makes people the individuals that they are.

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Appendix

Speeches that will be performed

"La Lona"

The Bride

The Father

Circo redondo en el río,  
ojo de las catedrales,  
sisa fingida en las hojas  
suy; ¡no podrán escaparos!  
¿Quién se oculta? ¿Quién maldice  
por la maleza del valle?  
La luna deja un cuchillo  
abandonado en el aire,  
que siendo asado de plomo  
quiere ser dolor de sangre,  
¡dejadme entrar! ¡Fuego halada  
por paredes!

BLOOD WEDDING

García Lorca

¡Brazos tejados y pechos  
donde pueda calentarse!  
¡Luzo frío. García Lorca  
de alfileritos metales,  
buscan la arista del fuego  
por los montes y calles.  
Pero me lleva la nieve  
sobre su espalda de jaspe,  
y me anega, dura y fría,  
el agua de los estanques.  
Pues esta noche también  
mis mejillas rojas sangre,  
y los juncos agrupados  
en los anchos pies del aire.  
¡No haya sobre mí emboscada,  
que no pueda escaparos!  
¡Que quiero entrar en un pecho  
para poder calentarme!  
¡Un corazón para mí!  
¡Calientos!, que se derrame  
por los montes de mi pecho;  
dejadme entrar, ¡ay, dejadme!

"La Luna"

The Bride

The Mother

(a las reves)  
No quiero sombras. Mis rayos  
han de entrar en todas partes,  
y haya en los frentes oscuros  
un rumor de claridades,  
para que esta noche tengan  
mis mejillas dulces sangre,  
y los juncos agrupados  
en los anchos pies del aire.  
¿Quién se oculta? ¡Afirmo digo!  
¡No! ¡No podrán escaparos!  
Yo haré salir al caballo  
una fiebre de diámetro.

## LA LUNA

Cisne redondo en el río,  
ojo de las catedrales,  
alba fingida en las hojas  
soy; ¡no podrán escaparse!  
¡Quién se oculta? ¡Quién solloza  
por la maleza del valle?  
La luna deja un cuchillo  
abandonado en el aire,  
que siendo acecho de plomo  
quiere ser dolor de sangre.  
¡Dejadme entrar! ¡Vengo helada  
por paredes y cristales!  
¡Abrir tejados y pechos  
donde pueda calentarme!  
Tengo frío. Mis cenizas  
de soñolientos metales,  
buscan la cresta del fuego  
por los montes y calles.  
Pero me lleva la nieve  
sobre su espalda de jaspe,  
y me anega, dura y fría,  
el agua de los estanques.  
Pues esta noche tendrán  
mis mejillas roja sangre,  
y los juncos agrupados  
en los anchos pies del aire.  
¡No haya sombra ni emboscada,  
que no puedan escaparse!  
¡Que quiero entrar en un pecho  
para poder calentarme!  
¡Un corason para mí!  
¡Caliente!, que se derrame  
por los montes de mi pecho;  
dejadme entrar, ¡ay dejadme!

(a las ramas)

No quiero sombras. Mis rayos  
han de entrar en todas partes,  
y haya en los troncos oscuros  
un rumor de claridades,  
para que esta noche tengan  
mis mejillas dulce sangre,  
y los juncos agrupados  
en los anchos pies del aire.  
¡Quién se oculta? ¡Afuera digo!  
¡No! ¡No podran escaparse!  
Yo haré lucir al caballo  
una fiebre de diamante.

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

Bride: From here I'll go on alone.  
You go now! I want you to turn back.

.....  
With your teeth, with your hands, anyway you can,  
Take from my clean throat  
The metal of this chain,  
And let me live forgotten  
Back there in my house in the ground.  
And if you don't want to kill me  
As you would kill a tiny snake,  
Set in my hands, a bride's hands,  
The barrel of your shotgun.  
Oh, what lamenting, what fire,  
Sweeps upward through my head!  
What glass splinters are stuck in my tongue!

