Chapter Three

Internalizing Racist Ideology: *The Emperor Jones*

In *The Emperor Jones* (1920), the title character Brutus Jones is an African American prison escapee of the United States who becomes an emperor in a West Indian island through con tricks which he learned from white businessmen while doing the job of sleeping car porter in New York. In this play, instead of showing a black character as a mere victim of scientific or institutionalized racism, for instance the Mulatto Sailor in *Thirst* and Abe in *The Dreamy Kid*, O'Neill presents an African American's internalization of the values of American success myth in the backdrop of Black Renaissance Movement. *The Emperor Jones* is the first play in American Broadway to project a black character in a major and tragic role (Sternlicht 19; Berlin *O'Neill's Shakespeare* 28). Through some enthralling expressionistic scenes, O'Neill here chronicles the African Americans' struggling history of forced migration as chained slaves in ships brought to the US, their auction as merchandise right after their arrival in the US, and the impact of American hegemony on the modern black culture.

In *The Emperor Jones,* Eugene O'Neill presents Brutus Jones as a kleptocrat to corroborate the fact that the streetwise black Jones' growing up in New York has a lot to do with his rule as a despot in the West Indian island. O'Neill projects the American mercantile psyche through the Island's experience of colonial capitalism and the enactment of original sin in America by a journey through Brutus' personal and racial memory lanes. The play explores to what extent Jones is a by-product of American capitalist system which considers greed is good and money as the bottom

line of success. The profit ripped-off from slave trades three centuries ago (Gates) incorporated the concept and signaled the advent of capitalism on the US soil, and O'Neill here digs up this darker side of American guilt-ridden psyche in *The Emperor Jones* to demonstrate how such wrong ways of accumulating wealth by the country's forefathers still form the basis for its society and culture in the modern days.

On another level, Jones can be conceived as the cruder, cleverer, and more streetwise version of Dreamy. Whereas *The Dreamy Kid* ended with a rare and substantial projection of the "twoness" or the "double-consciousness" of a Black of being an African and an American, *The Emperor Jones* starts by showing that its protagonist has already resolved the dilemma and sided with the American trappings of wealth and power. Yet Du Bois' theory provides interesting speculation a little later when Jones starts to panic confronting these two images:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.
>
> The History of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double-self into a better and truer self. … He simply wishes to make it possible for man to be both a Negro and an America, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly on his face. (*The Souls* 2-3)

Jones here is a prime example of Du Boisian "always looking at one's self through the eyes of another" as he emulates materialistic white social ways of earning money, success, and recognition in possible shortcut ways and time with a view to changing his status. Jones' desire, a part and parcel of American dream, drives him the way it drove Miller's Uncle Ben in *Death of a Salesman* who traveled out of an African jungle with a pocketful of riches.

Ethnic Budge in The Emperor Jones: "Money is Life"

Indeed *The Emperor Jones* is a literary *tour de force* that shows a documentary of a divided Black mind where the title character is an African American corrupted by the mercantile mentality (typically a trademark of the white mind). Brutus Jones has enslaved and tortured people of his race by applying the white theory of colonial capitalism. The play ventures more keen awareness and sensitivity about the coming of age of the problems of blacks in various scenes that focuses the evil effects of slavery on the protagonist, his corrupt ways, his crimes which come crushing down on his psyche later, his haughtiness, and how in the end he became his own destroyer. Mel Gussow rightly comments that Brutus Jones, who was once a sleeping car porter, "is playacting as the monarch, plundering a nation and preparing to abscond with his fortune. But the end of his reign comes far sooner than he anticipates … He flees through the forest, beleaguered by his guilt and by monstrous night forces … In the end, as his name indicates, the emperor is his own destroyer *(New York Times* Sept. 23, 1971)

Undoubtedly a "Negro play" (Raleigh *The Plays* 107) that conjures up "racial memories" to incorporate a "study of atavistic fear" (Tiusanen 107;111) using

expressionistic constituents in sound effects, monologues, and setting, *The Emperor Jones* penetrates the darkness latent in American heart on the basis of both historic and economic specificities. Viewed as a victim of "psychological determinism" (Pfister 136) through a "representation of psychological naturalism" (Engel 49) in racially biased America, Jones' portrayal exceptionally recounts and conforms to the theory of scientific, institutional, and structural forms of racism both as the signifier and the signified—as an emperor, he is a flag-bearer of colonial capitalism in West Indies; and as an African American, he himself is a descendant from generations of slaves.

In fact, the original name of *The Emperor Jones* was "The Silver Bullet," so titled because the protagonist Brutus Jones brags that he can be killed only with a silver bullet and not with the lead bullets. This myth was created when, after his arrival in the Island, he was targeted to be shot in a revolution led by Lem, the native leader; but the target missed and he survived. Henceforth Jones puts on airs and manufactures a myth with the bluff to deceive the primitive islanders that he holds a protective charm and cannot be taken out with any regular lead bullets other than a silver one. In conversation with Smithers, he reminisces about that decisive moment of glory which shaped his life with pride:

> JONES—(*with a laugh*) Oh, dat silver bullet! Sho's was luck! But I makes dat luck, you heah? I loads de dice! Yessuh! When dat murderin' nigger ole Lem hired to kill me takes aim ten feet away and his gun misses fire and I shoots him dead, what you heah me say?
>
> SMITHERS—You said yer'd got a charm so's no lead bullet'd kill yer. You was so strong only a silver bullet could kill yer, you told 'em. Blimey, wasn't that swank for yer—and plain, fat-'eaded luck?

JONES—(*proudly*) I got brains and I uses 'em quick. Dat ain't luck. (1.1.1036)

O'Neill later retitled the play since, as it can be construed, O'Neill wanted to focus more on Brutus Jones and the parameters involved which delimited him to take recourse to the "deceits of desire" in the shortcut ways to attain the position of emperor violating of all kinds of moral codes by intimidating, enslaving, and exploiting the natives in the West Indian Island—recalling and reenacting the similar sorts of oppression that Jones and his ancestors went through in the US. Examining the motif and action of this play, Maya Koreneva, a Russian critic comments that the past racial experience undergone by Jones and his forebears has impacted on his present dealings: "The crimes, committed by whites against his people and kept alive for him by the memory of his ancestors, have become the social and psychological reality which determines the protagonist's consciousness and behavior" as an Emperor of West Indian Island (159). Jones, thus, is never free from history, and his encounter with it serves for the action of the play.

Brutus Jones can be passed as the matured and belligerent Dreamy Kid, for, had Dreamy been fortunate enough to reach middle age, he could have learned the white man's crafts and have known how to shoot to prominence without resorting to violence (Engel 48-49). While critics consider the play conforms to Jungian psychology and contemporary ideas of racial memory (Wainscott 43-44), shows the collective unconscious (Falk 51-52, 66-71), and harbors atavistic primitive behavior (Wikander 225); it nonetheless "stand[s] as archetypes for playwrights seeking to develop 'black drama'" (Bogard xv).

First produced in the Provincetown Playhouse in New York on 1 November 1920, it was moved to Salwyn Theater on December 27 in the same year and later to

the Princess Theater on 21 January 1921, and then reopened with success in Broadway in 1924 (Dickinson 105). It marked a monumental event in American theater with a sweeping success, unanticipated by the Provincetown Playhouse, "beyond any horizon they had envisioned" (Bogard 134). A one-acter which gave a black protagonist the tragic stature and his white accomplice-cum-foil a secondary status, *The Emperor Jones* brought both fame and financial stability to O'Neill and Provincetown Players as well as heralded the ingenuity and importance of O'Neill on the international stage. In his *New York Tribune* article on 4 November 1920, Heywood Broun, a key theater critic of the time, wrote, "[the play] seems to us just about the most interesting play which has yet come from the most promising playwright in America. Perhaps we ought to be a little more courageous and say right out the best of American playwrights. This is a play of high trajectory and up above the country stores and the lobby of the Palace Hotel, Wappinger Falls, ten months later and Yvette's boudoir there is a rarer atmosphere which makes it difficult to avoid an occasional slip this way and that" (Cargill 144).

