The Emperor Jones Study Guide

The Emperor Jones by Eugene O'Neill

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

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

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

BOOKRAGS

Contents

The Emperor Jones Study Guide....1

Contents....2

Introduction....4

Author Biography....5

Plot Summary....6

Act 1, Scene 1....9

Act 1, Scene 2....11

Act 1, Scene 3....12

Act 1, Scene 4....13

Act 1, Scene 5....14

Act 1, Scene 6....15

Act 1, Scene 7....16

Act 1, Scene 8....17

Characters....18

Themes....20

Style....23

Historical Context....25

Critical Overview....27

Criticism....29

Critical Essay #1....30

Critical Essay #2....34

Critical Essay #3....36

Adaptations....39

Topics for Further Study....40

Compare and Contrast....41

What Do I Read Next?....43

Further Study....44

Bibliography....46

Copyright Information....47

Introduction

The Emperor Jones was part of an amazing first year for O'Neill as a Broadway playwright. His very first Broadway play, *Beyond the Horizon,* had appeared in February of 1920 and eventually won him the Pulitzer Prize for drama, but *The Emperor Jones* was so successful in its Off-Broadway production in November that it moved to Broadway by the end of the same year and became another high-profile success for the newly acclaimed playwright. By 1930, at the end of an astoundingly productive first decade, O'Neill was widely recognized as America's greatest dramatist.

The Emperor Jones was also the first of several experiments with Expressionism for O'Neill. O'Neill found inspiration for Expressionism in the work of Swedish playwright August Strindberg (1849-1912), whose *A Dream Play* (1902) and *The Ghost Sonata* (1907) explored and represented on stage complex states of mind, eschewing realistic style and imitating instead the fluid associative structure of human consciousness. After *The Emperor Jones,* O'Neill used expressionistic techniques most fully in *The Hairy Ape* (1922) and to some extent in *Strange Interlude* (1928), where his five-hour play focused on the interior monologue of its main character, Nina Leeds.

The Emperor Jones was also the first American play to offer an racially integrated cast to a Broadway audience and feature a black actor in its leading role. Prior to O'Neill's ground breaking drama, black roles in integrated productions were played by Caucasians in black-face makeup. But O'Neill insisted that black actor Charles Gilpin play Brutus Jones in the Provincetown Playhouse premiere of *The Emperor Jones,* and a precedent was set that would eventually lead to this country's present level of racial equality in the arts.

Author Biography

Apparently destined for a life in the theatre, Eugene O'Neill was not only born the son of an extremely popular American stage actor, James O'Neill (1846-1920); he was also literally born on Broadway October 16, 1888in the since demolished Barrett House family hotel on Broadway and Forty-third Street (the area presently called Times Square), while James O'Neill was touring in his most famous role as the Count of Monte Cristo. O'Neill's childhood and adolescence were mostly unhappy because of his unstable family life, and many of his plays, especially his most famous play, *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956), focused on disturbed, dysfunctional families.

O'Neill's formal schooling culminated in very brief stints at both Princeton and Harvard. His short stay at Princeton included a two-week suspension in 1907 for an act of drunken vandalism. After a short and unsuccessful first marriage, O'Neill's next few years included a mining expedition to Honduras, several stints as a seaman, an attempted suicide, and a bout with tuberculosis. O'Neill spent an academic year at Harvard (1914-15) studying playwrighting under the famous teacher, George Pierce Baker.

In the spring of 1916, the twenty-seven-year-old O'Neill became acquainted with a group of New York actors doing informal summer theatre in Provincetown, Massachusetts, and these "Provincetown Players" gave O'Neill's one-act plays their first productions. When the group officially organized and moved back to Greenwich Village for a winter season, they brought O'Neill's plays with them, and he soon became known as a promising new playwright.

O'Neill's first Broadway play, *Beyond the Horizon* (1920), earned him his first Pulitzer Prize for Drama (he would earn three more, one posthumously), and this initial Broadway success was almost immediately followed in the same year by *The Emperor Jones.* Initially produced by the Provincetown group in Greenwich Village, this startlingly new "expressionistic" play starring black actor Charles Gilpin was so successful Off-Broadway that it moved "uptown" to a Broadway theatre and has since become one of O'Neill's most famous plays.

During the 1920s, O'Neill was enormously successful, becoming the first American playwright to garner an international reputation. However, by the late-1930s, interest in O'Neill's work had cooled, and though he had earned America's first Nobel Prize for Literature in 1936, O'Neill's reputation did not return to its former high status during his lifetime. After years of failing health, O'Neill died, ironically, as he had been bornin a rented hotel roomon November 27, 1953, of pneumonia. However, O'Neill's literary reputation soon soared again, starting in 1956, when director Jose Quintero began mounting definitive productions of O'Neill's plays. The subsequent rejuvenation of interest in O'Neill has helped maintain *The Emperor Jones* as a crucial component in O'Neill's canon and in the history of American drama.

Plot Summary

Scene I

The Emperor Jones takes place on an island in the West Indies and opens in the elegant throne room of the island's ruler or "emperor," Brutus Jones. It is late afternoon and no one is present except for an old black peasant woman sneaking through the palace. A white trader named Smithers enters and interrogates the woman, asking her why the palace is deserted. Smithers learns that the natives of the island, led by a former native chief named Lem, have stolen all the horses and have headed to the nearby hills to plan a revolt against their oppressive emperor. When the Emperor, Brutus Jones, enters, Smithers gradually reveals this news, but Jones remains calm. He arrived on the island two years earlier from the United States, where he had worked as a porter on a fancy Pullman train before going to prison for killing a man named Jeff over a craps game. Escaping prison, Jones had come to the island and found Smithers cheating the black natives with his trade goods. After briefly joining Smithers as an associate, Jones eclipsed Smithers and named himself Emperor. Convincing the natives that he had magical powers and could only be killed by a silver bullet, Jones felt secure. He continues to feel secure in the face of this native revolt because he has carefully planned a response to it. He has money stashed in a foreign bank account, an escape route through the woods mapped out in his mind, and food buried at the edge of the forest. Jones has even made for himself a good luck charm out of what he thinks is the only silver bullet on the island.

But as Jones outlines his escape plan to Smithers, a drum begins to beat in the distant hills, and Jones is initially startled by it. Smithers informs Jones that the natives have begun a war dance to work up their courage for killing their "emperor." Smithers tells Jones that the natives will send ghosts after him into the dark forest, but Jones asserts that he's not afraid of ghosts and that by nightfall he will have gotten such a head start on Lem's troops that they will never catch up to him. At 3:30 in the afternoon, Jones casually sets off on foot for his getaway through the dense forest.

Scene II

Night has fallen sometime after 6:30 pm, and Jones has reached the edge of the dense forest. Fatigued from his afternoon hike in the hot sun, Jones rests, listening to the steady beat of the drum, pulsating at a little more than 72 beats a minute, the rate of the normal heart beat. However, Jones can't find the food he so confidently hid near this spot. As he lights a match to see more clearly, the rate of the drum beat increases and "the Little Formless Fears"□hallucinations that represent Jones's rising doubts□slide silently out of the darkness like black, shapeless grubworms "about the size of a creeping child." When the Formless Fears laugh at Jones's consternation, Jones notices them, pulls his pistol, and fires. In a flash, the Formless Fears are gone, and the

drums begin beating more rapidly. Jones reassures himself and hurries into the dark forest.

Scene III

It is 9:00 at night and the beams of the newly risen moon create an eerie glow on the dark forest floor as Jones enters a small triangular clearing. There, the figure of black Jeff, the man Jones killed in a crap game in the United States, seems to be mechanically throwing dice. Jones enters the clearing, his face scratched and his elegant clothes torn from forcing his way through the thick underbrush in the dark. He hears the increasingly rapid beat of the distant drums, sees Jeff, and fires another shot. The hallucinated image of Jeff disappears with the pistol shot and Jones leaves the forest path to plunge wildly into the underbrush.

Scene IV

It is an hour before midnight and from the forest Jones stumbles onto a wide dirt road running diagonally across the stage. His uniform is now ragged and torn, and he begins to discard parts of it to ease himself from the stifling heat. Exhausted, he throws himself down to rest but soon begins to hallucinate again. A small gang of black convicts in striped suits are working with picks and shovels. The white prison guard, armed with rifle and whip, demands that Jones join the convict group, and for a moment the nearly hypnotized Jones does. But when the hallucinated guard beats him, Jones responds by trying to hit the guard with his imaginary shovel. Realizing his hands are actually empty, Jones fires another shot from his pistol and all the imagined figures disappear. Jones plunges again into the forest, the drum beats increasing in volume and rapidity.

Scene V

It is an hour after midnight and Jones enters a large circular clearing and sits on a dead stump. In his exhaustion and misery, Jones hallucinates again and sees the stump as an auction block from the 1850s where a crowd has gathered to watch slaves bought and sold. When Jones becomes the slave being auctioned off, he fires at the auctioneer and planter trying to buy him, once again causing the images to disappear. Again Jones plunges into the forest as the drum beats quicken and increase in volume.

Scene VI

It is 3:00 in the morning and in a cleared space no more than five feet high under dense tree limbs Jones settles for another rest. The moonlight is shut out by the canopy and only a "vague, wan light filters through." Jones's silver bullet is all that remains in his gun. His clothes have all been torn away and what remains is no more than a breech cloth. Gradually, two rows of seated figures appear behind Jones in his next hallucination. The small space in the forest becomes a ship at sea and Jones a member

of a slave group being carried to the new world. As this hallucination fades, the drum begins to beat even louder and quicker.