.....  
The same hands, these that are yours,  
But which when they see you would like  
To break the blue branches  
And sunder the purl of your veins.  
I love you! I love you! But leave me!  
For if I were able to kill you  
I'd wrap you 'round in a shroud  
With the edges bordered in violets.  
Oh, what lamenting, what fire,  
Sweeps upward through my head!

.....  
I want from you neither bed nor food,  
Yet there's not a minute each day  
That I don't want to be with you,  
Because you drag me, and I come,  
Then you tell me to go back  
And I follow you,  
Like chaff blown on the breeze.  
I have left a good, honest man,  
And all his people,  
With the wedding feast half over  
And wearing my bridal wreath.  
But you are the one will be punished  
And that I don't want to happen.  
Leave me alone now! You run away!  
There is no one who will defend you.

.....  
I'll sleep at your feet,





ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

Mother: Is there nobody here?

My son ought to answer me. But now my son is an armful  
of shrivelled flowers. My son is a fading voice beyond  
the mountains now.

Will you shut up? I want no wailing in this house. Your  
tears are only tears from your eyes, but when I'm alone  
mine will come--from the soles of my feet, from my roots--  
burning more than blood.

.....  
I want to be here. Here. In peace. They're all dead  
now: and at midnight I'll sleep, sleep without terror  
of guns or knives. Other mothers will go to their win-  
dows, lashed by rain, to watch for their sons' faces.  
But not I. And of my dreams I'll make a cold ivory dove  
that will carry camellias of white frost to the grave-  
yard. But no; not graveyard, not graveyard: the couch  
of earth, the bed that shelters them and rocks them in  
the sky.

Take your hands from your face. We have terrible days  
ahead. I want to see no one. The earth and I. My  
grief and I. And these four walls. Ay-y-y! Ay-y-y!

.....  
I must be calm.

Because the neighbor women will come and I don't want  
them to see me so poor. So poor! A woman without even  
one son to hold to her lips.

Mother: She is not to blame; nor am I!

Who is, then? It's a delicate, lazy, sleepless woman  
who throws away an orange blossom wreath and goes looking  
for a piece of bed warmed by another woman!

.....

But what does your good name matter to me? What does  
your death matter to me? What does anything about any-  
thing matter to me? Blesséd be the wheat stalks, be-  
cause my sons are under them; blesséd be the rain, be-  
cause it wets the face of the dead. Blesséd be God,  
who stretches us out together to rest.

STARK CLEAN

Sarah: Look, Job: the forgotten  
The first few leaves...not leaves though...petals,

Where shall I go?

Among the ashes.  
All there is left of the town is ashes.  
Mouldering of ashes. Shattered glass.  
Glittering cliffs of glass all shattered  
Steeper than a cat could climb  
If there were cat J.B. all...

And the pigeons--  
They wheel and scuffle and whirl off  
Whirring Archibald MacLeish

And the silence--  
There is no sound there now--no wind now--  
Nothing that could sound the wind--  
Could make it sing--so dear--so dearway...

Only this.

Among the ashes!  
I found it growing in the ashes,  
Gold as though it did not know...

Sarah

I broke the branch to strip the leaves off  
Petals again...

But they so cling to life

Yes.  
You wanted justice, didn't you?  
Here isn't any. There's the world...

Cry for justice and the stars  
Will stare until your eyes sting. Weep,  
Hurricane winds will thrash the waters.  
Cry in sleep for your lost children,  
Snow will fall...

snow will fall...

I loved you.  
I couldn't help you any more.  
You wanted justice and there was none--

SCENE ELEVEN

Sarah: Look, Job: the forsythia  
The first few leaves...not leaves though...petals.  
.....

Where shall I go?  
.....

Among the ashes.  
All there is not of the town is ashes.  
Mountains of ashes. Shattered glass.  
Glittering cliffs of glass all shattered  
Steeper than a cat could climb  
If there were cats still...

And the pigeons--  
They wheel and settle and whirl off  
Wheeling and almost settling...

And the silence--  
There is no sound there now--no wind sound--  
Nothing that could sound the wind--  
Could make it sing--no door--no doorway...

Only this.

...  
Among the ashes!  
I found it growing in the ashes,  
Gold as though it did not know...

I broke the branch to strip the leaves off--  
Petals again!...