Proved to be an overnight hit, the play's success and fame spread so fast that already the following morning of its first staging a long queue of theater goers waited to buy tickets, and on top it, about one thousand or more subscriptions were sold during the first week (Bogard 134). Found popular with blacks and whites alike, in less than two months in 1920, *The Emperor Jones* ran for four hundred and ninety performances in New York before going to the road, although the Provincetown Players initially scheduled the play to last for two weeks. However, Alexander Woolcott's review on *The Emperor Jones* did not appear in *The Times* until 7 November. He hailed the play as "an extraordinarily striking dramatic study of panic fear." He further stated, "It reinforces the impression that for strength and originality

[O'Neill] has no rival among the American Writers for the stage" (Gelbs *O'Neill* 447). Also among the primary reviews included O'Neill's biographer Louis Sheaffer who viewed that this play opened up "various sides of O'Neill—the poet, the experimentalist, the born dramatist" and that the playwright "was his own man, blazing his own trail in the theater" (*Son and Playwright* 30). John R Cooley, a Black theater critic of late twentieth century, provides some reasons for this *avant-garde*[1] play's phenomenal stand as a modernist excavation: "In addition to being boldly in its staging techniques, *The Emperor Jones* was the first American play to employ black actors and develop a major black portrait. O'Neill's black portraits in *Thirst* (1914), *The Moon of the Caribbees* (1918), *The Dreamy Kid* (1919), and *All God's Chillun Got Wings* (1924), stand as evidence of a growing white interest in portraying black life, concurrent with the emergence of the Negro Renaissance of black self-awareness and artistic expression … Thus *The Emperor Jones* holds a very special place in black American theater" (73). The play could garner importance in American dramatic literature particularly in depicting black experience on stage during the beginning of the Jazz Age.

It is often argued that a black man in the US had long been regarded as not belonging to the American emblem as part of the "Puritan election" and hence was always driven by a sense of fear which urged him to "make his attempt at belonging." When Jones attempts to belong, he "unfortunately" finds a "modern setting [where] … money is the ultimate power that sinews the earth; its possession makes one master of life, and therefore, master over fear" (Nolan 8-9). Jones, therefore, exploits the position of an emperor to make money and is not a fool to hang on to the position; rather all his intention was to speed off with the earnings as soon as he sees a dethroning revolution in the offing, henceforth to live an action-prone life on

spending the bucks since, as Max Weber views in his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, spending money is as important in capitalism as is accumulating:

> I ain't no fool. I knows dis Emperor's time is sho't. … Was you thinkin' I'se aimin' to hold down dis job for life? No, suh! What good is gittin' money if you stays back in dis raggedy country? I wants action when I spends. And when I sees dese niggers gittin' up deir nerve to tu'n me out, and I'se got all the money in sight, I resigns on de spot and beats it quick. (1.1.1037)

Jones has already schemed out his escape route from the Island: "Dawn tomorrow I'll be out at de oder side and on de coast whar dat French gunboat is stayin.' She picks me up, takes me to Martinique when she go dar, and dere I is safe wid a mighty big bankroll in my jeans" (1.1.1040).

It is imperative here to note that the answer to the riddle of a black man's belongingness or existence has been money, simply because of the fact that it could elevate his status by safeguarding him from becoming invisibly diminutive, and at the same time, it would allow him to chip into the mainstream league with the whites to sustain his stake in the society as an equal go-getter. Therefore, Boy Willie in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* (1987), set in the Great Depression era of 1930s, dreams of buying the same Mississippi land of Sutters, which his ancestors had cultivated as slaves, by selling the hard-won family heirloom with black historical engravings on it so that with the hard cash he can seal his economic future. Determined to concede family heritage (by selling the piano) symbolizing black emotional memory to money-making (buying the possession of a potential land), marking the hub of crisis and conflict in the play, he has come to Berniece's Pittsburg apartment from South with a truck full of watermelons and shares his intention with Doaker:

> That's why I come up here. Sell them watermelons. Get Berniece to sell the piano. Put them two parts with the part I done saved. Lay my money down on the table. Get my deed and walk on out. (1.1.10-11)

Similarly, in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), set immediately after World War II, Walter carries the exact point on money and its undeniable importance in life through the following conversation with his mother:

> WALTER: … Mama—sometimes when I'm downtown and I pass them cool, quiet-looking restaurants where them white boys are sitting back and talking 'bout things … sitting there turning deals worth millions of dollars … sometimes I see guys don't look much older than me—
>
> MAMA: Son—how come you talk so much 'bout money?
>
> WALTER: (*With immense passion*) Because it is life, Mama!
>
> MAMA: (*Quietly*) Oh—(*Very quietly*) So now it's life. Money is life. Once upon a time freedom used to be life—now it's money. I guess the world really do change …
>
> WALTER: No—it was always money, Mama. We just didn't know about it. (1.2.1832)

Deeply ingrained segregation, bleak economic condition, concerns for manhood and race watermarked the era of Machine Age (1919-45) for blacks, the timeline which provided setting for all three of these plays where money was the heart of American dream and the making of it was regarded as the bottom line of success. After fighting in World Wars I and II, the blacks expected a minimal acceptance that would pave the way for their assimilation and participation into the American realm which would enable them to bridge the economic gap by establishing social justice of equality.

Unfortunately, the situation turned from bad to worse for them as racial tension aggravated further offering no immediate solution. The riddle behind changing the plight or status in highly-competitive American society gradually started to become transparent to them—it must be money; and that is why Walter, a descendent of O'Neill's Jones or Jim, strongly believes and reiterates, "it was always money," the black race "just didn't know" or rather overlooked the fact.

The recipe for success much attracted the black psyche and the shortcuts of the American dream, which claimed equal opportunities for everyone, seemed to have clicked as well as occupied their mind where black protagonists Brutus Jones, Walter Lee Younger or Boy Willie were found sharing the same cockpit with Miller's white hero Willy Loman. Ben in Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949), also set in American Depression era, affirms starry-eyed, perpetually backbreaking and heart-broken salesman Willy that "twenty thousand [dollars]—that is something one can feel with the hand" is worth having a "remarkable proposition" for an exchange with Willy's suicide (2.1539-40). James Tyrone in O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956), with a setting of 1912, is a Shakespearean-actor turned matinee-idol, who had to give in to money since "thirty-five to forty thousand dollars net profit a season … was too great a temptation" for him (4.809). Highly regarded as one of the three or four young talented actors with great artistic promise in America who received showers of accolades from the living legend like Edwin Booth, Tyrone accepted stardom by only playing the melodramatic role in *The Count of Monte Cristo* throughout his career instead venturing any challenging role. He thus deserted his spiritual entity only to regret the rest of his life by enslaving himself to money-making. Scholars view that material acquisitiveness in the forms of possessing wealth, land, and power has always been too deep-seated in American consciousness that its

culture of success has always been defined by the accumulation of money and feeling proud over it. Thus, "the burden of history" that the American psyche inherently carries, according to JP Diggins, is "as inescapable as original sin" (39). O'Neill's characters, particularly Jones in the play, are glaring examples of such premise.

Understandably, money is the constant leitmotif in the opening scene of *The Emperor Jones*, and the word "money" is uttered at least nine times—on three occasions by Smithers and six occasions by Jones. Besides, its synonyms like "cash," "bankroll," etc. are uttered when Jones constantly refers to money's worth. He brags about piling money up by employing various cons on natives, and depositing it in the foreign bank to spend later, and so on. Therefore, all three characters mentioned above, black or white alike, confided themselves to the philosophy that "money is life," but their efforts to obtain it was plausibly different; yet they shared a common doom since each of their endeavors was seen thwarted.

Genesis of Jones and Kleptocracy

Tellingly, Jones' character portrayal has been a subject of interesting speculations. Although he shares a common character trait, pivotal to many a classic antebellum slave tale like George in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or Jim in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, of searching and celebrating manhood with absconding freedom, O'Neill's forging the plot of *The Emperor Jones* had rather personal and realistic origins.

Some of the incidents in the play are based on true events, for example, one of O'Neill's friends named Jack Croak, a circus man who had toured the West Indies with a tent show and a sparring partner of the champion heavyweight boxer Jess

Willard, had told him of one Vilbrun Guillaume Sam, a once president of Haiti in 1915. According to the story recounted by O'Neill's biographer Shaffer, Sam was a tyrant, an unconscionable ruler who made life very difficult for his subjects. Fearing an assassination, and in order to magnify his pretended invincibility, he boasted that "his enemies would get him—that if he were overthrown he would kill himself, but not with an ordinary lead bullet; only a silver one was worthy of that honor" (*Son and Playwright* 27). Other biographers gave nearly the same account; for instance, Gelbs also mentioned O'Neill's recalling of Croak's story:

> He told me a story current in Haiti concerning the late president Sam. This was to the effect that Sam had said they would never get him with a lead bullet; that he would get himself first with a silver one. My friend, by the way, gave me a coin with Sam's features on it; and I still keep it as a pocket piece. This notion about the silver bullet struck me and I made a note of the story. (*O'Neill* 438; *Life with Monte Cristo* 532)

Jones in the play boasts that he is so strong that no lead bullet can kill him: "no lead bulet'd kill yer … only a silver bullet could kill yer" (1.1.1036). Sam was, however, murdered by a "voodoo-maddened" and enraged mob (Gelbs *O'Neill* 439), hence shares similarity with Jones' plight.

