



The Psychological Portrayal of The Mind in Eugene O'NEIL'S "The Emperor Jones"

P.Prathiba

Assistant Professor in English, Kongu Arts and Science College (Autonomous), Nanjanapuram, Erode,
TamilNadu.

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ABSTRACT

Eugene O'Neil is one of the greatest American dramatist. He is a prominent dramatist of modern age. His writing style is purely an objective kind of drama showing the working of the man's mind and conscience. His dramas are preoccupied with spiritual values, inner conflicts, anguish, failure, and pride. His great play The Emperor Jones about a Negro, who by chance landed in West Indies and made himself an Emperor. The protagonist named Jones, though luck has played a part, but he has been quick to take advantage of it. He could made them believe them that he had been protected by a charm, so silver bullet could harm him. As the people were unhappy with his rule, they have mustered up courage and came to the fighting point by calling local gods and demons of the forest. Jones realized his reign is over, he makes preparation for his escape to the coast where a French gunboat is anchored. During the night, many formless fears creeps On him, those are not only from his own life but old race fears. He used up six bullets out of his own mental trauma just by hearing the drum sound produced by the revolutionists. The author expressed the whole mental trauma through expressionistic words and actions throughout the play. Finally, he reached to the point of being defenceless and exhausted. He had made a complete circle in the jungle as his panic whipped him on.

Keywords: The Emperor Jones, Psychological study, Hallucinations, Interior Monologue.

Eugene O'Neil could be considered as father of modern American drama. He has written more than sixty plays and regarded as the American Shakespeare. Eugene O'Neil is the foremost American dramatist of psychology. He shows man battling with harsh environments and with his own inner passions. His interest in the human psyche was so great that it made him follow the discoveries in psychoanalysis and make it use them into his

plays. His play, The Emperor Jones, is credited as being one that provided. "Several firsts in American theatre history: the Provincetown Players' first major hit, the first major role for an African American actor on the legitimate Broadway stage (in houses where the audience was still racially segregated), and the play that secured O'Neil's place as a writer for the high-art, experimental theatre worthy of international attention." (Stein 343). His interest in the intricate workings of the human soul has given an extra dimension to his tragedies. He constantly taps the inner stream of consciousness of the subconscious, of his characters.

The whole is play around Brutus Jones as he undergoes various fears, visions and dreams. Smithers, his companion instils the idea of spell and enchantment of the revolutionists. Tom-tom sound of the drum played vital role throughout the play. When Jones made an attempt to save himself from the native people, he escaped into the forest. The forest is the place which was very familiar to him. He knew all the hook and corner of the forest. But as the night falls, the darkness brought fear in him. Whenever his fear risen, he could hear the tom-tom sound at high. He began to see visions there. Even small movements around that made him frightened. He used his gun to clear away the suspicious animal. Then he felt assured that he was safe.

Brutus Jones began to experience various "Formless fears". Then he saw a ghost of Jeff, whom he had killed. But all are illusions which pop up in his mind as he was disturbed. He remembered clearly what Smithers had informed him. The native people doing some rituals to invoke the spiritual things in the forest to get revenge of Jones. As Jones belonged to their tribe, those kind of beliefs were implanted in his roots, that he couldn't shake it off. Then through moonlight he could see a gang of black convicts and a white supervisor. He has made them work with shovel in their hands. The supervisor ill-treats Jones and out of rage he makes use of the gun to shot him. Immediately after that,



the scene disappeared. The things happened in his life that he felt guilty of, all the events surfaced in his traumatized situation.

Jones noticed a crowd, the auctioneer addresses the crowd to attention and taps Jones on the shoulder, motioning for him to get on the stump. Jones leapt to get away, and the auctioneer describes Jones's strengths to the assembled planters. When the auctioneer began the bidding, Jones realized he was being sold at a slave auction. A planter finally purchases Jones and the auctioneer pushes Jones towards the man. Angrily, Jones drew his gun and shot both the auctioneer and his purchaser. The crowd disappeared and the tom-tom beats faster. Tom-tom sound symbolizes the beating of the heart. At the emotional state the drum sound increases as his heart beatings.

Jones prayed God to protect him from a Congo, the witch doctor jumped out from behind a tree. The witch doctor began to dance and chant to the beat of the tom-tom, and Jones watches in fascination. The doctor narrated a story through dance, of being pursued by devils and as the tension increased, Jones got along with the chanting and beating the ground in time. Suddenly, the witch doctor approached Jones, and Jones understood that he was going to be offered as a sacrifice. From the river, the witch doctor summoned a crocodile god. The crocodile stared at Jones as the witch doctor instructed it for Jones to approach it. The tom-tom reached a fever pitch as Jones cried out, grabbed his gun, and shot the crocodile with his silver bullet. The crocodile returns to river and the witch doctor disappeared but Jones was left there disheartened.

