

Aaron Douglas's *Emperor Jones* Series: The Illustrations

Jeffrey Garrison

The Emperor Jones, Eugene O'Neill's play tracing the downfall, psychological disintegration and ultimate death of Brutus Jones, the despotic Black ruler of "an island in the West Indies as yet not self-determined by White Marines," enjoyed immediate critical as well as box-office success when the Provincetown Players produced it on November 1, 1920.¹ After a four-week run at The Playwright's Theatre, a 228 seat venue on Macdougall Street in Greenwich Village and home to the Players, *The Emperor Jones* was turned over to producer and former drama critic for the *New York Times* Adolph Klauber, who took the play to the 1050 seat Selwyn Theatre on W. 42nd Street for a four-day year-end series of special matinees to test the uptown waters. It continued to draw large audiences for five weeks before Klauber moved it to The Princess Theatre on W. 39th Street, an "intimate" house seating 299, for a regular run that continued for nearly four more months, closing on Saturday May 21, 1921 after over 200 performances. *The Emperor Jones* then embarked on a national tour under Klauber which was to last for more than a year with much of the original cast including the lead, Charles Gilpin, playing to enthusiastic houses in over two dozen cities in the East and Midwest, and creating controversy wherever it was scheduled in the South.²

Critics, at least white critics, were all but unanimous in their approbation of O'Neill's pioneering expressionistic masterpiece. "An odd and extraordinary play," noted Kenneth Macgowan in the *New York Globe* on November 4, "written with imaginative genius." Alexander Woollcott echoed the praise in the *New York Times* on November 7, a week after *The*

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Emperor Jones opened, calling it “. . . an extraordinarily striking and dramatic study of panic fear.”³ Black critics were less unanimous, as might be expected given the complexity of their feelings toward what they saw as Brutus Jones’s racial atavism on the one hand and the opportunities the drama provided to expand the repertoire of black actors on the “legitimate” stage on the other, for in addition to spawning a lively and sometimes rancorous controversy among black critics and commentators over its depiction of the central character of the play, a black Pullman car porter cum emperor who falls prey to “primitive” superstitions, *The Emperor Jones* also catapulted actors Charles Gilpin and later Paul Robeson into the public eye, and it is for this as much as the racially charged content of the drama itself that O’Neill’s one-act play has continued to attract the attention of black critics and social commentators over the years.

Coming at the outset of the Harlem Renaissance, a burgeoning of Black literature and arts emanating from Harlem and expanding to include the diaspora everywhere from the island nations of the Caribbean and the capitals of Europe to the African continent itself, *The Emperor Jones* was epochal. It not only provided opportunities for black thespians and provoked controversy over its extensive and some say gratuitous use of the word “nigger,” it also helped focus the attention of the art world on the artistic contributions of Blacks. The impact of the play on leaders of the Renaissance is evidenced by a series of illustrations executed by artist Aaron Douglas which remains relatively unknown outside the black arts world today. Douglas’s illustrations of O’Neill’s play began appearing some four years after the play’s debut. Douglas, the Kansas high school teacher who was destined to become the quintessential visual artist of the Harlem Renaissance, discovered in the play the motif for a number of derivative yet enduring works during the months immediately following his arrival in New York in 1925. In so doing Douglas provides the social commentator and art historian with a unique case study in the dynamics of patronage and the

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nurturing of young artists by both the “midwives” and the “Negrotarians” of the Harlem Renaissance. The works also show the depth and extent of interaction in the world of the arts among the races during the decade of the twenties.

For a year and possibly longer after he first published illustrations depicting scenes from the O'Neill play, Douglas would return to *The Emperor Jones* in a variety of mediums to rework and refine his earlier efforts. Small but significant alterations appeared in the works as the artist matured and distanced himself from his early artistic mentor and teacher, Bavarian artist and illustrator Winold Reiss, and incorporated changes consistent with the burgeoning racial awareness and pride that characterized his Harlem milieu.

This proliferation of Douglas's *Emperor Jones Series* (hereafter, *Series*) of illustrations or parts thereof, which were also reproduced with major alterations in three other mediums: woodcut, linocut and gouache on paper, while it may have resonated with his audience, has led contemporary art historians and cultural commentators to confusion. Although several exhibition catalogues reproduce some or all of the panels in the *Series* and mention of the *Series* or its individual panels has occurred in numerous books and articles in recent years, much misunderstanding has arisen regarding when the *Series* or its individual panels first appeared and what is depicted in the panels. A variety of factors including the publishing history of Alain Locke's *The New Negro*, the artist's inclination to recycle material, sometimes with alterations, and, occasionally, the commentator's unfamiliarity with the O'Neill play that inspired the works have contributed to the confusion. Scholarly notice and description of Douglas's illustrations, prints and paintings depicting Brutus Jones, therefore, has often been misleading and sometimes misinformative. Since this is especially true of the illustrations, this paper will focus on the artistic plexus emanating from *The Emperor Jones* as it involved Aaron Douglas and will focus on unravel-

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ling the mystery of the genesis as well as the morphosis of the *Series*, four interpretative illustrations the artist was commissioned to produce of the O'Neill play by the same title that appeared in several publications over the years 1925 through 1927 in a variety of renditions. It will also endeavor to answer the questions where, when, in what order and by whose agency Douglas published scenes from what would later be know as his *Emperor Jones Series* as well as how he got the commissions and what changes he made and why.

While many issues lend themselves readily to investigative illumination, it must be admitted at the outset that some details of the Emperor Jones commissions remain shrouded in mystery. It has proven difficult, for example, to discover if Douglas was initially commissioned by the editors of *Theatre Arts Monthly* or Alain Locke specifically to depict scenes from the O'Neill play. Likewise, it remains in the realm of speculation whether he was told how many scenes to depict or given the freedom to illustrate as many as he chose. The conclusions drawn regarding these issues, therefore, remain open to ammendation as further facts regarding the commissions come to light.

Background

The black literary and artistic ferment centering in Harlem during the 1920s was gathering steam when Aaron Douglas, who has been called “the most significant visual artist of the Harlem Renaissance” by Amy Helene Kirschke, his only biographer to date, arrived in Harlem in mid 1925, nearly five years after Charles Gilpin made history on the Broadway stage by starring in an integrated production of *The Emperor Jones* and too late for the first wave of attention to the burgeoning black arts movement.⁴

After a barrage of requests from the likes of Guyanese short story writer and journalist Eric Walrond, Douglas finally came, somewhat reluctantly if one is to believe reports, at the behest of Charles S. Johnson,

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orchestrator of the Civic Club dinner on March 21, 1923, which was in effect the coming out announcement of the younger generation of “New Negroes.”⁵ Then editor of the National Urban League’s monthly magazine *Opportunity* and de facto *éminence grise* of the Renaissance, Johnson had been informed by his secretary Ethyl Ray (later Ethyl Ray Nance) that a promising young black artist resided in Kansas City. Johnson charged her with convincing Douglas to pull up stakes and come to Harlem. Apparently on his way to a principalship in a Kansas City high school but harboring dreams of greater things including art school in Paris, the artist demurred at first and then gave in when Nance taunted him with “Better to be a dishwasher in New York than to be head of a high school in Kansas City,” her version of the folksy aphorism “I’d rather be a lamppost in Harlem than governor of Georgia.” Once in Harlem, however, Douglas first all but wore out his welcome, staying on at 580 St. Nicholas Avenue, a popular stopover for many Renaissance figures arriving in Harlem, with Ray and her roommate Regina Andrews, a librarian at the 135th Street branch of the New York Public Library and sleeping on her sofa far longer than expected and then becoming so entrenched in the Black artistic demimonde that Paris was all but forgotten.⁶

Douglas, whose works often express the themes popular among black intellectuals and “race builders” of the Renaissance and manifest what Locke has called “the natural ambition of Negro artists for a racial idiom in their art expression,” was a idealistic young man in his mid-twenties, supremely confident yet impressionable upon his arrival in New York.⁷ Through the nurturing plexus of introductions and patronage centering around Charles S. Johnson and then Howard University professor of philosophy and editor of the famous Renaissance manifesto *The New Negro*, Alain Locke, Douglas soon found outlets for his artwork first in and on the cover of *Opportunity* and later *The Crisis*, the official monthly publication of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People edited

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by W. E. B. Du Bois, the man Richard Bruce Nugent once described as “a whale” in a sea of fish.⁸

When Locke was enlisted to edit *The New Negro*, an expanded, book-sized version of the March 1, 1925 *Survey Graphic* issue on Harlem, he turned to Douglas, no doubt with a nod from both Johnson, who brought him to Harlem and probably introduced him to Locke, and Reiss, who had provided the illustrations for the *Survey Graphic* issue and with whom Douglas had been studying almost since his arrival, to supplement Reiss’s book decorations with six “drawings and decorative designs.”⁹ Although Douglas’s contributions at this point did not include any *Emperor Jones* panels, he had made the contact with Locke which promised to provide him with a forum for the first panels of the *Series*.