Scene VII

It is 5:00 in the morning and at the foot of a gigantic tree near a river Jones imagines an African witch-doctor dancing and chanting before him. As the drum beat reaches a frenzied pitch, Jones is hypnotized by the Witch Doctor's performance. He begins to sway with the shaman and joins in the chanting. At the culmination of the dance, the Witch Doctor indicates that Jones must be sacrificed to the sacred crocodile river god, but Jones rouses a final defiance and fires his remaining silver bullet into the crocodile apparition.

Scene VIII

It is dawn and the final scene takes place in the identical spot at the foot of the forest where Jones started his journey in Scene II. Lem enters with his small band of soldiers, followed by Smithers. They examine Jones's tracks, Smithers complaining that they have wasted their evening beating the drum and casting spells, Lem confident that they will still "kotch him." The sound of snapping twigs in the forest alerts the soldiers and they shoot Jones, who has simply run in a circle all night. The sound of the drum abruptly ceases and Lem reveals that part of the evening's ceremonies involved making their own silver bullets from melted coins. The soldiers show Jones's dead body and exit, leaving Smithers to sneer at"the lot of 'em."

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

The play opens on an interior of a palace in a high-ceiling room with a view from the portico looking out onto a vista of distant hills and palm trees. It takes place on and island in the West Indies. In the center of the room is a huge chair made of uncut wood, which is obviously a throne. It is bright red with an orange cushion. The late afternoon light warms the scene as an old native Negro woman sneaks into the scene. She carries a bundle at the end of a stick and warily makes her way to the door leading outside.

Suddenly Smithers appears and begins to interrogate her about where she is going. He has no authority at the palace other than the fact that he is a white man. He knows that something is going on; he has sensed restlessness in the blacks all day. She tells him that all the blacks have run away to the hills. She is the last one left and she is hurrying. He tells her to stop or he will shoot her but then decides it is not worth it.

Then Jones enters the throne room. He is a powerfully built black man dressed in a uniform of blue jacket and gold chevrons and braids. His pants are red with light blue stripes down the sides. Around his waist is a belt with a long-barreled, pearl-handled revolver in a holster.

He wonders where everyone is and Smithers asks if he has not sensed anything different lately; he has not. During their conversation, it becomes clear that Smithers has helped Jones by hiring him when he first got to the island years ago. In addition, it was a risk for him too because Jones had escaped from jail in the USA. Apparently, Jones has established himself as Emperor on the island and he knows secrets about Smithers that keep them both in their respective roles.

Emperor reminds Smithers how he has looked the other way on some of his deals while he was trying to pass laws against his very offenses. The Emperor knows the ways of the white world from the time that he spent working on a Pullman car. He knows how to talk quality and he has positioned himself as someone of authority over the blacks here.

Smithers reminds him that it was a silver bullet, not his skills, that got him his position. Lem, a native chief, had tried to kill him from 10 feet away and his gun misfired; Emperor killed him instead. He told the natives that only a silver bullet could kill him and that is how he arose to power, knowing that none of them would ever have one. He has bamboozled them into thinking he has mysterious powers.

Emperor has had a silver bullet made just for the drama of it and tells people that he is the only one who can kill himself.

Smithers reminds the Emperor of how quiet it is in the palace; maybe he should ring for the servants. He does and no one comes. He rings again and still no one comes.

Smithers confirms for him that there apparently is some sort of uprising. The Emperor begins to panic and declares that he will resign that very day. He will also head for the hills. He has food buried in places out in the forest and he has studied the paths so he can find his way in the dark because he knew that this day would come.

Smithers warns him to look out for any ghosts and the Emperor Jones strides out the front door of his palace headed to the forest.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

The year for the play is not stated but it seems to be the early 20th century as referenced by the Pullman car. The Emperor Jones has worked on the railway and then landed in prison, somehow escaped and made his way to the West Indies where he has taken up residence and declared himself Emperor. He, himself is not an educated man, but he is extremely clever and observant, and has been able to outsmart the native blacks which makes him feel superior. He is also smart enough to know when to leave and is doing just that as the scene ends to avoid any conflict from the potential native uprising.

Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

Jones has made it to the edge of the plain at the edge of the forest. He is fatigued and rests for a short while, removing his shoes and looking for the food he has buried at an earlier time. However, he cannot find the food that he buried under a white rock; and now there seem to be many white rocks. That's when he hears the beat of a faraway tom-tom. Panic sets in and he desperately tries to get his bearings. That is when the little formless fears appear in the night. They are black, shapeless, and have glowing eyes. They move about noiselessly, trying to stand, but always falling again. They seem amused by Jones' sense of panic and squirm upward toward him. He sees them and fires his gun. The forms retreat into the forest and the beat of the tom-tom continues, louder now. He realizes that it was foolish to have fired the gun because now the natives would know his location so he steels himself and heads off into the black forest.

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

Jones has underestimated the hardship of running the scorching plain to reach the forest. In addition, he has lost his boundaries and does not find the food he had buried. Seems to be symbolic for the life he had lived back in the US, where he was always on the run and could not find the resources he needed, even food. When the formless fears appear, they are the spirits of the Negro people who have come before him. They are shapeless, nameless and have no voice. They try to stand but cannot and fall back into submission. What is particularly haunting is that they find Jones' situation humorous. They must know what the impending tom-tom means so what could be so funny?

Act 1, Scene 3

Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

The moon has just risen over the forest. The scene opens to the beat of the tom-tom, louder and faster now. Gradually, a Negro man, Jeff appears and starts to shoot craps on the floor of the forest. He is dressed in a Pullman car's suit.

Jones appears out of the forest thinking that he has walked for hours but clearly, he has not as the moon has just risen. He is glad for the moonlight though because now he can see his way a little clearer. He surveys himself and chuckles a bit at how he no longer looks very majestic in his torn and dirty clothes but it was all just part of a game anyway. He hears the drum and knows that the natives are closer. Then he catches sight of Jeff and in amazement tells him that he thought he had killed him with a razor. Jeff does not respond which scares Jones and he shoots his gun at the apparition, which then disappears. The foolishness of the gunshot and the quicker and louder sound of the tom-tom propel Jones wildly back into the forest.

Act 1, Scene 3 Analysis

Jones is running and running, not only from his current enemies in the uprising but also from his past. When he sees Jeff, it is a ghost from his past from which he can never escape, no matter how far or fast he runs. Meanwhile, the drums continue their sound of impending doom.

Act 1, Scene 4

Act 1, Scene 4 Summary

Jones comes to a wide, flat road in the forest and stops to catch his breath. He relieves himself of his jacket and his spurs and heaves them into the bushes. As he talks to himself to convince himself that he did not see any ghosts and he did not really see Jeff, a small chain gang of Negroes appears. They carry picks and shovels and a prison guard with a rifle and a whip follows them.

Jones' eyes bulge when he sees this next apparition. The guard cracks his whip noiselessly and the men work silently. The guard points at Jones to join in and he begins shoveling with an imaginary shovel. Then when the guard turns his back, he tries to hit him but realizes that he really does not have a shovel in his hand at all. He swears that he will kill him and shoots at the guard's back. Instantly the group disappears and Jones flees again, the sound of the tom-tom approaching again.

Act 1, Scene 4 Analysis

This scene gives us another view into Jones' past. He has done hard time on a chain gang and tries to kill the guard with a shovel and then his revolver; something he was never able to do in the real world. He is running and running from a past that will not let him escape.

Act 1, Scene 5

Act 1, Scene 5 Summary

Jones comes to another clearing in the forest where he slinks down on a stump and holds his head in his hands. He begins to call out to the Lord. He knows he has done wrong in his life; he killed Jeff; and he killed the prison guard; and he took advantage of the people here. However, he hopes the Lord will forgive him and keep the natives away.

His clothes are in tatters and he removes his shoes, which are all torn, and flapping on his feet. He bemoans the fact that they had once been shiny patent leather and he is reluctant to throw them away.

As he is contemplating this, a silent crowd of people from the mid 1800's enters and it is clear that they have come to a slave auction. One man motions for Jones to stand on the stump and the group silently, but animatedly begins bidding on him. In horror, he realizes that he is on the auction block and he is seized by desperation, which gives him the courage to shoot the two men: the one selling and the one buying.

All goes black and Jones runs out again into the forest with the quicker, even louder beat of the tom-tom.

Act 1, Scene 5 Analysis

Jones has shed the last vestiges of his Emperor position. He is stripped down now to the bare minimum and the specters he sees now are not from his memory, but from the memory of the Negro race in general from the Southern United States in the 1800's. At this point, he is all black men, he is still trying to break free and again he runs with the tom-tom beating out his steps.

Act 1, Scene 6

Act 1, Scene 6 Summary

Jones arrives at a place in the forest that is overgrown with vines to make it appear almost vessel like. He is exhausted and must rest despite the possibility that he may be captured at any moment. His pants are so shredded that he appears almost to wear nothing but a loincloth. His moans intersperse with those of figures that now become apparent to him. They are seated in two rows with their back touching the forest walls as if they were shackled to them. They move rhythmically as if they were rowing a ship. Their melancholy moans increase and blend with his own sobs until he overpowers them with his wailing. They disappear and he runs even further into the forest.

Act 1, Scene 6 Analysis

Jones has been reduced symbolically to that of a native African in his pants, which now look like a loincloth. In addition, he is transported back to a slave ship as he moans with the ghosts of his ancestors. He is not making progress and is even losing ground. Maybe O'Neill wants us to recognize this as the then current state of Negroes in this country.