But they so clung to it!  
.....

Yes.  
You wanted justice, didn't you?  
There isn't any. There's the world...

Cry for justice and the stars  
Will stare until your eyes sting. Weep,  
Enormous winds will thrash the water.  
Cry in sleep for your lost children,  
Snow will fall...

snow will fall...  
.....

I loved you.  
I couldn't help you any more.  
You wanted justice and there was none--

Sarah: Only love.

.....  
But we do. That's the wonder.  
.....

Yes, I left you.  
I thought there was a way away...

Water under bridges opens  
Closing and the companion stars  
Still float there afterwards. I thought the door  
Opened into closing water.  
.....

Oh, I never could!  
I never could! Even the forsythia...

Even the forsythia beside the  
Stair could stop me.  
.....

Then blow on the coal of the heart, my darling.  
.....

It's all the light now.

Blow on the coal of the heart.  
The candles in churches are out.  
The lights have gone out in the sky.  
Blow on the coal of the heart  
And we'll see by and by...

We'll see where we are.

The wit won't burn and the wet soul smoulders.  
Blow on the coal of the heart and we'll know...  
We'll know...

Chorus: Laugh! Laugh!  
Fear is no more!  
There is no death!  
There is only life!  
There is only laughter!  
Laugh! Laugh!  
Death is no more!  
Death is dead!  
Laugh!

LAZARUS LAUGHED

Laugh! Laugh!  
Death is dead!  
Laugh! - But  
There lies our dead!  
Oh, shame and guilt!  
We forget our dead!  
Woe to us, woe!  
There lies our dead!

Eugene O'Neill

Laugh! Laugh!  
There is only life!  
There is only - Chorus  
Laugh -

Chorus

Miriam

Oh, Lazarus, laugh!  
Do not forsake us!  
We forget!  
Where is thy love fled?  
Give back thy laughter,  
Thy fearless laughter!  
We forget!  
Death ainks out  
Of his grave in the hearts  
Of hosts of fear  
Crawp back in the brain!  
We remember fear!  
We remember death!  
Forgotten is laughter!  
We remember  
Only death!  
Fear is God!  
Forgotten is laughter!  
Life is death!  
Life is a fearing, a long dying,  
From birth to death!  
God is a slayer!  
Life is death!

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

Chorus: Laugh! Laugh!  
Fear is no more!  
There is no death!  
There is only life!  
There is only laughter!  
Laugh! Laugh!  
Death is no more!  
Death is dead!  
Laugh!

.....  
Laugh! Laugh!  
Death is dead!  
Laugh! - But woe!  
There lies our dead!  
Oh, shame and guilt!  
We forget our dead!  
Woe to us, woe!  
There lies our dead!

.....  
Laugh! Laugh!  
There is only life!  
There is only -  
Laugh -

.....  
Oh, Lazarus, laugh!  
Do not forsake us!  
We forget!  
Where is thy love fled?  
Give back thy laughter,  
Thy fearless laughter!  
We forget!  
Death slinks out  
Of his grave in the heart!  
Ghosts of fear  
Creep back in the brain!  
We remember fear!  
We remember death!  
Forgotten is laughter!  
We remember  
Only death!  
Fear is God!  
Forgotten is laughter!  
Life is death!  
Life is a fearing, a long dying,  
From birth to death!  
God is a slayer!  
Life is death!



ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

Miriam: Lazarus! I could not bear that aching hunger of my empty heart if you should die again!

.....

I wish we were home, Lazarus. This Roman world is full of evil. These skies threaten. These hearts are heavy with hatred. There is a taint of blood in the air that poisons the breath of the sea. These columns and arches and thick walls seem waiting to fall, to crush these rotten men and then to crumble over the bones that raised them until both are dust. It is a world deadly to your joy, Lazarus. Its pleasure is a gorging of dirt, its fulfilled desire a snoring in a sty in the mud among swine. Its will is so sick that it must kill in order to be aware of life at all. I wish we were home, Lazarus. I begin to feel horror gnawing at my breast. I begin to know the torture of the fear of death, Lazarus - not of the passing of your man's body but of the going away from me of your laughter which is to me as my son, my little boy!

