

The Emperor Jones: An Odyssey of The Unconsciousness

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Abstract:

Brutus Jones, a brilliant work by Eugene O' Neill is the central protagonist of the expressionistic drama, 'The Emperor Jones'. The shrewdness and intelligence of Jones is highly exhibited in the play. The interior monologues reveal his voyage from a convict to an emperor. But the psyche of the character seems more enchanted throughout the scenes. The Emperor Jones takes place on an island in the West Indies and resides in the stylish throne room of the island's ruler or "emperor," Brutus Jones. He intends to act as a white emperor rather than a black one by creating "an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image". The cunning experience in history evokes intelligence and he very skillfully used it to befool the bush niggers. The greed of money centers his actions. Even he mirrors himself to the stature of the supreme by spreading the rumor of 'Silver Bullet Story'. The beating of tom-tom creates a horrific atmos in the play which also surrounds Jones. And finally, it is hushed with the fatal end of Jones.

Key Words: expressionistic drama, interior monologues, psyche

Brutus Jones, an intrigued craft by Eugene O' Neill is the central protagonist of the expressionistic drama, 'The Emperor Jones'. The shrewdness and intelligence of Jones is highly

exhibited in the play. The interior monologues reveal his voyage from a convict to an emperor. But the psyche of the character seems more enchanted throughout the scenes.

In the very first scene, Jones, a middle-aged Negro, is introduced wearing his gaudy taste having word exchange with Smithers, a white Cockney Trader. Jones is reminded of his past temperament, when he's new to the island. His arrogance and annoyance on Smithers and other inhabitants gives a proud manifestation of his self. He intends to act as a white emperor rather than a black one by creating "an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image" (Bhabha, 1989, p.117). It lies in the fact that when a trauma is inflicted upon the oppressed, a self-division is generated through the process of self-identification.

JONES: I'm boss heah now, is you fergettin'?

The conversation slowly opens the lid from his box of secrets. The audience gets acquainted by his humble start excused by no one but Smithers after hearing his account of breaking jail in the States. But Jones boasts of his achievement to befool the negroes and to become their emperor within a short span of time, of two years. He reveals his intelligence how safely he gathered his wealth and moved it to a foreign bank. His mind is always busy doing the stealing and nothing more. According to Freudian Psychology he's moving with the life instinct. He's never serious about his position and never bothered to respect it. The instinctive force seems dominating his persona for the greed of money. His imposing of high taxes on the negroes have made their life miserable. Jones chuckles at the idea of stealing.

JONES: For de little stealin' dey gits you in jail soon or late. For de big stealin' dey makes you Emperor and puts you in de Hall o' Fame when you croaks.

Once he's attacked by an old negro, old Lem, but missed his target and shot by Jones. He's hired to kill Jones. Jones took the opportunity of this situation and spread the rumor of 'Silver Bullet Story'. No lead but only a silver bullet can finish him. The foolish bush niggers believed the charm and were forced to accept his kinship. He also used his brains to learn their language and also taught them little English. He didn't want to take a bloody chance to get in a problem. So, he chose language as his safety measure. Even he himself moulds a silver bullet, if the time comes. He's very much aware of the niggers that they cannot have enough silver to make bullets. So, it's

impossible to kill him. He already made an escape plan because he understood their rage for him would soon be burst out.

A sudden change of course takes place when Smithers informs him about their runaway to the hill. At first, he ignores the setting but soon the ringing bell disclosed the matter. He controls himself about the seriousness of his position and declares with a burst of a low laugh.

JONES: A man can't take de pot on a bob-tailed flush all de time.... Well, I'se changed my mind den. I cashes in and resigns de job of Emperor right dis minute.

His mind starts to be chaotic but in an unconscious way. He damns the niggers, particularly old Lem. He is not afraid as his conscious mind makes him feel brave and confident enough. He in the name of going to hunting learnt all the paths in the big forest. He even puts a question in front of Smithers, who is anxious about Jones.

JONES: Think dese ign'rent bush niggers dat ain't got brains enuff to know deir own names even can catch Brutus Jones?

He recollected the reminiscence of himself laughing at the white men when they were after him. To make a fool out of these niggers seems easier than history. He reassures Smithers that he'll be at the other side of the forest, the next dawn and on the coast where a French gunboat will pick him up and will carry him all the way to Martinique, its destination. He will be safe with his amassed bank currency.

But Smithers cuts the thread of his flight of imagination by doubting the improbabilities. Jones accepts it and means the silver bullet for him. He gloomily shakes out of nervousness but somehow gives a confident laugh. He believes the silver bullet will bring him luck anyway.

A tom-tom starts beating from the distant hills. The drum is thumped akin to a heart throb, a pulse rate; 72 to the minute. Jones hears the thumps and his face seems horrified with the every beating on the tom-tom. He understands the ritual it's meant for. Though his cold looks utters a different sight before Smithers.