Confusion regarding the *Series*, however, initially arises from the “Notes To The Illustrations” in the “Who’s Who Of The Contributors” at the end of the first printing of *The New Negro* in December 1925. There, Douglas is credited with having “published drawings in *Opportunity*, *Vanity Fair*, and the *Theatre Arts Monthly*.”¹⁰ Kirschke has shown that Douglas never published any drawings in *Vanity Fair*.¹¹ Interviews and letters from the author, however, indicate that he had reason to believe publication in the magazine was imminent. In a 1971 interview with L. M. Collins, Douglas recalls that Carl Van Vechten “sent me to Frank Crownshield, the editor of *Vanity Fair*, and he took some of these drawings I had, some of them I brought from Kansas City.”¹² In addition, two surreptitious love letters to his future wife Alta Sawyer, who was then unhappily married to another man, both undated but clearly written after Douglas arrived in New York from Kansas City in mid 1925 and before the February 1926 publication of *Theatre Arts Monthly*, are more specific and may be indicative of how the confusion arose. In one, Douglas describes how after meeting author, critic and “negrotarian” Carl Van Vechten one day, he immediately took advantage of Van Vechten’s offer of an introduction to the editor of *Vanity Fair* the very

next. Douglas describes how he visited the magazine's offices and met a Mr. Freeman, with whom Van Vechten had "secured an appointment" for him. Freeman, in turn, took the artist's portfolio into Frank Crowinshield, the editor. "He returned shortly to introduce me to the editor. The editor congratulated me and praised me very highly. He not only praised me but took one of the drawings for which he is to mail me the little sum of fifteen dollars. The amount is not to be considered. I am however very much elated over the praise."¹³

The likely explanation is that the drawing purchased by Crowinshield was either for his personal collection or, although purchased for inclusion at a later date, simply never made it into the magazine. As for the erroneous information included in *The New Negro*, either Douglas, when asked for biographical information for the work by Locke, included the drawing he had sold to *Vanity Fair* expecting the magazine to publish it, or knowing full well that publication had not taken place, chose to include the credit to build up the artist's reputation in the eyes of the reader. Without assuming responsibility or ascribing it, Douglas addressed the issue in a 1975 interview with Ann Allen Shockley.

[T]he story got out that the *Vanity Fair* had published some of my works, which wasn't true. I just let it go. Yet, I knew that in some time or other I had to correct it. But I never did. I was never called on. No one ever said 'you weren't in any *Vanity Fair*.' But I never bothered.¹⁴

The *Theatre Arts Monthly* credit in the first printing of *The New Negro* also appears apocryphal for Douglas's first contribution to the magazine came in February 1926 and he could not therefore have been published in the magazine prior to the first publication of *The New Negro* in December 1925, having only recently arrived unknown outside a small

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circle of intellectuals in New York himself. It was in this journal, however, that Douglas actually published the first panels of the *Series*, albeit months after he had been credited by Locke in *The New Negro* for having done so.

First Appearance of *The Emperor Jones Series*

At the same time Locke was finalizing the manuscript for *The New Negro*, he was preparing an article for *Theatre Arts Monthly* on the American Negro's contributions to the stage. For illustrations to accompany his article, Locke again tapped Douglas. "The Negro and The American Stage" was published in the February 1926 issue of *Theatre Arts Monthly* and marked the first appearance of any panels from the *Series*. Two of the eventual four panels of the *Series* accompanied Locke's paper, which while admitting that overall "the Negro influence upon American drama has been negligible," and applauding the "race of actors" waiting in the wings of the serious dramatic stage for an opportunity to exploit "the rich native soil of Negro life, and not . . . the threadbare tradition of the Caucasian stage" singles out O'Neill's "fine craftsmanship and clairvoyant genius" for praise and points to the "unique acting gifts of Charles Gilpin and Paul Robeson" as the second of two components creating "the sensational success of *The Emperor Jones* and *All God's Chillun Got Wings*."¹⁵

Though white dramatist Ridgley Torrence is mentioned in passing by Locke, only O'Neill's plays are mentioned by name, making it highly likely that the commission for illustrations was specific; Locke needed scenes from *The Emperor Jones*, which was being revived with Gilpin in the lead again on February 16 by the Provincetown Players.¹⁶ Mention of O'Neill and *The Emperor Jones* by name in the article and the coincidence of the revival and the publication of the *Theatre Arts Monthly* article lead to the conclusion that Douglas was asked by Locke to draw upon *The Emperor Jones* for illustrations. Gilpin's long-awaited return to the boards more than five years after he opened in *The Emperor Jones* demanded it. The timing could not

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have been lost on the editors of *Theatre Arts Monthly*, one of whom was Kenneth Macgowan. It is not clear, however, how many illustrations Locke requested.

Three of Douglas's undated letters to Alta shed light on how his work first came to the attention of the editors of *Theatre Arts Monthly*. In the first, probably written in mid November 1925, well before *The New Negro* was published in December, Douglas cannot contain his enthusiasm for his early success.

“I've received a letter from Dr. Lock [sic] yesterday, saying that six of my drawings were to be published in his new book and that there were [sic] be a bit of royalty. He also asked to use some drawing[s] for an artical [sic] which he is to write for the Theatre Arts Magazine. Walter White liked the suggestion which I submitted for the jacket of his new novel. Dont [sic] know what knoff [sic] , his publisher, thinks of it yet.”¹⁷

Although his letters to Alta are undated, judging from the content and Douglas's occasional apologies for not having written earlier in the week, it appears that he endeavored to write at least once a week. Further support for this view comes from the fact that the artist occasionally chides Alta for not writing “this week,” indicating the frequency of their correspondence.

Thus, on Thanksgiving night 1925, shortly after informing Alta of Locke's request to use some of his drawings for the upcoming article mentioned above, Douglas wrote again providing more information regarding the appearance of his artwork and his relationship with Locke, whose name he still misspells. Although he still does not indicate how many drawings he expects to accompany Locke's upcoming article in *Theatre Arts Monthly*, Douglas anticipates publication of *The New Negro* and explains how the *Theatre Arts* commission came about and how it is

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progressing.

The book is out and my drawings are in the book, but I haven't seen it yet. Lock [sic] wants me to do the complete illustrations for a book which he proposes to write. I saw his manuscript for an article on the Negro on American stage. [sic] He already has my drawings for this article and they have been accepted by the editor of Theatre Arts in which Magazine [sic] the article is to appear.¹⁸

From the letter it is clear that the editors of *Theatre Arts Monthly* had his illustrations by mid November 1925, several months before the magazine appeared on newsstands. It is also clear that the "bit of royalty" he mentioned in the previous letter isn't putting food on the table and that commissions alone aren't going to keep him afloat, for while Douglas testifies to being inundated with demands for his illustrations it is clear that he suffers from a chronic shortage of cash. W. E. B. Du Bois appears to have solved this problem by offering Douglas a position in the mail room of *The Crises*. Douglas alludes to the offer by mail in the same letter and goes on to remark,

My Opportunity friends are going to be sick. I'm sorry, but I must live and the Crises has offered to solve a very real and withal a very pressing problem. Sentiment must be put aside. Besides the Crises can publish my drawings as well as Opportunity. And besides I can draw for both.

