

## I. Introduction

Eugene O'Neill was born in a Broadway hotel on October 16, 1888. He was the son of James O'Neill, a popular actor of romantic melodrama. O'Neill is held by many critics to be a major figure in American literature: It is unquestionable that he was the first American to write a number of popular plays. This still seems possible. He is, therefore, undoubtedly the central figure in any discussion of the new school of American dramatist. His works reveal both strong originality and the effect of forces in the observed, both an individual creative writer and the effect of an intellectual milieu common to him and his fellows.

O' Neill's chief concern had always been with the eternally tragic predicament of man struggling for some understanding and some justification of himself in a universe always mysterious and often seemingly inimical. He experimented different styles and philosophies in his plays throughout his life. The book entitled *Literary History of the United States* states: "O Neill may be said to have had styles rather than style and philosophies rather than a philosophy" (1240). His main concern was to show the relation of man to God . O'Neill once wrote he "must dig at the sickness of today as he feels it the death of the old and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfactory new one for the surviving primitive, religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fears of death with" (1246).

WW I left many things in the United States. Its impact was seen during 1920s. It brought racial tension too. Racial tension rose as white solders returning from Europe found themselves competing for jobs and housing with African Americans who had come north during the war. During the summer of 1919, race riots broke out in many Northern cities. The worst was in Chicago, where "nearly forty people were killed and more than five hundred injured" (477).

Few cities in the United States escaped racial violence in the early 1920s. Even after the Red Scare died down, racial intolerance lived on in organization such as a powerful national force. Blacks and women were not offered voting right. World War I turned out to be fruitful to blacks and women because they got different and other opportunities. World War I had been a liberating experience for true of those who went aboard. As Donald Ritchie in his book *American History States*.

For the first time they were freed from the second class citizenship they suffered in the United States. But the prejudice and discrimination that awaited them at home helped to create a spirit of pride and protest, forging a new unity and a new African American. A striking outcome of this new spirit among African American was the Harlem Renaissance. (506)

In New York City, the intellectual capital of the United States, a numbers of high talented African Americans rose to fame. Some were in the performing arts, including actors Charles Gilpin, who played the role of Brutus Jones in the *Emperor Jones* in almost all performances of the play, and Richard B. Harrison. Many other African Americans Singers, dancers, actors, scholars, economists, sociologists, writes, etc emerged during this time. Writers like Langston Hughes and Jessie H Faucet Zora Neale, Water White use the American experience as a theme for novels, poems, painting, and sculpture.

In this political and social background O'Neill wrote the play. Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* was written in 1920s. It is a powerful and complex play consisting of eight scenes. The play was first staged in November 1920s, in the Provincetown Players Theatre, and it got an immense success. It was hailed as an landmark for the representation of race on the American stage. For featuring a central

black character and for actually casting black actor to play the role. O'Neill and his work were seen to be radically progressive in that era. The play brought a new thrill both in black and white community. White appreciated O'Neill for his sympathetic and powerful representation of African American protagonist. In later years the frequent use of the word nigger came under attack. Actually the complexity in the character of protagonist, Brutus Jones, his paradoxical attitude to both blacks and whites; his rebellious beginning and terrifying end; plays expressionist investigation of the complexities of race and identify, are some of the unique features of the play. The play tells the story of Brutus Jones, an African American Pullman porter, who escapes from a chain gang and becomes the Emperor of a Caribbean Island. But Jones becomes tyrannically dictator in the island and starts to exploit natives getting advantages from their superstitious belief. Smither, a white cockney trader, blames Jones "Blimey! You've squeezed 'em dry!" (178). Natives prepared for revolution against him which he got information from smother. He escapes resigning the post of emperor and is killed on the way by natives.

Among O'Neill's five so-called "negro plays", from 1914 to 1924, last two of these: *the Emperor Jones* and *All God's Chillum God Wings* got influenced by "Harlem Renaissance". This was the period in which black writers themselves often treated the black man as primitive. With *the Emperor Jones*, as early as 1920s, O'Neill started experimenting with technical devices with which he becomes conspialosly identified. Beginning with the one act plays based on his sea experiences O'Neill experimented different techniques in his plays which emancipated American dramas from their dependency to European Dramas. With the Emperor Jones, and the plays that fallowed it, O'Neill began to enlarge the techniques his playwriting and was able to find suitable methods for expressing insights and attitudes keeping the real meaning

hidden. Though O'Neill started from realistic plays, he left it because realism only attempts to show the surface reality or reality of appearance. Because of the opinion that reality of appearance cannot be the reality of truth, O'Neill moved to diagnose the reality of truth which is the truth of mind. So, to show the inner feeling, emotions, ideas, obsession and experience appropriately he employed verity of styles for his play. He enriched his dramas with new and renewed techniques; In his numerous materialistic plays he mixed symbolism and melodrama. Even *The Emperor Jones* is what Gilled calls "magnificent presentment of panic fear in the breast of a half civilized negro. It is a kind of unfolding, in reverse order of the tragically epic of the American negro" (117).

Most of his plays embodied the ideas and conflicts of the First World War I, economic depression of 1930s, and World War II the period was quite traumatic, tenseful and hopeless. In order to show this truth he employed different techniques. So, his plays were shocking to the American audiences at that time who were habituated in the sentimental comedies, the pathetic dramas and melodrama. O'Neill himself insisted that he was concord with the tragic spirit, for him, the tragic alone has that significant beauty which is truth. It is the meaning of life and hope. His plays are not about a glorious struggle against fate or heroic pursuit of the unattainable. But he always shows the tragic struggle between the littleness of man and the vast nature of culture and universe. Occasionally he concerns himself with social and cultural realism, and also gives much focus to individuals in relation to great forces, which function outside. In short, he presents human beings chained in the web of socio-cultural and political relations from where he can escape away.

There is no consistent ideological pattern in his dramas; rather there are many ideas of discussion of ideas, which keep on changing from play to play. Nevertheless,

they indicate the chaos, turmoil, conflict, suffering, discrimination, hopelessness and helplessness of contemporary society. His best plays are genuine, powerful expression of the spiritual anguish, lies and mutual human destruction.

Like most of his plays O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* is open to interpretation on different levels. Regarding its techniques of amalgamation as well as the treatment of the subject matter and the character the play bears complexity which opens way to multiple interpretation. *The literary History of United States* likes to look at the play as “mystical rather than sociological or scientific” (1240). Some commentators have limited themselves to a consideration of the realistic surface layer. Critic like Gelb appreciate the play as “most interesting play which has come yet from the most promising playwright in America (235).”

Some critics like to look at the play as the drama of human fear; the emotion of terror where the protagonist is fighting against his own evil deeds. Spiller and Dorris V. Falk have studied it with psychological approaches in relation with human fear and terror. Lionel and Trilling compare Jones with Oedipus and Caesar and calls Jones "a little Caesar' since within him contains "his own assassin" (xi). Miller sees it as a moving and enthralling "drama in which O'Neill endeavors to foreshorten "human kind's progression from 'savagery' to civilization" (54).

Particularly these critics focus and interpret the play with the psychological approaches relating to Freud's or Jung's concepts. Or they interpret it from cultural perspectives and emphasize on the Jones' cultural degeneration. But close new historical reading of the text has not been done yet. Without doing the contextual study of the play by assorting it with the contemporary socio-cultural, and political situation responsible for the production of the text, the study of the text will remain incomplete. So this dissertation endeavors to do the deep study of the "co-text" or

"contexts". Position of writer in the contemporary society which framed his mentality; socio-cultural and political situation of society; representation of both black and white characters; and the improvisation of power will be the central focus of this dissertation. As Aoife Monks also states: "*The Emperor Jones* demands an investigation into why it has become not only acceptable, but preferable [...] why O'Neill's representation of race, which had once been seen as radically progressive was now deemed unaccepted racist" (9541).

So this dissertation tries to explore the racial relationship between Brutus Jones, and Smither, representation of these two characters. It also tries to find out the reactions to the play by the blacks and the whites. Writers' attitude towards the characters will also be studied.