Act 1, Scene 7

Act 1, Scene 7 Summary

Jones stumbles into a clearing that has a rough stone altar-like structure. He senses that he has been there before and is visibly scared. He lies on the ground and moans in his fear. Then he sees the witchdoctor who begins his chanting and dancing right in front of his face. It becomes evident that the forces of evil demand a sacrifice and it is Jones who will be the victim. He must offer himself up yet he begs the Lord to help him. A crocodile emerges from the water and starts crawling toward Jones and he crawls toward it bemoaning his fate. That is when he remembers his silver bullet and shoots the crocodile and the ghostly witchdoctor disappears. Jones lies with his face to the ground and listens to the muffled tom-tom beats.

Act 1, Scene 7 Analysis

Jones gives up his last piece of security, his silver bullet, to dispel the witchdoctor and the crocodile. He has given up everything he has ever had in his civilized state and now he is reduced to the elements of fear and voodoo, which will keep him literally fixed to the spot where he now lies.

Act 1, Scene 8

Act 1, Scene 8 Summary

It is now dawn and the tom-tom seems to be at the very spot where Lem and his soldiers enter. Smithers is with them and is incredulous that the natives could have tracked Jones all night. Lem insists that they have almost caught him; and they have melted down money to make silver bullets because that is the only thing that will kill the Emperor. Just then, rifle shots are heard and the soldiers carry Jones' dead body out of the forest. Smithers wants to know where the Emperor's high and mighty airs are now. Then he tells the dead man that at least they did right by him; they used only special silver bullets to end him in style.

Act 1, Scene 8 Analysis

It seems that O'Neill tried to tell us that the plight of the Negroes will never end. No matter what positions they may reach or status they achieve, they will always be haunted by their past and the past of their ancestors. The lure of money will always be powerful too but in the end, it will be their downfall, as symbolized by the silver bullet. There is nothing that can change their destiny. This seems a bit bleak but maybe right for the time that it was written in 1929. Hopefully, O'Neill's outlook would be different if he were writing it today.

Characters

Jeff

The black man Brutus Jones killed over a crap game in the United States before the action of the play began. Appearing in Scene III as one of Jones' s hallucinations, Jeff is brown rather than black-skinned, thin, middle-aged, and dressed in a Pullman porter's uniform. In Jones's hallucination, Jeff tosses the dice like a robot.

Brutus Jones

The main character in *The Emperor Jones,* Brutus Jones is a tall and powerfully built American negro man of middle age. Formerly a Pullman (train) car porter in the United States, Jones comes to the West Indian island where the play takes place and becomes "emperor" after convincing the natives that he has magical powers. Before coming to the island, Jones had escaped from an American prison, where he was being confined for killing a man over a crap game. Jones exudes a strength and confidence that commands fear and respect from all around him even while he reigns quite ruthlessly as Emperor. His eyes indicate extraordinary cunning, intelligence, and a careful shrewdness.

To make himself appear regal, Jones wears a light-blue uniform decorated with brass buttons and heavy gold chevrons and braids. His pants are bright red with a light-blue stripe down the side and he wears patent leather boots with brass spurs and a holster with a long-barreled, pearl-handled revolver. In the play he speaks with a strongly marked black dialect, as in, "who dare whistle dat way in my palace?" Jones is filled with contempt for the former exploiter of the islanders, the white man, Smithers.

Lem

A former chieftain on the island and the leader of the natives who finally rebel against Jones's dictatorial rule. The heavy-set Lem appears on stage only in the last scene, where he is dressed in a loincloth with a revolver and cartridge belt around his waist. Lem hates Jones and once hired another native to shoot him, but when the gun misfired in the assassination attempt, Jones proclaimed that only a silver bullet could kill him. As the play opens, Lem has finally convinced the rest of the natives to forge their own silver bullet, and they spend the night working up the courage to attack Jones. Lem and his men finally kill Jones in the forest where Jones had desperately run in circles trying to escape.

Little Formless Fears

In the second scene of the play, these fanciful creatures represent Jones's first hallucinations in the forest and they stand for his general anxieties. These "fears" are "black" and "shapeless," like "a grubworm about the size of a creeping child," and "only their glittering little eyes can be seen." These shapes "move noiselessly, but with deliberate, painful effort, striving to raise themselves on end, failing and sinking again." When these fears mock Jones with their laughter, Jones shoots at them and they disappear.

Henry Smithers

Smithers is the tall, bald, stoop-shouldered Cockney Englishman, about forty-years-old, who was successfully exploiting the black natives before Brutus Jones arrived on the island. Smithers has a long neck with an enormous Adam's apple, which looks like an egg. Deeply tanned, Smithers's naturally pasty face has taken on a sickly yellow color, and his nose is red from extensive drinking of native rum. Smithers has small, sharp features, including a pointed nose and little, red-rimmed eyes that dart around like a ferret's. He is mean, cowardly, and dangerous□afraid of Jones but openly defiant, as far as he dares to be, and is clearly delighted with Jones's downfall.

Smithers carries a riding whip and is dressed in a dirty white suit with a white cork helmet and a cartridge belt and revolver around his waist. Smithers speaks in a (British) Cockney dialect, which O'Neill indicates with idioms and spelling like "I got me 'ooks [hooks or hands] on yer [you]."

Witch Doctor

Jones's last hallucination, in Scene VII, includes this dancing and chanting shaman or medicine man of primitive African society. The Witch Doctor is shriveled, old, and "naked except for the fur of some small animal tied about his waist, its bushy tail hanging down in front." His body is stained a bright red, he has antelope horns on his head, and he carries a bone rattle and a "charm stick" made of white cockatoo feathers. The Witch Doctor finally indicates that Jones must serve as the ritual sacrifice for a crocodile god that rises from the nearby river. However, Jones' s last act is to defy the sacrifice and shoot his pistol and the remaining silver bullet into the crocodile apparition.

Themes

Race and Racism

The Emperor Jones examines race and racism on a number of levels. Most simply, it calls attention to the racial oppression that actually existed in America in 1920. In Scene I, Smithers expresses skepticism over Jones's claim that he killed a white man before coming to the island: "from what I've 'eard, it ain't 'ealthy for a black to kill a white man in the States. They burn 'em in oil, don't they?" And though Smithers is an Englishman, he clearly represents racist attitudes that were present in O'Neill's contemporary society. At times Smithers reveals his racism somewhat subtly, as in the opening moments of the play when he assumes that the peasant woman sneaking through the throne room must have been "stealin' a bit." At other times, Smithers is much less subtle, as when he delivers the vicious curtain line at the end of the play, dismissing all dark-skinned people as "Stupid as 'ogs, the lot of 'em! Blarsted niggers!"

And as Jones re-enacts in the forest the horrors of the slave trade that brought Africans to America, O'Neill's implication is that Jones is also a victim of American racism. However, at this point O'Neill takes the racism theme to another level of complexity: he reveals that Jones himself has become a racist on this distant isle. After he becomes "emperor," Jones thinks of himself as being separate from and superior to the natives of the island, whom he characterizes as "de low-flung bush niggers," "dese fool woods' niggers," and "black trash." He sees himself as civilized, and he is contemptuous of "dis raggedy country." In Scene IV, as he is recovering from his vision of Jeff, Jones says to himself, "Is yo' civilized, or is yo' like dese ign'rent black niggers, heah?" And Jones is also contemptuously racist toward Smithers: "Talk polite, white man! Talk polite, you heah me! I'm boss heah now, is you forgettin' ?" The suggestion that O'Neill seems to be making is that anyone who succumbs to the temptations of power is susceptible to racism, even those who themselves have so poignantly suffered from it.

But the most extraordinary feature of this theme is that even as O'Neill is attempting to expose the horrors of racism he seems himself to be guilty of it to some extent. His representation of the black dialect throughout the play, though an attempt to capture a unique vocal quality, perpetuates linguistic stereotypes about black speakers. And in Scene IV, when Jones sees the gang of prison convicts, O'Neill says of Jones in his stage directions that "his eyes pop out," relying on a stereotypical image of fear that is seldom applied to white characters. O'Neill's characterization of Lem in the final scene is especially insensitive. He describes Lem as "a heavy-set, ape-faced old savage of the extreme African type, dressed only in a loin cloth." And Lem's naive belief in the magic of the silver bullet is expressed in words that make him sound like a caricatured Native American Indian: "lead bullet no kill him. He got um strong charm. I took um money, make um silver bullet, make um strong charm, too. . . . Yes. Him got strong charm. Lead no good." Charles Gilpin, the original actor playing Jones, was so sensitive to the implied racism of the play that as the production continued he changed many of the lines, refusing at times to use the frequently repeated word "nigger." When United

Artists made its 1933 movie version of the play they even cut Smithers's last line, a clear concession to the play's excessively vivid racism.

Change and Transformation

In addition to its treatment of racism, *The Emperor Jones* focuses on the disintegration of Brutus Jones and his transformation from an apparently self-confident human being to a whimpering shadow of his former self.

When Jones first appears in Scene I and reports on his past, it is clear that there has already been a great transformation for Jones: "from stowaway to Emperor in two years!" he says. He is proud of his transformation and appears to be confident in its durability. When Smithers challenges him, Jones menaces the white trader and says "No use'n you rakin' up ole times. What I was den is one thing. What I is now's another." Jones defends himself against the charge that his transformation has been the result of luck, asserting instead that it has been the result of diligence, intelligence, quick thinking, and careful planning. He wants to be seen as a man in complete control, one whose transformation has put a former and inferior self far behind him. Expressing "real admiration" Smithers says, "Blimey, but you're a cool bird, and no mistake."