You just watch. Things are going to break and break fast.¹⁹

And break they did. In the third letter to Alta written around the same time mentioning the *Theatre Arts Monthly* commission and suggesting he

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expected *Vanity Fair* to publish one of his drawings, Douglas brags, "I'm becoming awfully egotistic. Things have broken and are breaking so beautiful for me that I cant [sic] help patting myself on the back. Vanity Fair has one of my drawings and Theatre Arts will publish some of my work before long."²⁰

As indicated in the letters to Alta, Douglas had been approached by Locke and could well have expected to publish his drawings, but the actual appearance of his two illustrations in the journal would not occur until February 1926.

The first appearance in print of any of the panels which collectively will later become the *Emperor Jones Series*, therefore, comes on pages 117 and 118 of *Theatre Arts Monthly*, Vol. X No.2 (February 1926), accompanying Alain Locke's paean to "the racial endowment of the Negro actor," "The Negro And The American Stage."

The two drawings are untitled although they appear with text explaining their dramatic referent, introducing the artist, and in mentioning a "striking *series* of interpretative designs based on Eugene O'Neill's *Emperor Jones* [sic] ," [my italics] ²¹ suggesting that they are already part of a larger whole at this point.

The stylistically uniform companion illustrations which will later appear in Locke's *Plays of Negro Life*, published in 1927 together with the two first published here, incisively capture major psychological moments in Brutus Jones' dissolution and show that the artist had an intimate knowledge of *The Emperor Jones* that could have only been derived from reading a published version of the play, seeing it performed or both.²²

Douglas's whereabouts, his financial situation from 1920 through 1922 and what is known about the national tour of *The Emperor Jones* during those years make it highly unlikely that the artist saw the play performed in or around his native Kansas though he may have seen it reviewed or read an article on Charles Gilpin, who together with former heavyweight cham-

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pion of the world Jack Johnson, was the subject of much coverage in the black press at the time.²³ Consequently, it is all but certain that the artist had read the play before he undertook the commission. Whether he read it before receiving the commission, however, is unclear and ultimately insignificant as regards the production of the four panels of the *Series*.

Whether Douglas saw the play performed after his arrival in New York in mid 1925 is equally difficult to ascertain. While he was not in New York in time in February 1925 to have seen the Broadway revival with Paul Robeson in the lead role as Brutus Jones, he may well have seen either the February 1926 revival by the Players with Charles Gilpin returning to the role he created or a second revival with Gilpin both in lead and directing in November. Whether Douglas saw either of these revivals with Gilpin, however, is immaterial for his production of the *Series* as it appears in print, for he had already given his artwork to Alain Locke and the publishers of *Theatre Arts Monthly* well before the February production. That he was familiar with it, however, is indubitable. Alain Locke included “The Negro in Print: A Selected List of Magazines and Books by and About Negroes,” a list, according to Locke, which he “selected for general reading” at the end of the March 1925 issue of *Survey Graphic*. Under section IV of the list, “The Negro in General Literature,” are included two of Eugene O’Neill’s plays, *The Emperor Jones* and *All God’s Chillun Got Wings*. It is more than likely that Douglas saw the title here or in Walter White’s *Survey Graphic* article “Color Lines,” which begins by describing the atmosphere in the Provincetown Theatre on his attendance of Paul Robeson’s portrayal of Brutus Jones in “O’Neill’s epic of human terror.”²⁴

The first panel of the series to appear (Illustration 1) , while untitled in *Theatre Arts Monthly*, would later be known as “The Emperor Jones,” “The Emperor,” or simply the “Bravado” panel in its blockprint version. The first depiction of Brutus Jones in Douglas’s oeuvre and the first chronologically in the unfolding of the drama — it comes from Scene I — the

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illustration is characterized by crispness, relative compositional simplicity and the figure's articulate angularity. Bedizened in the ensigns of heraldry, Brutus Jones wears an officer's full-dress coat with a high-neck collar, wide wales of braided frogging on the chest and epaulets fringed with bullions on the shoulders. The self-styled regalia of the throne include turn-top boots and either gauntlets or turned-back cuffs — the illustration is insufficiently detailed to determine which, and the stage directions given by O'Neill describe neither. Contemporary pictures of the actor Charles Gilpin in the role of Brutus Jones show him similarly dressed, with the addition of an *fourragère* to the frock coat he wears.²⁵

Jones, having rung for his guards and servants to prove a point to the sycophant Smithers, realizes none are responding, senses immanent danger and abruptly prepares to exit. Douglas depicts Jones at the moment he realizes his ensconcement in paradise is in jeopardy, his reign coming to an end. The emperor has risen precipitously from his throne, which remains visible behind him in the otherwise vacant audience room of his palace. The viewer's eye is led beyond the central figure of Jones through the splines of the throne and beyond the architectural cadence of three open archways and the portico, first by the geometric irregularity of the dias receding into the distance and then by foreshortened and elongated, alternating black and white floor tiles. In accordance with O'Neill's stage directions, the vast expanse of Brutus Jones's Caribbean domain is suggestively depicted by Douglas through the artifice of undulating horizontal lines retreating from the portico to the horizon in the distance.²⁶

Taken as a whole, the composition is airy yet imposes a clear articulation of space with Jones in profile facing the viewer's right and inclined forward at the waist, his left arm bent downward at the elbow, his left leg, repeating the angle, similarly bent at the knee to suggest both the possibility of imminent flight as well as haughty prancing and posturing in front of the undepicted sycophant Henry Smithers, a Cockney trader who

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(Illustration 1)

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has curried Jones' favor during his oppressive reign and has just informed Jones of his subjects' plot to overthrow him.²⁷ Poised dynamically atop the dais in front of his throne, the figure's triangular torso and hips are slightly off-center to the viewer's left, while the vertical axis formed by imagining a line passing through his head and the heels of both his right boot, planted on the dais, and his left, raised knee-high and suspended in mid-air as if to rush down the steps to cross the checkerboard floor for a better view of the plotters below, centers the composition beneath the larger middle archway in the wall to his rear.

Douglas has given Jones beetle brows, and as he had in many of his other illustrations at this early stage of his career, exaggerated, protruding white lips. Both devices are apparent in the work of his early mentor in Harlem, Bavarian-born artist Winold Reiss.²⁸ His one visible, crescent-shaped eye is set firmly in his head. While these characteristics mark the illustration as among his earliest, being diacritical of several works in the first printing of *The New Negro* as well as the illustrations and cover art he completed for *Opportunity*, the detail, clarity, and sharp angularity of the illustration show Douglas's quick artistic development.

Like the first, the second of the two illustrations to accompany Locke's article is untitled (*Illustration 2*) It depicts the action in Scene VI, the setting of which is described by O'Neill in the stage directions as:

A cleared space in the forest. The limbs of the trees meet over it forming a low ceiling about five feet from the ground. The interlocked ropes of creepers reaching upward to entwine the tree trunks give an arched appearance to the sides. The space thus enclosed is like the dark, noisome hold of some ancient vessel. The moonlight is almost completely shut out and only a vague wan light filters through. (Scene VI, p. 1055)

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Over time the illustration, or rather the pose in which we find Jones, will be known as “Forest Fear” or “Flight” and represents a terrorized Jones in full flight from pursuers, both real and imaginary. Done in the same simplified style as its companion piece, the penultimate frame in what will become a four-panel series depicts the now apparently nude-stage directions for Scene VI indicate that what remains of his pants are “no better than a breech cloth”—slightly curvilinear figure of Brutus Jones, who has already shed his clothing like so many extraneous trappings of civilization, saying “Dere! I gits rid o’ dem frippety Emperor trappin’s an’ I travel lighter.” (Scene IV, p. 1049)

The figure of Jones is framed by ensiform leaves below and jagged, threatening aciculae on both sides, his extremities seemingly pierced at several points by the highly stylized foliage and his lower body, stretched out in one giant stride, appears supported by the foliage below him as though in his attempts to escape he has all but prostrated himself. Night has fallen, and several broad, dark swaths of sky press heavily down from above symbolizing an impending fate and emphasizing the dread Jones has begun to suffer; Jones is in full-strided flight, head turned rearward as if to catch a glimpse of his unseen pursuers, mouth agape in panic and breathlessness and hands and arms raised above his head in fear, supplication, or an attempt to protect himself. Like its companion illustration, this first rendition of the “Forest Fear” panel in the series features Jones with the exaggerated white lips which will disappear in later versions but remain in both *The New Negro* and *Plays of Negro Life* panel entitled, respectively, “The Emperor Jones” and “The Emperor.”²⁹

As of the February 1926 publication of *Theatre Arts Monthly*, in addition to his regular work for *Opportunity* and beginning in February *The Crises*, Douglas had done six illustrations, no *Series* panels numbering among them, for Alain Locke’s *The New Negro* and two panels of the *Series* to accompany Locke’s article “The Negro And The American Stage.” The



(Illustration 2)

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evidence that a *Series* exists at this point is limited to Locke's caption quoted above for the first panel accompanying his article and an undated and untitled essay among the Aaron Douglas Papers in the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian Institution. Here, in reflecting on his development as an artist and recounting the inspiration and early evolution of his style, Douglas mentions multiple illustrations for *The Emperor Jones*.