JONES: Let dem! Dey'll sho' need it!

Jones is fully aware of the unholy religious service, of the charms and spells, of the devils and ghosts waiting to chase him in the ravenous forest. Yet he keeps his faith on the illuminating full
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moon, which will govern him on his way inside the dark woods. The ghosts and haunts can't harm him as he's baptized when he's a porter on the Pullmans. However, when he's amid the niggers, he yawns his religion for the lust of money in the past.

He puts his dear Panama hat before to set out. No luggage is carried by him as he arranged all the tinned food buried on the edge of the forest. His exit from the front door is awfully commendable.

JONES: Does you think I'd slink out de back door like a common nigger? I'se Emperor yit, ain't I? And de Emperor Jones leaves de way he comes...

His hands in his pockets and an abstracted whistling tune while walking out of the doorway symbolizes his lordship. Even Smithers is mesmerized with a puzzled admiration towards him.

In the second scene, quite good monologues by Jones seems making a pitch. The monologues give a voice to his mind. He stops at the edge of the forest and lies down. The way he addresses his feet sounds self worship.

JONES: Feet, you is holdin' up yo' end fine an' I sutinly hopes you ain't blisterin' none. It's time you git a rest.

On the other hand the rhythmic beating of the tom-tom is giving tremors to insanity. Jones gets up restless and hungry. He searches those white stones under which he hid his tin box of grub (food). He fails to find the grub and lights matches. A strange kind of phobia starts veiling over his character.

JONES: Nigger, is you gone crazy mad? Is you lightin' matches to show dem what you is?

The moon is disappeared from his trustful night sky. He can only stare at the trees tops to find his way. Everything is strange enough. The black woods appear virgin to him as if he's a complete stranger to this place. His disturbed mind provokes anger. He is unable to differentiate external reality and personal psyche. "The capacity of metaphor, which is the separation of signifier and signified, should be based on the ego integrity and boundaries that can be smashd by traumatic circumstances" (Grubrich- Simitis, 1984, pp.305-307). All of a sudden he hears a burst of low mocking laughter like a rustling of leaves. The dark formless figures prove to be the foreground of the deadly spell. He out of shaken nerve fires at them by his revolver and as a result the tom-

tom starts vibrating quicker than before. Somehow his bold inner self finally urges him to enter the forest.

In the third scene, the clock struck nine. The scene opens in the dark woods, where nothing catches sight. Jones' cheerful voice is sonorous, breaking the dead silence. The incandescent moon appears to be the reason of his transport.

JONES: De moon's rizen. Does you heah dat, nigger?

The worn out Jones feels too weary as if he had journeyed for hours and hours. However, the moonbeams just sprouted in the night sky, which means he has a long way to go. He starts conversing soliloquies. Amidst the tensed enclosure his mind plays with him. He cheers himself, boasts, whistles, instead of worrying about the coming dread. And at the same time he's watchful too.

A strange, queer and a clicketty sound abruptly stop him. He encounters the ghost of Jeff playing dice automatically. He is bewildered at the seeing he eyes. He fires at the figure, and it gets vanished by the smoke. The rapid concussion of the tom- tom gains after the shooting shot. The tom-tom plays a symbolic device in the drama. He wildly plunges into the underbush and disappears.

Its eleven o' clock in the forest and the fourth scene begins. His kingly apparel gets ripped and thus looks shabby. He tears and frees himself of it and reveals himself deprived to the waist. A fusion of fear and fearlessness is experienced. He prays to the Lord God to save him of these creepy shadows and at the same time he animates his spirit believing them as illusions results out of hunger.

JONES: Lawd God, don't let me see no more o' dem ha'nts! Dey gits my goat! Ha'nts! You fool nigger, dey ain't no such things! Don't be Baptist parson tell you dat many time! Hunger 'fects yo' head and yo' eyes.

He's sitting on the road. A small gang of negroes enters, dressed in convict suits, followed by a white man donned of a prison guard uniform. Jones is extremely frightened with terror. The prison guard cracks his whip and the convicts start their work on the road. Their movements are alike to Jeff, slow and automatic. "Persons who experience degradation and humiliation at the hands of their tormenters or who are swept along helplessly by the capriciousness of fate often

describe a profound identification with the terror of helplessness.....” (McCann & Pearlman, 1990, p.71). The prison guard signals at Jones and he as if spellbound gets to his feet. He curses the guard with rage. Suddenly the guard whips Jones across the shoulders. Jones cries with pain and in a fit of anger upraises his arms handled a shovel, he targets on the white man’s skull for a murder purpose. But all of a sudden he realizes that his hands are empty. He cries in anguish. He begs his fellow convicts to hand him a shovel, but they stare on the ground with mute faces. At last he shoots again at the guards back. The shooting echo breaks the trance and Jones leaps away in mad flight. The tom-tom is heard beaten vigorously with more volume and speed.

