

# DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS AND THE EMPEROR JONES ARE A PICTURES OF TRAGIC CONFLICT BY EUGENE O'NEILL IN MODERN AMERICAN DRAMA

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**ABSTRACT**-- *This paper aims to study Desire Under the Elms and The Emperor Jones are the pictures of conflict. The dramatist, O'Neill wants to reveal the struggles and conflict in the selected plays. This conflict leads to the tragedy in modern American drama. The researchers use the qualitative method, the narrative analysis as the storytelling techniques. The study uses the conflict theory by Karl Marx (1888-1818) to justify the conflict or the struggle in the plays of O'Neill to tackle the characters, the actions and plot.*

**Keywords**--*O'Neill, Desire Under the Elms, The Emperor Jones, Tragedy, conflict*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The introduction of this research is to tackle the tragic themes in the plays of O'Neill. This dramatist, O'Neill regards as a father and the founder of modern American drama. He addresses the tragic and conflict in the family in particular and the society in general. The central focus of these plays are to show the relationship among the family. O'Neill is influenced by the contemporary literary elements and the radical changes that took place in the first decades of the twentieth century. The dramatic changes have represented the new visions of the American family. (Jensen, 2005).

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* is considered the story of a widower, Ephraim Cabot and his three sons Simeon, Peter and Eben. This play takes place on a farmhouse in New England (United States of America). This play starts with Simon's and Peter's enthusiastic determination to go to a gold mining in California State. The reason behind their enthusiasm is that they work on their father's farm or Gabout's farms. They leave the daunting task at the farm for a more comfortable job. Going to mining, they feel that they can obtain their liberty. O'Neill shows the character's conversation (O'Neill, 2019; Yandell, 2017).

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Gabout says that “the farm needs son” and Abbie say that Abbie needs a son (p.14). In the quotations, between Eben and Abbie say that Abbie has needed a son. This son means a farm. The farm needs children. The character, widowed father, Cabot, decides to abandon the heritage and kept his three sons on the farm. The three sons can loathe their father due to several and personal reasons. Simon and Peter, who are his sons from his first wife, hate him because he is greedy character and he always toughly asks them to work hard on the farm. His second wife’s son, Abbie hates him also. Eben avoids his father , since Cabot took his mother’s land by force (Eisen, 2017).

O’Neill has depicted the conversations between the characters Simeon and Eben (jumping to his feet. You have the right. She wants yew, Maw! It was her farm. Did not he steal it from? She is dead. It is my farm. Simeon: stamp his foot on the earth and address it desperately. Waal – you have thirty-year me burned out over (P.5). In these conversations, Simeon and Peter lead to death of the characters in the Gabout’s family.

When Cabot leaves the farm or (land) Eben begins to fall down plans to dispose of his half-brothers Simon and Peter. They start thinking in getting rid of them because he does not want to see them forever. Yet, he is a little bit disturbed as he knows that they will come back from Californian as they are penniless. He exploits their poverty and attracts them with money need. He persuades them to sign a paper (legal document) on renouncing the possession of the farm; and he, in return, they will pay one hundred dollars for each one of them. They agree to sign the paper, and renounce their claim of the farm. As a result, they are able to go back to Californians. Moreover, they can get rid of their father’s work (Esmail & Jamil, 2015).

The liberty sense is served of O’Neill’s portrayal of the complex family life. This play offers deep insights into the peoples’ state of affairs at the time. In addition, it carries out the essence of family disintegration at the expenses of economic and problems. Both the characters, Simon and Peter are illustrative examples of this fact. They strive for freedom through money, which is an archetype of wealth and comfortable life. The other side of their experience circulates the family disintegrate. They plan to free from the farm due to their father’s harsh treatment. Their flight represents the symbolic implication of family disintegration. As a deduction, O’Neill recognizes that designation in the contemporary American social life and wants to allegorize it in the play.

When the characters, Simon and Peter leave for California (American state) this play turns its focus on Cabot’s behavior or attitudes. He brings his third wife, Abbie, to the farm. The couple (Abbie and Eben) are far from each other in terms of age. The character. Cabot appears as an older man of seventy-five years, while Abbie is thirty-five years old and seems not concerned with marital status. Instead, she seems looking for safety by marrying Cabot. Eben, who still resides the farm, is overwhelmed with negative thoughts.