Besides, Sam was not the only subject behind O'Neill's idea for the play as according to Gelbs, the playwright knew of Henri Christophe, the black slave who made himself king of a section of Haiti in 1811 and ruled despotically until he took ill and committed suicide by shooting himself in the head (Gelbs 439) because of guilt, his loss of popularity, and strong hatred he had incurred from his subjects.

However, other than Sam and Christophe, the influence of the portrait and persona of the "black 'emperor' in uniform in 1920" (Pfister 129), Marcus Garvey, cannot be overlooked. A promoter of distinctive racial consciousness among the black Americans at the outset of twentieth century, Marcus Garvey was driven by "a fantastic dream: black men re-establishing themselves in Africa, being a real people, becoming a real nation" (Huggins 22). Garvey's "back to Africa mission" or "Garveyism" was based on mitigating black's pressing socio-political issues. His creed shot to prominence in 1920, the year *The Emperor Jones* was staged, with the formation of Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in which he was the Provisional King of Africa. He used to appear in public in Jones-like military regalia with plumed hat, and maintained a court of nobles who also had duke and knight-like uniforms. Perhaps one of the most influential and appealing black political leaders of the last century to have endorsed black cultural pride and solidarity, Marcus Garvey, the proponent of post-World War I militancy and aggressive Black Nationalism of "New Negro" ethos, was deported from US after he had defrauded investors in his Black Star steamship line. Garvey is occasionally dubbed "showman" for his "impractical, charlatan" type big talks (Pfister 129; Huggins 141), and Jones in this play makes an ironical reference to mock Garvey's principle when he remarks: "Ain't a man's talkin' big what makes him big—long as he makes folks believe it" (1.1.1036)? Interestingly, James Weldon Johnson, while comparing the kings—Garvey and Jones in his *Black Manhattan*, infuriatingly comments that O'Neill's Jones cannot be imagined in Garvey's role since the former indeed played and not assumed the "imperial role" (254). Johnson's attempt of comparison between Jones and Garvey goes far to prove that O'Neill was successful in providing the audience with an air of familiarity on stage by contemporizing his protagonist.

O'Neill also drew some of his sources from his acquaintance with his black friend, Joe Smith, a gambler who told him much about the experience of blacks; and also with the "black belt" of Greenwich Village—an aspect of Manhattan that dwindled as more and more blacks flocked northward to Harlem. Another derivation for material was Adam Scott of New London, a black, who was a bartender during the week but a Shiloh Baptist church elder on Sundays. The biographers Sheaffer and Gelbs mentioned that O'Neill was so impressed with Scott's domineering presence, boldness, superstition, and religious convictions that he not only molded some of these features into Jones, but also retained Scott's dialect and figures of speech in *The Emperor Jones*. Scott would maintain that he was a religious man on Sundays but for "the rest of the week," he would put his "Jesus on the shelf" (Sheaffer *Son and Artist* 27; Gelbs *Life with Monte Cristo* 349-50). Brutus Jones is found aping likewise when he says: "It don't git me nothin' to do missionary work for de Baptist church. I'se after de coin,' an' I lays my Jesus on de shelf for de time bein'" (1.1.1042).

Some devices employed in the play, however, were part of O'Neill's personal experience of his excursion to Honduras in search of gold in 1909. For example, his idea of the tom tom drums came from his reading of the religious feasts in Congo and the uses to which the drum is put there (Bogard 135). Quoting one O'Neill's letter, both Sheaffer and Gelbs mention that O'Neill was awe-struck to notice "how it starts at a normal pulse-beat and is slowly intensified until the heart-beat of everyone present corresponds to the frenzied beat of the drum" (Sheaffer *Son and Artist* 27; Gelbs *O'Neill* 438).

Furthermore, the motivation for the "Little Formless Fears"—the figment of the imagination which consumes Jones in the second scene is a straightjacket from O'Neill's Honduras-jungle nightmare, although Stephen Watt very recently claimed

that it was O'Neill's reading of Tennyson's "The Passing of Arthur" in *Idylls of the King* as an undergraduate student at Princeton University which influenced O'Neill (3). Gelbs consider O'Neill's stage direction, where he refers the forest to "*a wall of darkness dividing the world,*" (1.2.1044) as "probably how he remembered the impenetrable Honduran jungle" (*Life with Monte Cristo* 261). According to O'Neill, the trunks of trees looking like "enormous pillars of deeper blackness" and whose "leaves moan in the air," create a soul frightening "brooding, implacable silence." He adds, "the effect of the tropical forest on the human imagination was honestly come by … It was the result of my own experience while prospecting for gold in Spanish Honduras" (qtd. in Gelbs *O'Neill* 438-39; *Life with Monte Cristo* 261-62). Besides, Normand Berlin in his *O'Neill's Shakespeare*, a recent study aimed at finding structural and thematic likeness and relevance between some foremost tragedies of both Shakespeare and O'Neill, claims that O'Neill may have modeled Jones after Othello where both black protagonists "stripped off [their] outer layers of civilization" in exotic places: Jones in the Great African Forest and Othello in Cyprus. Besides, according to him, both Jones and Othello are great story-tellers, had Christian-pagan tendencies, proved superior to their hyper-jealous color-prejudiced white foils, Smithers and Iago respectively, and talk in monologues, although O'Neill's use of expressionistic technique economizes much of the verbal dialogues in *The Emperor Jones* (27-38).

Nonetheless, Pfister, in his *Staging Depth*, claims that the concept of the crocodile god—for killing which Jones spared the last bullet (and the only silver) of his six-shooter, thereby leaving him defenseless—came off as consequences of O'Neill's inhibition into "the cultural swamp of literary imagination" (132). In the penultimate scene of the play, when Jones has a sense of *dejavu* of the place in the

woods by the river bank contending the "Congo witch-doctor" (1.7.1057), the audience is reminded of the images on cigar boxes and post cards of 1910 and onwards (Pfister 133-34).[2] But Pfister in his study did not mention, as part of this "cultural swamp," the other two undeniable nomenclature of exotic visual images that might also have "inhibited" audience's memory: the likeness of Gilpins's and Robeson's (casting as Jones) majestic attire with Marcus Garvey's parade photograph; and Jones' stripped off dress of breechcloth with James O'Neill (casting as Edmund Dantes in *The Count of Monte Christo*, one of the all time US romantic hits, a stage adaptation of Alexandre Dumas' 1844 novel, in which O'Neill's father played this leading role over six thousand times between 1885-1916 to an estimated fifteen million American spectators).[3]

All these above parameters suggest that O'Neill's intention did not correspond to the stereotypical portrayal of blacks, but rather he was "deep" (Pfister 131) in modeling his psychological discourse. He shows a collage of various elements and brings them in line with his own philosophy—exposing characters' inner natures as expressively as their outer appearances instead of merely aping the cultural stereotypes of the time. His combined thematic concerns of primitivism and imperialism in the play portray Jones as a victim of deterministic socio-economic forces. Jones reflects an outsider's terrible fall in nature's heart, the primordial jungle, and like Conrad's Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*, the reduction is shown to be resulted from white-instilled value-system of desire to possess, where one's skin color hardly matters. Thus, Huggins comments in his *Harlem Renaissance* that "O'Neill used Negro characters in *The Emperor Jones* … to make general statements about humanity through them" (297). Quite in line with viewpoint, it would be further delineated that the projection of Jones equates him with other major white portraits of

the playwright's canon and thereby shows the black protagonist fighting the common psychosomatic ghost under a typical American setting.

Jones is undoubtedly moved by an all-American sin of greed and grabbing, and presages, at least fifty years before, what social scientists of comparative culture in the 1970s would call "kleptocracy"—the propensity of political leaders, businessman, bankers, and high officials of the Third World countries, to plunder the national wealth, to loot people's hard-earned money, and run (Diggins 146). Thus, like a modern philosopher he well understands that power does not last forever. He says, "I ain't no fool. I knows did Emperor's time is sho't." Hence has his eyes are fixed upon "de long green," i.e., the escape route through the forest. When a revolution for regime-change gets underway, Jones flees towards the jungle where he stashed his money and food, and heads to the Coast where a French gunboat is harbored to take him away to safety.

The Trajectory of African and Irish American Diaspora

Edward Shaughnessy claims that O'Neill's African and Irish Americans are faithfully realistic portrayals, and that the blacks in his plays are, as conditioned by the surroundings of 1920s, drawn as "emancipated *de jure* but never *de facto*." In O'Neill's dramas, according to Shaughnessy, blacks "exist in condition of effective subjugation" and suffer circumstances of "resentment and fear" which leave them in condition which may be dubbed "simultaneously suspect and pitiable" ("faithful realism" 149). Joel Pfister quotes a critic who views O'Neill's Irish characters as "actually dark, eerie, Celtic symbol-folk … who beat their breasts at the agony of living, battle titanically and drink like Nordic gods, but are finally seen to wear the

garb of sainthood and die for love" (17). Even though the blacks and the Irish in America had differences in the nature of their headways on American soil, one being purchased and brought in as slaves and the other being forced to emigrate as results of eviction and starvation, they shared similar estrangement in this new country since both were "hated and alienated" (Shaughnessy 149).