To make the new historicist reading of the text, the theory of new historicism is essential. The New Historicism emerged during the decade of 1980s is vibrating in the field of literary studies. Blurring the boundary between literary and non-literary texts, it puts all in the same category. As proclaimed by Montrose new historicism is "a reciprocal concern with historicity of the texts and textuality of histories" (410). Blurring the boundary between history and literary text it demands to challenge the linearity of history which pretends to be factual and objective. Instead of writing the comprehensive linear history as supported by traditional historians, new historicists attempt to write histories from the perspectives of margin, suppressed, left out and excluded. They believe that even a literary text is giving lots of information about the contemporary society so the present dissertation will do the intensive study of Foucauldian concept of power and discourse, and its influence on new historicism. Similarly it will do broader study on theories of Greenblatt, Montrose, H. Aram

Veese to get the clear idea of new historicism. Detailed explanation of this theory will be done in the second chapter.

## II. New Historicism

New Historicism as a mode of literary theory emerged in the 1980s. Some pioneering new historicists are Louis Montrose, H.Aram Veseer, Wisley Morris, and especially Stephen Greenblatt. Greenblatt's book *Renaissance Self Fashioning* is widely accepted as the first book to develop the concept of New Historicism. In this book he defines "new historicism as a practice rather than a doctrine"(1). Originated as a Renaissance studies it traces its broader space to all historical, cultural, and literary phenomenon. In this regard, Louis Montrose comments:

New historicism has been constituted as a terminological cite of intense debate of multiple appropriation and contestation, not only within Renaissance studies but in other literary criticism, in history and anthropology, and within the cross-disciplinary space of cultural studies. (407)

Because of its primary focus upon the historical and cultural condition of the production of the text, its meaning and effects new historicism opposes the basic concept of formalistic New Criticism and Structuralism for their insistence to place text in isolation from its historical context. Denial of the possibility of finding any objective truth leads new historicism in blurring the boundary between text and context, fact and fiction and putting them in equal position as Louis Montrose describes the new historicism as "a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and textuality of history" (416).

The concept of historicity of the text arose because of the thinking that text is connected to the social, cultural, and economic circumstances of its production. Similarly, the concept of the textuality of the history came because of the belief in subjective truth and fictionality of history. Truth, as Foucault describes, "Is undoubtedly



the sort of error that cannot be refuted because it was hardened into the unalterable form in the long baking process of history"(79). As new historicism is strongly impacted by Foucault and his concept of truth, power and knowledge, it believes that there is no universal meaning or truth in history. According to the historian Dwight W. Hoover new historicism believes that "the meaning imputed in history reflects power relations at the time of writing as well as the time of the events occurrence" (356). Because of its strong belief that every individual is chained in the complex socio-historical context and the text produced by him can never reflect the objective truth, new historicism rejects the synchronic study of cultural and structural study of literature what David Hollinger calls "linguistic imperialism" (356).

Thus, new historicism and cultural materialism reject both the autonomy and individual genius of the author and the autonomy of literary work. As the prominent new historicist Stephen Greenblatt has opined that of the work of art is the product of a negotiation between a creator or class or creators, equipped with a complex communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society" (12). As a literary text is inevitably involved with a discourse or an ideology, it cannot help being vehicle for power. It will be relevant to put the view of Hans Bertens about literature in context of new historicism as he says:

Literature does not simply reflect relations of power, but actively participates in the consolidation and construction of discourse and ideologies, just as it functions as an instrument in the construction of identities, not only at the individual level ... but also on the level of the group or even that of the national state. (177)

Thus the tendency of reading a literary text as an autonomous entity as in art for art's sake as in new criticism, formalism and tendency or reducing history and art into the

question of language and its meaning is strongly rejected by new historicism. It believes that all human actions are dependent upon symbolic representation and cultural meaning.

Dealing with the contribution of new historicism on the field of literary critical mode Jon R. Veenstra, a literary critic, writes

Contrary to many older interpretive method and schools that tend to see historical and literary texts as autonomous entities, poetics of culture seeks to reveal the relationship between texts and their socio-historical contexts. Cultural poetics assumes that text not only documents the social forces that inform and constitute history and society but also features prominently in the social process themselves which fashion both individual identity and the socio-historical situation. (174)

Dealing with the basic assumptions of new historicism, H.Aram Veesser in preface to his book, *The New Historicism Reader* writes:

New historicism really does assume 1- that every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices; 2- that very act of unmasking, critique, and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes; 3- that literary and non literary "texts" circulate inseparably; 4- that no discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths or expresses unalterable human nature; and 5- that a critical method and a language adequate to describe culture under capitalism participate in the economy they describe. (2)

In this way, some of the key terms related to new historicism can be included in 'context', 'text', 'deconstruction', 'canon', 'discourse', 'representation' and so on. The first term 'context' can be defined as the situated use of language. Because of its arbitrariness and conventionality language does not have a clear meaning. It reflects only a battle over meaning. Therefore text's are not self explanatory; they do not contain their own meaning because language is subversive of meaning. So the reader must place meaning into the text by putting it into context and revive the hidden meanings that are not consciously articulated. Similarly, the concept of the 'canon', those written text that supposedly constitute the best in the western tradition is under severe attack in new historicism. Similarly, the concept of a universal meaning as supposed by Humanism and old historicism is also come under rejection. Meaning varies according to the varying communities which speak to their members in terms which they alone best understand.

The tendency of doing historicist reading of the text is not the first one. The Old Historicism, the product of the nineteenth century German thought, with the precursor Hegel, also did the historical reading of the text. Historian Dwight W. Hoover states: they ( old historians) felt "the need for historians to fathom the mental universes of past cultures and societies in order to understand them" (358).

Even though there are found some general similarities ,there are vast differences between old historicism and new historicism. In her famous book "*Critical Theory Today*" Louis Tyson mentions:

Traditional historians ask, " what happened?" and "what does the event tell about history?". In contrast, new historicists ask, "How has the event been interpreted?" and "what do the interpretations tell us about the interpreters. ( 278)

For most traditional historians history is a series of event that a linear or causal relationship. They believe that objective analysis of history is possible by means of which we can uncover the facts about historical events. On the contrary new historicists never believe in the possibility of objectives analysis. For them history cannot be understood simply as a progression of events from the perspective of causes but those causes are usually multiple, complex, and difficult to analyze. According to the book *Theory for Beginners* edited by H.S. Paudel new historicists believe that text is thrice processed, "first through the ideology, or outlook, or discursive practices of its own time, then through those of ours, and finally through the distorting web of language itself " (200).

Frederich Nietzsche, who is regarded as one of the first real precursor's of Postmodernism, settled the foundation for new historicism questioning the traditional notions of truth, history, and knowledge. In his essay "Truth and Falsity in an Ultramoral Sense", he questions the relation of language to truth. According to Hazard Adams, Nietzsche secularizes the "truth in language that is lie "(628). In the essay, he views human intellect as wretched, shadow like, transitory, purposeless, and fanciful. For Nietzsche history is made by "superman" who has "will to power" and "supra historical vantage point.(630) He formulates truth on his behalf and so truth differs from society to society and discipline to discipline. Possibly, therefore, he defines truth as "a mobile army of metaphor, metonymy, anthropomorphisms: in short a sum of human relations which becomes poetically and rhetorically intensified, metamorphosed, adored, and after long usage seems to a nation fixed, canonic and binding(636). He opines that "truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions"(636).

Nietzsche's skepticism about the notions of truth and linearity of history becomes influential in the postmodern era. In other word, he anticipated most of the

central tenets of postmodernism. And aesthetic attitude viewing history as the representation of truth no longer exists after Nietzsche because he says life can never be understood in terms of ultimate truths. He denies facts and essences, and celebrates plurality of interpretations and fragmented self. He views 'power' as the only important thing in the world. Everyone desires it. He states, "the only thing that all men want is power, and whatever is wanted is wanted for the sake of power. If something is wanted more than something else it must represent power" (511).