But the opening scene reveals at the same time that Jones's confidence in his transformation from oppressed black man to "emperor" of this small island is really quite shallow and fragile. Very subtle and early indications of Jones's tenuous hold on his new status appear throughout Scene I in O'Neill's stage directions. When Jones shows Smithers his silver bullet, Jones holds it in his hand and looks at it, "strangely fascinated," as if he can't quite believe in its power himself. And when Smithers dares him in the opening scene to ring his throne room bell and summon the natives, Jones is "startled to alertness but [preserves] the same careless tone." He is "alarmed for a second" over Smithers's news that all of the horses have been taken away by Lem and his men, but Jones is soon "shaking off his nervousness□with a confident laugh." When the tom-tom is first heard, Jones "starts at the sound," and "a strange look of apprehension creeps into his face for a moment as he listens." Then he asks, "with an attempt to regain his most casual manner: What's dat drum beatin' fo'?" He is "a tiny bit awed and shaken in spite of himself;" his carelessness is "studied."

So, when Jones disintegrates so thoroughly during his night in the forest, it does not come as a total surprise. In Scene II he is already a man whistling past the graveyard. "With a chuckle" he says, "cheah up, nigger, der worst is yet to come," and then "his chuckle peters out abruptly." With the first serious reversal of fortunes, his inability to find his hidden food, Jones begins to crumble and his "little formless fears" appear. O'Neill is suggesting that confidence so manufactured and hollow often responds to reversals with a desperation that is deep and long-lasting.

At the end of the play Smithers says of Jones, "'e'd lost 'imself," and Jones is indeed a man in conflict with his past and the self he created to hide from it. The exalted position he claims for himself in order to obliterate that past has no real roots, and his inner self

can't match the postured self that he aspires to. In spite of his blustering behavior, it is clear in the opening scene that Jones's status as "emperor" is fraudulent, and when this fiction gets sufficiently tested, Jones's recently assumed status crumbles because he is not aware of the power of his own self-doubts. Only dimly aware of the conflict between his real self and his postured self, Jones is like the schoolyard bully who is unaware of his basic fears. When forced to his knees, there is no genuine strength to call forth in defense.

Style

Exposition

The Emperor Jones is a one-act play in eight scenes. The first and last scenes contain several characters and employ a realistic style while the six scenes in the middle are an expressionistic monologue chroncling Jones's nightmarish trip through the forest. This middle section is the main part of the play and focuses as much on light, sound, and setting as on Jones's spoken words. The first and last scenes of the play, then, serve as a framing device, first setting up and then resolving Jones's night in the forest. However, the first scene of the play is vastly different not only from the middle scenes but also from its companion, frame scene at the end of the play. For it is in this opening scene that O'Neill must provide all of the "exposition" for the play.

"Exposition" is the term used for that part of a play that must give the audience the necessary background information for the main action. It is a very demanding aspect of the playwright's craft and can be performed expertly or inexpertly, depending on whether or not the information is woven subtly into the dramatic flow of the initial action. *The Emperor Jones* focuses on the last twenty-four hours in the life of Brutus Jones, but in the first scene O'Neill must inform the audience of Jones's past□that he is a non-native black man from America, that he has only been on the island for two years, and that in his former life he was a train car worker who killed a friend in a craps game, went to prison, and then killed a white guard in order to escape. O'Neill must also indicate that Jones's quick rise to "emperor" included a period where he served Smithers as an associate and survived an assassin's bullet. All of this and more must be indicated quickly and efficiently in order to effectively set up the middle scenes and Jones' s experience in the forest.

At times in this first scene, O'Neill is not very subtle or clever as he reveals Jones's background. For example, Smithers says, "I wasn't afraid to hire yer like the rest was□' count of the story about your breakin' jail back in the States." At other times, however, O'Neill delivers this exposition very adroitly, as when he reveals much of Jones's background in a single speech. Jones is responding to Smithers's skepticism about his claim that he killed a white man in the United States when he says:

Maybe I goes to jail dere for gettin' in an argument wid razors ovah a crap game. Maybe I gits twenty years when dat colored man die. Maybe I gits in 'nother argument wid de prison guard who was overseer ovah us when we're walkin' de roads. Maybe he hits me wid a whip an' I splits his head wid a shovel an' runs away an' files de chain off my leg an' gits away safe. Maybe I does all dat an' maybe I don't. It's a story I tells you so's you knows I' se de kind of man dat if you evah repeats one word of it, I ends yo' stealin' on dis yearth mighty damn quick!

With the simple addition of the single, repeated word, "maybe," O'Neill conveys much of the necessary background while at the same time suggesting that the information might be false, thus creating an air of mystery about this "emperor."

Of special interest in regard to the exposition in *The Emperor Jones* is that the 1933 movie version of the play drastically expanded O'Neill's script by fully dramatizing this background information. The movie added scenes in America and on the island that showed the entire process whereby Jones proceeded to his fateful last day. Thus, over half of the movie is an elaboration of the exposition that O'Neill provided so briefly in the play's first scene.

Symbolism

Jones's night in the forest is a symbolic journey that represents not only his process of personal self destruction but also a confrontation with his racial past. Once he gets to the island, Jones tries to deny what he has been in order to imitate the successful white men he once served on the train in America. Like his former white oppressors, Jones wants to dominate and be all-powerful, treating other people like inferior "trash" and exploiting them for personal gain. In overcompensating excess, however, Jones tries to set himself apart from all other human beings, only to discover during his nightmare journey that he cannot escape his connection with other people or even with his repressed inner life.

The first scenes in the forest show Jones confronting his personal past□his killing of Jeff, his time in prison, and his lethal attack on the prison guard. After reliving these personal experiences, Jones begins to confront the history of his race. He re-enacts the experience of his ancestors coming to America in slave ships and being sold at auction like property. Then he goes even deeper into his racial past and confronts the primitive witch doctor who claims him as a sacrifice for the crocodile god. Jones's trip through the forest, then, becomes a trip back through time, perhaps even an expiation for his attempted denial of self as a member of the black race.

And the symbolism culminates in the strange figure of the crocodile god, which is the most evocative and puzzling symbol in the play. As the climax of Jones's journey, the crocodile might be seen as a symbol of Jones's primitive self or as a symbol of evil□either the evil of Jones or of humanity in general; perhaps it represents the pagan, non-Christian response to the world; perhaps it is a symbol of Jones's inner being, which he can't accept. Any number of interpretations can be made of this figure whose presence brings Jones to his final destruction.

Historical Context

Expressionism

Expressionism is a term used for an artistic movement that initially appeared in painting, as a reaction to Impressionism, near the beginning of the twentieth century. Eventually the term came to be applied to literary forms, including drama, where it served as a reaction against Realism. Expressionism was strongest in drama in the early-1920s.

Basically, Expressionism is an attempt to objectify inner experience, to express the reality of the inner self rather than to copy external reality. Expressionism is most often concerned with representing states of human consciousness and exploring the psychology of complex feelings. Often, the emphasis is on intense and rapidly changing emotional states, since these are considered more interesting than states of serenity and calm. In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, the famous Viennese psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud had revolutionized the conception of humanity by introducing the world to the complexities of the subconscious mind. In the twentieth century many artists felt compelled to explore and accurately describe these complexities.

In theatre, expressionism appeared very prominently in the work of Swedish dramatist August Strindberg, whose *A Dream Play* (1902) and *The Ghost Sonata* (1907) explored intense feelings of human pain and disappointment. Filled with free association and fantasy, these plays seriously challenged conventional stagecraft with their multitude of characters, shifting scenes, and bizarre settings. Expressionism was even more widely represented by German playwrights like Frank Wedekind, Ernst Toller, and Georg Kaiser, in plays like *Spring's Awakening* (1891), *Man As the Masses* (1921), and *From Morn to Midnight* (1916).

O'Neill's experimentations with Expressionism were mostly influenced by Strindberg, and in *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape* (1922) O'Neill is trying to find dramatic means to express the working of the subconscious mind. Perhaps the easiest places to see this are in O'Neill's use of the drumbeat to indicate Jones's heartbeat and in his dramatization of Jones's "little formless fears." O'Neill also objectifies Jones' s obsessive memories in the visions of Jeff and the prison experience. But perhaps the most powerful of O'Neill's dramatizations comes when he shows Jones' s mind coming to grips with racial memories. Deep in the recesses of Jones's mind he relives black history, the culmination of which leaves him defenseless in the dark forest. From dramatizing fear as a state of mind to capturing the tormented soul of a race, *The Emperor Jones* earns its title as one of the stage's successful experiments with expressionistic technique.

By the middle-1920s expressionism in the theatre was losing its immediate impact, but the long-lasting effects helped to liberate many generations of artists. Freed from the boundaries of realism, playwrights like Luigi Pirandello *(Six Characters in Search of an*

Author), BertoltBrecht *(Mother Courage and Her Children),* Thornton Wilder *(Our Town),* Samuel Beckett *(Waiting for Godot),* Eugene Ionesco *(The Chairs),* and Jean Genet *(The Balcony)* enjoyed a significantly broadened range of dramatic subject matter and technique. Even a play as nominally realistic as Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* shows the influence of Expressionism. Miller's play attempts to dramatize the internal workings of protagonist Willy Loman's mind (the original title of Miller's play was "The Inside of His Head").