O'Neill showed through his two portrayals, black Brutus Jones in *The Emperor Jones* and Irish Con Melody in *A Touch of the Poet* (1942), how the socio-economic conditions and particularly the subjugation and segregation faced by these immigrants produced an artificial or contrived social class and left them as mere wannabe capitalists. Their fling with the ethics of capitalism has insulated their firms on diaspora, and O'Neill has successfully given the historical basis of the events by projecting the African and Irish Americans on tightropes of social evolution. Each man's regalia, Jones' faux-royal attire of Emperor and Melody's military garb of a Major of His Majesty's Seventh Dragoons, are stripped off at either plays' ends signifying that their portentous drive to change gear of status forsaking self-identity is nothing but an illusion concocted from the life-lie of capitalism which cannot feed them sanity but can breed physical demise as seen in case of Jones or psychic death as noticed in case of Melody. Jones has "squeezed [the natives] dry" (1.1.1035) and Melody comes of an Irish aristocratic lineage whose father, according to Maloy, was nothing "but a thievin' sheeben keeper who got rich by moneylendin' and squeezin' tenants and every manner of trick" (1.185). The imprint of capitalism on them—in Jones through the white salesmen's talks in the Pullman sleeping cars, and in Melody through his father and the fancy dress symbolizing prosperity—differentiate either of the two from the people they come of. Jones, therefore, claims to be head and shoulders above "a common nigger" (1.1.1043), and Melody not only calls Irish

population "scum" (3.237) but also despises his fellow Irish including his wife and daughter for their "damned peasant's brogue" (1.201). But both fall at the hands of the people, served as foils, they spurn, with a return to their primitive and atavistic selves respectively: Lem, in the final scene of *The Emperor Jones*, "*examines [Jones'] body with great satisfaction*" after continuously reassuring Smithers with the guaranteed demise of Jones by saying, "We cotch him … Him dead" (1.8.1060-61), and Smithers brags, "Dead as a 'erring! Where's yer 'igh an' mighty airs now, yer bloomin' Majesty" (1.8.1061)? Sara, in the last scene of *A Touch of the Poet*, scoffs at her father after watching him finally shedding all pretense exclaiming, "May the hero of Talavera rest in Peace" (4.280)!

In fact, Brutus Jones, like the other black portraits of O'Neill's canon—Dreamy, Jim Harris or Joe Mott, and the Irishmen: Melodys in *A Touch of the Poet*, Tyrones in *Long Day's Journey into Night*, and Hogans in *A Moon for the Misbegotten*—share a common concern and plight coming off the dehumanizing effect of capitalist principle which eventually victimized the blacks and the Irish in America. Constantly trying to merge themselves into the vortex of capitalist America, the Irishmen is O'Neill's plays repeatedly try to lose the brogue which is metonymic for their cultural assimilation and a lowering of the barriers to attaining the American dream, and the blacks are found to be busy in putting on the white professional ethics into their dark bodies. They are left, at the end of the day, crest fallen as they become the victims of a promise unfulfilled, a dream differed, and unsurprisingly their pipedream echoes the false illusion carried by the American dream: Melody's quoting of Lord Byron's lines with a touch of Irish brogue, "I stood/Among thim, but not av thim" (4.277) excellently fits into Jones' high and dry clamor, and Jones' life-lie of "What I was den is one thing, and what I is now's another" (1.1.1034) can be viewed

as indentation of their respective diasporas as well as the last nail into the coffin of both men-in-regalia who undergo the torment resulting from this. Jones was despised by the white society in the United States, and Melody, like the O'Neills in real life, by the New England Yankees, which prompted both to fight for survival to fit into the oscillating structure of American economy by taking in the white/Yankee ciphers discarding their roots. Though either of them was able to make hay initially and turn the table, but the ethics, the very brainwave of the white-dominated system, based on racial inequity, proved false for them in the end. O'Neill thus debunks Jones' and Melody's perceptions of *nouveaux riches* by showing them suffering severely from ethnic heartbreaks.

Shifted Perspective: White Imprints on Jones

The Emperor Jones shows the evolvement and the effect of three-century long racism in America, and portrays its protagonist with the raw-level reaction to the racial injustice incurred upon his race. In the next black play *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, written four years later, O'Neill's leading character Jim shows more intellectual acumen than Jones, yet both protagonists become victims for imitating the ways of the white world. In fact, by doing such, either of them tried to cross their marginalized social status: in Jones' case it was through cunning ways of intimidation and swindling, and in Jim's case through patience and mental prowess—and in their respective ways both were castigated for being indifferent to their race since they possessed the aspiration to be white which made them traitor to their ancestry not only by denying the racial root, but also by seeking to replace it.

The earlier victims of racial justice, Mulatto Sailor in *Thirst* and Abe in *The Dreamy kid*, seem either bearing with or resisting the racial treatment of the whites to survive in life. While the Sailor uncomplainingly digested the slurs from his white raft-mates, Abe fought the white person who had tried to kill him and later the police force who encircled him at his dying grandmother's apartment. But O'Neill showed in these next two black plays, through Jones in *The Emperor Jones* and Jim in *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, an altogether different approach of the leading characters in their dealing with the racist white environment. Both Jones and Jim seem to try out the Darwinian conquest ethic: since it has been a mission-impossible to exist as blacks, what would come by if the blacks themselves go for the white ethics or desire-standards to survive and thus live better. This, however, would not be easy as it involves putting on a white mask and nullifying the black commonness of all sorts as well as casting off the (Jungian) collective consciousness of the race, i.e. not trying to belong to the race one represents.

Unsurprisingly therefore, Brutus Jones renounces his racial and cultural legacy to "buy white." Interestingly, virtues like those of industry, competition, etc.—"the bed-rock virtues of America," which are ascribed to whites and which Booker T Washington or WEB Du Bois wanted the "New Negroes" to possess (Huggins 141)—made impacts on Jones in a way that "sabotage [his black] psychology" (Pfister 135). Recalling the difficult literary era of the early decades of the last century, also known as Black Renaissance, which was mired into producing stereotypes leaving no standard for developing a "black identity," Huggins mentions how the black traits carried only the scars of poverty and humiliation over the years: "The challenge to find a black identity within the American cultural context was made more difficult because the stereotype which defined Negroes for most Americans was the obverse of

the Protestant Ethic, that convenient measure of deserving character. Laziness, slovenliness, and excessive sensual appetite deserved no reward except poverty and dishonor" (141).

In opposition to common stereotypes and clichés, Jones, a felon of two homicides and a prison escapee, ran off to a small island where he worked his way to success and within a span of a couple of years has become the emperor. According to Engel, "His rise to wealth and power, 'from stowaway to Emperor in two years,' had been achieved by virtue of his possession of none of the characteristics commonly associated with the Negro, such as a shiftless laziness, or lack of initiative" (45). O'Neill's stage description of Jones breaks away from the normal pattern of black portrayal as the illuminating account of Jones' features reveals his dynamic body and mind: "*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 kin, cunning intelligence*" (1.1.1033). The use of "*yet*" is in fact drawing the line between the stereotyped black based on white authors' imagination over the centuries, and an individual with "*distinctive*" qualities as a human being, black or whatever. Although the word "yet" seems to suggest that for a "*typically negroid*" possessing the "*distinctive*" features was unusual, it must be borne in mind that O'Neill was staging the play for a racist audience of 1920s, and hence, by debunking and utilizing the internalized language of racism, O'Neill was actually aiming high—to sympathetically and indiscriminatingly create a tough and determined individual of black race who "*inspires respect*."

Further, O'Neill describes Smithers, the white cockney trader and the natural enemy of Jones' cultural, social, and economic growth, in derogatory terms to

emphasize Jones' individuality. In O'Neill's description, Smithers is drained off the distinctiveness that marks Jones, "*Smithers is a tall, stoop-shouldered man of forty. His bald head, perched on a long neck with an enormous Adam's apple, looks like an egg … naturally pasty face with it small, sharp features to a sickly yellow … His little, washy-blue eyes are red-rimmed and dart about him like a ferret's. His expression is one of unscrupulous meanness, cowardly and dangerous*" (1.1.1031). Having committed the "original sin" of desire, pocketing unscrupulous financial success through colonizing, and oppressing the blacks for centuries in plantations for making more money, Smithers is a descendent of the white-bred American civilization and O'Neill shows him carrying "*a ridding whip in his hand*" (1.1.1032) to give the audience an impression of Smithers' race as the perpetual flogger. Moreover, other than projecting Smithers as drunken, "*stoop-shouldered*" with "*sickly yellow*" face, in direct contrast with effervescent Jones who is "*full-blooded*" and "*hardy*," O'Neill shows Jones intellectually superior to Smithers even at the very outset of the play: the former is "*alive with a keen, cunning intelligence*" and the latter is "*cowardly dangerous*."