Lem, the Native Chief and his soldiers, and Smithers approached the edge of the forest and discovered the spot where Jones had entered the forest. Smithers felt disappointed but Lem calmly conveyed Smithers that they would catch Jones. As Smithers continued to insult the natives, Lem remained being positive. Lem smiled by hearing the rifle sound and affirmed that Jones was dead. He explained that he and his men spent the night casting charms and melting their money to make silver bullets. Smithers laughed when he learnt that the natives truly had believed Jones's assertion that he could only be killed by silver bullets, and he called Lem crazy. Soldiers emerge from the forest carrying Jones's dead body. Smithers mocked Jones's body and the natives as they carry Jones away.

The sound which is most important and heard persistently throughout the play is the beating of the tom-tom on a distant hill. The tom-tom is a kind of big drum which the natives sounded on various occasions for various reasons. It was

sounded to encourage the tribes to attack a hostile tribe or to prepare them for their own defence against the attack of an enemy. Arthur Eloesser (1933) argue that religion has not been influential and the worth of man even less. The wild primitives danced to the beat of the drum and the pace of dancing increased in keeping with the rhythm of the tom-tom. In this way a wild frenzy was induced in them to attain their goal.

The tom-tom was also beaten to exorcise devils and evil spirits. It was also beaten to cast spells to destroy some enemy. As the tom-tom was sounded the witch-doctor danced, swayed and chanted mantras for the purpose, and it was supposed that in this way the fate of the enemy in question would be sealed. The beating of the tom-tom is thus seen to be the instrument of Fate for determination of the individual concerned. In *The Emperor Jones* the tom-tom is beaten from Scene II to VII, and its sound increasing rapidity and intensity, pursues the fleeing Brutus Jones like unabated fate, till he was almost driven crazy. He has the illusion that his enemies were coming nearer to him while, as a matter of fact, they were there on the same hill. Thus, here the tom-tom serves to increase the terrors of Jones as well as it affords his enemies time to mould silver bullets with which he is ultimately killed.

The expressionistic scenes vividly portrayed the mental bewilderment of Brutus Jones. O'Neil used Expressionism is a dramatic technique to depict the inner reality, the soul or psyche of his main character. The emphasis shifts from the external to the internal reality. The action moves background and forward freely in space and time in harmony with the thought processes of the Brutus Jones concerned. There is a deeper and deeper probing of the sub-conscious, action is increasingly internalised, and what goes on within the soul becomes more important than the external action. The writer explored the idea, the source of conduct, until reality becomes sub-conscious, and character mere abstraction. Scenes are often brief; they sometimes succeed one another without time-sequence. Mostly the scenes were neither have order nor unity and they represented the disconnected features of psycho-analysis.

The play *The Emperor Jones* not only the sufferings of the nigger but the superiority of white in America. The black people were looked down by Whites as of racial discrimination. Brutus Jones grasped the characteristics of the white people, and used it against his own race. Edwin Engel in his book, *The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill* has supported this view. He says, "it's in Jones himself



that we are to observe sharp criticism of the civilization of modern white man, for Jones is Negroid only in physical appearance and in speech. He is rather the American 'success to read' in black face." During the ten years in which he has served as Pullman car porter he had listened to the white quality and adapted their ways. What he learned in those years were the white man's cynicism, shrewdness, efficiency and philosophy of selfinterest.

Conclusion

Eugene O'Neil depicts Brutus Jones not in the conventional sense of hero image. Brutus exalted by the very intensity of his obsession and suffering. The way their characteristic description the readers would not consider his as mean or petty about him. His grandeur and heroism are truly tragic. According to Carpenter, "The fundamental themes of the play are those of human life itself - the eternal conflict of good and evil, of sunlight and moonlight, of civilization and savagery, of the clearing and the Great Forest.- Thus, the play has not one theme but a variety and multiplicity of themes." It is a work of literary genius in which meaning, message and motivation along with the dramatic techniques of realism makes the characters real. The human psychology portrayed creatively in one of the most complex dramatic monologues through a black actor, and equally intricate stagecraft of light and sound. Emperor Jones remains a classic in its portrayal of the human struggle traumatized by the onslaughts of culture and civilization in our world. O'Neil shows man as he really is, in all his blemishes and selfishness.

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