Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*: An Overview of White Imprints and Desire

Shahed Ahmed

Abstract
Eugene O'Neill's The Emperor Jones (1920) is the first ever projection of a black protagonist on Broadway who carries the imprints of white ideals. While the playwright presents the title character Brutus Jones as a kleptocrat, he seems 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 on the island. This paper explores O'Neill's projection of the American mercantile psyche as seen on 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. This article also investigates to what extent Jones is a by-product of the American capitalist system which considers greed as good and money as the bottom line of success.

Keywords
Eugene O'Neill, American Drama, Race, Capitalism, Kleptocracy, Blackface

The Emperor Jones (1920), an avant-garde[1] tour de force, takes place on an island in the West Indies inhabited by Blacks at the turn of the twentieth century. Following an uprising on the island, presumably incited by the occupation force of "White [American] Marines,"[2] Brutus Jones, a shrewd trickster of African-American origin accompanying the Marines, was made Emperor. Jones, however, was a sleeping car porter in New York before committing two homicides and escaping from jail in the United States. The puppet king Jones serves the purpose of the Whites like Smithers, but a rebellion by the island natives has surfaced against his brutal suppression. The action in *The Emperor Jones* opens just on the wake of a regime change in Jones' empire.

Brutus Jones is a streetwise black who learned about means of economic exploitation by listening to, in his own words, "de white quality talk"[3] while doing the job of a porter. When he gets a chance to implement his lessons in real life, he ends up becoming the emperor in just two years of his stay on the West Indian Island. As Emperor, Jones is encouraged by the capitalistic impulses of unrestrained greed and grab-all-you-can approach, and presages, at least fifty years before, what social scientists of comparative culture in the 1970s would call "kleptocracy"– rule by thieves – in this case the propensity of political leaders, businessman, bankers and high officials of Third

1 After Edgar Allan Poe's influence of French symbolism and Walt Whitman's broadcast manifesto of free verse in nineteenth century, it can be construed that O'Neill, at the beginning of twentieth century, instilled for the first time avant-gardism on the US stage, introducing German expressionism to promote a Black Renaissance ethos with a role-reversal in terms of color-line that "shocked" the audience. In fact, Picasso (with his 1907's painting "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon") and the Fauves artists brought to canvasses primitivism, which nearly at the same time can be found in the theories of Freud as well as in Western literature with Joseph 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 by way of its cutting edge snubbing of typical structural and thematic concerns.

2 Eugene O'Neill, 'The Emperor Jones,' *Eugene O'Neill: Complete Plays, 1913-1920* (NY: Library of America, 1988), 1030.

3 O'Neill, 1035.

World countries to plunder the national wealth and scurry off.[4] Jones well understands that power does not last forever and every mission comes to an end: "I ain'tno fool. I knows dis Emperor's time is sho't."[5] But as he withdraws at night to the coast where a French gunboat awaits him, he is encountered by a series of hallucinations that not only reminds him of his sordid past crimes, but also incapacitates him, resulting in his capture and death in the hands of his subjects.

Jones' character portrayal has been a subject of interesting speculations. He shares a common trait pivotal to characters in many classic antebellum slave tales such as George in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or Jim in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, of exploring manhood and the nature of human freedom. On a superficial level, O'Neill's projection of Jones as a strong and powerful monarch at the beginning and finally a stereotyped primitive portrays the natural political unfitness of a black man. But as this paper will probe, O'Neill's purpose was to show that Jones' failure as an African-American was due to his putting on fake trappings of the white colonial world. The veneers of his emperor's garb are thus removed piece by piece in every scene. In fact, Jones tried to contravene his marginalized social status through cunning ways of intimidation and swindling. Jones is indeed a "blackface" who is internally possessed by an aspiration to be white, which makes him traitor to his ancestry not only by denying the racial root but also by seeking to replace it.

O'Neill describes Jones as "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."[6] The word "yet" seems to suggest that for a "typically negroid" possessing these "distinctive" features which motivate admiration was unusual.