Novelists as diverse as Virginia Woolf *(To the Lighthouse),* Franz Kafka *(The Trial),* James Joyce *(Ulysses),* William Faulkner *(The Sound and the Fury),* Kurt Vonnegut *(Slaughterhouse Five),* and Thomas Pynchon *(Gravity's Rainbow)* show the influence of Expressionism, as do poets like T.S. Eliot, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Allen Ginsberg. Early films like Robert Wiene' s *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), Friedrich Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926) were clearly experiments in Expressionistic techniques, and echoes of the influence can be found in the work of later filmmakers like Ingmar Bergman *(The Seventh Seal),* Federico Fellini *(Satyricon),* and Michelangelo Antonioni *(Zabriskie Point).*

The Harlem Renaissance

The year 1920 represents the early stages of an important cultural movement in America called the Harlem Renaissance. During the 1920s, an extraordinary number of African American poets, essayists, and novelists suddenly appeared, and their work constituted both a literary and social movement, gaining recognition and respect for black writers while at the same time increasing racial pride among blacks and awareness of black culture among whites. Journals like *Crisis,* and *Opportunity* published many of these new works, and influential editors like W. E. B. Du Bois, Charles S. Johnson, and James Weldon Johnson demonstrated that black writers were making genuine contributions to American literary culture. Other black writers of the Harlem Renaissance, like Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes, have become highly visible figures in the history of twentieth-century American literature.

O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* was related to the Harlem Renaissance because it helped to stimulate an increased interest in African-American life. Other white playwrights like Paul Green and DuBose and Dorothy Heyward wrote of African-American life, as in the Heyward's *Porgy* (1927), which eventually spawned the still popular folk opera, *Porgy and Bess* (1935). Ironically, the strength of the Harlem Renaissance destroyed a vital Harlem theatre movement in the 1920s because interest in black stories led to such an array of Broadway musicals dealing with black subjects in the first half of the decade that indigenous Harlem theatre lost much of its audience base.

Later generations of black writers, including Richard Wright, Zora Neale Hurston, Gwendolyn Brooks, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, and many others owed much of their success to the pioneers of the Harlem Renaissance.

Critical Overview

On the night of November 1, 1920, *The Emperor Jones* opened Off-Broadway for a short run at the 200-seatProvincetown Players' Playwright's Theatre on Macdougal Street, and it was an immediate and huge success. The first-night audience refused to leave even after repeated curtain calls, and early the next morning long lines formed at the box office. Because one had to be a "member" to see the company's productions, the group's subscription list doubled within days and the projected two-week run was extended. In part the play was a great novelty as it presented an integrated cast and a captivating black actor in the lead role, but an unusually powerful script and startling scenic effects for such a small theatre contributed greatly to the play's success. First-line theatre critics had been busy earlier in the week at Broadway openings and didn't see the play for three days, but when they arrived they generally concurred with the audiences.

Writing for the *New York Times,* Alexander Woollcott called *The Emperor Jones* "an extraordinarily striking and dramatic study of panic fear." Production values were not first-rate□there were clumsy and irritating transitions between scene changes that interrupted the drum beat and produced long, silent blackouts□but even with these flaws Woollcott found that the play "weaves a most potent spell." Charles Gilpin was singled out for praise, and Woollcott concluded that the play "reinforces the impression that for strength and originality [O'Neill] has no rival among the American writers for the stage."

New York Tribune critic Heywood Broun agreed with Woollcott, calling *The Emperor Jones* "just about the most interesting play which has yet come from the most promising playwright in America" and reiterated the high praise for Gilpin's performance. Broun also complained about the scene changes: "unfortunately, production in the tiny Province-town Theatre is difficult and the waits between these scenes are often several minutes in length. Each wait is a vulture which preys upon the attention. With the beginning of each new scene, contact must again be established and all this unquestionably hurts."

Other critics concured□like Kenneth Macgowan of the *New York Globe,* Maida Castellun of the *New York Call,* and Stephen Rathbun of the *New York Sun*□and by the end of December the play was on Broadway in a series of special matinees at the Selwyn Theatre. There, the critics generally repeated their praise. Woollcott proclaimed that in the larger and better equipped space the play was still "exciting and terrifying" and "quite as astonishing," with Gilpin continuing to be "amazing and unforgettable." The move "uptown" seemed to improve the production because better facilities eliminated the long waits between scenes. Later, the production shifted to the Princess Theatre, where it enjoyed an unusually long and successful run followed by a two-year national road tour featuring Gilpin and numerous international productions. Paris, Berlin, London, Vienna, Stockholm, Buenos Aires, and Tokyo were some of the foreign cities it visited, and on the basis of *The Emperor Jones,* Eugene O'Neill was now the first American playwright with an international reputation.

In 1924 the play was revived at the Province-town Playhouse, but this time O'Neill chose newcomer Paul Robeson to play the role of Brutus Jones. During the original run, O'Neill had become impatient with Gilpin's drinking during performances and with Gilpin's habit of changing the play's dialogue. Gilpin played Brutus Jones in two more 1926 revivals of the play, but he never recovered his commanding ownership of the role. After the 1924 revival, Robeson went on to play the role in London and also in the 1933 film version. Robeson's portrayal was praised almost as much as Gilpin's, especially because of Robeson's physical stature and deep bass voice, but contemporary observers and even O'Neill himself finally admitted that Gilpin's portrayal of Jones was more authentic and powerful. Still, in part because of Robeson's appearance in the enduring film version, Robeson's portrayal has come to be the one most closely associated with the role.

Ironically, the tremendous success of *The Emperor Jones* was both the best and the worst thing to happen to the Provincetown Players. Overnight they went from an experimental theatre struggling on a small budget to a profitable venture that could pay all its actors a salary. But they divided over the issue of moving *The Emperor Jones* to Broadway. Originated in 1915 as an informal group dedicated to art rather than commerce, some of the actors and managers wanted to exploit the commercial success initiated by O'Neill's play while others wanted to retreat from it in order to stay small, amateurish, experimental, and faithful to their original vision.

When the production finally moved uptown, the original cast and most of the group's working actors went with it, leaving a depleted crew to continue the season downtown. Rising expenses and personal jealousies eventually destroyed the small group. Their leader, George Cram (Jig) Cook, finally declared a year's moratorium on productions, left for Greece, and died in 1924 after bitterly severing ties with his theatre. A new organization was formed in 1923, led by O'Neill, but the idealistic and non-commercial spirit of the original Provincetown Players was gone forever.

Today, *The Emperor Jones* is still recognized as one of O'Neill's finest plays. In 1921 it was considered "a splendid achievement, easily the author's finest work to date," as O'Neill's biographer Sheaffer put it. However, O'Neill's major triumphs with autobiographical materials near the end of his life led to powerful full-length plays like *The Iceman Cometh* (1946) and *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956) that have put O'Neill's early one-act play in a subordinate position.

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Nienhuis is a Ph.D. specializing in modern and contemporary drama. In this essay he discusses the theatrical elements in O'Neill's The Emperor Jones.

The critical enthusiasm for O'Neill's drama has always been tempered by a recognition that he was limited as a writer. As his foremost biographer, Louis Sheaffer, put it in *O'Neill: Son and Playwright,* "of all the major playwrights, O'Neill is, with little doubt, the most uneven. During the larger part of his career ... he kept producing, almost alternately, good plays and bad." And even O' Neill' s good plays sometimes seem to display his major faults: he is often melodramatic, clumsy and heavy-handed with dialogue, unpoetic in his use of language, obsessed with regional and ethnic dialects, verbose, unsubtle, labored, and simplistic.

But there is one area where O'Neill's skills are seldom questioned□he had an uncommon ability to create compelling theatrical effects. He was, as Croswell Bowen described it in *The Curse of the Misbegotten,* "the most theatrical playwright of his time." And *The Emperor Jones* is perhaps the clearest example of O'Neill's unequivocal strength as a "theatrical" playwright.

It is often said that O'Neill's dramas "play" better than they "read," that what sometimes appears lifeless and labored on the page often becomes quite vibrant in a theatrical performance. At their best, O'Neill's plays create an effective blueprint for his theatrical collaborators: actors, directors, set, sound, light, and costume designers take his script and help transform the page into a thrilling theatrical experience.

In his introduction to *O'Neill: A Collection of Critical Essays,* the venerable scholar John Gassner expressed this commonly held appraisal of O'Neill. He said that O'Neill is "disproportionately effective on the stage and disappointing in print." As Gassner said of O'Neill, however:

He acquired a strong aptitude for dramatic writing and theatrical effect. He was able to compensate for his defects as a writer with the power of his stage action; had he elected to write novels and been forced to rely on description and narration rather than dramatization and visualization, he might have proved a second-rate author.... Dramatic action, pictorial composition, and sound-effects such as the beating of the tom-toms in The Emperor Jones concealed, or minimized his literary infelicities, and sustained his intense□often, indeed, over-intense□dramatic intentions.

Where, then, in *The Emperor Jones* do we see this aptitude for theatrical effect? Perhaps it is most obvious in the simple idea of indicating Jones's emotional state through the beating of the drum. As Doris Falk wrote in *Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension,* "Nowhere in O'Neill's work is his theatrical skill more evident than in Jones's flight through the jungle to the drumbeat which begins at normal pulse rhythm, growing faster and faster, louder and louder." In fact, the drumbeat was one of the first ideas that led O'Neill to write *The Emperor Jones.* In a 1924 interview with the *New York World*

O'Neill said, "One day I was reading of the religious feasts in the Congo and the uses to which the drum is put there; how it starts at a normal pulse-beat and is slowly intensified until the heart-beat of every one present corresponds to the frenzied beat of the drum. There was an idea and an experiment. How would this sort of thing work on an audience in a theatre?"

