

Volume-1, Issue-VI, Sept- 2017

Research maGma

An International Multidisciplinary Journal

CONFERENCE

of

**Thiruvalluvar University
College of Arts & Science, Arakkonam.**

on

**"EMERGING TRENDS IN ENGLISH
LANGUAGE & LITERATURE"**



Research maGma

An International Multidisciplinary Journal

ISSN NO- 2456-7078 IMPACT FACTOR- 4.520 VOLUME-1, ISSUE-7, SEPT-2017

PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY ON EUGENE O' NEILL'S THE EMPEROR JONES

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ABSTRACT

This paper studies *The Emperor Jones* as a psychological play. The action moves backward and forward freely in space and time in harmony with the thought processes of the character concerned to express the soul or psyche of a character, Brutus Jones. The play delineates the psychological conflicts and the unconscious working in the mind of the hero. It opens one afternoon of a crucial day in the life of Jones and it ends with his tragic death at the dawn of the next day. It was written under an impact of the theories of modern psychologists like Freud, Bergson and Jung, to illustrate in particular Jung's concept of collective consciousness, which states that the past life of a person influences his present and future. His mind contains unconscious ideas and symbols arising from his unique personal situation to make up the structure of his personal unconscious.

KEYWORDS:

Psyche, Unconscious, Collective Consciousness, Sensitivity, Hallucination

INTRODUCTION

The paper studies *The Emperor Jones* as a psychological play. The dramatist has used the technique of the interior monologue very effectively to express the soul or psyche of a character, Brutus Jones. The action moves backward and forward freely in space and time in harmony with the thought processes of the character concerned. It delineates the psychological conflicts and the unconscious working in the mind of the hero, Brutus Jones. It is a play of visions and psychological motivations. The mental processes of the hero, his visionary fears, feelings of guilt and the conflicting motives have been portrayed. The stress or focus is on the unconscious. The title of the play is apt as it deals entirely with the life, career and tragic death of Jones.

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The action of the play revolves round Brutus Jones. It opens one afternoon of a crucial day in the life of Jones and it ends with his tragic death at the dawn of the next day. The past life of Jones is known through the conversation between Jones and Smithers, a white trader. The protagonist, Jones is a Negro, who worked as a Pullman porter and acquired the veneer of Western Civilization, but failed to control his animal instincts and impulses. He was imprisoned in America in the past for having murdered a white, but he broke out from the prisons and made his escape to an island in the West Indies.

Jones is the emperor of the island and ought to be held in esteem. His enemy shoots at him from very close quarters but failed to kill him. This was certainly a stroke of luck. But, he has made the Negroes of the island believe that he is a divine figure who can be killed only with a silver bullet. They fell at his feet and worshipped him as a god, 'a miracle out o' de Bible'. He maintains a pompous, glittering atmosphere in the court not because he likes it but because the unrefined Negroes want the 'big circus show' for their money. It is true that he was given a 'start' by Smithers by conniving with his illegal business practices. Jones admits that both Smithers and he are basically robbers. Opposition to Jones increases as he overtakes the people and deposits all his ill-begotten money in a foreign bank in Martinique. Jones' servants are running to a nearby hill to hatch a plan to topple him.

The play was written under an impact of the theories of modern psychologists like Freud, Bergson and Jung, to illustrate in particular Jung's concept of the collective consciousness, which states that the past life of a person influences his present and future. The mind of a given man contains ideas from the collective unconscious which come to him simply by virtue of his membership in the human race as well as ideas inherited from his own specific race, tribe and family. His mind contains unconscious ideas and symbols arising from his unique personal situation to make up the structure of his personal unconscious. Finally, from his personal unconscious emerges his own consciousness, his ego. So by 'collective unconscious' Jung means one's racial memories which lie buried deep in the unconscious which means one's own past actions, particularly memories of one's sins and evil doings and then there is the 'personal conscious' or ego of the individual.

Eugene O' Neill has shown how the ego or self of Emperor Jones breaks down under the impact of terror, and how his personal and racial memories crowd in upon him, causes the disintegration of his ego or personal consciousness. Jones' plan is to cross the Great Forest and sail to Martinique on the following morning and live quite a carefree life there, withdrawing the money hoarded in the bank. But he is overwhelmed and stung by his guilty conscience, as he recalls his past crimes, with that he wanders in a circle in the forest. Jones is at first unnerved by the sight of certain shapeless creatures creeping towards him, which is an externalization of his fears and anxieties. He shoots at these figures and then runs away. Next he has a hallucination of the unscrupulous gambler Jeff dicing in the forest and shoots down the figure which disappears at once, causing Jones to resume his running. Thirdly, Jones visualizes himself being whip lashed by the prison guard. Flaring up, he shoots down the guard. The guard disappears and he starts running again. Here he recalls his killing of the cruel prison guard many years ago. It is in this way that the past of Jones determines his present and leads to his decay and undoing.

Fourthly, he sees with his mind's eye an auctioneer auctioning well-built Negroes to white buyers. When the auctioneer tries to sell out the sturdy Jones, the latter cannot contain him. He shoots down both the auctioneer and the prospective buyer and flees from the spot. This scene is Jones re-

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enactment of his memory as a slave bought and sold in an inhuman way. Lastly, Jones shoots down the crocodile god which a witch-doctor brings out of the river to eat up Jones. Jones uses his silver bullet for the purpose. Jones is helpless and defenseless after being spent of all his bullets, both leaden and silver. Lem, the native chief, appears on the scene with his Negro soldiers. Believing Jones' claim that he is vulnerable only to a silver bullet, Lem has supplied his soldiers with silver bullets. They shoot down Jones and bring his dead body to Lem.

The play is a record of the gradual breaking down of Brutus Jones' conscious ego and the revelation of his personal and collective consciousness. The first two visions of Jeff and of the Prison Guard proceed from his personal unconscious, but the later hallucinations proceed from a racial memory, for Jones had never actually undergone the traumatic experience of being auctioned as a slave, nor had he a direct knowledge of any Congo Witch-Doctor. His racial unconscious projects frightening visions and completely subjugates his conscious mind.

Jones' character of sensitivity is the most appealing trait. Though he has murdered people who deserved to be murdered, he feels guilty to the extent of recalling old memories and torturing himself. The tragic death of Jones raises the issue of his death due to the silver bullet as Lem boasts or is it due to his acute guilty feeling and inner conflict as Smithers says. Jones talks of the efficacy of the silver bullet only to cheat the superstitious Negroes. He himself does not believe in it. His death is due entirely to his inner turmoil enfeebling him and making it nearly impossible for him to runaway. His being killed by a silver bullet is purely a coincidence. As in Greek tragedies, Nemesis overtakes Jones at the end. The Negroes whom he has successfully cheated for long, at last rally behind Lem and kill him.

Jones' guilty fear is conveyed by these eerie sounds of wind 'moans' and the rustling of leaves is like 'mocking laughter' and also the tom-tom which is throbbled intensifies Jones' agony and anxiety. As Jones fires his revolver, 'the beat of the far-off tom-tom becomes louder. The tom-tom thus projects Jones' mounting panic and tension. When Jones dies, the tom-tom also ends. It is also the symbol of his own restlessness and the feeling of guilt generated by his past crimes results in the tragedy of Jones.

Thus, O'Neill has made a remarkable attempt to dramatize subconscious emotions. From Freud, O'Neill has made use of the idea of a flight to the past with reference to the character, Jones here. He uses emotion as a vital force. Thus O'Neill gives a psychological interrelation to the question of Fate that looms large in the Greek tragedies.

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