O'Neill instills in Jones some qualities which are typically attached to whites to show how the ingrained values, ethics, and standards of white society have taken toll on him. O'Neill defies the contemporaneous received Anglo-American stereotype of blacks as passive, idle and 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 demEnglish befo' I kin talk to 'em?"Jones, like a white colonialist, not only learns the natives' language but also, interestingly, teaches the natives English. On the other hand, characteristics which are usually 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."[7] Smithers, over these years, has only been busy with his cockney trading and remaining oblivious to missionary work, which would be facilitated by the white man learning the local tongue. 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 the services he has performed for Smithers: "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'

4 John Patrick Diggins, *Eugene O'Neill's America: Desire under Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 146.

5 O'Neill, 1037.

6 O'Neill, 1033.

7 O'Neill, 1036.

right out in de broad day? Sho' I has – and me makin' laws to stop it at de same time."[8] This suggests that both Jones and Smithers are equally guilty of exploiting the natives. Besides greater intelligence, O'Neill gives 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.

However, behind Jones' short-cut success story there lies a crucial point: while working as a porter on trains in the presence of successful Yankee salesmen 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."[9] Under the influence of "white" rhetorical modes, Jones' psyche has grown to hate the "less than fully human"[10] native blacks as mere "low-flung bush niggers" or "foolish niggers." He also sneers at their superstitious acceptance of and vulnerability to myths. He mocks the natives' pagan gods and prides himself a sophisticated, civilized, and modern monotheist "member in good standin' o' de Baptist Church."[11] Like a true white colonialist, he steps into the Caribbean Island faking the public eye with an intention "to do missionary work for de Baptist Church" and "teach [the natives] English."[12] 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'."[13] Thus, spurred on by a 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 extortsexorbitant taxes and other levies from the natives. Living a life on the "Yankee bluff"[14] and giving natives a "circus show," Jones, therefore, is a prototype of the colonialist who arrives in the darkness of Caribbean Island as a savior.[15] By using superstition and thus stifling a revolution,[16] ostensibly to bring light with the white man's "missionary work" in the forms of spreading Christianity and schooling people by teaching English, his main goal, like his white avatar Kurtz, was exploiting the natives by plundering fortune, yet remaining on the margins of native culture. Jones seems to recognize that 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 locates himself in a long tradition of carrying the sins and specters of corruption into the Caribbean island.

Joel Pfister (1999) detects how Jones "internalized the very language of [white] domination" through his use of some words in the opening scene.[17] As he is awakened by the blowing of Smithers' raspberry, Jones' bullying reply summons up the sort of response which could be heard from an antebellum southern plantation overseer: "I'll

8 O'Neill, 1034-1035.

9 O'Neill, 1035.

10 Simon During, *Cultural Studies: A Critical Introduction* (NY: Routledge, 2005), 164.

11 O'Neill, 1042.

12 O'Neill, 1036.

13 O'Neill, 1042.

14 O'Neill, 1036.

15 O'Neill, 1035.

16 Jones spreads a rumor (which can also be seen as wartime propaganda) that he can only be killed by a silver bullet and not by a regular lead one, when the native leader Lem's gunshot misses him. In his six-shooter, he thus has five lead bullets and one silver bullet. Ignorant islanders believe this and that is how he becomes the emperor during the uprising. During his panic run on the night of his death, he shoots the apparitions he encounters and the sixth or the silver bullet is spent to shoot the croc god.

17 Joel Pfister, *Staging Depth: Eugene O'Neill and the Politics of Psychological Discourse* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995, Rpt. 1999), 135.

get de hide frayled off some o' you niggers sho'!"[18] Also, like a true European colonialist, Jones unscrupulously yet plainly declares,"I'se after de coin."[19] This furthermore emphasizes the fact that Jones' attitudes, values and overall lifestyle in the Caribbean Island follow those of the white world.

Importantly, O'Neill here tends to mitigate the faults 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. O'Neill shows that Jones would not have been corrupt had the white civilization's success myth not impacted him:

> *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'slistenin' to de white quality talk, it's dat same fact.*[20]

As Edwin Engel comments in 1953, 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.*[21]

Tellingly, according to a number of critics Brutus Jones' ultimate demise has been foretold with the very name given to him by O'Neill. His first name is associated with the English vocabulary word "brute" which goes hand in glove with the description of his too dazzling scarlet attire and his enormous throne "made of uncut wood." The typical Yankee surname Jones represents the shrewd, sophisticated, white colonizer of this "yet not self-determined" island.[22] Thomas Pawley (1997) considers the first name Brutus to be "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."[23] Pfister contends that southern "slave owners sometimes mocked the abject condition of their slaves by naming them after leaders of the Roman Empire." In addition, hand, Pfister views that the protagonist's second name (Jones) stands for "crooked politicians and businessmen – [of] 'de white quality.'"[24]