In Scene I, the sound of the drumbeat begins just as Jones boasts to Smithers that he is not afraid. The initial sound is faint but steady, beating "at a rate exactly corresponding to normal pulse-beat□ 72 to the minute." As the drumbeat continues "at a gradually accelerating rate from this point uninterruptedly to the very end of the play," it represents Jones' s state of mind. But the art of the drumbeat is even more complex. It begins literally as a war drum and always remains so, even after the sound comes to represent Jones's increasing anxiety. But in Scene VI, the sound also becomes the cadence for the moaning black slaves being carried by ship to America. Ultimately, the sound becomes as well the heartbeat of the audience itself as they get caught up in the action. At the end of each scene in the written text, O'Neill reminds the reader that the drumbeat is intensifying. In a theatrical production no audience member would have to be reminded, but adept readers have to be more imaginative to hear the constant drum and follow its complex theatrical effects.

The next most powerful theatrical element is perhaps light, for the shifting of light during the play is not only varied and complex but highly indicative of Jones's changing frame of mind. The play begins in late-afternoon light, still bright but on the edge of sunset, communicating heat and languor. As the play progresses, varieties of light become more and more oppressive for Jones. A "wall of darkness" greets him at the forest's edge in Scene II, and a "barely perceptible, suffused eerie glow" of moonlight envelops him as he encounters Jeff in Scene III. A "veil of bluish mist" colors the river in the final scene with the witch doctor and crocodile. In every scene the light is changing, reflecting Jones's mental state and providing the theatre audience with an immediately perceptible visual experience that the reader of the play must try to imagine. But as challenging as O'Neill's script is to the reader, it is even more so for the lighting designer. In Scene IV, for example, O'Neill specifies that "the road glimmers ghastly and unreal" in the moonlight, "as if the forest had stood aside momentarily to let the road pass through and accomplish its veiled purpose. This done, the forest will fold in upon itself again and the road will be no more." This light cue and set design would be more appropriate for a film project than for a stage designer!

Working closely with the theatre's lighting designer, then, is the set designer, who must create throne room and forest environments that complement the nightmarish quality of the play's light. The throne room is spacious and speciously elegant with its high ceilings, white walls, white floor, and garishly red throne. With the distant hills in the background, the white and spacious throne room contrasts with the dark forest environment that will gradually enclose Jones in ever smaller spaces. When he crouches in Scene VI in a tiny space that becomes the galley of a slave ship, Jones has retreated to an almost womb-like environment, and Scenes IV and V both end with the walls of the forest once again folding in on him.

Given the importance of the set in *The Emperor Jones,* it is ironic that the play was first produced in a tiny Off-Broadway theatre whose budget could not accommodate elaborate scene design. But George Cram (Jig) Cook, the leader of the Provincetown Players and the director of the original production, saw immediately that the staging would require something special to capture its atmospheric qualities. As Ronald Wainscott put it in *Staging O'Neill,* "Cook's problem was finding a way to present O'Neill's sweeping nightmare on a stage the size of an ordinary living room." Cook insisted that an elaborate "dome" or cyclorama be built on stage to give the effect of great distances. He had seen such domes in small European theatres, and working with plaster, concrete, and iron, he created a sky against which hanging cloth and canvas could represent the forest. When light was bounced off the dome's textured surface, it gave an illusion of infinity.

Arthur and Barbara Gelb reported in their biography, *O 'Neill,* that "viewers seated three feet from the stage had the illusion of vast distance; an actor could stretch his hand to within inches of its plaster surface and still seem to be far away from it." But Cook had to construct the dome over the protests of the other members of the theatre group because in building it he had to spend the theatre's entire budget on its first play of the season. According to Helen Deutsch and Stella Hanau, authors of *The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre,* "Cook left just $6.40 in the treasury, drained the last measure of strength from his workers, and sacrificed eight feet of very limited floor space of the stage to build the first dome in New York." However, the dome was spectacularly successful and the visual effect one of the sources of the play's tremendous success.

Last, but certainly not least, the effects of the play's costume design have an enormous impact on a theatre audience. When Jones first appears, he is dressed in an outlandish military uniform that reflects his tenuous standing as emperor. As he bolts through the forest, pieces of this uniform are gradually torn away and then discarded until he is left in the last scene in a loincloth, and the primitive witch doctor now has, ironically, all the sartorial accouterments of high status. Timo Tiusanen speculated in *O'Neill's Scenic Images* that O'Neill might have specified Jones's light blue uniform as a way of further indicating Jones's disorientation. The uniform, he says, would fit well with the scarlet and white throne room but clash and be "out of harmony " with the dark green forest. "It is possible that O'Neill knew the physical qualities of light well enough to choose light blue for Jones, a color that remains visible on a relatively dark stage where green trees are turned into a menacing darkness."

Other examples of "theatrical" elements abound in the play. In an adept production, the "Little Formless Fears" of Scene II are almost spooky in their unearthly quality, moving noiselessly "but with deliberate, painful effort, striving to raise themselves on end, failing and sinking prone again." Their mocking laughter "like a rustling of leaves" contrast sharply with the loud report of Jones's gunshot, and those gunshots echo against the casta-net-like clicking of Jeff s dice in Scene III and the silence of the guard's whip and the convicts' picks and shovels in Scene IV. The disappearance of the various hallucinations is a difficult visual effect to achieve on stage, but it gives a dream-like quality to the play. The film technology in 1933 was obviously not sufficient to make the hallucinations and their disappearance even the slightest bit convincing or powerful, but

the technology of contemporary stage and (especially) film could make the hallucinations appear and disappear effectively.

Taken together, these theatrical effects make *The Emperor Jones* "a striking series of scenic images," and O'Neill's "early masterpiece," according to Tiusanan. But it is the theatrical elements working all together that creates the impact on an audience in a theatre. As Tiusanan asserted, "It is not the tom-tom, striking as this repetitious sound effect is; it is not the presence of the visions as such. It is the fusion of the scenic means employed; it is the interaction of the scenic images ... the abundance of imaginatively used scenic means of expression within the space of thirty-odd pages or about an hour and a half of acting time." Croswell Bowen summed up *The Emperor Jones in The Curse of the Misbegotten* by saying, "Although not the best play that Eugene O'Neill ever wrote, it is in many ways the most theatrical□the most theatrical play by the most theatrical playwright of his time."

Source: Terry R. Nienhuis, for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 1999.

Critical Essay #2

Brustein is one of the most respected theatre critics of the late-twentieth century. In this review of a 1998 revival production of The Emperor Jones, *the critic offers a mixed appraisal of the work, citing troubles with both O'Neill's original script and liberties this new production has taken with the casting of the title character, Brutus Jones.*

The other O'Neill, the writer pursuing transcendence rather than domesticity, is also being represented on the New York stage these days, in a production of *The Emperor Jones* by the Wooster Group. This enterprising experimental troupe has already flexed its O'Neill muscles earlier this season with a powerful version of *The Hairy Ape. The Emperor Jones* is a reworking of a production that it first presented in 1993.

This relatively early work, written in the same rush of inspiration that produced *The Hairy Ape* and *Anna Christie,* would seem to be virtually unplayable today, owing to its clumsy effort to render the black idiom. Look at this typical passage: "Think dese ign'rent bush niggers dat ain't even got brains enuff to know deir own names even can catch Brutus Jones? Huh, I s'pects not! Not on yo' life." Or even worse, when Jones is preparing to flee: "Feet do yo' duty!" Perhaps recognizing that O'Neill's tin ear made almost all of his language sound stereotypical (Smitty's Cockney dialect, even in the mouth of the superb actor Willem Dafoe, is equally clumsy), the Wooster Group meets this problem head on. Brutus Jones, a role once played by the majestic Paul Robeson, is performed not by a black actor but by a white person in black face, and a woman at that (Kate Valk). Rather than normalize Jones's speech, Valk chooses to exaggerate the already exaggerated dialect into minstrel-show patter.

This is inviting trouble; but then so is the very act of producing the play. The only notes in the Wooster Group program are some generous comments from W.E.B. DuBois, defending O'Neill against those "preordained and self-appointed" judges of how black people should be represented on stage, those who would "destroy art, religion and good common sense in an effort to make everything that is said or shown propaganda for their ideas." DuBois believed that O'Neill in *The Emperor Jones* was trying to break through the defensive shells that prevent black people from being represented truthfully in the theater. Today, when even such black artists as Kara Walker and Robert Colescott are being attacked for creating black stereotypes, O'Neill's early effort at opening the doors of perception looks all the more brave and prescient.

As written, *The Emperor Jones* is a trip into the heart of darkness by an American black man who has persuaded himself that his Western reason and intelligence are protections against the voodoo spells of his native antagonists. He proves to be wrong. This former Pullman car porter and ex-convict is conquered less by external enemies than by his own terrors. Having set himself up as Emperor of a West Indian island and looted all its treasure, Jones has invented the myth that he can only be killed by a silver bullet. He eventually comes to believe the myth, too. Both the emperor Caesar and the assassin Brutus inhabit the same breast. In Trilling's words, Jones "goes backwards through social fears to very fear itself, the fear of the universe which lies in primitive

religion." This is a great theme. O'Neill never lacked great themes. He lacked only the art with which to express them.

Once again the Wooster Group, under its visionary director Elizabeth LeCompte, supplies that art by distracting attention from the play and the dialogue to the theatrical medium itself. The stage is bare except for a white linoleum floor, decorated with three television screens and, for one blinding moment, three bright headlights. While the screens register ghost images, Valk and Dafoe engage each other, both displaying great vocal range and variety, sometimes as characters in O'Neill, sometimes as samurai warriors and dancers in a Kabuki drama. Two prop masters solemnly hand them their properties. Each actor carries a microphone, which also has a prop function (a walking stick for Jones, a bat for Smitty). Valk sits in a high chair on wheels, rolling her eyes and roaring her lines through a reddened mouth, a bit like Hamm in Beckett's *Endgame.* The mikes and the music (often raucous rock) are set at a high decibel level.