I took the beginning steps toward [a] fairly complete visual statement as far back as 1925. At that time, pleas could be heard on all sides for a visual pattern comparable to, or rather suggestive of, the uniqueness found in the gestures and bodily movements of the Negro dance, and the sounds and vocal patterns as found in the Negro song. I finally undertook the task simply because there was no one else to do so.

Under the guidance, inspiration, and encouragement of my teacher, Winold Reiss, I ventured forth. The results are these: Drawings for the *New Negro* . . . [and] Illustrations for the *Emperor Jones*.³⁰

Recycled

Alain Locke's approval of Douglas's work is underscored by the March 1927 reprinting of *The New Negro* with five additional works by Douglas, bringing his total contribution to eleven, including a rerun of the first *Theatre Arts Monthly* panel, now complete with "The Emperor Jones" as its caption.³¹ Confusion has arisen among art and cultural historians regarding the first appearance of the panels in what will collectively later become the *Series* because the colophon of the first edition merely indicates that the book was published by Albert and Charles Boni in 1925. Not until the second printing in March, 1927 is there any indication that the original date of publication was late in the year, in December, 1925. With no notice

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in the introduction or elsewhere that changes have been made between printings, some who have seen the later printings of *The New Negro* have been led to assume that the first printing also included "The Emperor Jones" panel.

While Douglas was credited with "Six Drawings and Decorative Designs," including "Sahdji," "Meditation," "The Poet," "The Sun God" "Music," and "Ancestral," with an unspecified four of the latter five drawings mysteriously subtitled "Four Symbolic Sketches," on the first print run. By the time of the second printing some sixteen months later, contributions by Douglas had nearly doubled to eleven and for the first time included one entitled "The Emperor Jones."³² Pagination remained the same up to and somewhat beyond that point in the second printing, with the illustration appearing on what had been a blank page in the first printing.³³

The second appearance of "The Emperor Jones," therefore, is opposite "The Drama of Negro Life," an article written in 1925 for the first printing of *The New Negro* by Montgomery Gregory, former Professor of English at Howard University and organizer and director of the Howard Players. As a precursor to Locke's *Theatre Arts Monthly* article, it sounds the same chords of returning to mine "the rich veins of folk-tradition of the past" and urges establishment of a national Negro Theater in order to portray the "authentic life of the Negro masse of to-day."

Douglas's illustration, depicting an early scene from O'Neill's play in which the self-styled emperor of an unnamed Caribbean island senses his imminent downfall and flees, is intimately related to Gregory's article insofar as the author pauses on more than one occasion to heap praise on O'Neill as the man "who more than any other person has dignified and popularized negro drama" and *The Emperor Jones* as "the breakwater plunge of Negro drama into the main stream of American drama."³⁴

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Recycled, Expanded and Finally Complete

The role played by Alain Locke at this early stage of Douglas's career can hardly be overemphasized, especially insofar as it regards publication of the panels for the *Emperor Jones Series*. Indeed, all publications in which *Series* illustrations appear are either books Locke edited or magazines containing articles written by him. The third and final appearance in print of Douglas's illustrations depicting Brutus Jones occurs in *Plays of Negro Life*, a collection of drama written by or featuring black characters edited by Alain Locke and Montgomery Gregory. When Harper and Brothers published the book in 1927, it marked a milestone for the *Series* for it was the first time it had appeared complete in print. While some art historians have misleadingly referred to Douglas's contributions to the *Plays of Negro Life* as comprising "53 illustrations," the truth of the matter is less impressive. Although the number itself is correct, there are only eight full-page illustrations related to the *twenty*—not fifty-three as claimed by Kirschke—plays selected by Locke and Gregory: four accompanying *The Emperor Jones*, together with one each for Ridgley Torrence's *The Rider of Dreams* and John Matheus' *Cruiter*, and one for each of two plays by Willis Richardson, *The Flight of the Natives*, and *The Broken Banjo*. Each of the last four takes its caption from the title of the play with which it appears.³⁵ The remaining forty-five "illustrations," many not much larger than a quarter, are more accurately termed book "decorations" and are repeated, alternately, at the beginning of each play and elsewhere between five and six times each. More accurately then, Douglas's contribution in addition to the eight full-page illustrations includes four modernistic page-top horizontal decorations and an equal number of smaller decorations, all informed by the artist's interest in African and Egyptian themes, on the various frontispieces of each play and elsewhere.

The four-panel *Series* as it here appears together for the first time includes: "The Emperor" (formerly " [The] Emperor Jones" or untitled),

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which had appeared in print twice before; “The Fugitive” (elsewhere “Defiance”) which appears here for the first time and will be described below; “Forest Fear” (formerly untitled and elsewhere “Flight”), which had appeared once before; and “Surrender” (same title throughout) which appears here for the first time and will also be described below. As though emphasizing the centrality of *The Emperor Jones* in the black dramatic pantheon, the frontispiece for *Plays of Negro Life* is a Francis Bruguere photograph of Charles Gilpin as Brutus Jones seated on his throne. Another Bruguere photograph of the auction block scene from the play appears later. A third photograph from the play, this one by Maurice Goldberg, shows Paul Robeson in the same role, probably from the 1925 Broadway revival.

This is the first appearance in print of what, judging from frequency of reproduction at least, some consider the artistic centerpiece of the four-panel *Series*. Known in other mediums as “Defiance,” “The Fugitive” panel (*Illustration 3*) is dominated by the uniformed profile, facing to the viewer’s right, of Jones’s long, angular body, which, standing erect in the center of the composition, extends full-frame top to bottom and very nearly fills the frame from left to right. Mouth agape, visible eye glaring, nostril flared, Jones’s head is uncapped and uncovered, framed left and right by the jungle, but appearing to penetrate an open space in the foliage above him. In his left hand Jones holds a recently fired pistol, the smoke from which curls lazily across the frame behind him to merge with the foliage and disappear off frame left, emphasizing the stifling weight of the jungle air by its horizontal movement. Threatening by its intrusion into the frame, but not yet oppressive, the stylized foliage which together with an ominously black sky will dominate the next panel, is limited here to an adumbration of the fate awaiting Jones.³⁶

Stylistically, “The Fugitive” closely resembles the two panels which succeed it depicting the plight of the fleeing emperor, “Forest Fear” and “Surrender.” Brutus Jones’s facial features, including the fully silhouetted

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(Illustration 3)