.....

On the hills near Bethany you might pray at noon and laugh your boy's laughter in the sun and there would be echoing laughter from the sky and up from the grass and distantly from the shining sea. We would adopt children whose parents the Romans had

Miriam: butchered, and their laughter would be around me in  
my home where I cooked and weaved and sang. And in  
the dawn at your going out, and in the evening on  
your return, I would hear in the hushed air the  
bleating of sheep and the tinkling of many little  
bells and your voice. And my heart would know peace.  
.....

I may not laugh either. My heart remains a little  
dead with Lazarus in Bethany. The miracle could not  
revive all his old husband's life in my wife's heart.  
.....  
Lazarus!

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

Miriam: May I accept. Lazarus? Is it time at last: My love has followed you over long roads among strangers and each league we came from home my heart has grown older. Now it is too old for you, a heart too weary for your loving laughter. Even your laughter has grown younger, Lazarus! Upwards it springs like a lark from a field, and sings! Once I knew your laughter was my child, my son of Lazarus; but then it grew younger and I felt at last it had returned to my womb - and ever younger and younger - until, tonight, when I spoke to you of home, I felt new birth-pains as your laughter, grown too young for me, flew back to the unborn - a birth so like a death! May I accept it, Lazarus? You should have newborn laughing hearts to love you. My old one labors with memories and its blood is sluggish now with the past. Your home on the hills of space is too far away. My heart longs for the warmth of close walls of earth baked in the sun. Our home in Bethany, Lazarus, where you and my children lived and died. Our tomb near our home, Lazarus, in which you and my children wait for me. Is it time at last?

.....

Say what you like, it is much better I should go home first, Lazarus. We have been away so long, there will

.....

Miriam: be so much to attend to about the house. And all the children will be waiting. You would be as helpless as a child, Lazarus. Between you and the children, things would soon be in a fine state! No, no! You cannot help me, dearest one. You are only in my way. No, I will make the fire. When you laid it the last time, we all had to run for our lives, choking, the smoke poured from the windows, the neighbors thought the house was burning! You are so impractical. The neighbors all got the best of you. Money slips through your fingers. If it was not for me - But, dearest husband, why do you take it so to heart? Why do you feel guilty because you are not like other men? That is why I love you so much. Is it a sin to be born a dreamer? But God, he must be a dreamer, too, or how would we be on earth? Do not keep saying to yourself so bitterly, you are a failure in life! Do not sit brooding on the hilltop in the evening like a black figure of Job against the sky! Even if God has taken our little ones - yes, in spite of sorrow - have you not a good home I make for you, and a wife who loves you? Be grateful then - for me! Smile, my sad one! Laugh a little once in a while! Come home, bringing me laughter of the wind from the hills! What a mellow, sweet fruit! Did you bring it home for me? (Dies.)

.....

Miriam: Yes! There is only life! Lazarus, be not lonely!

(Laughter.)

ACT ONE

Jennet: Will anyone say  
that I don't understand that I don't every day  
stand in on the quiet circle of a family  
in prayer? Not quite so unconsciously,  
or so shamefully near a flood of tears,  
or looking so surely as I surely do. Will you  
Jennet's self

THE LADY'S NOT FOR BURNING

There are houses in the garden of the Magpie,  
First Lane's Field, Chick Alley and Poorwall Road  
in the city of Christopher Fry

Magpie: I've gone over them all.

Jennet: I was ignorant.

They were burning and bowling for me, as though I were  
like a dog. So I took to my toes, thank God  
I was saved by a small girl in a shawl  
like a girl the head of her daisy-chain Jennet  
and a boy named what-boy  
the police at me. They say I have changed a man  
and a dog.

Magpie: It isn't a dog at all.

It's a braggart, an appealing, rueful, brindle black  
with grey fleas. Are you a gentleman  
with a dog, friendly wisdom?

Jennet: Oh, this is the reasonable  
white wicket I promise not to leave behind me  
leaving behind me of black magic, or any families  
with a sign of beetles which might preach  
heresy in your shirting-board.