Michael Foucault's radically new idea about 'discourse' , 'truth', 'knowledge', and 'representation' shake the western intellectual circle once again after Nietzsche. McHoul and Wendy Grace describe Foucauldian discourse "not as a language or social interaction but as relatively well bounded areas of knowledge" (31). He takes 'power' not just as the ruthless domination of the weaker, by the stronger. In his first volume of *History of Sexuality* he claims, " Power is everywhere [...] power comes from below; that is there is no binary and all encompassing opposition between ruler and ruled at the root of power relations and serving as a general matrix" (93-4). His opinion of 'subject' as particular historically located disciplinary process enables us to consider ourselves as individual subject. Contrary to the contemporary analysis of power as negative and repressive; and its form of relationship between sovereign and subject, Foucault posits productive nature of power. For Foucault, power is never monolithic and power relations always imply multiple sites not only of power but also of resistance of variable configuration ,intensity ,and effectiveness;

The strictly relational character of power relationships....depends on a multiplicity of point of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, of handle in power relations.... .Resistance ...can only exist in the strategic field of power relations. But this does not mean that

they are only a relation a rebound, forming with respect to the basic domination an under side that is in the end always passive doomed the perpetual defeat. (95-96)

So, the power relation between two forces is always relational and multiple. This relation goes further in agreement not in restriction and domination.

In their text *A Foucault Primer* McHoul and Grace opine that Foucault's main aim was to turn the negative conception of power upside down and attribute the production of concept, ideas and structures of institutions to the circulation and exercise of power in its modern form. For him " power is nothing more and nothing less than the multiplicity of the force relations extent within the social body" (Foucault 84). Foucault's essay "Truth and Power" *posits* the view of discontinuity in history. Disregarding the structuralists systematic effort to evaluate the concept of the event form history he forwarded the susceptible analysis of history. He states:

The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of language relations of power, not relations of meaning.

History has no "meaning", though this is not to say that it is absurd or incoherent. On the contrary, it is intelligible and should be susceptible to analysis down to the smallest details. (56)

Now it becomes almost obvious that Foucault argues for the 'historical contextualization' of the text to get its meaning. But this historical contextualization needed to be something more than the simple relativization of the phenomenological logical subject.

Foucault persistently insists on genealogical approach for writing history. His essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History "systematically deals with he genealogical approach of writing history which becomes great source for accessing texts for new

historicism. He defines genealogy as gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. He says, "It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments documents that has been scratched over and recopied many times"(76). For him, genealogy must define even those instances when they remained unrealized. Without opposing history it subtly rejects "the meta-historical deployment of ideal signification and indefinite teleology"(77). Genealogist refuses the search for origin because of its link with metaphysical extension; because it always pressed fall: because it lies at a place of loss: and also because it is related to truth. Genealogy cultivates the details and accidents that accompany every beginning. Therefore, the genealogist ,for Foucault," needs history to dispel the chimeras of the origin. He must be able to recognize the events of history, its jolts, its surprise, its unsteady victories and unpalatable defeats "(80).

Foucault blames traditional monolithic history of having comprehensive view of history and tracing the past as a patient and continuous development .It dissolves singular event into an ideal continuity –as a teleological movement or a natural process. He states:

'Effective' history, however, deals with events in terms of their most unique characteristics, their most acute manifestations. An event... the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of vocabulary turned against those who had once used it, a feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of a masked 'other'. (88)

Thus, 'effective' history, i.e. genealogical approach to history excavates the loopholes of history, observes suffering of dominated, marginalized, and other peoples.

In the later part of the essay, Foucault deals about the three uses of history which have close association to Nietzsche's three types of history: Monumental history, Antiquarian history, and Critical history. The first parodic use is directed against reality, and opposes the theme of history as reminiscence or recognition. The second dissociative use is directed against identity, and opposes history given as continuity or representative of a tradition. And the third sacrificial use is directed against truth, and opposes history as knowledge. These kinds of radical views about reality, identity, history, truth, and knowledge gave sufficient impetus to new historicism to rethink about these ideas and make a contextual study of the text to get meaning of the text.

Stephen Greenblatt is one of the most notable critics in the field of new historicism. His text *Renaissance Self-fashioning* is mostly accepted as the pioneering book for establishing the trend of new historical study of the text. He prefers new historicism to be a practice rather than doctrine. Geoffrey Harpham, a literary critic mentions:

Greenblatt proposes an explanatory model that pulls away from a stable, mimetic theory of art and form a 'monolithic' view of culture, and replaces them with an idea of the art work as a 'set of manipulations', themselves manipulable by a restless cultural production.(364)

Greenblatt applies this new model mainly in the Renaissance works which H Aram Veenser thinks "is the origin of subjectivity and individualism" (13). Renaissance is actually the delivery room in which new historicists witnessed their own birth.

Human produces a text, and as a human-made object it is radically informed by all the forces that condition and shape our societies and histories. Therefore,



Greenblatt primarily focuses on relationship between text and context, between art and society. For him, text is informed by the same cultural dialects as society at large. A text, therefore, reflects as well as supports this dialectics. In other words, a socio-historical context conditions its textual representation and likewise a text informs and sometimes even conditions the historical process. Greenblatt's rejection of essentialist humanistic view of man as an autonomous, free, transcendental essence leads him to believe human self as a cultural construct. His pioneering text *Renaissance Self-fashioning* declares that a self is firstly formed in submission to an absolute power, and secondly, in relation to other, a category other than authority. In *History and Theory*, one of leading literary critics of twentieth century, Jan Veenstra states: Greenblatt stresses that literature as the unique expression of the process of self-fashioning must be defined here: 1. as manifestation of the behavior of the author; 2. an expression of the codes that govern behavior; and 3. as a reflection on these codes. (182)

Now it becomes clear that Greenblatt sees the 'world of the text' in ideological terms or in terms of Foucault's concept of power. He does not allow a dissociation of the 'world of the text' from the world of the socio-historical context.

In his new historical essay "The Improvisation of Power" he does minute observation of the term power. He delineates the Renaissance origin of the 'mobile sensibility'. With the help of Shakespeare's drama *Othello* he demonstrates how colonial power is functioning behind the role characters play. By improvisation he means "the ability both to capitalize on the unforeseen and to transform given materials into one's own scenario"(50). Improvisation is the central Renaissance mode of behavior. He sees Iago's colonial attitude toward Othello. In this context he states:

Though he finds himself in a subordinate position, the ensign regards his black general as 'an erring barbarian' whose 'free and open nature' is a fertile field for exploitation [. . .] Iago's subordination is a kind of protection, for it conceals his power and enables him to play upon the ambivalence of Othello's relation to institution society: the moor at once represents the institution and the alien, the conqueror and the infidel. (56)

Here Greenblatt clearly sees the encroachment of colonial mentality in Iago. His soliloquy "were I the moor, I would not be Iago" (1.1.57) also shows his confidence in shaping his power. Even Desdimona's relation to Othello is also the relation of submission and that is gender submission. For Greenbelt Shakespeare's military hero Othello's submission to narrative self-fashioning is due to certain circumstance in which he is situated. He loses his own origin and embraces norms of another culture. Iago's success to pollute the mind of Othello about the adultery of Desdemona is his achievement in improvisation on the religious sexual doctrine.

Greenblatt sees Iago's villainy even in Shakespeare himself. He writes:

Shakespeare seems a kind of green-room Iago, appropriating for himself the labor of others. In *Othello* Shakespeare seems to acknowledge, represent and explore his affinity to the malicious improviser .... There are characters in his works who can improvise without tragic results, characters who can embrace a mobility of desire. (72)

Towards the end of the essay he gets confused how to conclude about drama.

Then he suggests that "truth itself is radically unstable and yet constantly stabilized as unstable as those male authorities that affirm themselves only to be undermined by subversive women" (74). He further says:

Shakespeare's language and themes are caught up, like the medium itself, in unsettling repetitions committed to the shifting voices and audiences, with their shifting aesthetic assumptions and historical imperatives, which govern a living theatre. (74)

Thus Stephen Greenblatt distinguishes what he dubs the "new historicism", both from an older, religionist, and positivist literary historical scholarship and from New Critical Formalism. He comments that "Renaissance literary works are no longer regarded either as a fixed set of texts that are set apart from all other forms of expression and that contains their own determinate meanings or as a stable set of reflections of historical facts that lie beyond them" (398). Furthermore, he suggests that the contours of art and literature are socially and historically configured: distinctions between artistic production and other kinds of social production are not intrinsic to the texts; other they are made up and constantly redrawn by artists, audiences, and readers.