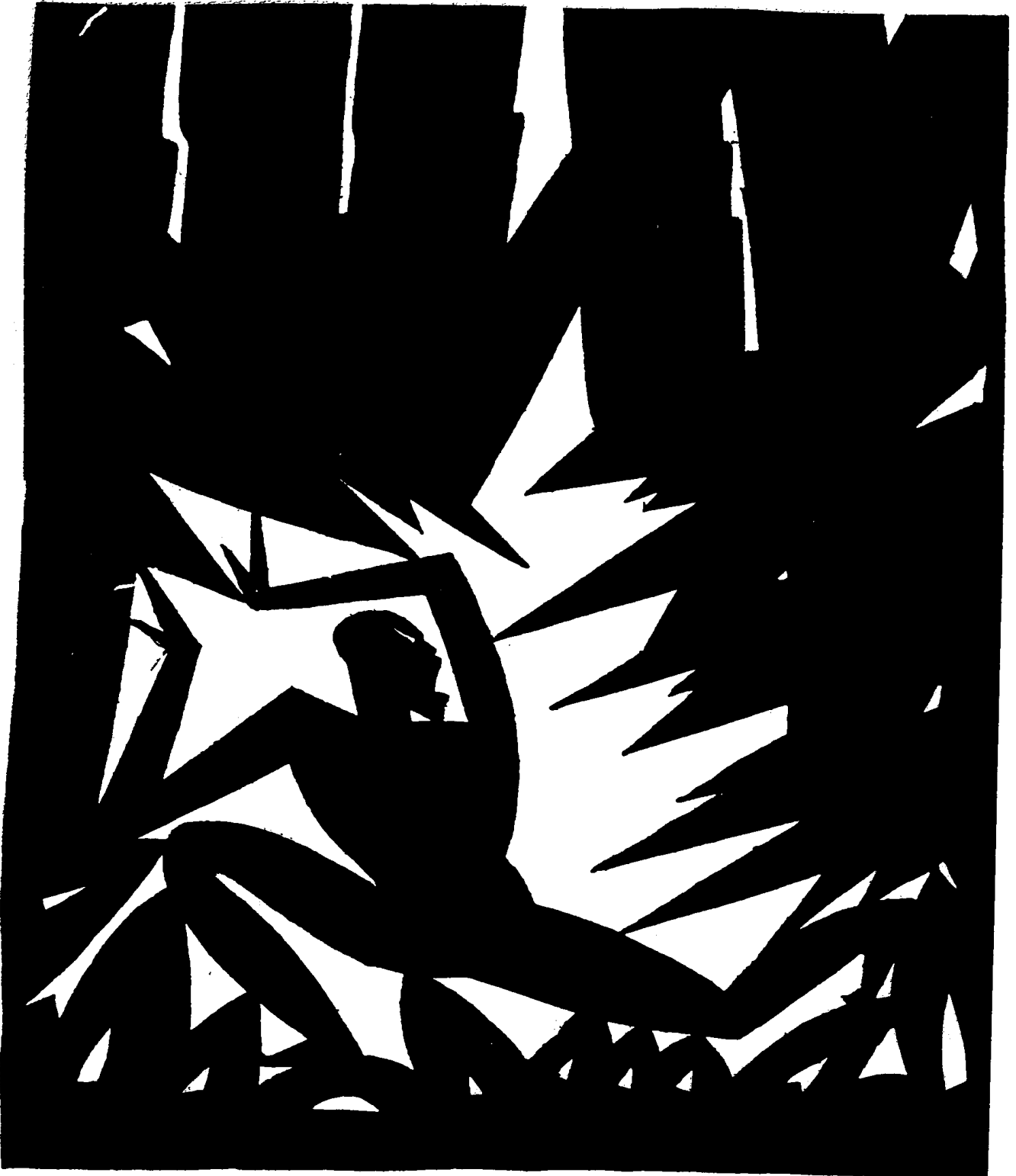
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depiction of his head, the angular jaw, open mouth and absence of full, white lips all speak to a unity of composition, perhaps in time. There are two significantly dissimilar details, however, suggesting "The Fugitive" may have been created at a different time, especially when compared to the first panel in the series, here entitled "The Emperor." The frogging on Jones's chest, for example, in addition to being in four rows here instead of three as in the first panel, is joined in the center now, whereas it is separated in the first panel. The variance indicates, in my judgment, a lack of attention to detail or perhaps a conscious rejection of uniformity rather than creation at a different time. The same perhaps can be said of the left-handed Jones, who, like the figure in all three other panels faces right, even while fleeing left in panel three, "Forest Fear." Furthermore, the exaggerated white lips prevalent in Douglas's early illustrations are absent here, due perhaps to either criticism from others within the author's *Gemeinschaft* for the perceived caricaturing of negroid features or Douglas's own awakened racial pride.

The third panel in the *Series*, here entitled "Forest Fear," (*Illustration 4*) has undergone two stylistic alterations indicating this panel had been revisited after its original appearance in *Theatre Arts Monthly*. The single eye, characteristic of Douglas's figures in profile, has been elongated and the white, protruding lips, the significance of which has been discussed above, have disappeared. Otherwise, the panel is identical with those published in *Theatre Arts Monthly* and *The New Negro*.³⁷

Of further noteworthiness is the shape of the single visible eye in each of the four *Series* panels. Insofar as Douglas chose to severely limit the range of emotional expression his figures are capable of by his choice of depicting them in cutout, silhouette fashion, it is likely that rather than attesting to their creation at different times, the various sizes and shapes of the eyes he imbeds in Jones's otherwise nearly expressionless face instead indicate an attempt by the artist to endow him with a modicum of emotion.

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(Illustration 4)

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The crescent-shaped eye of “The Emperor,” shows his imperious suspicion, the one wide, and elongated upwardly in “The Fugitive” glares with shaken defiance, while the thin and elongated eye in “Forest Fear,” emphasizes the full-blown fear Jones has fallen prey to, and the final wide-eyed triangular eye in “Surrender” mutely yet eloquently expresses the “anguished pleading” of the defeated Emperor Jones. A wide range of emotion finds expression through this small but significant artifice by the artist.

The final panel of the Series, “Surrender,” (*Illustration 5*) depicts Brutus Jones in profile, kneeling in paludal surroundings facing to the viewer's right, his head upturned, his arms raised as though in surrender or supplication with his palms facing upward. In the foreground are alternating wavy black and white horizontal swathes angling downward to the left as though to indicate the drop of a flowing, moonlit river. Jones is pricked from behind by the same highly stylized ensiform leaves that appear in both preceding outdoor frames of the series, “The Fugitive” and “Forest Fear,” the artist having taken care to frame the figure with the same foliage above and on the sides to reinforce the perception that Jones is down low in the bush.

The playwright's stage directions for Scene VII nowhere indicate Jones should have his arms raised above his head. O'Neill first directs that he “sinks into a kneeling, devotional posture,” later that he “reaches a half-kneeling, half-squatting position and remains rigidly fixed there, paralyzed with awed fascination,” and finally that Jones “squirms on his belly nearer and nearer [the awaiting Crocodile God], moaning continually” (Scene VII, p. 1057-58).

Although the artist may have interpreted the stage directions calling for a kneeling, devotional posture to indicate that Jones's arms would be raised overhead and went on to take poetic license by conflating that moment in front of the witch doctor with the subsequent appearance of the Crocodile God, given Douglas's nascent but burgeoning interest in Africana



(Illustration 5)

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as witnessed in his other works of this time, his stated pride in being black as seen in his letters to Alta and Langston Hughes, it is more likely that he chose not to portray Brutus Jones in a supine position and quite plausible that he adapted the Egyptian hieroglyph *ka*, two hands upraised in a defensive attitude, to indicate the Emperor's last-ditch efforts to ward off impending doom.³⁸ With Jones nearly at his wits' end, the adaptation of an Egyptian apotropaic symbol and its translation into a gesture to protect from the evils of evil dovetails perfectly with the dramatic moment the artist is attempting to depict. That Douglas was interested in Egyptian art and drawn to Egyptian images during this early stage of his career is manifest in numerous illustrations featuring pyramids and sphinxes he completed between 1926 and 1927 for *Crisis* as well as his cover for *Fire!!* in the fall of 1926 and his other illustrations and decorations appearing in *The Plays of Negro Life* as well.

Although the long span of time between the first appearance of panels 1 and 3 in February, 1926 and the full 4-panel layout in 1927 suggests that the *Series* may not have been executed, though it is not impossible that it was conceived, at the same time, the overall artistic unity of the series belies that suspicion. The noted difference in the frogging between panels one and two aside, only the "Flight" panel has undergone a significant stylistic change since first appearing: de-emphasis of the lips and this, as has been pointed out, was most likely a revision by the artist in accordance with his heightened racial consciousness.