I am aged or snowed so that I shouldn't bring in  
the old Egyptian sand which drifts at night,  
the willow, into the corners of my house  
and then with the approach of naked morning  
shine like the fire like a shadow of goldfinches,  
the white, the white, the wild  
the dog will

ACT ONE

Jennet: Will someone say  
Come in? And understand that I don't every day  
Break in on the quiet circle of a family  
At prayers? Not quite so unceremoniously,  
Or so shamefully near a flood of tears,  
Or looking as unruly as I surely do. Will you  
Forgive me?

.....  
Do you know how many walls  
There are between the garden of the Magpie,  
Past Lazer's field, Slink Alley and Poorsoul Pond  
To the gate of your paddock?

.....  
Eight. I've come over them all.

.....  
Indeed, I was ignorant.  
They were hooting and howling for me, as though echoes  
Could kill me. So I took to my toes, Thank God  
I only passed one small girl in a shady  
Ditch telling the beads of her daisy-chain.  
And a sad rumped idiot-boy  
Who smiled at me. They say I have changed a man  
Into a dog.

.....  
But it isn't a dog at all.  
It's a bitch; an appealing, rueful, brindle bitch  
With many fleas. Are you a gentleman  
Full of ripe, friendly wisdom?

.....  
Thank you. Oh, this is the reasonable  
World again! I promise not to leave behind me  
Little flymarks of black magic, or any familiars  
Such as mice or beetles which might preach  
Demonology in your skirting-board.  
I have wiped my shoes so that I shouldn't bring in  
The soft Egyptian sand which drifts at night,  
They tell me, into the corners of my house  
And then with the approach of naked morning  
Flies into the fire like a shadow of goldfinches.  
The tales unbelievable, the wild  
Tales they tell!

Jennet: Asking to be punished? Why, no, I have come  
Here to have the protection of your laughter.  
They accuse me of such a brainstorm of absurdities  
That all my fear dissolves in the humour of it.  
If I could perform what they say I can perform  
I should have got safely away from here  
As fast as you bat your eyelid.

.....  
They say I have only  
To crack a twig, and over the springtime weathercocks  
Cloudburst, hail and gale, whatever you will,  
Come leaping fury-foremost.

.....  
They also say that I bring back the past;  
For instance, Helen comes,  
Brushing the maggots from her eyes,  
And, clearing her throat of several thousand years,  
She says 'I loved...'; but cannot any longer  
Remember names. Sad Helen. Or Alexander, wearing  
His imperial cobwebs and breastplate of shining worms  
Wakens and looks for his glasses, to find the empire  
Which he knows he put beside his bed.

.....  
They tell one tale that once, when the moon  
Was gibbous and in a high dazed state  
Of nimbus love, I shook a jonquil's dew  
On to a pearl and let a cricket chirp  
Three times, thinking of pale Peter:  
And there Titania was, vexed by a cloud  
Of pollen, using the sting of a bee to clean  
Her nails and singing, as drearily as a gnat,  
'Why try to keep clean?'

.....  
Can you be serious? I am Jennet Jourdemayne  
And I believe in the human mind. Why play with me  
And make me afraid of you, as you did for a moment,  
I confess it. You can't believe--oh, surely, not  
When the centuries of the world are piled so high--  
You'll not believe what, in their innocence,  
Those old credulous children in the street  
Imagine of me?

.....  
What, does everyone still knuckle  
And suckle at the big breast of irrational fears?  
Do they really think I charm a sweat from Tagus,  
Or lure an Amazonian gnat to fasten  
On William Brown and shake him till he rattles?



Jennet: Can they think and then think like this?  
May I, Jennet Jourdemayne, the daughter  
Of a man who believed the universe was governed  
By certain laws, be allowed to speak?  
Jennet: Here is such a storm of superstition  
And humbug and curious passions, where will you start  
To look for the truth? Am I in fact  
An enchantress bemused into collaboration  
With the enemy of man? Is this the enemy,  
This eccentric young gentleman never seen by me  
Before? I say I am not. He says perhaps  
He is. You say I am. You say he is not.  
And now the eccentric young gentleman threatens us all  
With imminent cataclysm. If, as a living creature,  
I wish in all good faith to continue living,  
Where do you suggest I should lodge my application?  
.....