Louis Montrose, a prominent new historicist, views literature and history as interdependent. He thinks that "new historicism" has been constituted as an academic site of ideological struggle between containment and subversion. He argues "Cultural poetics tends to emphasize structural relations at the expense of sequential process; in effect, it orients the axis of inter-textuality synchronically, as the text of a cultural system, rather than, diachronically, as the text of an autonomous literary history (401)." Montrose emphasizes that texts are embedded in specific historical, social and material context. Literary text, too, are the material products of specific historical conditions. Literary texts, therefore, must be treated along with its historical context. Montrose argues that "literary texts act out the concerns of ruling class by reproducing and renewing the powerful discourse which sustains the system. He

realizes the fact that we live in history, are made manifest in our subjective thought and actions, in our belief and desires "(394). Montrose says that new historicism is a "shift from history to histories" (411).

Montrose believes that new historicism attempts to confront or to evade some of the most complex, persisted, and unsettling problems. Among them "the conflict between essentialist and historically specific perspective, literature and its relation with other discourse, the possible relation between cultural practices and social and economic institutions are major ones.

Anyway, literary texts present the dominant ideas of a particular time by representing alternatives or deviations as threatening. The new historicists tend to examine widely different texts in order to show that those texts play a key role in mediating power relations within the state. In this way, we can say that some prominent issues related to emphasis on culture as a text on the discursivity of material life and of social and political relations: the critics' self-imposed limitation to the study of synchronic intercultural texts and textualized performance; and the apparent incompatibility of the cultural paradigm with the dynamics of ideological resistance, conflicts and change.

With the help of this methodological approach of new historicism present dissertation looks at the play *The Emperor Jones*. It emphasizes on the representation of black identity by white dramatist. It will historicize the text to the socio-cultural and political situation of United States in the 1920s which exactly is the production date of the play. How power is circulated and improvised upon the characters also be the issue to be researched. Factors responsible for the production of the text will be tried to the methodological tool will be doing textual analysis of the play *The Emperor Jones*.

*The Oxford English Dictionary* supplement of 1982 defines racism as "the theory that distinctive human characteristics and abilities are determined by race (345)." Racism as a concept has become a tool which almost always puts the white person or white group in a position of superiority and the black person or group in a situation of inferiority, lesser power or influence, and having to justify themselves. Actually, the main challenge of twentieth century became the challenge of troublesome relationship between different races .W.E.B.Du Bois prophetically observes in 1903 that " the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line-the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and in the islands of the sea (qtd in Solomos and Bulmer:1)

In the general introduction of their renowned book "Racism" Bulmer and Solomos write:

Racism is an ideology of racial domination based on (i) beliefs that a designated racial group is either biologically or culturally inferior and (II) the use of such belief to rationalize or prescribe the racial group's treatment in society, as well as to explain its social position and accomplishment. (4)

In fact, racism as a concept is much more closely tied to the concept of race, and is a reminder that where members of society make distinctions between different racial groups.

Regarding its origination, critic George Mosse mentions that racism has its foundation both in the period of enlightenment and the concept of race as we understand it today came into being relatively late in the development of modern capitalist societies. In this regard, historicist Michael Biddis also notes :

Before 1800 race was used generally as a rough synonym for 'lineage'. But over the first half of the nineteenth century 'race' assumed an additional sense that seemed, initially, tighter and more scientific. This usage was evident, at its simplest, in the growing conviction that there were a finite number of basic human types, each embodying a package of fixed physical and mental traits whose permanence could only eroded by mixture with other stocks. (qtd in *Racism* 8)

The changed notion about race made the situation even more complex in later phase of nineteenth century as mentioned by Biddis. This complexity even deeply rooted in the fourth UNESCO statement also shows its deep concern about racism and defines racism as a falsification of the scientific knowledge about human biology. It claims "Racism falsely claims that there is a scientific basis for arranging groups hierarchically in terms of psychological and cultural characteristics that are immutable and innate. (qtd in *Racism*,) (348)

From the very first decade of the twentieth century a number of great racial movements occurred that gave the germinating concept for anti-racism. Race riot of 1919 in Chicago, the Harlem Renaissance movement of the 1920s gave consciousness of racial identity. So both racism and anti-racism played an important role in mobilizing racial categories in many societies. Solomos and Bulmer in their book *Racism* views that ideas about race have been shaped by different historical and social process and in a complex variety of ways, including important religion, religious, cultural, and political differences, they further note that: Institutionalized structurally, racism can be an ideological defense of specific social and political relations of domination, subordination, and privilege. Racism operates as other ideologies do, by

constituting new historical and ideological subjects. Race, and also authenticity, can be viewed in terms of the representation of difference.

The above statement shows that racism is an ideological construct which can also be viewed in terms of representation of difference. Anti-racism always endeavors to disclose the racist ideologies which give hierarchical space of superior and inferior to different group. It raises the voice of marginalized and suppressed people and attempts to blur the earlier racial boundary. Solomos and Bulmer also accept that "there is no single monolithic racism which structures ideas and values in all societies. Rather there are quite distinct racisms that are constructed and reconstructed through time and space by social action" (15).

The anti-racist ideology has its own belief that racism is determined by social and political mobilization of the then society, and so it differs from time to time, society to society. This belief of anti-racism co-operates in one way or another to the new historicist belief that literary texts are embedded in specific historical social and material context. So literary texts are to be treated as the product of specific historical condition. Ultimate goal of both is to raise the voice of minority, suppressed, marginalized and inferior groups. So, present researcher, by using new historicism as a methodological tool, is going to critique the issue of racism in the text *The Emperor Jones*.

### **III. (Mis)-representation of Blacks in**

#### **Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones***

O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* was first performed on November 1, 1920 AD by the province town players. The play brought a new sensation in American dramatic literary history for its strong originality.

The play is set in the context of the Harlem Renaissance. Harlem Renaissance is a cultural movement of the 1920s and early 1930s that was centered in the Harlem. Various known as the New Negro movement, the New Negro Renaissance, and the Negro Renaissance. The movement emerged toward the end of world war I in 1918 blossomed in the mid-to late 1920s and then faded in the mid - 1930s.

Several factors laid the groundwork for the movement. During the phenomenon known as the Great Migration, hundreds of thousand of black Americans moved from an economically depressed rural south to industrial cities of North to take advantage of the employment opportunities created by World War I. Donald Ritchie, in his most renowned book *American History*, also states " World War I had been a liberating experience for many African Americans. This was especially true of those who went abroad. For the first time they were freed from the second - class citizenship they suffered in the United States. But the prejudice and discrimination that awaited them at home helped to create a spirit of pride and protest, forging a new unity and a new African American.

Ritchie's opinion also supports the view that Harlem Renaissance was the movement of African American for their equal right in the nation. Harlem Renaissance does not contain particular, specific, and political ideology. What united participants was their sense of taking part in a common endeavor and their commitment to giving artistic expression to the African American. Some common



themes existed, such as an interest in the roots of the twentieth century African American experience in Africa and the American South, and a strong sense of racial pride and desire for social and political equality.

In the preface to the *Encyclopedia of Harlem Renaissance*, Cary D Wintz and Paul Finkelman also mention that Harlem Renaissance was one of the most significant development in African American history in the twentieth century. This movement has its connection to the major social, political and intellectual developments in early twentieth - century African American history. Though, the movement was situated in particular time and place, its long-term impact was not confined within that short temporal and geographical location. Regarding its vastness of scope Cary Wintz and Paul Finkelman further state :

Neither the movement nor its influence was confined to the United States. Caribbean writers and artists immigrated to the United States and participated in the movement ; others from this region influenced the political and cultural life of Harlem. African - American writers, artists and performers traveled to the Caribbean, Africa and Europe, where they interacted with the artistic and political life of Europeans and immigrants from the European, African and Caribbean empires.

(1)

Racial issue was the prominent issue of Harlem Renaissance, although there were so many others issues related to it. Wintz and Finkelman further state:

Race, in all its complexity is fundamental to the Harlem Renaissance. Each African - American writer of artist confronted in his or her own way the racism and colonialism of the United States and the western world at the struggle for civil rights and the anticolonial movements. (3)

These issues had an impact on the Harlem Renaissance and on the lives and work of those who participated in it.