Those who emerge from the theater without a headache can testify to a penetrating, if painful, encounter with the play. The Wooster Group's deconstructing of classic American drama can some-times come perilously close to desecrating it. But when successful, such approaches can also open up new avenues of understanding. "O'Neill's techniques," wrote Trilling, "like those of any sincere artist, are not fortuitous□they are the result of an attempt to say things which the accepted techniques cannot express." The same might be said for the Wooster Group.

Source: Robert Brustein, "The Two O'Neills" in the *New Republic,* Vol. 218, no. 17, April 27, 1998, p. 28.

Critical Essay #3

In this review of an early production starring Paul Robeson as Brutus Jones, Shand offers a positive appraisal of The Emperor Jones, *despite some reservations that O'Neill was over-ambitious in his themes.*

Eugene O'Neill, the American dramatist, comes to Europe with a great reputation. Genius, we hear, is not too high a term for him. So that on going to see a new play of his some of us expect to see something "Diff'rent" from the usual. *The Emperor Jones,* produced last week at the Ambassadors, at first seems unconventional in form; and though few would argue that constructional novelty is any criterion of future fame, praise must always be given to any fresh attempt to loosen the girths of modern drama. In my opinion, the modern technique is too tight. The acquisition by any less vigorous mind than an Ibsen's of the highly specialised technicalities necessary for the construction of a modern play, is apt to produce a clever juggler rather than an artist. But, remembering always the exception, it is also a general rule that the genius in any art does not invent new forms, but uses to their full extent the forms moulded by others. The fact, then (I quote Mr. C. E. Bechhofer's preface to *Emperor Jones)* that "for years dramatists have been attempting to find a new kind of play, something that would pass the limits of contemporary drama," and that "in *The Emperor Jones* O'Neill may be said to have solved this problem," is no evidence of genius in the author, even if it be true. But, to put aside the feeling that G. Bernard Shaw, not to mention the Expressionists, may also be said to have solved this problem, it may be well to examine whether O'Neill is quite so original as some would have us believe.

Readers may remember that a few years ago the Everyman Theatre gave us some of this author's one-act plays, and a full play, *Diff'rent.* Afterwards, at a West End theatre, *Anna Christie* was produced. I should like to point out that O'Neill has written about a dozen one-act plays. Now this is very significant if we take in conjunction the fact (which is obvious to all who have seen or read *Diff'rent)* that this play is really two one-act plays divided by an interval of thirty years; and that in *Anna Christie,* which is in four acts, there is a decided declension of interest after the first act. After saying this, and after seeing *The Emperor Jones,* I am prepared to suggest that O'Neill is strictly a one-act playwright, and probably has not enough creative impetus to carry him the length of a full play. Of course, there is nothing derogatory to O'Neill in saying this. We cannot all be major artists. We cannot all be Shakespeares and Ibsens. The perfect painter of miniatures is no less to be admired than he who fills a mighty canvas with his genius. The miniaturist we do not admire is only he who, despising the real talent he possesses, endeavours to use a larger brush. In all the arts the same rules apply, and the same results obtain when they are forgotten. The perfect short story writer is rarely the great novelist as well. Just so, the one-act playwright may attain perfection in his own medium even while he fails in each attempt to write a full-length play. And he fails, as all like him must fail, because he is fluttering at the bars of his own talent, attempting to win a freedom that he will never be able to use. How many artists have been spoilt because they have tried, or have been persuaded that they ought to try, to do "important" work? It will be a pity if O'Neill is spoilt in this way, for he has an undoubted talent for the short

piece; and if he does not, perhaps cannot, make his characters very significant, he is certainly a master of emotional effect, even if the emotions he plays upon are the very crudest.

With the suggestion in mind that this author's proper medium is the one-act play, let us examine *The Emperor Jones.* The action takes place on an island in the West Indies. Brutus Jones, an unusually intelligent and self-reliant negro of tall and powerful build, has made himself "Emperor" over the "trash" niggers. For years he had been in the States. Owing to a quarrel in which he killed his negro opponent, Jones had been given a twenty years' sentence; but he had escaped, after killing his warder, and had fled to this island. His personality and intelligence have enabled him to dominate the other negroes. As "Emperor," he has ground them down with taxes and appropriated the money. But he realises that they will sometime rise against him, and he has made all arrangements for a hurried departure.

The scene opens in a spacious audience chamber, bare of all furniture except a bright scarlet wooden throne. Through archways can be seen an unclouded sky of intense blue. This setting is very simple and very good. After an unnecessary scene between a negress and a white-livered, shiftless, aitchless Cockney trader who acts as chorus to the play, Emperor Jones appears. There follows a well-written scene of great interest. As the huge negro talks to the comic and sickly representative of Europe, we hear the necessary antecedent facts at the same time as we learn to appreciate the vigour of the negro. He boasts and swaggers, but O'Neill makes us believe that he has something to boast about. The trader tells Jones that his game is up, that the rebellion has started. Jones, incredulous, clangs the attendance bell. No one comes. After a moment of anger he accepts the situation, and decides "to resign de job of Emperor right dis minute." It is late afternoon, and a tropical sun burns hotly. He will have to reach the edge of the great forest by running over the plain, before evening. After resting, and eating the food he has buried there in readiness, he is going to run all night through the forest to the coast. And as he boasts to the Cockney of his cunning foresight, there comes from the distant hills the low vibrant throb of the tom-tom. It is the "trash" niggers weaving spells to aid them in their attack. It brings a moment's breath of fear to the superstitious negro in Jones. But he waves the fear away, and starts his flight from the palace, grandiloquently, through "the front door."

The rest of the play consists of seven very short scenes, in which we see Jones in various parts of the forest. Physically exhausted by hunger, mentally harassed by fear of the ghostly visions which appear every time he rests, he loses his way. Each vision disappears when he shoots, but every time be shoots he remembers that he has only six bullets and that he is also indicating his position. Throughout these scenes sounds the gradually accelerating thump of the tom-tom, which also quickens at each ghostly appearance, giving us out loud, as it were, the negro's heart-beats quickened by fear. The last scene is at the edge of the forest. Some natives are there, one frantically beating the tom-tom, the others armed with rifles. The Cockney is also there. "Ain't yer goin' in an "unt 'im in the woods?" he asks. "We cotch him," answers the chief. There is a sound of snapping twigs. The natives shoot. The dead body of Brutus Jones is

dragged in. By losing his way he had run in a circle, and he comes out of the forest where he went in.

All this reads much better than it acts. Indeed, the scenes in the wood are scarcely dramatic, and being almost repetitions of each other certainly do not create a crescendo of interest. Besides, ghosts and supernatural visions are hardly ever successful in the theatre. Shakespeare is the only dramatist who has dared to bring on a ghost three times in one play. He managed, it is true, to make the third visitation more effective than the first, but there are few dramatists who could do likewise. The first act of *The Emperor Jones* is good, and could almost stand by itself. The rest of the play is a monologue in a series of anticlimaxes. The author has found a good theme; but the play will never be a famous one because there are so many plays with good ideas spoilt by wrong treatment. It is worth seeing, if only for the first act; but mainly you ought to see it because of Mr. Paul Robeson in the leading part. I have nothing but admiration for his performance. Where the author was good he was magnificent. He failed, I think, only in those pitfalls of the author's which only a personality of the greatest magnetism could have o'erleaped. Mr. Robeson's voice, intelligence, physique, and sense of the stage immediately made me want to see him in *Othello.*

Of those readers who see this play many, I hope, will agree that the theory that O'Neill is a one-act dramatist holds good in *Emperor Jones* as in *Diff'rent.* And that in any case a series of monologues on a theme of fear hardly passes beyond the limits of contemporary drama. What are most plays written round a "star" actor but monologues on that well-known theme, the capabilities of that particular "star"? But it is unfortunate for the theory that O'Neill is a good one-act dramatist that the curtain-raiser should have been *The Long Voyage Home.* For in this piece is exposed to view the simple and conventional mind of the author, who at first sight surprises us by the unusualness of his characters, and his literal transcription of their language, but who is soon found to be developing them so conventionally that we know exactly what they will do and say next. So that although he "piles on the agony," letting us know that the quiet, simple sailor about to be drugged, robbed, and put on to an outgoing ship, has all the virtues, that he has been saving up for two years to buy a farm, and that his aged mother is waiting for him, we are not very interested in him, and watch him being drugged, robbed and carried off without emotion. As in other plays and books of this kind, to use Wilde's perfect phrase: it is the suspense of the author which becomes unbearable.

Source: John Shand, review of *The Emperor Jones* in the *New Statesman,* Vol. XXV, no. 647, September 19,1925, pp. 628-29.

Adaptations

The Emperor Jones was adapted as a full-length feature film in 1933 and starred Paul Robeson as Brutus Jones and Dudley Digges as Smithers. The screenplay adaptation for this black and white, seventy-two-minute film was written by Du Bose Heyward and directed by Dudley Murphy for United Artists. In 1980 the film was released on videocassette by Hollywood Home Theatre. In 1993, Janus Films joined Voyager Press to issue the 1933 film coupled with a thirty-minute documentary of Paul Robeson's life taken from the Janus Film Collection and originally released in 1980. The documentary, in color, is narrated by actor Sidney Poitier.

In 1933, an operatic version of the play had its World Premiere at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City. The composer and librettist was Louis Gruenberg, the conductor Tullio Serafin. The set was designed by Jo Mielziner, and the role of Brutus Jones was sung by baritone Lawrence Tibbett. The opera followed O'Neill's script faithfully except for the omission of the final scene and the changing of Jones's death to suicide (using his last silver bullet on himself). O'Neill approved the changes. As a result of the orchestration, the drum-beat was less effective.