Abbie attempts to be kind with although he (Eben) refuses her tender reactions towards him. He suffers from a psychological implication caused by his hate of his father. Then, he begins to recognize the changes in the farm, especially after Abbie had come to the farm. Now he feels that life had become more comfortable. By the time, she accuses him of being rude. She informs Cabot of Eben’s flirtations.

Cabot’s reactions are so hostile. He reprimands Eben and treats him that he will kill him if he makes advances to Abbie. She does not like Eben because he is the right of the farm. After that, she persuades Cabot of giving birth to a child who will inherit the farm when they die, and in this way; Eben will be deprived of legal inheritance Cabot welcomes her proposal because is badly needed a child. In so doing, he does not take care of Eben.

Consequently, he leaves him alone. But Cabot still does not believe that he might give birth to a child when he is seventy-five years old. He agrees with Abbie's suggestion as he is so enthusiastic to have a child. Notwithstanding, Abbie wants to deceive him. She tries to seduce Eben when Cabot goes and sleep at night in the barn. She wants to be impregnated by Eben to falsely tell Cabot that she is pregnant with the heir life. She tries with Eben in his mother's parlor, which is now empty after the death of his mother. She tells Eben that his their sexual affair will be revenge against his father's bad treatment. Eben gets convinced, and they both have a sexual relationship. She gets pregnant and to Cabot's happiness. He sets up celebrations and invited his friends and neighbors (J. JING & F.-c. HUO, 2015).

The characters, Eben gets angry and tells his father of Abbie's betrayal because she wants to own the land. He becomes angry as he threatens the character, Abbie kills the baby. But she tells him that she loves him more than the baby. She claims that she only loves him and she does not want to have the baby to inherit the farm. He does not believe her because she kills the baby to confirm her genuine love for him. He becomes more furious. He goes out to bring the Sheriff to detain Abbie. On his way back, he realizes her true love. As a result, he says that he participated in the crime. They were both captured and punished Gabout lives alone(O'Neill, 2019).

O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms*, Abbie reserves her sexual Desire for her husband's son, Eben. She, later on, becomes anxious when she meets the father, Cabot. She turns her anxiety into a fight between the father and the son. She exploits this quarrel to gain the love of the son, Eben. Ultimately, Eben and Abbie develop an affectionate, sexual desire for each other; while Cabot does not know anything about this. When the Sheriff arrests them, they become incredibly anxious and guilty (Abbas, 2019; Eisen, 2017).

O'Neill *Inheritance of Greek Tragedy in Desire under the Elms* is the classical Greek tragedy of the dramatic forms. (Chen et al., 2015) argue that *Desire Under the Elms* is an experimental play. This play exemplifies O'Neill's dramatic skill that appeals to the individuals. In this manner, the play comprises the conventional dramatic structure and modern style of drama. O'Neill perfectly conveys this style and attempt to discover O'Neill's orientation of the Greek tragedy is excited elements in the contemporary American drama. Hence, O'Neill improves the Greek dramatic traditions and reconstructs them in new dramatic styles (Chen et al., 2015).

O'Neil provides great pictures about the drama of family, through presenting the family and showing their conflict among each other in society. The main action in the play takes places on the farm and there are two elms in each sound of the house, and these elms can represent the desire of the family- members. In the same way, Ephraim Gabout has the farm without telling the family about his leaving. He backs with a new wife, Eben tells Simeon and Peter about the marriage of their (jing & F.-c. HUO, 2015). *Desire under the Elm* leads reflect the features of tragic family in other play.

This play has eight characters. Five characters are primary and the other three are subordinated. The main characters are Brutus Jones, the Emperor, Henery Smither, A Cocky Trader, An old native Women, Lem, Native chief, the soldiers, Adherence of Lem, The little formless fears, Jeff: The black character, The Negro Guard, The planters, the slave, The characters divide into principal the subordinate(Callow, 2018; Iranpour, 2017)

In the same of text, a black American who shows the differences between black and white people in society. This play considers the most important literary work in American drama. It also has another title formless fears

because O’Neill has increased the numbers of conflict of society. This play considers as the dramatic monologue in American literature. This play has many characters like The Emperor is The Emperor, Hennery Smothers’ is a Cockney trader. Lem is the native chief, and the soldier is the adherence of Lem. There are also slave people like the Congo who doctorates actions. All the activities of the play take place on the island. The form of drama shows discrimination and racial differences in society. This play is a tragedy because it has involved the tragic action in the community. (Dyck, 2017).O’Neill uses the black-white conflicts in American drama such as Smother: “you had aye been in jail. If you had would not yen then (will women) And from what I care it is not healthy for black to kill a white man in the states. They burn Elm in O’Neill’s play” (p.5)