One aspect of the racial experience that is the subject of several entries is the role of whites in the Harlem Renaissance. White authors writing about African Americans; white patrons and supporters of the Harlem Renaissance; white publishers, producers, and booking agents; white critics and promoters - these all influenced African - American culture for better or worse. A closely related subject is the interaction between the blacks and the whites. Most often black artists reacting with white publishers, promoters and critics. But also the more complex interaction between the black intelligentsia and black writers and white publishers and intellectuals. Some black civil rights leaders like W.E.B Du Bois and James Weldon were critiquing the work of black artists and writers.

Other white artists like Carl Van Vechten, were writing major Harlem novel. In this Socio - political, cultural and historical background Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* came which brought great shaking in American literary scenario. Some white critics applauded it and some black critics severely criticized it. What sort of politics was there behind the production of this play is observed and analyzed in this dissertation.

Racial relation between the whites and the blacks has been shown very deceptively in the play. The relation is very troublesome which reflects the contemporary social and political situation of the 1920s America. From the very beginning of the play the relation is shown tenseful when Smither, a white cockney trader, grabs the weak old black woman by the shoulder. She struggles hard but can not get rid of the Smither. This struggle of black woman actually reflects the struggle

of black people during the 1920s to get job opportunity and good establishment by struggling with white labors.

After the World War I many American soldiers including some blacks, returned from the battle field. When they returned they sought for jobs which were already holding by blacks and women in absence of them. Then there arose the race riots in main cities of America. At the same time blacks were looking for their self identity with their movement like Harlem Renaissance. Some prominent writers like Langston Hughes, Abram Harris, Countee Cullen etc and so on, started to express their experiences as African Americans in America. Being influenced from all these movements and racial riots Eugene O'Neill wrote the play *The Emperor Jones*. Therefore, from the very beginning of the play racial tension can be noticed. When Smither tries to remind about Jones's past and his action in the past Jones becomes angry and commands Smither to talk in polite manner because that was his palace. Jones says, "Talk polite, white man! Talk polite, you heah me! I'm boss heah now, I you forgetting?" (176). It shows that Jones is quite conscious about his dignity and too much angry towards white people because of their inhuman behaviour towards the blacks in the chain gang. He wants to take revenge from Smither. He further says in anger about his past "What I was den is one thing. What I is now's another" (177). While analyzing these dialogues we can see that the play reflects clearly the racial tension of the 1920s. Blacks were searching their self identity. They were quite negative towards the whites because of their mistreatment as the second class human beings to the blacks.

The play not only shows the interracial tension but also intraracial tension. So, both interracial and intraracial relation is not harmonious in the play. Brutus Jones is as exploitative to the native inhabitants as he is aggressive to the white folks who

once exploited him. He almost all time uses the derogatory term “bush niggers,” “black bastard” and so on. (173-202). In this sense we can conceptualize that interracial tension heightens the intraracial tension. Because of the frequent use of the word nigger some black critics like William Bridges observed the play as “a travesty of the African race” (7). Before escaping from the chain gang Jones killed one white jailor. Now also he warns Smither, he would be the next white to be killed from his hand. He says, “I does kill one white man back dere. May be I does. And may be I kills another right heah ‘fore long if he don’t look out” (181).

But Jones’ this sort of antagonistic aggressions to whites decreases when he gets information from Smither that all native inhabitants are doing preparation of revolt against him. He hands over all of his assets in the palace to Smither and leaves the palace. From now onward we can clearly see the discursive relation of white and black. From this point Jones becomes polite to the whites and aggressive to the blacks. He accepts what Smither tells him. When he knows that Lem is the leader of the revolutionary’s group, he reacts very severely: “Dat fool no-count nigger! Does you think I’s scared of him? I stands him on his thick head more’n once befo’ dis, and I does it again if he comes in my way – and dis time I leave him a dead nigger fo’ sho’!” (183). This kind of continuous mistreatment towards the blacks by Brutus Jones was intolerable to the black audience at that time.

This frequent use of the term ‘nigger’ during the time of Harlem Renaissance had taken on for many a forceful pejorative significance. Eric D. Walrond, for example, wrote in *The Negro World* in 1922 that nigger represented a “stigma of inferiority” (qtd. in David Krasner 100). Brutus Jones uses the term ‘nigger’ to refer to African Americans including himself. Nigger becomes redundant, as the following passage demonstrates, when the character begins conversing with himself:

Deyi're gone. Dat shot fix'em. Dey was only little animals – little wild pigs, I reckon Dey've may be rooted out yo' grub an' eat it. Sho: you fool nigger, what you think dey is – hants? [...] Gorry, you give de game always when you fire dat shot – Dem niggers hed dat fo su' tin! Time you beat it in de woods without no long waits. Git in nigger! What you skeered at? Ain't nothin' dere but de trees! Git in! (190)

This kind of continuous use of the word nigger upset African American audiences and critics.

So, some black critics like Caswell Crews of *The Negro World* remarked of *The Emperor Jones*:

To be sure it is pronounced a great play by the critics, but they are white, and will pronounce anything good that has white supremacy as its theme: [. . .] we imagine that if Mr. Gilpin (actor of Brutus Jones) is an intelligent and loyal Negro his heart must ache and rebel within him as he is forced to belie his race[. . .]. (7)

So many Negroes disliked the play, either because they constructed it as sociality, a study of the superstition and bestiality of their group, or because they resented the portrayal of a Negro criminal. The play's another theme of romanticizing the primitivity of poor black folk and showing how such 'primitivism' fundamentally affects the plights and predicaments of refined and educated black, middle class individuals was threatening question during Harlem Renaissance

Even Charles Gilpin, actor in the role of Brutus Jones, was not satisfied with this frequent use of the word 'nigger.' So, in many performances he replaced the word nigger with 'colored man' black baby or Negro. But because of O'Neill's

unconscious or conscious intention of perpetuating the white discourse through these humiliating words and stereotypical representation, he could not tolerate this change. According to O'Neil's biographers Arthur and Barbara, O'Neils's bristling at the actor's audacity, chided to Gilpin: "If I ever catch you rewriting my lines again, you black bastard, I'll beat the hell out of you" (qtd. in *African American Review*3) .

Actually the word nigger carries with it an entire semiotics of differing signifier/signified relationships far too many to cover here. Nevertheless Gilpin had begun to question the validity of context of the role and the play. The main character Jones is presented from the second scene stereotypically. If we look at the play as a tragedy it does not contain a protagonist like great tragedy. No protagonist of tragedy spends seventy five percent of his action by remorseing his past action. From Oedipus Rex through Othello to Wily Lowman no one does too much remorse most of the time. They do one great mistake and towards the end they realize that mistake. But Brutus Jones starts to remorse about his past mistakes from the second scene to the end of his life up to scene seven .

He expresses his mistakes so weakly which can be seen in his following soliloquy:

Lawd Jesus, heah my prayer! I'se a po' sinner, a po' sinner! I knows I done wrong I knows it! When I catches Jeff Cheatin wild loaded dice my anger overcomes me and I kills him dead! Lawd, I done wrong!

When dat guard hits me wid de dead. Lawd, I done wrong! And down heah whardese fool bush niggers raises me up to the seat o' de mighty, I steals all I could grab Lawd, I done wrong ! I knows it ! I'se sorry!

Forgive me, Lawd! Forgive dis po'sinner. (196)

This kind of poor, meek and cowardly characteristic does not give him the quality of a hero. Rather he seems more clown than hero, ultimately laughable pretender to be pitied and dismissed.

