

**Analysis of hallucinations and fear complex cause for
psychological abnormalities of the protagonist Brutus Jones
In Eugene O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones***

Submitted by

Dr. M. Nallathambi

Associate Professor of English, SRM Trichy Arts and Science College, Trichy

E-Mail: nallathambi.mng1975@gmail.com

T. Gnanasekaran

Assistant Professor of English,

VidhyaaGiri College of Arts and Science, Puduvayal, Karaikudi, Tamilnadu, India

E-Mail: gnanam.documents@gmail.com

Abstract

In order to explore the fundamental themes of human life itself—the endless conflicts of good and evil, of light and darkness, of civilization and savagery, O’Neill experimented with expressionistic techniques in some of his early plays. In *The Emperor Jones*, published in 1921, O’Neill makes special use of symbolic scenes and sound effects to portray certain psychological states of mind, hallucination and the emotional intensity of his protagonist: Brutus Jones. This study reveals the psychological abnormalities of the protagonist Brutus Jones. *The Emperor Jones* is arranged in eight scenes dramatizing the psychological journey by which of an island in the West Indies to a man acknowledging his guilt, attempting to do away with the evil in himself, and finally accepting his humanity. Central to the process of this journey are Jones’ feelings of isolation and his quest for belonging. The present study explains the scene wise summary of the psychological abnormalities, struggles and the tragic end of the hero Brutus Jones.

Key words: conflicts, civilization, savagery, psychological states of mind, hallucination, emotional intensity, psychological abnormalities, isolation, humanity, quest for belonging.

Introduction

Eugene Gladstone O’Neill is the first playwright who has much written about Negroes. His collection of plays entitled *Thirst*, *The Emperor Jones* and *All God’s Chillun Got Wings* cover a great range of Negroes life and view. O’Neill’s concept about Negroes reveals his sympathy on their distress. It is so called Negro-Renaissance in the United States, a period of heightened awareness of the right of the Negroes. The Provincetown players paved the way for Negroes who had been chosen as the protagonist of their dramas. O’Neill has selected a Negro as the protagonist of the play *The Emperor Jones*. The play shows that a humble American Negro has been heightened a tragic hero. It has given a landmark in the history and growth of American drama and won for O’Neill a permanent place in it.

Hypothesis

O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones* is a play broken into eight short scenes, not divided into acts. As Emperor, Jones has control over the island; he is feared by both the natives and his white helper Smithers. He also has amassed a fortune by imposing heavy taxes on the natives and

carrying on large-scale graft. With power and money Jones has a strong sense of security. Besides that, he has plans to ensure his safety if his empire crumbles. He belongs. When rebellion is brewing, Jones starts to make his escape to the coast where a gunboat is anchored by traveling through the forest. From the time Jones enters the forest, loses his way, and begins to fear to the time he fired his silver bullet at the green eyes of the crocodile, Jones experiences the depths of isolation that force him to recognize his identity as a man.

Discussion about the problem

In *The Emperor Jones*, O'Neill has used the psychological abnormalities such as hallucinations and fear complex. The use of dramatic monologue in *The Emperor Jones* is in the nature of an extremely bold experiment and is very much akin to the interior monologue of the stream of consciousness novel. The dramatic monologue in this play shows a clear line of departure from the soliloquies of the Elizabethans and the dramatic lyrics of Tennyson and Browning. Here we find a combination of a modified variety of the stream of consciousness technique with expressionism. The whole play is conceived as a sustained dramatic monologue except the first and the last scenes. Once surrounded by the weird and malignant darkness of the forest the erstwhile dignified emperor is in the grip of the fear complex. The dark shadows of the forest and the dread of a relentless pursuit have combined together to turn Jones into a nervous wreck. He shivers at the smallest sounds and is absolutely incapable of looking after himself. His guilty conscience lashes him with the relentless fury of a maniac and compels him to look into his past. His guilty past is gradually vanished into life a series of hallucinatory visions which remind us of some of the greatest of the tragic figures of Shakespeare, such as Macbeth and King Richard III.

Psychological abnormalities of the protagonist Brutus Jones

O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* is a dramatic monologue. A scene by scene analysis of the whole play except the first and last scenes, we can understand that the psychological abnormalities such as hallucinations and fear complex of the tragic hero Brutus Jones. The first scene provides the reverent background for the introduction of the psycho-analytical monologue which is uniformly sustained from the second to the whole thing with the death of the hero. The extremely intensified fear complex of the hero is shown in Scene ii. In order to overcome his nervousness, Jones is continuously talking to himself. He is afraid of the threatening beat of the tom-tom. He has miscalculated the route in the wood. He has already hidden his food under white stones but he finds that everything has disappeared. This makes him even more nervous and strain of his strenuous journey of three hours. Finally he is overcome by the pangs of hunger and has the horrifying hallucinatory vision of The Little Formless Fears squirming upward towards him. Throughout this period, except for this hallucinatory vision which is a figment of his overwrought mind, Jones is alone on the stage, and the nervous fear to which he is a victim, is conveyed to the audience in a dramatic manner with the help of a monologue.