O’Neill’s The Emperor Jones has a historical and psychological aspects of John Brutes. His fears, visions, dreams and social issues. This play has symbol, image and metaphorical expression to indicate tragic events. This play contains the slave people. This play is realistic because it looks into the soul of man in reflecting the irrational and brutish in The Emperor Jones.(Sarker, Talukder, & Biswas, 2016) have talked about the inner reality because it enables O’Neill to discover the character’s existence. The truth indicates the world visions and ideas to reveal the characteristics of inner reality of life. The theme of the ethical crisis is strongly associated with the movement of anti-Americanism that has dominant in O’Neill’s plays (Nallathambi, 2014; Zhang & Ni, 2015).

### III. METHODOLOGY

The method of this study is to use the qualitative approach and the type of the analysis is the narrative. The qualitative applies to this paper because it deals with emotion, feeling, stories, event, and narration. In addition, the researchers apply the narrative technique. In the erratically part, the conflict theory applies to this paper because it has justified the conflict and the struggle in American society. This theory has three classes the power, the course and the stratification. All these classes have separating the community into the upper and the lower levels. In Desire Under the Elms, the conflict is represented by the power and the domination of Ephraim Gabout the father. This character “Gabout “has enforced the oppression and bad treatment to his three sons (Simeon, Peter and Eben). As for the Emperor Jones, the conflict is represented by John, who makes the struggles and conflict of American Society. In the conflict theory, the concept of social conflict has justified the fights or the conflict that lead to black-white conflict.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

**Table 1.1:** The tragic representations

NO.	The tragic Representations	The explanations
1-	About: The farm needs a son. Abbie: I need a son	In this quotations, the conversation of Gabout and Abbie leads to the tragedy of life. The farm needs a son illustrates that the farm needs a baby or son. The son will lead to the trouble and conflict among the family of the characters.

2-	Simon :( Jumping to his feet. You have the right. She wants yew, Maw! It was her farm. Does Peter say that Did not he steal it from? She is dead. It is my farm. Simeon: stamp his foot on the earth and address it desperately. Waal – you have thirty-year me burned out over	In this quotations, the conversation of Simon and Peter revealed that the characters of Maw (late wife of Ephraim Gabout) had represented the role of the ghost. Her role presents the part of tragic issues. She motivates her son (Eben) to do revenge.
3-	Smither says that “You had aye been in jail. If you had would not yet then (will women) And from what I care it is not healthy for black to kill a white man in the states. They burn Elm in O’Neill’s play	In this quotations, it reveals the struggle and classes by John and his friend Jeff. They have fought with each other because they also represent the black-white conflict. The efforts of two cultures in the United States of America.

**Table 1.1** indicates that the analyses and the discussion of the plays *Desire Under the Elms* and *The Emperor Jones*. There are different tragic representations in O’Neill’s plays. The researchers have represented the deadly-actions in the term of the farm. This term “farm” indicates the tragedy of family. The farm is one of the hobbies of Abbie. She needs a son means that it means that it has hobbies.

In the same way, the character of Maw has represented the role of a tragic figure in *Desire Under the Elm*. Meanwhile, *The Emperor Jones* has reflected the black-white conflict to indicate the clashes of cultures. The white and black- people. In this paper, the conflict theory by Karl Marx has represented three concepts, including the power, the classes and the social conflict. In the *Emperor Jones*, the social conflict has revealed the tragic action in the family and the society of American drama (Al-Lehaibi, 2015; O’Neill, 2019)

Moreover, in *Desire Under the Elms* has the concept of power. This concept has represented by Ephraim Gabout on his family. These concepts have justified the struggles and conflict in the plays of O’Neill. These classes show the cause and effects of the disputes. Some scholars have studied *Desire Under the Elms* and *The Emperor Jones* but in various perspectives or issues in modern American drama (Barnes, Potter, Abrahamse, Meyer, & Hayes, 2019)

## V. CONCLUSION

Finally, the *Desire Under the Elms* and the *Emperor Jones* represent the picture of the conflict in modern American drama. These plays have various tragic events such as killing and revenge. This play shows the struggles in the domestic family and inner- conflict. The *Emperor Jones* has represented the clashes of cultures and struggle of black and white people.

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