Scene five reveals the same background and its one in the morning. Jones is regretting of his past misdoings, sitting on a clearing, holding his head in his hand, rocking to and fro. The situation is tense now. He is apologizing that he killed Jeff, because Jeff cheated in dice. He killed the white guard as he was hit by the whip. In both the circumstances anger overpowered him. He admits that he’s made an emperor by the foolish bush niggers. And he took the advantage to secure his future. He prays to god to forgive him. He gathers a little self-confidence after the prayer and gets up. His shoes are cut and misshapen now which hurt him bad. He removes them mournfully.

JONES: You was real, A-one patin’ leather, too. Look at you now, Emperor, you’s e gittin’ mighty low!

His attention is grabbed by a crowd of figures with the Auctioneer. A batch of slaves is going to be sold by the white planters. A silent pantomime is performed before Jones. All the mute figures chat against the booming tom- tom. The Auctioneer places his hand on the shoulder of Jones. He turns his head around and finds no way to escape as he’s surrounded by the slaves on all sides. The description of Jones is gestured. The bidding starts. The terror of Jones takes its turn towards agitation. Two rapid shots are fired at the Auctioneer and at the white planter. The atmosphere regains its deadly silence. The volume of the beating of the tom-tom increases. Jones cries in fear and rushes off. In real he meets in the forest what he fears the most. Jacques Derrida remarks that “the ghost, by forcibly introducing in the present recognition of our debt to the past, wounds that every present, causing a state in which time is disarticulated and dislodged” (Ferran, 2007,

p.172). The ghosts bear witness to his sinful past which he himself is unable to confront and resolve.

Its three O' clock in the morning when the sixth scene commences. A cleared space in the forest can be viewed. He is aware of the fact that he's going to be doomed. He's left with the only silver bullet which he has saved for good luck. He lies down out of fatigue. All of a sudden, darkness is replaced by light. Two rows of seated figures behind Jones can be eyed. Their melancholic wail raises and falls in a slower pace. At first his wearied physique declines to get up. The next time he joins in their mourning. His wail reaches the highest pitch of sorrow and misery that he caused to them and to himself too. The blackness of the forest is restored, and Jones runs away. The noise of the tom-tom is raised again to an intense level.

The seventh scene gets revealed when its five O' clock at the foot of a gigantic tree by the edge of a great river. He gazes at a stone altar. He forwards toward it as if bewitched. However, he doubtfully interrogates himself of his unusual behavior. Behind the trunk of the tree, leaps out a Congo Witch-Doctor. Jones is hypnotized by him. Then the witch-doctor starts dancing and chanting before the altar. The tom-tom sounds victorious. The witch-doctor summons to some God. Soon a crocodile head comes out of the river bank and demands Jones to offer himself as a sacrifice. "Evil has been his God, and he has sacrificed all other values to it; now it demands his life" (Falk, 1958, p.69). Jones hysterically calls out to Lawd God to have mercy upon the sinner and miraculously the thought of the silver bullet clicks his mind.

JONES: De Silver Bullet! You don't git me yit!

Finally, he fires at the green eyes of the crocodile. Jones breaks down with fear as the thump of the tom-tom fills the calm forest.

Scene eight, the final episode opens at dawn at the same dividing line of forest and plain where he started from. The tom-tom is continuously beating. Lem along with a small band of soldiers and Smithers enters. The soldiers are searching traces of Jones. One soldier finds it. Lem satisfactorily signals to the soldiers and sits down. Smithers condemns Lem for he thinks Jones is far away to their knowledge. They can't catch him. But the concentrated Lem becalms Smithers that they will. A sound of breaking twigs come out of the forest. Lem quickly signals to his

followers. They creep inside the forest and soon several shots sound from their rifles followed by barbaric roars out of joy. Jones is caught and dead. The previous night Lem was engaged of making silver bullets for they believed the rumor of Jones being charmed. The soldiers carry the carcass of Jones. A little reddish-purple hole under his left breast is found. He is cold. Jones is a type to all men who search meaning for their own being, humanity, under the pressure of isolation and fear. The play “dramatizes a ‘long day’s journey into night’, which advances in physical action, as it regresses in psychological action, until it ends symbolically in an illumination of the heart of darkness within the soul of man. The difference is that the primitive ‘emperor’ never fully comprehends his own tragedy, and can never transcend it” (Carpenter, 1979, p.93). Smithers is terrified and amazed in the end and remarks:
Silver bullets! Gawd blimey, but yer died in the ‘eight o’style, any’ow!

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