

# Expressionistic Technique in Eugene O' Neill the Emperor Jones

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## Abstract

*There is no doubt that Expressionism is a new technique of drama developed in the 20th century as the Stream of Consciousness technique is a new technique in fiction. Expressionism in literature arose as a reaction against materialism, complacent bourgeois prosperity, rapid mechanization and urbanization, in pre-world war first in Europe society. It was the dominated literary movement in German during and immediately after world war first.*

*Expressionism is a dramatic technique with the help of which a dramatist depicts the 'inner reality', the soul or psyche of his personages. The emphasis shifts from the external to the internal reality. The action moves background and forward freely in space and time in harmony with the thought processes of the character concerned. There is a deeper and deeper probing of the*

*sub-conscious, action is increasingly internalized, and what goes on within the soul becomes more important than the external action.*

**Key-Words:** Expressionism, Rootlessness, Action, Inner Reality, Psyche, Dramatic, Racial, Probing

## Paper

It is in the twentieth century that man faith in the established institutions and accepted values of life has been shattered resulting in to a great void with its consequent feelings of rootlessness and aimlessness. The inevitable outcome of this dismal and disturbing picture is that man finds himself orphaned and at bay. The writers of twentieth century in general, and the dramatists in particular, have responded assiduously and cautiously to this damaging picture in their own respective moods and modes to diagnose and discuss it as is evident by the nihilism of

Nietzsche and angst of Soren Abby Kierkegaard.

In the same way, Eugene O' Neill also exposes this existentialism chaos under the influence of Freud and Jung in terms of determination and racial collective unconscious where the human life as a whole has become 'a wilderness', and 'long day's journey in to the night'. So whether we study Brutus Jones in The Emperor Jones, trying to escape his racial inheritance and mooring; the central vision of O'Neill as a dramatist lies in his making the hero as the victim of forces of this indifferent and inhuman universe, but facing it with the strength of the spirit and sharpness of intellect inevitably meeting his tragic doom with pride and self-respect.

This is what we find superbly illustrated through the life, career and fall of Brutus Jones. The word Brutus stands for the brute in man, and Jones stands for that every man who is powerful representative of such victims of the modern nihilistic society. In fact, Jones is imprisoned for the murder of jeef, but he escapes out of the prison by killing the jail guards. Being a Negro by birth he comes to a Negro inhibited East- Indies island where by his sheer intellect strength and skill he rises to be the emperor of the island within a short period of time.

The first scene of the play is in the form of a dumb show where without any dialogues, we are introduced to a hell of mystery, suspense, and impending violence that await the Emperor for his misdeeds as well as for his exploiting the natives with moral qualms. So, the first scene of the play is a realistic account of a conversation between the emperor and the white trade Smithers which lets the mood of the play, and adumbrates the future course of the events.

Now Jones realizes the likelihood of his dislodgement as the natives are up in arms against his misrule and misdeeds. That is why, now he decides to leave the palace enroute to some foreign country through the forest and so he starts his escape fully dressed as an emperor with his panama hat, his pistol, and the silver bullets which he ties to his arm in the afternoon, but the food which he had kept under a white stone on the one edge of the forest, is missing now, so completely haggard and hungry, he hunters in the forest as the sound of tom-tom is heard louder.

It is the skill of Eugene O' Neill that he succeeds in transferring the forest on the stage to represent the spiritual regression of Emperor Jones till he become one with the Negro race. The trees and the

bushes of the forest appear to be as the threatening phantoms, and the fear of Jones is at its peak when he finds the figure of Jeff whom he murdered in the state. He fires a shot and the phantoms and the figures disappear which is followed by the appearance of the figure of jail-guards which also disappears when he fires another shot.

The vision of the galley slaves with shovels beckoning Jones to join them symbolizes his complete identification with his race as he also casts-off his dress and jewellery except the lion clothes which is the traditional dress of a Negro. This vision also disappears when Jones fires a shot, but by this time Jones takes a wrong turn as he is moving towards the same edge of the forest where he had started. The final and last vision of Jones in the forest is that of a Congo witch doctor dancing and enchanting incarnations in front of a crocodile god emerging out of the water which symbolizes the evil which Jones has worshipped and pursued throughout his life.

Now this evil deity demands the sacrifice of Jones' life for appeasement, but the firing of the last shot relieve Jones of the symbolic compulsion of self-sacrifice. However, every step of Jones in the forest is minutely

monitored by the dramatist with the time sequence as well as with the rising pitch of the sound of tom-tom.

Here the readers get the movement from personal level of being to impersonal, and finally to the racial unconscious cast within the framework of the first and the; last scene. Racial unconsciousness is an integral part of yourself, and you cannot escape yourself from it. Racial inheritance is a very powerful factor in the personality of a man, and in shaping man's personality, the racial factor is very important. You may try to change this concept, but you cannot.

So, as in *The Hairy Ape*, O' Neill exposes beautifully the psycho-spiritual regression of yank powerfully and symbolically in terms of a circular movement which shows that all human advancements and so called the civil stride snare merely an illusion with the onset of dawn, in the same way, in *The Emperor Jones*, O' Neill portrays man's struggle against something greater than him- a struggle against the inexorable forces of his inner most self, where he incarnates the insolubility of the conflict between an individual and a world hostile to him.

It is in this manner, O'Neill shatters the external reality as is perceived

by the conscious mind of Jones, and exposes the inner reality of the sub-conscious mind, thus revealing his real self. The play is a record of agony and terror that the Negroes has to face in search of their identity. It is a journey of shedding illusion of a fragmented self through the experiences of knowledge ultimately to his being.

In this way, we can safely and rightly aver that the tragedy of Jones is a powerful tragic expression of the basic human nature with its lust, greed, pride

and arrogance constantly in conflict with a callous society.

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