Of particular interest in the final frame "Surrender" is the partial image of the Crocodile God, which takes up the whole right side of the frame.³⁹ The playwright's stage directions describe the Crocodile God's appearance in the drama thusly:

*The forces of Evil demand sacrifice. They must be appeased.
The witch-doctor points with his wand to the sacred tree, to the*

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river beyond, to the alter, and finally to Jones with a ferocious command. Jones seems to sense the meaning of this. It is he who must offer himself for sacrifice. He beats his forehead abjectly to the ground, moaning hysterically. . . . The witch-doctor springs to the river bank. He stretches out his arms and calls to some God within its depths. . . . A huge head of a crocodile appears over the bank and its eyes, glittering greenly, fasten upon Jones. . . . Jones squirms on his belly nearer and nearer, moaning continually. (Scene VII, p. 1058)

It is at this moment that we witness Brutus Jones transfixed with fear in the presence of the Crocodile God, which in the artist's rendition has indeed fixed his eyes upon the terrorized Jones and appears to be approaching him. It is unclear whether O'Neill undertook research to establish that there were such saurian gods or spirits in the West African tropics and the Congo or merely imagined there to be. He may also have telescoped through the millennia to Nilotic cultures and their worship, especially during the 12th and 13th dynasties, in and around the marshy plains of Medinet el-Fayum near the Delta and upriver at Kom Ombo north of the 1st Cataract, of a theriomorphic river god known variously as Sobek or Sebek and mentioned in the Pyramid Texts as the son of Neit or Neith, a relatively minor goddess involved with hunting. The most dangerous animal on the Nile, its tributaries, floodplain and marshes, the crocodile was believed to be an incarnation of Sebek and as such was associated with the demonic god Set, considered to embody the essence of evil, and viewed as the personification of the powers of evil and death, a perfect antagonist in this atavistic drama of collective racial conscious. After retrogressing through generations in America, crossing the Atlantic on a slaveship and penetrating the jungles of western Africa, the Black hero finds himself ultimately confronted by a Nilotic saurian god of his distant Egyptian ancestors. Whether

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O'Neill meant it to be or Douglas interpreted it so, the selection of the penultimate scene of the drama for depiction in the *Series* attests to the artist's awareness of the currency of Pan-Africanism then popular with W. E. B. Du Bois and many other members of the Talented Tenth, of which Douglas was clearly a member and to whom he wished his works to appeal.⁴⁰

Conclusion

It appears paradoxical that Aaron Douglas, the pre-eminent artist of the Harlem Renaissance, the new Negro's new Negro, the black artist who was most influenced by African and Egyptian art, seems to have gained admittance into Harlem's inner circle in part on the strength of instruction he received in the studio of his early artistic mentor, white Bavarian artist Winhold Reiss, introductions from white patrons like Carl Van Vechten, and inspiration if not the commissions themselves thanks to white playwright Eugene O'Neill. Yet a more careful investigation shows that it was Charles S. Johnson, W. E. B. Du Bois, and ultimately Alain Locke who actually nurtured him and brought him into the fold. Locke, the man most directly responsible for Douglas's *Emperor Jones Series* ever seeing light, of course, was not entirely altruistic. Like Johnson and Du Bois, he needed illustrations and he needed them done by a black artist to support his claims of a Negro renaissance in the arts. Reiss had merely filled a gap for Locke before he obligingly went on to train Douglas as his own successor. Talented black artists were few, and Locke reached out to Douglas, who had already made a bit of a reputation for himself thanks to his early work for *Opportunity*. But Douglas's preference for black subject matter also delimited his appeal among Whites, for popular though Harlem may have been during the decade of the twenties, it was as a dark refuge from the travails of life in the city, not as an artistic haven.

Coming at the beginning of his career as it does, Douglas's *Emperor Jones Series* is exceptional, albeit in a limited way, insofar as it provided the

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artist with the opportunity to present himself before the general reading public. Its appearance in *Theatre Arts Monthly* marks one of only two times his work graced the pages of a mainstream journal, the other being in *American Monthly* in May 1927. The longevity of the *Series* attests first to the fact the drama itself continued to resonate with the theatergoing public long after its appearance in 1920 and only second to the appeal of the the illustrations themselves, powerful and bold though they are: no interest in the drama, no venue for publication of the illustrations.

That having been said, Douglas made use of the drama to express his growing racial consciousness and interest in the arts of Africa and Egypt. In that capacity, *The Emperor Jones* served Aaron Douglas well. O'Neill's play provided the artist with a subject, current and popular — or at least controversial — among his contemporaries which he could exploit. The hero of the drama, Brutus Jones, was, above all, Black, not a first for O'Neill, maybe, but certainly a first when Gilpin strode the boards of the Selwyn on Broadway. Jones was a multifaceted character, now imperiously confident in front of the lackey Smithers, now paralyzed with fear and groveling in front of his own ancient ancestral gods. Eugene O'Neill, the creator of *The Emperor Jones*, was a Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright at the top of the dramatic world. With the play, he broke new ground for black actors, and thanks in large part to Charles Gilpin's portrayal of Jones, proved to the world that audiences would pay to see a black actor in a serious role. For Douglas, the opportunity to illustrate scenes from *The Emperor Jones* was a chance to have his work seen by a wide audience. And as though in attestation of his fascination with the subject, Douglas returned to the play on several occasions around this time to rework the series in other media.⁴¹ Indeed, the recycling by Douglas of his *Emperor Jones Series* is paradigmatic. Coming early in his career as it does, it is indicative of a pattern that the artist was to repeat on many occasions. Illustrations were recycled in other journals or books; book illustrations were later painted in gouache or

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oils. Blockprints and linocuts of reworked illustrations were issued. Today, Douglas remains all but unknown outside the black literary and artistic establishment while public display of his works is relegated to inclusion in “art of the Harlem Renaissance” exhibitions. He may have gotten a lot of mileage out of his *Emperor Jones Series*, but like the protagonist Brutus Jones, Aaron Douglas never really made it out of the forest either.

Notes

1. Unless otherwise stated, quotations from *The Emperor Jones*, hereafter *TEJ*, including stage directions, are taken from Eugene O’Neill, *O’Neill, Complete Plays 1913-1920*, ed. Travis Bogard, (*New York*: Literary Classics of America, 1988)

On the first bill of The Provincetown Players’ seventh season together with *The Emperor Jones*, was *Matinata*, a comedy by producer and co-founder of the Washington Square Players, Lawrence Langner. Both were produced under the direction of George Cram Cook. Information on the production of *TEJ* is taken from the same source as well as a program in the New York Public Library’s Billy Rose Theatre Collection, File No. MWEZ+ N. C. 747.

2. Descriptions of the Selwyn and the Princess can be found in Henderson, Mary C., *The City and the Theatre* (Clifton, New Jersey: James T. White & Co., 1973.) Interestingly, Henderson notes that actress Jane Cowl, the wife of Adolph Klauber and creator of the scrapbook in the Billy Rose Theatre Collection from which the bulk of the information regarding the production of *TEJ* has been taken, starred in *Information Please*, the first production at the Selwyn on October 2, 1918. Additional information regarding the early production of *TEJ* can be found in Helen Deutsch and Stella Hannau, *The Provincetown: A Story of the Theatre* (New York, 1931)

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3. Woollcott and Macgowan, who would soon join O'Neill and Robert Jones as a member of the Provincetown Players' "Triumvirate," were joined in their praise by another critical heavyweight, Heywood Broun, of the *New York Herald Tribune* on November 4. According to Broun, *The Emperor Jones* was " . . . the most interesting play which has yet come from the most promising playwright in America." Quoted in Louis Sheaffer *O'Neill: Son and Artist* (Boston; Little, Brown, 1973) pp. 33-34.

4. Amy Helene Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas: Art, Race, & The Harlem Renaissance* (Jackson, Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 1995) p. xiii, passim. Kirschke also — and somewhat hyperbolically — termed Douglas "the father of Black American art," an assertion that ignores the contributions of the likes of Henry O. Tanner and Meta Warrick Fuller.

5. Contrary to claims made by Romare Bearden and Harry Henderson in *A History of African-American Artists: From 1792 to the Present*, Walrond's urging came before the publication in 1926 of his widely acclaimed collection of short stories, *Tropic Death*. Douglas is known to have arrived in Harlem in mid-1925.