Smithers, however, like Ella in *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, also represents the train of white people whose perpetual effort is to check black man's dream or ambition to attain social respectability of a strong and self-reliant individuality by gaining fame and earning money. Though admonishing and helping Jones to exploit the natives, when the cowardly, cynical, and sycophantic Smithers unearths the natives' design to revolt and thereby dethrone Jones, he is over the moon with happiness. With "*extreme vindictiveness*," he comments, "And I'm bloody glad of it, for one! Serve 'im right! Puttin' on airs, the stinkin' nigger! 'Is Majesty! Gawd blimey! I only 'opes I'm there when they takes 'im out to to shoot 'im" (1.1.1032-33).

Smithers here is like the over-jealous Iago of Shakespeare who cannot put up with the sight of a black man succeeding, since in his count, Jones is reversing the white-defined black-standard which, according to the existing norms of society, is tantamount to committing unspeakable crime. Therefore, part militant "New Negro" and part bourgeois Jones, who is very strong, enterprising, cunning, and shrewd, literally challenges the white idea of the intellectually substandard black in America as "less than fully human," the notion carried forward by "Darwin's theory of species-formation" that "allowed the whites to continue to dominate African Americans in the America where, even after the ending of slavery, a whole set of Jim Crow 'race laws' were established to prevent blacks participating fully in society, politics and economy" (During 163-64).

To stress the comparison between Jones and Smithers all the more, O'Neill credits the former with more success, as Virginia Floyd explains:

> Jones in his two years on the island has learned the language of the natives and taught some of them English. Smithers has been there ten years and still cannot communicate verbally with them. The former forged his way from a lowly stowaway … to emperor. He had been Smithers' employee, doing, as he says, 'de dirty work fo' you—and most o' de brain work'. (203-04)

O'Neill gives Jones more white strappings to show how the ingrained values, ethics, and standards of white society take toll on him. O'Neill turns the tables for Jones and defies the existing idea of blacks as passive, idle or lazy. While arguing with Smithers, the white occupation agent and Jones' alibi, the proactive Jones braves: "And ain't I got to learn deir lingo and teach some of dem English befo' I kin talk to 'em" (1.1.1036)? Jones, like a white colonialist, not only learns the natives' language

but teaches the natives English also. On the other hand, the characteristics that usually are reserved for stereotyped blacks in literature are endorsed on Smithers. Jones claims: "You ain't never learned ary word er it, Smithers, in de ten years you been heah, dough you knows it's money in you' pocket tradin' wid 'em if you does. But you'se too shiftless to take de trouble" (1.1.1036). When Smithers tries to give himself credit for having helped Jones start life at a time "when no one else would" help him, Jones retorts by recounting more things he has done for him: "But you ain'tno kick agin me, Smithers. I'se paid you back all you done for me many times. Ain't I pertectedyo and winked at all de crooked tradin' you been doin' right out in de broad day? Sho' I has—and me makin' laws to stop it at de same time" (1.1.1034-35). This suggests that both Jones and Smithers are equally guilty of exploiting the natives, but other than the intelligence, O'Neill gave Jones more wickedness and desire to be able to rise from a mere employee of Smithers, the job description of which involved doing "dirty work" for him and "most o' de brain work," to the position of an "emperor."

The fact of the matter is that behind Jones' success story lies a hardcore verity: while working inevitably for successful white salesmen in United States for the past ten years he has acquired a lot "on de Pullman by listenin' to de white quality talk. … And when [he] gits a chance to use it [he] winds up Emperor in two years" (1.1.1035). With the influence of "de white quality talk," and the time of a decade spent with rich white Yankee salesmen, Jones' psyche has grown to hate the "less than fully human" (During 164) natives as mere "low-flung bush niggers" or "foolish niggers" and he sneers at their superstitious acceptance and vulnerability to myths. He mocks the natives' pagan gods and prides himself for being a sophisticated, civilized, and modern monotheist "member in good standin' o' de Baptist Church" (1.1.1042). Like

a true white colonialist, he stepped into the Caribbean Island faking the public eye with an intention "to do missionary work for de Baptist Church" and "teach … [the natives] English" (1.1.1036). But soon he "lays [his] Jesus on de shelf for de time bein'" to go "after de coin" because doing the missionary work could "git [him] nothin'" (1.1.1042). Thus, spurred on by the theory of colonial capitalism that puts a successful hunter of the wilderness in "de Hall o' Fame when [he] croaks," Jones starts the "big stealin'" and extorts exorbitant taxes and levies from the natives. Living a life on the "Yankee bluff" (1.1.1036) and giving native a "circus show," Jones, therefore, is a prototype of a colonialist who arrives in the darkness of Caribbean Island as a savior, (1.1.1035) by using a superstition and thus stifling a revolution, to bring light with the white man's "missionary work" in the forms of spreading Christianity and schooling people by teaching English where his main goal, like his white avatar Kurtz, was exploiting the natives by plundering fortune staying in ivory towers. Jones knew, as an American, that its history books read, the promise of American life had been compromised from the very beginning, with the first landing of Spaniards, who spoke of God while searching for gold. He just carries these sins and specters of corruption into the Caribbean Island.

Joel Pfister detects how Jones "internalized the very language of [white] domination" through his use of some words in the opening scene (Pfister 135). As he is awakened by the blowing of Smithers' raspberry, his bullying reply summons up the sort of response used to be heard from an antebellum southern plantation overseer: "I'll get de hide frayled off some o' you niggers sho'" (1.1.1033)! Also, like a true European colonialist, Jones unscrupulously yet plainly declares, "I'se after de coin" (1.1.1042). This furthermore emphasizes the fact that Jones' attitudes, values, and

overall lifestyle in the Caribbean Island takes after the ways of the white successful world, thus making him an absolutely white jockey.

Importantly, O'Neill here tends to lessen the despicable fault or guilt of Brutus Jones by transferring the blame and responsibility of his corrupt knowledge and behavior to the whitemen from whom he has learned all his tricks and treachery. In other words, O'Neill seems to be telling the audience that Jones would not have been corrupt had the white civilization's success myth not alluded, impacted upon him or rather left him alone:

> For de little stealin' dey gits you in jail soon or late. For the big stealin' dey makes you Emperor and puts you in de Hall o' Fame when you croaks. (*reminiscently*). If dey's one thing I learns in ten years on de Pullman ca's listenin' to de white quality talk, it's dat same fact. And when I gits a chance to use it I winds up Emperor in two years. (1.1.1035)

As a result, Jones falls prey to the white men's greed and acquisitive prosperity:

> During ten years in which he had served as Pullman car porter, he had listened to the white quality—to George Babbit, perhaps, as he traveled by Pullman to the Maine woods from Zenith—and adopted their ways. What he learned in those years was the white man's cynicism, shrewdness, efficiency, philosophy of self-interest … Having absorbed the ethic of 'white quality,' [Jones] is quite as ready to exploit the natives as the white is to exploit the Negro. (Engel 50)

Jones adopts the shortcut policies of white society, talks their talk, does their work, and just as some whites practice their tricks of exploitation and dominance on Blacks, so does Jones abuse and dictate the natives without qualms.

White Jockey Jockey-strapped

Tellingly, Brutus Jones' ultimate demise has been concocted, according to a number of critics, with the name given to him by O'Neill. His first name symbolizes the African root which is brutal, fiery like scarlet, and as raw and earthly as his enormous emperor's throne which is "*made of uncut wood*." The second name or the surname represents shrewd, sophisticated, white colonizer of this "*yet not self-determined*" island (1.1.1031). Although Pawley considers that the first name Brutus is "reminiscent of the practice of nineteenth century American playwrights who gave black characters Roman names such as Caesar and Cato as comic devices, thus making them appear outlandish" (Liu 143), Pfister contends that it was the southern "slaveowners [who] sometimes mocked the abject condition of their slaves by naming them after leaders of the Roman empire" (Pfister 129). On the other hand, Pfister views that the protagonist's second name stands for the "crocked politicians and businessmen—[of] 'de white quality'" (129).