Ultimate aim of playwright behind this representation is to create white discourse that blacks are ultimately superstitious, primitive, savage and second class citizens. They must come under white leadership ultimately. The end of the play, Jones's murder by his own subjects and Smither's victorious satisfaction, also shows that O'Neill was not actually merciful to the dread full end of Mr. Jones. The literary critic David Krasner, in *African American Review*, also mentions that O'Neill was not positive towards Jones. He states:

Had O'Neill been less interested in dramatic effects less swayed by racial stereotype, he might have written authentic tragedy [...] instead, O'Neill gives the last lines to the Cockney Smithers, establishing beyond all doubt the play's racial bias. Smither dismisses Jones and his assassins with contemptuous scorn. "Stupid as 'ogs, the lost of 'emphasizes! Blistered niggers! (61)

This kind of racial bias of writer heightens the racial distance. Blacks are presented in such a superstitious condition that natives easily believe when Mr. Jones says that no lead bullet can kill him but only silver bullet can kill him. He gets advantages from this kind of superstition. He is proud of making natives fool and says: "I has de silver bullet moulded and I tells when de time comes I kills myself wid it- I tells 'emphasizes dat's cause I'm de only man in de world big enuff to get me . No use'm deire trying'. And dey falls down and bumps deir heads (179)." This dialogue shows that primitiveness of blacks has made them superstitious. Brutus Jones seems to be getting profit from their superstitious belief. But actually it was the playwright's intention to represent blacks stereotypically superstitious. This is further intensified

when Lem says how he does preparation for moulding silver bullet in order to murder Jones. He says " My means dey got um silver bullets. Lead bullet no kill him. He got um strong charm. I cook um money, make um silver bullet make um strong charm, too (203)." In fact, this silver bullet is the symbol of white discourse. Earlier Jones liked to imitate this discourse and used this discursive power upon natives. But later this discourse killed him. The reason why lead bullet could not kill him and why he needed the very silver bullet is not clear. But this silver bullet which is white in colour and matches to the whites is really symbolic representation of whiteness. This bullet ultimately kills him.

In this way, in one way or another O'Neill plays with white black relation. From one-step to another he throws blackness one step behind by forwarding whites ahead. Behind all this is his politics of improvising power of whites upon blacks. The use of contemptuous language is also one aspect of improvisation of power. So Toni Morrison emphasizes to look at the distinctive use of language in order to show the racial and cultural differentiation; "The most valuable point of entry into the question of cultural or racial distinction, one most fought , is its language - - its unpoliced, seditious, confrontational, manipulative inventive, disruptive, masked and unmasking language (qtd in *African American Review* 13). "Therefore the use of African American pidgin and Creole language also has become one useful way of creating discourse from the side of the white playwright.

In some ways racial representation seems to be a justifiable interpretation in the play *The Emperor Jones*. Eugene O'Neill, for the first time in American stage gave opportunity to black actor to play the role of black character. He also made a black character the protagonist in the play. It was actually the time when black representation on the stage was supposed to be rare. In spite of this, like David



Metzer's opinion "The play has a strong colonial agenda, assenting through the demise of its protagonist the inability of non-whites to govern themselves" (58).

O'Neill sets his drama on an unnamed Caribbean Island, which is not yet self-determined by white marines: until that imperialist moment, the island had been ruled by the native inhabitants. When Brutus Jones, a black American who appeared after fleeing the states for slaying a prison guard during his incarceration for murder. Through various deceptions Jones crowns himself emperor as he sates: "It didn't take long from dat time to get dese fool, woods niggers right where I wanted dem. From stowaway to emperor in two years! Dat's gon' some!" (177). Brutus Jones' exploitative rule incites the natives to rebel. Learning of the uprising through the white trader Smither, his factotum, he plans an escape through the jungle to the shore where he will meet a French gun boat. In his flight Jones is haunted by the sound of the natives drums. He experiences a series of hallucinations. Encroaching formless fear', the gambling scene in which he commits murder, his killing of the prison guard, an antebellum slave auction, the cries of Africans on a slave ship and a religious ceremony in Africa. In other words, Jones experiences a 'racial regression'. Journeying from the recent past through slavery and the 'Middle passage to Africa, and to emphasize the point he gradually sheds his clothes, at the close wearing only a loin cloth. The play ends when Jones, having used all of his ammunition, including the silver bullet that he tricked the natives into believing is the only means of killing him, runs into his pursuers, who shot him with their own silver bullet.

O'Neill presents blacks as brutes, uncivilized, primitive, physically strong, irrational and failed to govern themselves. He describes Lem as "a heavy-set, ape face old savage of the extreme African type, dressed only in a loin clothe" (202). Similarly

Jones is described as “a tall, powerfully built, full blooded Negro of middle age. His features are typically Negroid, yet there is something decidedly distinctive about his face” (175). Likewise, negro women is described as “very old, depressed in cheap calico, barefooted a red bandana hand kerchief covering all but a few tray wisps of white hair ” (173). On the other hand the white character is described as physically weak but mentally strong. Even Smither, a cockney trader, who is a factotum of emperor, can easily manipulate all black characters including emperor Jones. His physical appearance is described as “a tall, strop- shouldered man about forty. His baldhead, perched on a long neck with an enormous Adam’s apple looks like an egg” (173-74). His domineering and hateful attitude towards blacks can be clearly seen from his first behavior to the ignorant native old woman when he springs forward and grabs her firmly by the shoulder. She struggles to get away fiercely but silently” (174). He warns her “You can wiggle out, now I got me ‘ooks on yer” (174). Though politically he is inferior to Jones, his hand is always above because of his racial superiority. His relation to Jones reminds us the relationship between Othello and Iago in Shakespeare’s tragedy *Othello*.

By utilizing Othello’s rude, brute, irrational behavior and gullible nature Iago succeeds to destroy the beautiful world of Othello and Desdemona. There Othello saw no ways of punishing Iago even after the revelation of this treachery, rather he kills himself because of self- humiliation. Here in *The Emperor Jones*, getting advantage of brute nature of Jones, Smither succeeds to manipulates him in accordance with his will. There is no way out for him for his mistake except death.

Though Brutus Jones has got the role of Emperor and protagonist, he has come from criminal background. His crimes of killing both the black and the whites gives clear vision of his character. He says: “I does kill one white man back dere.

"Maybe I does, And maybe I kill another right heah fore long if he don't look out (181)." But from his dialogues it becomes clear that all the criminal activities that he did are due to his learning from white society:

Jones: Air't I de Emperor? De laws don't go for him you heah what I tells you Smithers- dere's little. of stealing like you does, and dere's big stealing like I does. For de little stealing dey gets you in jail soon or late. For de big stealing' dey makes you Emperor and put out in de Hall of Fame when you cracks. If deys' one thing I learns in ten years on pulman ca's listenin' to de white quality talk, it's dat same fact. And when I get's a chance to use it I wind up Emperor in two years. (178)

The above dialogue of Jones reminds of many things. Firstly, it clearly reminds us about the exploitative rule of white colonial power to African and Asian countries. In spite of their extreme domination and exploitation they remained in government and in power. But natives were put into jail even for their small mistakes. So, Jones realizes the fact that power is worshipped everywhere and that one should try to hold power anyhow because it can easily hide so many mistakes done while attempting to hold power.

The play further demarcates "primitiveness and 'civilization' by establishing numerous representational boundaries between whiteness and blackness. Even the opening palace scene of emperor is full of primitiveness. "The room is bare of furniture with the exception of one huge chair made of uncut wood which stands at centers, its back t real. This is very apparently the Emperor's throne" (178).

This palace's scene is directly in contrast to the luxurious palace of the white emperor. O'Neill relies on a conventional cluster of primitivism to depict blackness, including corporeality, chaos, violence and superstition. The few white character however, receive an equivalent representation. The prison guard, slave auctioneer and porter, despite being hallucinations, assert the social authority claimed by the whites. Similarly, Smither through inferior in political position to Jones appears superior in reason and logic. He is offered all property by Jones before leaving the palace. The presence of the imaginary figures the audience notices that whiteness has the upper hand.

Though whiteness is sickly in appearance, Smither's presence is very sickly and it lacks life and visible representation, his absence is not a sign of weakness but rather is a means of cohering power. Blackness is depicted as a color the hue of fabric or skin whereas whiteness is a non-colour, a race without colour. Even when whiteness is actually unseen, its presence is felt. Sitting on the territorial and chronological breeder of the drama the French gunboat and the impending marines confirm the authoritative anti-presence of whiteness, proclaiming that it can and eventually interment whiteness eludes the eye largely because it controls the eye, manipulating the gaze both inside and outside the drama. On the other hand, the black body, particularly the nery naked male body, through out the work reduced to an object to be desire and scrutinized by the white observer. Jones frequently draws attention to this objectivistic, at one point commanding Smither "You wheath mel!" (176). At the end of the drama Smither takes the breath of relief when he becomes successful to make the ultimate demise of Jones "Silver bullets!' Gawd blimey, but year died in the 'eight o' style, anyhow!" (204).