6. Note: David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1979) pp. 96-97 and Steven Watson, *The Harlem Renaissance: Hub of African-American Culture, 1920-1930* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1995) p. 24.

Douglas mentioned his intention to visit Paris in a letter to Alta written sometime before September 1925. "My program is six hundred dollars, and Paris by September '25. I cant [sic] go like a prince on such a sum nor can I live in Paris like an Ambassador [sic], but I feel that if I get there will get on by some means or other. Do you approve of my program dear. Tell your daddy just how you feel about the plan." Aaron Douglas to

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Alta Sawyer, n.d., Folder 2 No. 18, Aaron Douglas Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library, New York.

7. Alain Locke, ed., *The New Negro* (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, Inc 1925; reprint, New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1992) p. 262. Indeed, Locke saw in Douglas's early illustrations and decorative book and magazine designs the beginnings of "a racial school of art," which would draw inspiration from the African idiom. (*The New Negro*) p. 266-67

8. Nugent to David Levering Lewis, n.d.; in Lewis, "Voices from the Renaissance," Special collections, Schomburg Center NYPL. Quoted in Steven Watson, *The Harlem Renaissance: Hub of African-American Culture, 1920-1930* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1995) p. 17.

9. See Arnold Rampersad's introduction to the 1992 Simon & Schuster reprint of *The New Negro* for more information about publication dates of *Survey* and its "special monthly number" *Survey Graphic*. Locke, *The New Negro*. pp. x-xi.

10. Locke, *The New Negro*. p. 440.

11. Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas*. p. 90.

12. Quoted by Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas*. p. 38.

13. Aaron Douglas to Alta Sawyer, n.d. Folder 1 No. 7 Aaron Douglas Papers, NYPL.

14. Quoted by Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas*. p. 90.

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15. Alain Locke. "The Negro and The American Stage" *Theatre Arts Monthly*, Vol. 10 No. 2 (February 1926) pp. 112-120. passim.

16. Deutsch and Hannau, *The Provincetown*. p. 142. The authors, both former members of the Players, go on to give details.

"The season was foundering when Charles Gilpin, the original Emperor Jones, turned up in New York. The Provincetown shrewdly revived "The Emperor" for a . . . As always, "The Emperor Jones" made money. It opened on February limited run . . . 16th and played to capacity for five weeks. The Provincetown learned the value of reviving its past successes, and during the next few years, whenever funds were dangerously low, an O'Neill play was hastily unearthed."

17. Aaron Douglas to Alta Sawyer, n. d., Folder 1 No. 6, Aaron Douglas Papers, NYPL. The letter is of further interest for its description of the conditions under which Douglas created the cover for the December 1925 issue of *Opportunity* and the rapidity with which he had been accepted into the "Niggeratti" fold. In the letter Douglas mentions the group around the *Opportunity* office, "Countee Cullen, Eric Walrond, Charles S. Johnson, [and] Zora Hurston." The letter can be dated to sometime before Thanksgiving 1925 because of the mention of the *Opportunity* cover as well as Walter White's second novel, *Flight*, which was published by Knopf in 1926. It can also be dated by another letter the artist wrote shortly thereafter on Thanksgiving and quoted in the text. *Theatre Arts Magazine* is the former name of *Theatre Arts Monthly*.

18. Aaron Douglas to Alta Sawyer, n. d. Folder 1 No. 8, Aaron Douglas Papers, NYPL. The book Douglas says Locke proposes to write is *Plays of Negro Life*; the manuscript for the article on the Negro on the American

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stage is the one he was to publish in *Theatre Arts Monthly* in February 1926.

19. Ibid.

20. Aaron Douglas to Alta Sawyer, n. d. Folder 1 No. 13, Aaron Douglas Papers, NYPL. Douglas goes on to say that he “want [s] no more recognition of that sort. I shall submit nothing more to magazines excepting Opportunity and The Crises. I want to keep away from publicity. It’s bad. At present. Distracts my plans. Distracts and forces my development. I should like to remain obscure for two years longer. At my present rate of progress I’ll be a giant in two years. I want to be frightful to look at. A veritable black terror.”

21. Alain Locke, “*The Negro and The American Stage*. p. 117. Of further interest is the masthead of *Theatre Arts Monthly*, which notes “Edith J. R. Isaacs, Editor, Kenneth Macgowan and Ashley Dukes, Associate Editors.” Kenneth Macgowan was theatre critic for the *New York Globe* and had been one of the early reviewers of *The Emperor Jones*.

The full text of the captions for the two illustrations, apparently written by Locke, is quoted below.

Under the first illustration, the “Defiance” pose was the following: “In a striking series of interpretative designs based on Eugene O’Neill’s *Emperor Jones* [sic], the young Negro artist, Aaron Douglas, has recaptured the dynamic quality of that tragedy of terror. There is an arbitrary contrast of black masses and white spaces; and the clash of broken line becomes highly expressive in suggesting the proximate collapse of the Emperor’s throne and the fear it inspires.” (p. 117)

Under the second illustration, the “Flight” or “Forest Fear” pose, was the following:

“The tropical jungle closing in on the defeated Brutus Jones is here

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suggested by Aaron Douglas with an utter simplicity of means, yet with no sacrifice of psychological verisimilitude. There is a sharply defined sense of dramatic design-of drama in design. This power is one often missing among men of greater technical skill but less vivid imagination. (p. 118)

22. The first publication of *The Emperor Jones* came shortly after the play had been moved to Broadway in the January 1921 issue of *Theatre Arts Magazine*, the same journal, later renamed *Theatre Arts Monthly*, in which Locke's article and Douglas's illustrations appeared in 1926. It was first published in book form together with *Diffrent* and *The Straw* on April 7, 1921 by Boni & Liveright. O'Neill made his final revisions of the play in preparation for the 1924 publication by Boni & Liveright of *The Complete Works of Eugene O'Neill*, a two-volume limited edition. O'Neill, *Complete Plays 1913-1920*, pp. 1072 and 1092.

23. I have been unable to discover any evidence that the national tour of 1920-1922 ever came anywhere near Topeka, Kansas or Lincoln, Nebraska where Douglas was studying art at the University of Nebraska. Indeed, there is no solid evidence that the play ever came farther west than St. Louis, Missouri. There are two newspaper reports that *The Emperor Jones* was scheduled to play one night, possibly in Springfield, Missouri, at the Fairbanks theater on November 7, 1921, but the reports have not be confirmed. At any rate, whether Springfield or St. Louis, the closest that the tour appears to have come to Lincoln is well over 300 miles, an arduous and expensive journey for a penurious college student in 1921.

24. Walter F. White, "Color Lines," *Survey Graphic* Vol. VI No. 6 (March 1925) p. 680.

25. O'Neill's stage directions describing Jones upon his first appearance in

the play: “He is a tall, powerfully-built, full-blooded negro of middle age. His features are typically negroid, yet there is something decidedly distinctive about his face — an underlying strength of will, a hardy, self-reliant confidence in himself that inspires respect. His eyes are alive with a keen, cunning intelligence. In manner he is shrewd, suspicious, evasive. He wears a light blue uniform coat, sprayed with brass buttons, heavy gold chevrons on his shoulders, gold braid on the collar, cuffs, etc. His pants are bright red with a light blue stripe down the side. Patent leather laced boots with brass spurs, and a belt with a long-barreled, pearl-handled revolver in a holster complete his make up. Yet there is something not altogether ridiculous about his grandeur. He has a way of carrying it off.” O’Neill, *Complete Plays 1913-1920*, p. 1033.

See the frontispiece of Locke’s *Plays of Negro Life* for Gilpin photo.

26. The stage directions preceding Scene I describe the palace and the view beyond: “The palace is evidently situated on high ground for beyond the portico nothing can be seen but a vista of distant hills, their summits crowned with thick groves of palm trees.” O’Neill, *Complete Plays 1913-1920*. p. 1031.

Kirschke, apparently with no understanding of the play, describes what extends into the distance behind Jones “Three arches line the background, with the soft vertical lines Douglas often employed to represent a river flowing behind the arches.” Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas*. p. 85.

27. Smithers, black like Jones, is depicted in a woodcut rendition of the “Bravado” pose. See Joanna Skipwith, ed., *Rhapsodies in Black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance*, (Berkeley: Hayward Gallery, the Institute of International Visual Arts and the University of California Press, 1997) p. 164.