Therefore, Brutus Jones simultaneously denotes a still enslaved (under American conditions) African who is an eerily clever fellow engaged in practicing white American ethics of power, success, and money. Seen from this perspective, Jones' full name here stands as accommodating the two trains of thought-patterns and value-systems which usually haunt an African American, stated elaborately by WEB Du Bois in his *The Souls of Black Folk*. According to Du Bois, this never-ending double-standard of an American "Negro" is the bottom line of his quagmire of existence: "An American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it

from being torn asunder" (Du Bois 2). Jones in the following six memory scenes of the play is to be confronted within by these "warring ideals" in the form of battles in his mind between the conscious ("American") and the unconscious ("Negro") "souls" dividing him in two selves.

Jones' flight from the black natives of the Island whom he is determined to "outguess, outrun, outfight an' outplay" is cautiously checked by the expressionistic aural device of drum, staring in the first scene "*at a rate exactly corresponding to normal pulse beat—72 to the minute—and continues at a gradually accelerating rate from this point uninterruptedly to the very end of the play*" (1.1.1041) when Jones' corpse is brought by the islanders after he is gunned down. On-the-run Jones first encounters, in his anxiety-ridden and Macbeth-like heat-oppressed unconscious mind, the "*Little Formless Fears,*" which he regards as the "little [*formless*] animals" (1.2.1045-46) of weird African jungle that recalls Tennyson's King Arthur. According to Stephen Watt, "Jones' fears [are] analogous to Arthur's" since "both involved with being a man … and these fears attack all men—black and white, medieval and modern, great and small" (3). He fires at the figures to "fix 'em" (1.2.46) and to come back to his own conscious self, and in the next two scenes he likewise fires another two shots by reenacting his personal past to kill Jeff, a black man, and the white prison guard after recovering from his turmoil in unconscious mind. Diya Abdo views that Jones here shows his disliking for the "*automaton*"-like Jeff (1.3.1047) in the third scene and the black prisoners who stand "*fixed in motionless attitudes, their eyes on the ground*" (1.4.1051) in the fourth, as these postures and comportment reflect the stereotypical blacks which he, as a white man in black body, hates (1-2); hence this argument stands directly in contrast to Gabriele Poole's observation that here Jones

extracts "guilt feelings for the wrongs he committed against specific individuals" (29).

The next three scenes show Jones' atavistic regression (Orlandello 51; Murray 16) into the racial past, haunted by past memories and moving from one pocket to another. Scene five presents Jungian regression into the collective consciousness of his race where his conscious and unconscious selves duel with each other for possession, and the former prevails at the end of the scene. In this slave-auction scene, Jones appears like a typical southern black where "*his pants are in tatters, his shoes cut and misshapen, flapping about his feet*" (1.5.1052). Although Jones did not experience the pain, the punishment, and other evils of slavery, he is still affected and conditioned psychologically because his forebears went through it all. This collective consciousness of his race confronts him in the forest: while his attention is thus occupied, a crowd dressed in southern costumes of the 1850s converges on the clearing. This crowd comprises "*well to do planters*," an authoritative auctioneer, a group of "*young belles and dandies who have come to the slave-market for diversion*" where their movements are "*stiff, rigid, unreal, marionettish*." The "*white planters*" appraise each group of the slaves as buyers and examine them "*as if they were cattle*" (1.5.1053). Jones, standing among the slaves, is unconsciously bound up with the auction as merchandise, and seeing the bidding on him starts after planters' scrutinizing eyes detected his physical prowess, gets "*paralyzed with horror*" as this slave-auction proceeding reminds him the experiences of his ancestor. Jones, "*seized by the courage of desperation*," reacts consciously with violence:

> Is dis a auction? Is you sellin' me like dey uster befo' de war? (*jerking out his revolver just as the auctioneer knocks him down to one of the planters—glaring from him to the purchaser*) And *you* sells me? And

> *you* buys me? I shows you I'se a free nigger, damn you' souls! (*He fires at the auctioneer and the planter with such rapidity that the two shots are almost simultaneous*.) (1.5.1053-54)

Indeed, Jones' such disposition is a reminder of slave-revolt leader Spartacus' wrath on auctioneers Bracchius and Lentulus in the antebellum play *The Gladiator* (1831)[4] when he, seeing his wife and kid on sale, charges: "Villains, do you put them up for sale, like beasts? Look at them: they are human" (1.182).

However, here again, Jones' conscious and the unconscious selves fight for the control where the latter suggests that Jones can never be "free" as a "nigger" since this is embedded into his psyche that no matter how hard a black may try he cannot cast off the burden of pain and miseries of slavery to drive his destiny. His conscious soul suggests that Jones, considering himself as equal to a white man for conceiving the white standards and ethics, feels himself completely "free" American on whom the society bestowed equal opportunity to go and grab success. Nonetheless, Jones' action in this regard recalls the "New Negro" ways of earning racial equity through inflicting violence on the society where equality exists only in rhetoric, not in reality. O'Neill here, showing the plight of the blacks in America, is making the point clear that racial segregation and oppression is making a mockery of the nation which to the whole world is considered "paradigm of freedom," emerging as a role model right after World War I (Krasner *American Drama 1945-2000* 29).

Next, the sixth scene presents Jones' deeper regression into the collectives of his race as here he encounters another group of distraught, almost naked and melancholy black slaves, swaying simultaneously forward and backward toward each other in "*some ancient vessel*." He himself now looks very much slave-like as his emperor's attire has given a way to a mere loincloth, the very dress code of the Island

natives he detested at the play's start; the stage description reads: "*His pants have been so torn away that what is left of them is no better than a breech cloth*" (1.6.1055). Haunted, naked, and barefooted emperor Jones consciously knows he has now only the last but the most important bullet (silver) left, and thus says, "If I shoots dat one I'm a goner sho'" (1.6.1055)! But succumbing to his conscious self, he unconsciously begins "*swaying back and forth*" (1.6.1056) with the chained slaves and even his voice joins them "*as if under some uncanny compulsion*." Jones' merging with the chorus of the slaves of Middle Passage along with his physically acting out the chained slaves' roles symbolizes his adherence to and bondage with the African root and hence at the end of the scene, the tom-tom, which is gathering faster pace in every scene, is heard "*with a more insistent, triumphant pulsation*" (1056). As viewed by Edwin Engel, "[Jones'] haunted mind functions as a protracted symbol of fate in the shape of the biological past … [and] is based upon the assumption of a psychical as well as a physical continuity between ancestor and descendent" (53).

Here for the first time, Jones' affinity with the conscious soul or American self is found dislodged and bearings gone as at the end of the scene Jones is left bewildered without attempting to break his unconscious magic spell with firing from the cocked revolver that guaranteed his individuality as an American the way he did in the previous scenes which eventually landed him in conscious reality. However, Viswanathan contends that here O'Neill does not include any white characters as he did in the previous two scenes (in 1.4 he fired the white prison guard, and in 1.5 the white planter and auctioneer who seemed to threaten his individuality and freedom as a "free" American) to ward off "an element of tension between white and black cultures" and to prepare Jones for a complete "mental Odyssey of a regression to the Congo" in the following scene (3).

Hence the penultimate scene of Jones' struggle-within between conscious and unconscious selves reach a climactic point where Jones is still hypnotized by the unconscious whose "*voice is heard from the left rising and falling in the long despairing wail of the chained slaves, to the rhythmic beat of the tom-tom*." Curtain rises as he is discovered under a Lady Macbeth-like magic charm of "*a strange deliberation like a sleep walker or one in trance*" in a plain surrounded by a large tree, an alter, and a great river of his ancestors' desolate as well as natural habitat signifying to the audience that Jones has finally reached the root of his racial past. "*As if in obedience to some obscure impulse, he sinks into a kneeling, devotional posture before the alter*," Jones, in his stretched-out hang-over claims: "I remember—seems like I been heahbefo'" (1.7.1057). In fact, Jones has never been here before but his ancestors, and it is his African-ness, the unconscious block of his African soul is drawing the racial link between him and his African population of pre slave-trading era. He is now taken in by the conjurer or voodoo man witch-doctor, the agent of the pagan crocodile god who, as suggested in the scene's trial attempt at the beginning, is demanding sacrifice because of Jones' continuous denial of African root or racial past. The witch-doctor, symbolizing the core pagan anthropocentric spirits, lures Jones to boogie, and then to sacrificial alter, right after which appears a huge head of a croc god, upon which the tom-tom beats go wild as the pagan spirit nears towards Jones. The battle-royal between Jones' conscious and unconscious souls gathers extreme momentum as the former, absent in this scene until now, reemerges:

> (*Jones cries out in a fierce, exhausted spasm of anguished pleading*)
>
> Lawd, save me! Lawd Jesus, heah my prayer!
>
> (*Immediately, in answer to his prayer, comes the thought of the one bullet left him. He snatches at his hip, shouting defiantly*)

De silver bullet! You don't git me yit!