Although targeted by the gaze and marked as a 'color' Jones initially succeed in resisting many of the other stigmatic representations of blackness. He boasts of having more sense than the 'fool niggers'. He says, "Look –a heah, white man! Does you think I'se a natural bo'n fool'? Give me credit for havin' some sense , fo' lawd's sakes" (183). Even in his own monologue he asks to himself 'Are you civilized or is you like dese ign'rent black niggers heah?' (190) O'Neill presents Jones very paradoxically. He hates both native blacks and white Americans. He is too much exploitive to natives and says that are only fool 'wood niggers'. Even he doesn't want to be an emperor for long period exploiting natives because he thinks of money that he has collected doesn't gets its work if he stays there for long time. His opinion about the duration of his reign in the island clarifies it:

was you thinking . I'se aimin' to hold down dis job for life? No, suh!  
 What good is gittin money if you stays back in dis raggedy country?  
 [. . .] when I see dese niggers getin 'up deir nerve to tu'n me out, and  
 I'se got all money in sight, I regin on de spot and beats it quick. (180)

So, his relations with both black and white seems paradoxical. His nature is like colonial exploitive white but his color hides his that identity because he is black in color. Devid Metzger also says, "Jones disrupts the colonialist system in the drama making it unclear whether he is a colonizer (a civiliers of the natives) , the colonized (one civilized by white colonizer), native" (60).

The drama struggles to resolve such ambiguities by returning Jones to the level of the primitive making him indistinguishable from the relatives from when he seeks to separate. Perhaps because of this paradisiacal position of Jones critics like Shatunnon Steen points out "the play is also more subtly encoded with metaphorical and textual crossing in the figured of O'Neill himself , and Irish American, who used

the black body of Jones as a means to examine the liminality of his own racial positioning in American culture (542).”

Written at the time of the Harlem Renaissance, O’Neill’s play *The Emperor Jones* on race was part of a larger interest in black culture in the 1920s. The play functioned as an artistic strategy with which to criticize modernity, racism and colonialist. ‘O, Neill’s interest in black empowerment was seen really praiseworthy. O’Neill was applauded by some critics as internalizing the black sentiment of Harlem Renaissance. During the first half of the twentieth century artists positioned themselves in opposition to the dominating forces of capitalism, technology, industrialism and racism by identifying with the non-whites and non-west. But O’Neill’s conscious attempt to oppose the prevalent racial segregation system failed because his unconscious white ego does not allow him to do so. He unconsciously falls prey to his white mentality. The critic Aoife Monks also asserts that “While O’Neill consciously sought to resist the imperialist and repressive attitudes towards blackness in his America, he like many other primitivists, nonetheless reaffirmed many of the stereotypes of blackness by confining black identity to the authentic and primitive ‘black boy, a boy that was both radical and reductive in performance in the 1920s” (544).

O’Neill, by writing this play, wants to establish the white discourse about the blacks. White discourse of racial superiority is that there is a great chain of being where God is at the topmost position, then comes the position of whites then Asians and Africans and at last comes the position of animals. This white discourse was reaffirmed during the period of Darwin who claimed of scientific origination of human being. In fact social Darwinism affirmed and naturalized already existing social hierarchies and gave the fixity through scientific claims to objectivity and

'truth'. O'Neill also through the play intensifies the earlier existing discourse. To present the unsuccessful black emperor is the clear examples of his inner desire to send the message that black are unable to rule themselves. That means they need some one to guide and those guides are whites. To do this O'Neill uses different means, language degenerated black (Brutes Jones), the white cockney trader and others.

O'Neill has used the language of Southern American dialect along with black English vernacular: " No, me no steals'. Yes, mister. Him great father. Him sleep after eat. Then they go –all go. Me old women. Me left only. Now me go too" (175). This kind of polite language contrasts to the language of Smither, a white folk who was dominating and aggressive language to the poor and innocent, black women stop or I'll shoot! Pop orf then, if yer like, yer black a cow" (175). Pretendingly Smither shows some regard to Jones but in fact he is no respecting him and anyhow he wants to make failure of his regime- when he gets information that , natives are doing preparation for revolution he becomes very happy thinking that Jones rule is about to end. He expresses his happiness saying "I'm bloody glad of it, for one! Serve him rights! Putting on 'airs the Stinkin' nigger! 'is majesty , Gawd blimey! I ny opes I'm there when they takes im out to short 'im." (175). The above opinion of Smither represents the whole intension of whites to the black empowerment. They could not see blacks to be empowered and wanted them anyhow to be snatched from power. So, representing the white sentiment O'Neill shows the downfall of black protagonist. When Jones is killed with the silver bullet by natives, Smither expresses his last winning satisfaction.He says sarcastically, and mockingly "Well, they did for yer right enough,. Jonesey, me lad! Dead as 'erring! Where's yes igh an'mighty iaris

now yer blowin' majesty silver bullets! Gawd blimey butyer died in the eight o'style, anyow!" (204)!

While looking from this perspective we can see what Greenblatt says "improvisation" of white power. By Improvisation he means "the ability both to capitalize on the unforeseen and to reform given materialistically western mode, present to varying degree in the classical and medieval world and greatly strengthened from renaissance onward. This improvisation infects the exercise of western power, power that is creative as well as destructive. For Greenblatt improvisation is made possible by the subversive perception of another's truth as an ideological construct. In this context while analyzing the Renaissance text *Othello* by Shakespeare he sees Iago's attitude towards Othello of none the less – colonial. He further says "Though he finds himself in a subordinate position, the ensign regards his black general an "on erring barbarian" whose free and open nature" is a Fertile field for exploitation. However galling it may be to him, Iago's subordination is a kind of protection, for it conceals his power and enables him to play upon the ambivalence of othello's relation to Christian society (56)

This kind of same improvisation of power can be seen even in the play *The Emperor Jones*. Smither, a white cockney trader is in subversive political position to Jones because he is a factotum of Jones. His lower political position becomes protective to him in order to exercise his power. He can easily manipulate the brute nature of Jones. Sometimes he becomes even ready to beg pardon to persuade Jones.

When Jones warns Smither to talk polite because that was his palace. Smither apologizes "no 'arm meant, old top (178). By persuading in such a way he succeeds to get all wealth of Jones' palace when he declares " I travels light when I wants to move fast. And I got tinned gruh buried on de edge of de fore st. Nw say that I don't look a



head an' use my brains! I will all dats left in de palace to you – and you better grab all you kin sneak away wid befo' day gits here" (186) Smither is not only associated to Jones but also with the oppose side. When Lem, the leader of the native revolutionaries kills frustrated Jones, he brought the carcass of Jones in front of Smither. In the last scene Smither and Lem talk about the death of Jones. Lem tells his and his mens's preparation for killing Jones. He says "My mens dey got um silver bullets make um strong charm too" (203). Smither also tells his plan to Lem that if they had not killed Jones he had made another plan. He says "If yer don't beat all 'ell I'll bet yer it ain't Im they shot at all, yer bleeding lonely!" (204). In this way it becomes clear that Smither becomes successful to get the economic power and political power in the end of the play. This reminds us the period of the 1920s in America which is also known as the period of "roaring twenties" where every crimes were raising in order to earn lots of money. In this way we can see anyhow white is represented to superior to blacks.

While analyzing the play from this perspective it would be better to look at the position of writer at that time in American society which also contributed to bring out the play *The Emperor Jones* in front of the audiences. Literary critic Aoife Monks mentions that "In America in the mid- nineteenth-century, the Irish were aligned with the black community and both were portrayed with monkey or ape-like characteristics" (545). Therefore Irish participation in blackface performance can be seen, in part, as an anxious assertion and construction of whiteness even while Irish immigrants constructed degrading images of blackness on the mistral stage. Irish participation in minstrelsy, therefore, became a way of combating caricature of themselves by constructing even more denigrating images of blackness.