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28. Kirschke has pointed out the similarity of Douglas's depiction to that of his mentor and teacher, Winold Reiss's *Interpretations of Harlem Jazz*, which appeared on page 666 of the Harlem issue of *Survey Graphic*. Saying, "Both are flat, angular, open silhouettes with a patterned background. Both figures have exaggerated thick lips as well." While ignoring the fact that the subjects are entirely different, she goes on to point out the superiority of Douglas's "version." "Douglas's version is simpler, bolder, and more forthright." Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas*. pp.85-86. Kirschke has also failed to note the true similarity of Reiss's silhouette figures accompanying Langston Hughes's poem "Our Land" on page 678 of the same issue which exemplify these characteristics. Here, it is clearer that Douglas owes much to Reiss stylistically. His depiction of the figures in silhouette with protruding lips and exaggerated brows, the wavy black and white lines employed to depict water or distant hills, the cuneiform leaves and repetitive lines emanating from the form, as well as the African motifs in Douglas's work all testify to the debt.

29. Illustrations 40 and 41 reproducing Douglas's artwork are mistakenly identified by the Kirschke as the *Theatre Arts Monthly* drawings. They are instead two of a later four-panel series of blockprints executed by Douglas. Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas*. illustrations 40 and 41 falling between pages 76 and 77.

30. Aaron Douglas, untitled essay, Aaron Douglas Papers, reel 4522, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C. Quoted in Donna M. Cassidy, *Painting the Musical Way: Jazz and Cultural Identity in American Art, 1910-1940*. (Washington, D. C., Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997). p.119.

31. Credited simply as "Emperor Jones," without the definite article in the

list of illustrations on p. xxxiii of the second printing.

32. Kirschke mistakenly identifies “Ancestral” as “Rebirth.” Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas*. p. 93 and illustration no. 45.

33. Other changes related to the illustrations in the second printing include: “Sahdji,” which retains the same title and location, “Meditation” is brought forward two pages to make room for the former “Ancestral,” which is relocated and perhaps retitled “Rebirth” because it conflicted with Winold Reiss’ drawing entitled “Type Sketch: ‘Ancestral’” in the illustration index and “Ancestral: A Type Study” on page 242. “Rebirth” now faces Rudolph Fisher’s article “The City of Refuge.” “The Poet” retains the same title and location, “The Sun God” retains the same location but is hyphenated, and “Music” retains the same title and location. Other new Douglas illustrations bringing the total to eleven include “Roll, Jordan, Roll,” “And the Stars Began to Fall,” “The Spirit of Africa,” and “From the New World.”

The confusion is exacerbated by the 1968 reprinting of *The New Negro* “from a copy in the Arthur A. Schomburg Negro Collection, The New York Public Library” (from the colophon) without an explanation of the printing history in the preface. Further difficulties arise from the Who’s Who of Contributors in both the first and second printing. The original December 1925 printing credits Douglas with “Six Decorative Designs,” though at least two, “Rebirth” and “Sahdji” are full-page illustrations, while the March 1927 printing inexplicably credits the artist with “Ten Decorative Designs,” when, in fact, he contributed eleven. Adding to the confusion, both claim that Douglas “has published drawings in Opportunity, Vanity Fair, and the Theatre Arts Monthly.”

By the time of the second printing, of course, the *Theatre Arts Monthly* credit had become fact.

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34. Montgomery Gregory, “The Drama of Negro Life,” *The New Negro*. (New York. Albert & Charles Boni, 1925) pp. 153-160, passim.

35. The “Bibliography of Book and Magazine Illustrations by Aaron Douglas,” appearing on pp. 192-93 of *Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America*, an exhibition catalogue published by the Studio Museum in Harlem and Abradale Press in 1987, notes that *Plays of Negro Life* included 53 illustrations by Douglas. Kirschke, apparently without looking at the book, goes on to extrapolate that to mean one for every play, since she purports there to be “fifty-three prominent plays selected and edited by Locke” Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas*, p. 95.

36. Renditions in other media by Douglas around the same time depict Jones in a similar pose, but facing the opposite direction and holding the pistol in his right hand. One, an isolated version in which Jones wears a jacket splashed with brass buttons instead of frogging, depicts him with a sword scabbarded at his waist, an addition for which there is no support in either the script or the early performances of which photographs are available.

Naming of the panel “Defiance” finds textual support in stage directions for Scene II, when Jones, confronted by the Little Formless Fears, realizes he is lost. “Can’t tell nothin’ from dem trees! Gony, nothin’ round heah looks like I evah seed it befo’. I’s done lost de place sho’ ‘nuff! (*with mournful foreboding*) It’s mighty queer! It’s mighty queer! (*with sudden forced defiance — in an angry tone*) Woods, is you tryin’ to put somethin’ ovah on me! (Scene II p. 1046)

37. Writing two decades later in 1943, artist and art historian James A. Porter, who was not overly impressed with Douglas’s contributions, noted the elongated eye was characteristic. “There is little direct evidence of African influence in Douglas’ schematic mural painting or his book illustra-

tions with their posturing figures,” wrote Porter. “What we do find is a species of exoticism, fanciful and unpredictable rather than controlled, pointing to an effort to find an equivalent in design for the imagined exotic character of Negro life. Still, this geometric extravagance is present in devices used to suggest Negroid features and tropical locale. According to the Douglas formula, the eyes must be long slits of light, the facial angle must project very positively beyond the slender stem of the neck, and the spindling shanks and wide shoulders must suggest the lithe and supple strength of the black savage or the primitive slave.” James A. Porter. *Modern Negro Art*. (New York: The Dryden Press, 1943) Reprint Howard University Press, Washington, 1992. pp. 104-105.

38. The hieroglyphic *ka* is “hands raised in a defensive attitude [representing] a magical gesture designed to preserve the life of the wearer from evil forces.” Originally a term for “the creative and preserving power of life,” *ka* was a spiritual doppelgänger fashioned by the god Khnum on his potter’s wheel that accompanied a child into birth and departed its “mortal house” upon death to dwell, upon return, in its “divine origin.” Manfred Lurker, *Götter und Symbole der Alten Ägypter* (Bern-Mtinchen-Wein: Scherz Verlag, 1974) *An Illustrated Dictionary of The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt*, (English-language edition, London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1980) p. 73

An adumbrated version of the *ka* symbol can also be seen in the cover illustration Douglas did for the May 1927 issue of *The Crisis*. Here, the artist has the upwardly and outwardly outstretched black hands and arms rising from flowing water out of which rises a pyramid to embrace both the pyramid and a star above it. Kirschke has identified the cover title as “Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.” Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas*, p. 81 and illustration No. 31.

39. Douglas’s biographer, apparently unfamiliar with the play but not

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unwilling to comment on what the artist has chosen to depict from it, describes the Crocodile God as “a dragonlike figure.” Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas*. p. 96.

40. The crocodile was also believed to incarnate the *ba*, or soul, of the creator god. Egyptian mythology holds that the Nile issued from the sweat of this river god and he made herbage green, thereby associating Sobek with cosmic and regenerative powers. Such ambivalence exhibited by ancient Egyptians toward the crocodile, however, is nowhere present in either O’Neill’s drama or Douglas’s depiction.

Lewis Spence, *Myths and Legends of Ancient Egypt*. 1915. Reprinted as *Ancient Egyptian Myths and Legends*. (New York, Dover Publications, Inc. 1990) pp. 99-101, 289-291.

41. The left-facing “*Defiance*” woodcut alluded to above may have been one of another four-panel series. It is occasionally mistakenly included as part of a series of linoleum cuts, a stylistically uniform four-panel series depicting Jones in the same scenes, same poses. None of these works show Jones with exaggerated, protruding lips and all are considerably more detailed and sophisticated than the illustrations which are the subject of this paper. The panels are variously retitled: “*Bravado* formerly [“*The*] *Emperor Jones*” or simply “*The Emperor*” “*Defiance*,” formerly “*The Fugitive*” “*Forest Fear*” (“*Flight*”) [formerly untitled or “*Forest Fear*] “*Surrender*” [uniform throughout]