A retrospective dramatic monologue can be found in scene iii in which Jones imagines that his seeing the ghostly figure of the Negro Jeff whom he had killed in a skirmish over the gambling table. This figure is nothing but a hallucinatory apparition conjured by the over-wrought brain of Jones. He addresses it directly and tries to talk to it. Finally, not

finding any response, he gets nervous and fires at the apparition with furious rage. The moment the smoke clears away he finds that he is alone in the forest. In scene iv, an exhausted and miserable condition of the erstwhile emperor can be found. He tears away the “frippety Emperor trappin’s” from his body. It makes him feel lighter. He continuously talking to himself in wild fashion. The things which he keeps seeing have made him absolutely nervous. He tries to reassure himself that there are no such things and tells himself: “you jus’ get seein’ dem things cause yo’ empty and you’s sick wild hunger inside”. Almost immediately after this he has another hallucinatory vision which makes him cry out to Lord Jesus. His guilty conscience plays an equally important part here and takes him to the level of that white person guard who had whopped him on the back and who he had killed in a vicious fit of passion. The whole scene is re-enacted on the stage of his mind. The impression is so vivid that he actually gets into the posture of striking at the guard. Just when he feels sure that he might caught him, he realizes with sudden horror that his hands are empty. He addresses the figure of the guard directly and fires point blank at his back. Immediately the whole vision is bottled out and Jones stands alone in an enshrouding darkness.

Jones has started to pray to God in scene v. He repents for his sins. He prays to Lord Jesus and asking Him to forgive all his sins. He confesses that he is a great sinner and wants Lord Jesus to have mercy on him. Then his morbid imagination is carried back to the days when the slave-trade was practiced and he has a hallucinatory vision in which he finds himself in the company of the common slaves who are about to be auctioned. The hallucination emerges from his collective unconscious. Jones finds himself in a slave market and a slave auctioneer is about to sell him on the block. Jones is identified with the Negro slaves and has to suffer the pain he has let his black people suffer during his inhumane “white” regime. He fires his fourth and fifth bullets to kill the spruce, authoritative auctioneer and the planter who can be regarded as the reflections of Jones’ own sins and his evil self. By this time Jones comes closer to his own race by experiencing the horror his ancestors had gone through in a slave market.

The hallucinatory vision appears in scene vi is to be one of the greatest triumphs of the modern psycho-analysis and the law of mental association. Here the dramatic monologue merges into the interior monologue of the stream of consciousness novelists-James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf. The first of these visions makes Jones feel that he has already been sold as a slave and he finds himself on board a galley where he is playing at the oars like a common galley-slave. The pathetic wail of the slaves in which Jones also joins is symbolical of the bottomless pit of despair into which he has fallen. It is not possible for a man to descend lower than this. He has lost all hopes of being saved and has turned into a perfect nervous wreck. In this scene we find the combination of a dramatic monologue and a pantomime.

In scene vii, the unconscious associations in Jones’ mind carry him to the original home of his ancestors into the dark and dreadful jungles of Africa, wherein a horrifying hallucinatory vision he joins in the crooning and the dancing of the Congo witch-doctor who by a gesture seems to tell him that he must offer himself as a sacrifice in order to appease an angry god. Then the huge head of a hallucinatory crocodile with wide open jaws appears on

the stage and Jones, hypnotized by the fascinating glare of its green eyes, moves towards it with deliberately slow steps all the time crooning to Lord Jesus to have mercy on him. Then, all of a sudden, the spell is broken and coming out of his trance, Jones fires into the eyes of the crocodile. Immediately the whole vision disappears and Jones lies with face to the ground, his arms out-stretched, whimpering with fear as the throb of the tom-tom fills the silence about him with a somber pulsation, a baffled but revengeful power.

Conclusion

Hallucinations and fear complex cause for psychological abnormalities of the protagonist Brutus Jones. He himself is responsible for his destruction. His over-ambitiousness and his blind pride alienate him from his own self as well as from God and society. But O'Neill provides a heroic death to him. The rebellion shoots him with the silver bullet, which, according to him, is the key to his death, an appropriate symbol of the destruction of self by its own pride and greed.

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