Therefore, O' Neill's engagement with racial issue in *The Emperor Jones* is to be read through the legacy of the minstrel tradition that he both rejected, and unconsciously maintained in his play and Through the lens of his own parish American ethnicity. Because of this nature of O' Neill, Krasner views "O'Neil's modernist interesting the authentic or the 'real ' was' based on racist presentations that utilized newly formed scientific data in manufacturing distortion in monist" (545). The contradictory elements of O'Neil's own ethnicity were reflected in his contradictory treatment of black identity, which moved between a social constructionist and a deeply primitivist understanding of race. O' Neil like Brutus Jones was liminally and preciously called.

In the opening scene of the play Jones seems to be like whites. He boastfully says he is quite different from those " Savage niggers"(173). He wants either" look a heath white man does you think having' some sense of Lawad's to white man! Does you think I've a natural born fool? Give me credit of' having' some sense. of Lawd's save!" (183). It shows his desire to associate himself to the whites. So, O'Neill gives him garb of whiteness in the beginning. By emulation and imitating the "white quality" Jones has become as brutal a colonizer as those who once colonized him, and this is another kind of masquerade. He acts brutally to the natives and exploits them so severely that he squeezed them dry like white colonizer by spell bounding the natives in the circus show. He says "De wants de big circus show for dear money. I give it to 'em an' I gits de money" (177). But this masking of the whiteness turns out to be destructive to Jones. He becomes pendulum. He can neither adjust to his own culture nor the whites allow him to be adjusted to their culture. So, O'Neill foregrounds the contradictory nature of race and the implications of power within the social hierarchies of color, through the relationship between Jones and Smithers.

Resisting a static or social Darwinist perspective on race, the opening scene of O'Neill's play offers a deconstruction of the semiotics of color in the cross-raced figures of Jones.

But when O'Neil sends Jones from his white palace to the dark forest his attitude to Jones changes. He discloses the mask of Jones removing his signs of whiteness and revealing his black body beneath the masquerade of civilization . Jones journey through the forest is a journey though history. He visits his personal past on a chain gang to the man he murdered as Pullman porter. Then he moves even further back into the history of his race hallucinating a slave auction, as slave ship, and finally his " primordial" roots in Africa, with a vision of a crocodile and a masked with doctor. By the end" his pants have been so form away that what is left of them is no better than a breech cloth" (197). In this way, moving from the white space of civilization, to the black space of the forest Jones' white' mask is stripped away to reveal the "authentic" identity beneath: embodied. Superstition, irrational and black Jones's Journey from whiteness to blackness. Civilization to the jungle is also a journey from masculinity to feminization, which can be seen in the coyly erotic striptease he undergoes from scene to scene. O'Neill uses the loss of clothing to assert Jones' "authentic' body. He also establishes, for the white audience, and erotic, specular relationship with Jones' black body just as Jones' body is asserted becoming visual object of desire for the audience. He is also feminized, losing the stereotypical trappings of masculinity, becoming irrational, fearful and servile Jones's parodic whiteness also contains a parodic masculinity and by stripping away his masquerade of color, O'Neill reconfigures Jones' gendered status.

Now, we come to know about the playwright's attitude and intention behind projection of colour. O'Neill's position is quite contradictory while approaching to the color. Even the critic Aoife Monks asserts:

Even while O'Neill deconstructs racial hierarchies, both through the historicizing of black identity in Jones's journey, he nonetheless simultaneously renders race a stable, inescapable corporal fact. Jones denial of his race leads to his death, and his body is asserted as the guarantor of the authenticity of his blackness. (548)

He further states emphasizing on the unknowing reaffirmation of racial hierarchies by O'Neill:

The play both deconstructs the static hierarchies of race that were prevalent at the time that O'Neill wrote his play and simultaneously affirms them, by showing Jones' racial cross-dressing to be unperformative. No matter how much Jones acts like a white man, he will never quite be a white man and his black body is defenseless against the superstition of the ignorant "bus sniggers. (548)

Here we can see that O'Neil's play simultaneously offers the black body as an object of desire, spectacle, and revulsion that still operated within the economy of representation constructed by white playwright for the white audience. In this way, consciously or unconsciously, O'Neill creates the whites' discourse to the blacks. He represents black character as superstitious, brute, irrational, illogical and unable to govern themselves.

#### IV. Conclusion

Brilliantly original in its content and form, the play *The Emperor Jones* reflects the socio-political, cultural and racial conflict of America during the 1920s. The play reflects the tenseful inter and intra racial conflict resolving with victorious satisfying breathing of whites over blacks. Though O'Neill seems to be giving justice to the blacks in theatrical history of American for the first time, unconsciously he is supporting racist discourse on white superiority and black inferiority. By giving the stereotypical representation of black character, he fails to do justice to them.

The play begins with the ascension of Brutus Jones as an Emperor in the Caribbean island and ends with his assassination. He has bitter experiences of exploitation, suppression, domination and humiliation while remaining in the chain gang of whites, and while working during his reign he ruled with severe exploitation and domination of the innocent natives by taking advantage of their superstitious belief. But it does not continue for long time. The natives revolt against him: he escapes from the palace, and gets killed with silver bullet on his way by the natives.

From the very first scene of the drama tenseful racial relation is noticeable which is the historical fact of American society when the drama got its publication in 1920. Smither, a white cockney trader unnecessarily gives torture and threatens poor native woman of shooting if she does not tell the truth. In the palace of Brutus Jones also Smither and Brutus Jones do hot discuss about Jones' past and present status. Smither's voice is always polished with the feeling of white superiority. But Jones cannot tolerate it and threatens of shooting if he does not become polite.

Along with this sort of inter-racial conflict, the play also reflects intraracial tension which results into natives' rebellion. Smither's accusation that Jones has squeezed them dry clarifies his exploitative rule. Jones frequently uses the derogatory

terms to his own race like 'bushniggers', 'black bastard' and so on. Jones changes his aggressive voice to white Smither after he gets news that natives are preparing for rebellion against him. Because of African American's consciousness about their race, cultural heritage, and self-identity racial tension was increasing in America during the 1920s. Chicago race riot, Harlem Renaissance are some of the major instances for this. This kind of socio-political and cultural scenario of American society is reflected in this drama.

In the similar way, O'Neill also dramatizes another trend of American society of the 1920s. O'Neill cannot come out from the stereotypical concept of the whites about the blacks. He repeats the stereotypical representation of the blacks and presents them as superstitious, primitive, barbaric, hostile, sensuous, dependable and unable to conduct good governance by themselves. The very setting of the palace is very random and primitive. The natives are represented so superstitiously that they easily believe in Jones's deception that only silver bullet can kill him. While escaping through the jungle also he is presented as a coward and clown like character lamenting and remorseing about his past mistakes. His remorse is more than his guilt. He begs pardon from God and remorsees too much with God. In the observation of his lamentation and activities in jungle he seems a mere clown but not a protagonist

In the similar vein, Jones is presented as inferior to Smither, a cockney trader, in logic, trick, manipulation as Othello was made inferior to Iago in Shakespearean drama *Othello*. Actually Jones is made a puppet in the hand of Smither. This kind of stereotypical representation is intended to create the discourse that the blacks are in every aspect inferior to the whites. Although surface intension of O'Neill seems to resist the imperialist and repressive attitude of whites towards blacks, he nonetheless

unconsciously reaffirms many stereotypes of blackness. Really speaking he is improvising white power upon African American community.

Thus, the play surfacely dramatizes antagonism between Brutus Jones and native leader Lem where both lose the war. Jones loses his throne and even his life, whereas Lem loses his rebellious hero and native pride. In the core level antagonism is actually between blacks and whites and ultimate victory goes to the whites and Jones escapes to the jungle where he gets killed. In the same way, Lem and his group come in contact to Smither and put dead body of Jones in front of him. Smither breathes with satisfaction. Both groups of blacks come in the hand of Smither. Therefore, actual racial war is won by the whites. In this way, O'Neill unconsciously conceptualizes the white discourse and puts one brick in the discursive realm with general view that the whites are far superior to the blacks in every aspect.

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