

Dialectics of Self-fashioning in Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*

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Abstract:

American writers in the early twentieth century have focused on the constant battle between individual subjectivity and the social and political environment. Eugene O' Neill in *The Emperor Jones* (1920) portrays the life of Jones, an ex-convict to show the inevitability of frustrations that characterize many individuals in the impoverished African American community. O'Neill chose a foreign country and Jones for symbolic purposes as the protagonist voices his opinion, explains his role in society and draws attention to unfulfilled dreams and frustrations in a Hegelian dialectics of the master and slave bondage in an attempt to engage the audience's sympathy. Jones's struggle in the jungle is portrayed as search for a respected class identity rooted in a desire for a role that shows no bondage in the social and political life in America. Self-fashioning dialectics in *The Emperor Jones* (1920) becomes a form of resistance against the hegemonic negative attitudes towards African American men and emphasize the importance of taking leadership in the African American community.

Key words: African American, The Emperor Jones, Eugene O'Neill, Hegelian, modern plays