(*He fires at the green eyes in front of him. The head of the crocodile sinks back behind the river bank, the witch doctor springs behind the sacred tree and disappears.*) (1.7.1058-59)

The killing of the croc god and driving away the Congo witch-doctor carry some points here as it implies Jones' putting the last nail into the coffin of his African Congolese past, and thus keeping his American self intact and alive. This finally is stamped when at the end of the scene the tom-tom, which beat "*madly*" (1058) some moments ago anticipating Jones' sacrifice to the pagan god, is now heard "*with a somber pulsation, a baffled but revengeful power*" (1.7.1059) contrary to the "*triumphant pulsation*" (1.6.1056) in the previous scene where Jones merged himself with the chained slaves. Further, his Christ-like pose at the end of this seventh scene proves that he, denying and discarding the African Congolese god, made his sacrifice towards the white Christian god as a result of which he reaffirms his affinity with American-ness, making the tom-tom beat, the proponent of African culture, "*revengeful*." Jones thus, like Jim in *All God's Chillun Got Wings* who ignores the Congo mask symbolizing religious spirit, backs out of and refuses to join the African collective for "buying white." Both Jones and Jim are bound up and at the same time torn apart by the conflicting African and American values, and both consciously went for the white ethics, religion, and most importantly, desires. Jones at the end dies a martyr of money as Lem claims, "[he] cook um money, make um silver bullet" (1.8.1061) as part of the design to kill Jones, and to Jones, the silver bullet, made of money, was his "baby," and "rabbit's foot" (1.1.1037). Through his physical and psychical jockey-strapping, "[Jones] strips away the layers of veneer of white society" (Floyd 209). Brutus Jones nullifies his ancestral root or deterministic forces to

embrace American desire-standard since "the goal of success in America is to 'become American,' negating one's particular personal history in the drive to approximate … [the] 'typical American'" (Schwarz 9).

Jones and the American Sin of Desire

Indeed, in most of his plays—*The Emperor Jones*, *The Hairy Ape*, *Marco Millions*, *The Great God Brown*, *Ah Wilderness*, *A Touch of the Poet*, *More Stately Mansions*, *The Iceman Cometh*, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, *A Moon for the Misbegotten* and also in few others, O'Neill condemns the greed, the selfishness, and the unremitting acquisitional or grabbing proclivity of his countrymen, and in a broader sense, all men. O'Neill, according to Gelbs, himself was a believer in the "utopian credo" of "philosophical anarchism" all through his life and hence abhorred the unchecked capitalism (*Life with Monte Cristo* 216 and 219). In *Ah Wilderness*, the autobiographical character Richard Miller conveys an American's disillusionment towards his country's deep thrust into capitalism which economically divided the nation with the exploitation of working class and unequal distribution of wealth as he defies his father's stand with the following remark:

> The land of the free and home of the brave! Home of the slave is what they ought to call it—the wage slave ground under the heel of the capitalist class, starving, crying for bread for his children, and all he gets is stone. … No, you can celebrate your Fourth of July. I'll celebrate the day the people bring out the guillotine again and I see Pierpont Morgan being driven by in a tumbril! (1.13)

Likewise, another autobiographical creation Edmund Tyrone in *Long Day's Journey into Night* echoes the same thought-pattern as he tells Jamie, "It's all a frame-up! We're all fall guys and suckers and we can't beat the game" (2.2.758). Edmund also digs up the corrupting influence of capitalism and heavily disdains his father by calling him "stinking old miser" for his constant money-making mania of saving "a few lousy dollars to buy more bum property" (4.806) instead of providing family members with proper medical treatment that literally shattered the inter-relationships between them.

From time to time seeing himself as "reconverted to a sterling Anarchism" or referring to himself as "philosophical anarchist" while writing to friends or talking to press, (Floyd *O'Neill at Work* xix and xx), O'Neill maintained his anti-capitalist beliefs all his life to whom capital-hunters like Brutus Jones, Con Melody, Simon Harford or James Tyrone augur a dangerous America vaingloriously sunken in projecting an all-possessive economic identity that seriously derides humanity. America, O'Neill tries to insinuate in some of his plays, has lost her goal to direct the rest of the world as it claims—because of her intense and overriding craze to own the whole world. In an interview he gave to the press at the offices of the Theatre Guild in September 1946, O'Neill lashes out:

> I'm going on the theory that the United States, instead of being the most successful country in the world, is the greatest failure … because it was given everything, more than any other country … Its main idea is that everlasting game of trying to possess your own soul by the possession of something outside of it, too. America is the prime example of this because it happened so quickly with such immense resources. (Clark 152)

Before he makes his way into the West Indian Island, Brutus Jones is already infected with the American virus of greed and chicanery. He strives with all his might and "brain work" to possess both the natives and their property. Jones is like the Venetian Marco Polo in *Marco Millions* (1928) who boasts of the unprecedented amount of taxes he has "sweated out" of the local citizens. Marco brags about the way he does it:

> My tax scheme … that got such wonderful results is simplicity itself … For one thing I found they had a high tax on excess profits … I repealed it. And I repealed the tax on luxuries … The tax wasn't democratic enough to make it pay! I crossed it off and I wrote on the statute books a law that taxes every necessity in life, a law that hits every man's pocket equal, be he beggar or banker! And I got results. (2.1.425)

Jones is the American Marco Polo who has milked the natives more than any white man, and Smithers is even baffled at the propensity and the intensity of Jones' exploitation: "You been grabbin' right and left yourself," Smithers reminds him, "ain't yer? Look at the taxes you've put on 'em! Blimey! You've squeezed 'em dry!" (1.1.1035). Jones' grasp of reality is overwhelmed by his desire. Other than the exotic figure European Marco Polo, Jones figures parallel with the American sea Captains in O'Neill's plays where Captain Keeney's lust for "ile" [oil] in *Ile* (1917) and Captain Bartlett's hunt for golden treasure in *Where the Cross Is Made* (1918) and *Gold* (1921) inevitably bit the dust just likes Jones' greed for power and money in *The Emperor Jones*.

In *The Emperor Jones*, O'Neill penetrates deep into the American psyche to unearth, and at the same time, criticize the pre-capitalism which, by justifying the slavery and lending to the feudalism of the slave south, enrooted the evil seed of

capitalism on American soil. Showing Jones' regression into the "collective consciousness of his race" through some expressionistic scenes, O'Neill depicts the three-century long plight of the blacks in America where Jones, although not a slave but a product of slavery in modern America, recalls, using his psychological memory-blocks, the white oppression and enslavement of the Africans: the sale of human beings called slaves as merchandise in auctions, and the forced voyage on slave-ships of innocent blacks huddled together as cows where most of them were brutalized and killed like animals. In fact, with power and money the white men brought Jones' forebears from Africa as slaves and sent them to their plantations to work for them and increase their material resources. Thus the overriding interest and motive for this trade was purely profit-oriented.

O'Neill explains this profit-motive in *Marco Millions* where the central character Marco talks about using the slaves as machines for grinding out profit: "There are millions and millions of capital invested in this industry, millions of contended slaves labor unremittingly millions of hours per annum to obtain the best results in the weaving and dying of the finished products" (3.2.460). But to show his unconscionable attitude to these workers who make him rich, Marco says with contentment: "Well cargo's all aboard before schedule, too. We killed six slaves but, by God, we did it! And look at the crowd we've drawn, thanks to my band" (2.2.437). Some of the facts that O'Neill is alluding to in *The Emperor Jones* relate to white oppression, the inhumanity of slavery and its endemic consequences. By indulging in the traffic of human lives, uprooting them from their soil in Africa, and transporting them in chains to the United States just for cheap labor and quick profit, America for some years disoriented a whole race, and at the same time, tainted its innocence and dream. Here in this play, Jones himself becomes the archetype of such power-play of

capitalism in twentieth century America which O'Neill detects deep down in the American vein, kicked off with the slave-trade. With intoxicating and corrupting power Jones reenacts the original sin by enslaving the natives of the West Indian Island to earn and amass profits through manipulation and exploitation of people of his own race since to him black or white does not make any difference anymore as he hates and uses both natives and Smithers equally for profit-making. He thus imitated the corrupt ways of his white over-lords and has attempted to jump out of his skin to behave and think as a white businessman committed to money-making.