Thank you for that.  
Did speak of the world I thought I was talking to  
Was working. What horror is walking round me here  
Because nothing is as it appears to be.  
That's the deep water of childhood had to swim in.  
My father was drowned in it.  
.....

In the pursuit of alchemy.  
In refusing to accept your dictum 'It is  
What it is.' Poor father. In the end he walked  
In Science like the dumbest night. And yet  
He was greatly gifted.  
Even he was born he gave an algebraic  
Oy; at one glance measured the cubic content  
Of that ivory cone his mother's breast  
And multiplied his appetite by five.  
By he mastered by a progression, gained  
Experience by correlation, expanded  
Into a marriage by contraction, and by  
Certain physical dynamics  
Formulated me. And on he went  
Still deeper into the calculating twilight  
Under the swishing of five-pointed figures  
Still Truth booms for him the sum of sine  
And Death the long division. My poor father,  
What years and powers he wasted.  
He thought he could change the matter of the world  
From the poles to the simultaneous equator  
By strange experiment and by describing  
Numerical parabolas.  
.....

ACT TWO

Jennet: Twilight, double, treble, in and out!  
If I try to find my way I bark my brain  
On shadows sharp as rocks where half a day  
Ago was a wild soft world, a world of warm  
Straw, whispering every now and then  
With rats, but possible, possible, not this,  
This where I'm lost. The morning came, and left  
The sunlight on my step like any normal  
Tradesman. But now every spark  
Of likelihood has gone. The light draws off  
As easily as though no one could die  
To-morrow.

.....  
Thank you for that.  
You speak of the world I thought I was waking to  
This morning. But horror is walking round me here  
Because nothing is as it appears to be.  
That's the deep water my childhood had to swim in.  
My father was drowned in it.

.....  
In the pursuit of alchemy.  
In refusing to accept your dictum 'It is  
What it is.' Poor father. In the end he walked  
In Science like the densest night. And yet  
He was greatly gifted.  
When he was born he gave an algebraic  
Cry; at one glance measured the cubic content  
Of that ivory cone his mother's breast  
And multiplied his appetite by five.  
So he matured by a progression, gained  
Experience by correlation, expanded  
Into a marriage by contraction, and by  
Certain physical dynamics  
Formulated me. And on he went  
Still deeper into the calculating twilight  
Under the twinkling of five-pointed figures  
Till Truth became for him the sum of sums  
And Death the long division. My poor father.  
What years and powers he wasted.  
He thought he could change the matter of the world  
From the poles to the simultaneous equator  
By strange experiment and by describing  
Numerical parabolas.

Jennet: Why do they call me a witch?  
Remember my father was an alchemist.  
I live alone, preferring loneliness  
To the companionable suffocation of an aunt.  
I still amuse myself with simple experiments  
In my father's laboratory. Also I speak  
French to my poodle. Then you must know  
I have a peacock which on Sundays  
Dines with me indoors. Not long ago  
A new little serving maid carrying the food  
Heard its cry, dropped everything and ran,  
Never to come back, and told all whom she met  
That the Devil was dining with me.

.....  
I know of none. I'm an unhappy fact  
Fearing death. This is a strange moment  
To feel my life increasing, when this moment  
And a little more may be for both of us  
The end of time. You've cast your fishing-net  
Of eccentricity, your seine of insanity  
Caught me when I was already lost  
And landed me with despairing gills on your own  
Strange beach. That's too inhuman of you.

.....  
It means I care whether you live or die.  
You have cut yourself a shape on the air, which may be  
My scar.

.....  
Why should that be?  
If you're afraid of your shadow falling across  
Another life, shine less brightly upon yourself,  
Step back into the rank and file of men,  
Instead of preserving the magnetism of mystery  
And your curious passion for death. You are making yourself  
A breeding-ground for love and must take the consequences.  
But what are you afraid of, since in a little  
While neither of us may exist? Either of both  
May be altogether transmuted into memory,  
And then the heart's obscure indeed.