In 1971, Everett and Edwards released a thirty-two-minute audiocassette lecture on the play as part of their Modern Drama Cassette Curriculum Series. The lecturer is Jordan Yale Miller. In 1976, Everett and Edwards released a thirty-six-minute audiocassette lecture on the play as part of their World Literature Cassette Curriculum Series. The lecturer is Howard F. Stein.

In 1974, Jeffrey Norton Publishers released a fifty-five-minute audiocassette interview between Heywood Hale Broun and O'Neill biographer Louis Sheaffer as part of the Jeffrey Norton Publishers Avid Readers in the Arts tape library.

In 1975, Educational Dimensions Corporation released an eighteen-minute audiovisual film-strip that examines and analyzes O'Neill's play.

Topics for Further Study

Research the history of Expressionism in both painting and theatre in the early-twentieth century and discuss how *The Emperor Jones* illustrates expressionistic subject matter and technique.

Research the lives of Charles Gilpin (1878-1930) and Paul Robeson (1898-1976), the black actors who portrayed Brutus Jones in the original stage (1920) and film (1933) versions of *The Emperor Jones.* Discuss the ways in which their skin color had an effect on their personal and professional lives.

Research the history of how African Americans were portrayed in drama and film during the first thirty years of the twentieth century. Compare these portrayals with the one O'Neill creates in *The Emperor Jones*

Research the physiology and psychology of hallucinations. What is happening in the human brain when people "see" and experience phenomena that are not actually present? Compare this information with what you see happening to Brutus Jones in *The Emperor Jones.*

Research several biographies of Eugene O'Neill to see how his father, James O'Neill, had his promising acting career "ruined" by his extraordinary success in the stageplay, *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Then research in biographies (and the autobiography) of twentieth-century actor, Basil Rathbone, who had a similar experience with his success in the Sherlock Holmes film series. Finally, read O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* and discuss how "success" is not always what it seems to be, a theme that can be applied as well to *The Emperor Jones.*

Compare and Contrast

1920: The African American population in the United States is about 10.5 million, or nearly 10% of the American population. The average life expectancy for African American males is 45.5 years, compared to 54.4 for whites. For females the comparable figures are 45.2 and 55.6.

Today: The African American population in the United States is about 32 million, or nearly 12% of the American population. The average life expectancy for African American males is 67.5 years, compared to about 73.4 for whites. For females the comparable figures are 75.8 and 79.6.

1920: After race riots break out in twenty-six U.S. cities in 1919, the recently rejuvenated Ku Klux Klan experiences tremendous growth in 1920, expanding to 100,000 members in twenty-seven states. According to Frederick Lewis Allen in *Only Yesterday,* the Klan will mushroom to 4.5 million by 1924. There are sixty-one documented lynchings of African Americans in 1920.

Today: Klanwatch is an organization founded in 1980 to monitor residual Klan terrorism. In 1986, they estimated that there were only six to seven thousand active Klan members in the United States. In 1998, police and hate-group watchers in South Carolina estimated they had only two state Klan groups with fewer than fifty members, diminished from four groups of several hundred in the early-1990s. However, over the years the Klan has been joined by a hundreds of other hate groups. One group, the Skinheads, numbered about 3,500 members in the early-1990s and were considered by many to be a greater racist threat than the Klan.

1920: Though proposals are defeated for regular cooperation between white and black labor leaders, the national convention of the American Federation of Labor (the AFL) officially opposes discrimination and votes in support of the unionization of blacks. The Brotherhood of Railroad Clerks is asked to change their "whites only" membership policy. The Brotherhood of Dining Car Employees is organized on a national basis.

Today: The AFL-CIO is the most powerful labor organization in the United States. The merger of the AFL with the CIO (the Congress of Industrial Organizations) in 1955 brought both skilled and unskilled or semi-skilled workers together. Under the leadership of its president, George Meany, the AFL-CIO became completely integrated and openly supported civil rights initiatives in the 1960s.

1920: The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)□founded in 1909 by an interracial group□makes James Weldon Johnson the Secretary and the first African-American on the national board. The original organization, though headed by W. E. B. DuBois, was predominantly white.

Today: The NAACP remains one of the preeminent organizations attempting to assure black Americans their constitutional rights. Considered a radical organization in 1920,

the NAACP is now considered much less radical than other civil rights groups born in the 1960s and 70s. Focusing mainly on litigation, legislation, and education, the NAACP has won numerous victories for civil rights in the federal courts, including the landmark legislation ending school segregation in 1954.

What Do I Read Next?

The German silent film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919) is one of the classic examples of expressionistic technique in film. Odd angles of vision, distorted sets, and hypnotic acting enhance the dream-like portrayal of insanity in this film.

The Hairy Ape;;;; (1922) is O'Neill's most completely expressionistic play. Set initially on an ocean liner and focusing on the social snub felt by the brutish, below-deck worker, Yank, the play creates a nightmare atmosphere as Yank searches for a place where he can "belong."

All God's Chillun Got Wings (1924) is another of O'Neill's plays dealing with the black experience. The play caused a tremendous controversy because of the interracial kissing of a hand and the portrayal of an interracial marriage.

In the history of theatre, *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) by Lorraine Hansberry is one of the most famous and commercially successful dramas focusing on black life. A poignant protest against racial injustice, the play features a black family and its attempt to rise into the middle class.

Funny house of a Negro (1962) by Adrienne Kennedy is a one-act play that portrays the disturbed mind of a mulatto woman named Sarah as she contemplates suicide. Surreal, poetic, and mythic in its presentation, the play shows Sarah hallucinating and shifting between various alter egos□black and white, male and female□as she resists her Negro identity.

The Sound and the Fury (1929), a novel by William Faulkner, tells a story from the point of view of four different characters, revealing the mental process of each narrator along the way. One of the speakers is a mentally deficient young man named Benjamin.

Expressionism (1970), by John Willett, is a thorough examination of Expressionism in many different areas, including painting, drama, poetry, and film.

Further Study

Allen, Frederick Lewis. *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties,* Blue Ribbon Books, 1931. One of the classic accounts of the "roaring twenties," this very readable book discusses everything from daily life to the great stock market crash in 1929.

Deutsch, Helen, and Hanau, Stella. *The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre,* Farrar and Rinehart, 1931.

A history of the Provincetown Players with a chapter focusing on the production of *The Emperor Jones*.Appendices include reproductions of the company's theatre programs from 1916 to 1929.

Huggins, Nathan. *Harlem Renaissance,* Oxford University Press, 1971.

A basic treatment of this important movement in American literary history.

Miller, Jordan Y. *Eugene O 'Neill and the American Critic: A Bibliographical Checklist,* Archon Books, 1973.

A reference book that lists detailed publication and production data for all of O'Neill's plays along with an annotated list of contemporary reviews of these productions.

Pfister, Joel. *Staging Depth: Eugene O'Neill and the Politics of Psychological Discourse,* University of North Carolina Press, 1995.

Despite its foreboding title, a very readable book with an unusually detailed multi-disciplinary slant on O'Neill and the times in which he wrote.

Ranald, Margaret Loftus. *The Eugene O'Neill Companion,* Greenwood Press, 1984.

This encyclopedia dedicated to O'Neill has entries for plays, characters, and important individuals and organizations in O'Neill's life and much more. Contains several valuable appendices.

Sheaffer, Louis. *O'Neill: Son and Playwright,* Paragon House, 1968, and*O'Neill: Son and Artist,* Little, Brown, 1973.

These two-volumes constitute the best of the many biographies of O'Neill.

Turnqvist, Egil. *A Drama of Souls: Studies in O'Neill's Super-naturalistic Technique,* Yale, 1969.

A very close reading of the plays, giving special attention to theatrical effects.

Wainscott, Ronald H. *Staging O'Neill,* Yale, 1988. Includes an unusually detailed chapter focusing on the theatrical elements of *The Emperor Jones.*

Bibliography

Bowen, Croswell. *The Curse of the Misbegotten,* McGraw-Hill, 1959, p. 132.

Broun, Heywood. Review of *The Emperor Jones* in the *New York Tribune,* November 4, 1920, reprinted in *O'Neill and His Plays: Four Decades of Criticism,* edited by Oscar Cargill, New York University Press, 1961, pp. 144-46.

Falk, Doris V. *Eugene O'Neill and the Tragic Tension,* Rutgers University Press, 1958, pp. 67-68.

Gassner, John. "Introduction" in *O'Neill: A Collection of Critical Essays,* edited by John Gassner, Prentice-Hall, 1964, pp. 2, 4.

Gelb, Arthur, and Barbara Gelb. *O'Neill,* Harper, 1960, p. 444.

O'Neill, Eugene. Interview with Charles P. Sweeney in the *New York World,* November 9, 1924, p. 5M, reprinted in *Conversations with Eugene O'Neill,* edited by Mark W. Estrin, University Press of Mississippi, 1990, pp. 57-58.

Tiusanen, Timo. *O'Neill's Scenic Images,* Princeton, 1968, pp. 104, 106, 338.

Woollcott, Alexander. "The Emperor Jones" in the *New York Times,* December 28, 1920, sec. 9, p. 1.

Woollcott, Alexander. "The New O'Neill Play" in the *New York Times,* November 7, 1920, sec 1, p. 1.

BOOKRAGS

Copyright Information

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

Project Editor
David Galens

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

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

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

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

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

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

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

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

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

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

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

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

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

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

Selection Criteria

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

How Each Entry Is Organized

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

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

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

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

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

Other Features

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

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

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

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

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

Citing Drama for Students

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We Welcome Your Suggestions

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

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