Jones is an African American who grew up in the United States as a suppressed and inferiorized outcast of society like the Mulatto Sailor or the Dreamy kid with repressed, resentful and bitter feelings towards the white men. As he has been a victim of severe physical punishment, a victim of degradation, spite, and exploitation, he grows up with these grievances and looks for the other commoners who will be victims of his own frustrations. As Richard Dana Skinner views:

> Jones' first instinct is to despise all those who are still in bondage, to turn traitor to his own and to enslave them, as he has been enslaved, by his superior knowledge and trickery. He is … symbolic of those who suddenly find themselves freed from old chains, and use their freedom to despise and destroy others, of all the snobs and new-rich of the world who grow fatuous on the continued miseries of those they have left behind. (88)

Thus, when he finally takes over the West Indian Island, he transfers his hatred for the white man who has oppressed him, to the natives, who are now his loyal subjects. By taking resort to this, Brutus Jones, in Michael Hinden's words, becomes "an embodiment of the original violation of America's communal spirit, the introduction

of slavery (the vilest manifestation of the profit motive) to a fresh and vital land. In O'Neill's eyes he is both victim and victimizer, for he has reenacted the original violation by enslaving the natives of his West Indian empire" (4). He, therefore, represents a train of tragic protagonists who undoubtedly "share in common the American fault: desire to possess" (Hinden 4).

O'Neill's Kaleidoscopic View of Racism

Jones, like Dr. Faustus, has sold his soul for material attainment by disregarding human ethics of brotherly fellow feeling, religion, and plays all the foul and manipulative tricks as a tyrannical emperor in pursuit of power and money. In O'Neill's plays, all those who seek wealth and power to dominate others do so out of personal weakness. When finally they gain these, they become "poorer thereby" (Cargill 400). This interpretation of financial and worldly success was behind O'Neill's pronouncement that the United States was "the greatest failure" in socially conjuring up such idea inside its own boundary for its citizens, and seeking such politically even outside of its own territory right after emerging as superpower at the end of both World Wars I and II. Jones in this play is a prototype for promoting the idea of amassing wealth illegally by tyrannizing over the natives, thereby implementing the theory of colonial capitalism.

Jones himself, however, was a taboo subject, a byproduct of the original sin, in the history of American system driven by profit-motive: they idea of making money through his ancestors' forced enslavement as plantation labors in seventeenth century America. Jones follows this white-master-plan to accumulate money and change his financial status in this island of natives as it is impossible for him in any means to

accomplish it in the United States. His best bet in the States, a country deeply entrenched into segregation and lynching and offering nightmarish economic condition to blacks, would be the position of a smoking car porter in "first fired, last hired" (Greenberg 43) basis. Jones, therefore, like Dreamy, is a spin off from social bigotry, but quite unlike Dreamy, tries to curve his way out submerging himself into the whirlpool of Darwinian ethics that "fulfilled particular ideological needs" of the white power-play globally (During 163). At the same time, he is seen absorbing the values of "corrupt version of the militant 'new negro' [or] the insecure version of the professional 'new negro'" (Pfister 136). Under the white mask, Jones, a black man engulfed with whiteness inside, puts the white souls on fire when he asks for desire-standard Faustus-like forgiveness, for redoing and reenacting the unforgivable crime of colonial oppression after arriving with an initial promise of doing the missionary work in the forms of bringing monotheistic Christianity in a godforsaken land submerged in paganism and educating the heathens:

> And down heah whar dese fool bush niggers raises me up to the seat o' de mighty, I steals all I could grab. Lawd, I done wrong! I knows it! I'se sorry! Forgive me, Lawd! Forgive dis po' sinner! (1.5.1052)

Michael Hinden views that O'Neill's artistic intention in *The Emperor Jones* is beautifully foxed in testing the American psyche, and through Jones' regression into his racial past, he actually wide-opens his nation's cardinal crime. Hence Jones as an individual becomes secondary to the primary show of stained history's unveiling on stage:

> [W]hat is significant here is that [Jones'] journey on stage is one into history as well as into the unconscious, a flight backwards in time toward the uncovering of the original sin that, in O'Neill's view,

> marred the Edenic harmony of the New World. The sin was slavery: the possession of those who cleared the wilderness as well as of the wilderness itself. In this respect, then, O'Neill is not exploring in *The Emperor Jones* "the collective consciousness of the American Negro" so much as he is exploring the collective conscience of Americans. (4)

Hit hard by black intellectuals like McKay, Johnson, Stebbins, Von Wiegand, and later by John Cooley and others for projecting Jones and Lem as commercial stereotypes (Pfister 135), O'Neill, however, seems to have corresponded to another radical Black Renaissance philosopher Alain Locke's diction of "propaganda" to "deal with oppression [of blacks] indirectly" (Huggins 202) through his invocation of the sad black history under the guilt-ridden white mask of Brutus Jones. Moreover, Jones is considered "no stereotype of Negro character" by historian Nathan Huggins to whom *The Emperor Jones* is "incidentally a Negro play" since when Jones' "artifices that have propped him up have been removed … [he becomes] any man" (296-97), destroyed by greed. Thomas Dickinson claims that Jones tries "to play the game of civilization without the password" and contends that "Brutus Jones has learned from civilization the laws of 'bluff' and 'double cross.'" Dickinson adds, "Jones tries those on the children of nature and nature gets him" (105-06). Jones is like Shakespearean tragic hero Othello and hence the question of blackness or whiteness of skin is deemed unimportant while investigating the reasons for their demises, as according to Normand Berlin, "both [Othello and Jones] ultimately are destroyed from within" (37-41).

In *Performing O'Neill: Conversations with Actors and Directors*, James Earl Jones, who played both Brutus Jones and Hickey, and whose father once played Joe Mott, views how O'Neill has merged his artistic intention with vision in this play, and

how the portrait and persona of the emperor Jones is curved out to create an all-American *dejavu*:

> If O'Neill set out to write a straight play about a deposed dictator from Caribbean island, like Haiti, it might never have been produced … So he gave you something with a whole lot of fun and a great documentary on American capitalist sentiment … But Brutus Jones was the ultimate capitalist, the ultimate exploiter. And that's not black, that's American. (Shafer 83-84)

This is obviously quite in tune with Edwin Engel's view when he claims that "it is in Jones himself that we are to observe sharp criticism of the civilization of the modern white man, for Jones is Negroid only in physical appearance and in speech." He further adds, "[Jones], is, rather, the American 'success story' in black-face" (49). Brutus Jones is black only in physical appearance and in speech; he is white as he has not only become a colonial master inflicting pain on his subjects to make hay with their resources but also betrayed with his own racial identity in the process. Undoubtedly, he is the American success story frolicked in blackface.

O'Neill's claim *in re* racial justice in *The Emperor Jones* is forged with mockery in one hand, as it forwards the theoretical notion of America's attainment of success through a reenactment of the "original sin," and a harsh criticism on the other, as it shows imitating the corrupt white means or "buying white" is never going to augur well for American minorities like the Irishmen Captain Keeney, James Tyrone or Con Melody, and the Blacks like Brutus Jones, Jim Harris or Joe Mott.

---

[1] After Edgar Allan Poe's influence of French symbolism and Walt Whitman's broadcast manifesto of free verse in the nineteenth century, it can be construed that O'Neill, at the beginning of twentieth century, instilled *avant-gardism* for the first time on the US stage

introducing German expressionism to promote Black Renaissance ethos with a role-reversal in terms of color-line that "shocked" the American audience. In fact, Picasso, with his 1907's painting "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon," and the Fauves artists brought primitivism at the canvas of art which found its way nearly at the same time in theory with Freud and in literature with Conrad and D H Lawrence. *The Emperor Jones*, a play conforming to expressionistic primitivism, marks this radical aesthetic transformation which shaped modernism at the turn of the last century. Thus this play stands as a very crucial piece in American literature since it had "cutting edge status" that does not deal with "commonplace" structural and thematic concerns. Rodrigues and Garratt *Introducing Modernism* 46-81.

[2] Pfister prints the cigar box portrait titled "Little African: A Dainty Morsel" (1910) which shows an alligator is crawling towards a naked black infant on a riverbank at the edge of a jungle, and the postcard portrait "A Darkey's Prayer" (1940) showing an alligator biting the part of an adult black from behind who is in praying posture.

[3] The production photographs of Gilpin in Shaughnessy's "faithful realism" (152) and of Paul Robeson in Wilmeth and Miller (167) are compared with that of Marcus Garvey in regalia in Huggins (114-d); the snapshot of Jones in the penultimate scene in Pfister (128) is examined against Edmond Dante in Wilmeth and Miller (356 and 129). The historical facts carried with the photo gallery in *Cambridge Guide to American Theatre* (1993) by Don Wilmeth and Tice Miller served as an invaluable source in these and other occasions.

[4] Robert Montgomery Bird's *The Gladiator* (1831) is a slave-revolt play which dramatizes explicitly the Virginian slave Nat Turner's organized violent uprising in protest of white oppressions in Southampton County in 1831 that resulted in many white deaths before Nat Turner and his men were captured and executed.