.....  
Sluts are only human. By a quirk  
Of unastonished nature, your obscene  
Decaying figure of vegetable fun  
Can drag upon a woman's heart, as though  
Heaven were dragging up the roots of hell.  
What is to be done? Something compels us into  
The terrible fallacy that man is desirable  
And there's no escaping into truth. The crimes

Jennet: And cruelties leave us longing, and campaigning  
Love still pitches his tent of light among  
The suns and moons. You may be decay and a platitude  
Of flesh, but I have no other such memory of life.  
You may be corrupt as ancient apples, well then  
Corruption is what I most willingly harvest.  
You are Evil, Hell, the Father of Lies; if so  
Hell is my home and my days of good were a holiday:  
Hell is my hill and the world slopes away from it  
Into insignificance. I have come suddenly  
Upon my heart and where it is I see no help for.

.....  
I hardly hope I'm beginning  
To understand you.

.....  
You mean you give us a choice:  
To sleep with you, or to-morrow to sleep with my fathers  
And if I value the gift of life,  
Which, dear heaven, I do, I can scarcely refuse.

.....  
Admirable sense.  
Oh, why, why am I not sensible?  
Wildly enough, I hesitate. Can I  
So dislike being cornered by a young lover  
That I should rather die? That would be  
The easiest pitch of pride. Indeed, it might  
Even be wise. Can I believe my ears?  
I seem to be considering heaven. And heaven,  
From this angle, seems considerable.

.....  
We have  
To look elsewhere—for instance, into my heart  
Where recently I heard begin  
A bell of longing which calls me out to church.  
But need that, ringing anyway in vain,  
Draws the milkmaid singing in my blood  
And freers into the tolling of my knell?  
That would be pretty, indeed, but unproductive.  
No, it's the time-----

.....  
I am interested  
In my feelings. I seem to wish to have some importance  
Be the play of time. If not,  
Then sad was my mother's pain, and my breath,  
And the articulation of my bones.

ACT THREE

Jennet: It is hard to live last hours  
As the earth deserves. Must you bring closer the time  
When, as night yawns under my feet,  
I shall be cast away in the chasm of dawn?  
I am tired with keeping my thoughts clear of that verge.  
.....

Hope can break the heart, Humphrey. Hope  
Can be too strong.  
.....

I fondly hope I'm beginning  
To misconstrue you.  
.....

You mean you give me a choice:  
To sleep with you, or to-morrow to sleep with my fathers  
And if I value the gift of life,  
Which, dear heaven, I do, I can scarcely refuse.  
.....

Admirable sense.  
Oh, why, why am I not sensible?  
Oddly enough, I hesitate. Can I  
So dislike being cornered by a young lecher  
That I should rather die? That would be  
The maniac pitch of pride. Indeed, it might  
Even be sin. Can I believe my ears?  
I seem to be considering heaven. And heaven,  
From this angle, seems considerable.  
.....

We have  
To look elsewhere--for instance, into my heart  
Where recently I heard begin  
A bell of longing which calls no one to church.  
But need that, ringing anyway in vain,  
Drown the milkmaid singing in my blood  
And freeze into the tolling of my knell?  
That would be pretty, indeed, but unproductive.  
No, it's the time-----  
.....

I am interested  
In my feelings. I seem to wish to have some importance  
In the play of time. If not,  
Then sad was my mother's pain, sad my breath,  
Sad the articulation of my bones,

Jennet: Sad, sad my alacritous web of nerves,  
Woefully, woefully sad my wondering brain,  
To be shaped and sharpened into such tendrils  
Of anticipation, to feed the swamp of space.  
What is deep, as love is deep, I'll have  
Deeply. What is good, as love is good  
I'll have well. Then if time and space  
Have any purpose, I shall belong to it.  
If not, if all is a pretty fiction  
To distract the cherubim and seraphim  
Who so continually do cry, the least  
I can do is to fill the curled shell of the world  
With human deep-sea sound, and hold it to  
The ear of God, until he has appetite  
To taste our salt sorrow on his lips.  
And so you see it might be better to die.  
Though, on the other hand, I admit it might  
Be immensely foolish.

.....