Therefore, Brutus Jones simultaneously denotes a still enslaved (under different 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 W.E.B. Du Bois in 1903's *The Souls of Black Folk*. According to Du Bois, this never-ending double-standard of an

18 O'Neill, 1033.

19 O'Neill, 1042.

20 O'Neill, 1035.

21 Edwin Engel, *The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 50.

22 O'Neill, 1031.

23 Thomas D. Pawley, 'Eugene O'Neill and American Race Relations,' *Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 9 (1997), 69.

24 Pfister, 129.

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."[25] Jones in the subsequent six memory scenes of the play is 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 the drum, starting 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,"[26] when Jones' corpse is brought in by the islanders after he is gunned down. On-the-run in his anxiety-ridden and Macbeth-like heat-oppressed unconscious mind, Jones first encounters the "Little Formless Fears," which he regards as the "little animals"[27] which according to Stephen Watt (2007) recall the terrors of Tennyson's King Arthur:"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."[28] He fires at the figures to "fix 'em"[29] and to come back to his own conscious self. In the next two scenes, he likewise fires two more shots in reenactments of his killing of Jeff, a black man, and the white prison guard. These acts of his past further jolt his unconscious mind. Diya Abdo (2007) views Jones as showing his disliking for the "automaton"-like Jeff[30] in the third scene as well as the black prisoners who stand "fixed in motionless attitudes, their eyes on the ground"[31] in the fourth, as these postures and comportment reflect the stereotypical blacks which he, as a white man in a non-white body, hates;[32] hence this argument stands directly in contrast to Gabriele Poole's 1994 observation that here Jones is attempting to alleviate "guilt feelings for the wrongs he committed against specific individuals."[33]

The next three scenes show Jones' atavistic regression[34] into the racial past, haunted by memories and moving from one pocket to another in the forest and in his mind. Scene five presents a Jungian regression into the collective consciousness of his race where his conscious and unconscious selves duel each other for possession, with the former prevailing at the end of the scene. In this slave-auction scene, Jones appears like a typical southern black of the era: "his pants are in tatters, his shoes cut and

25 W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* 1903 (NY: Dover, 1994), 2.

26 O'Neill, 1041.

27 O'Neill, 1045-1046.

28 Stephen M Watt, 'The 'Formless Fear' of O'Neill's Emperor and Tennyson's King,' *The Eugene O'Neill Newsletter* 6.3 (Winter 1982): no pagination, accessed January 10, 2007, http://www.eoneill.com/library/newsletter/vi_3/vi-3f.htm.

29 O'Neill, 1046.

30 O'Neill, 1047.

31 O'Neill, 1051.

32 Diya M Abdo, '*The Emperor Jones*: A Struggle for Individuality,' *The Eugene O'Neill Review* 24.1-2 (Spring/Fall 2000): 36.

33 Gabriele Poole, '"Blarsted Niggers!": *The Emperor Jones* and Modernism's Encounter with Africa,' *The Eugene O'Neill Review* 18.1-2 (1994): 29.

34 See e.g. Edward Murray, *The Cinematic Imagination* (NY: Ungar, 1972), 16.

misshapen, flapping about his feet."[35]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 gathering comprises "well to do planters," an authoritative auctioneer as well as 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."[36] Jones, standing among the slaves, is unconsciously caught up in the auction as merchandise. As the bidding on him starts when planters' scrutinizing eyes detect his physical prowess, Jones becomes "paralyzed with horror" as proceeding reminds him of the experiences of his ancestors. 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.)*[37]

Indeed, such rage in the face of being auctioned off shows again how Jones' conscious and the unconscious selves fight for control; whereas the latter suggests that Jones can never be "free" as a "nigger" since it 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 and drive his own destiny. His conscious soul suggests that Jones, considering himself as equal to a white man for conceiving the white standards and ethics, feels himself to be a completely "free" American on whom the society has bestowed equal opportunity to grab success. Nonetheless, Jones' action in this regard recalls the "New Negro" ways of earning racial equity through outspoken declarations of dignity in a society where equality existed only in rhetoric, not in reality. Showing the plight of the blacks in America which stemmed from the nation's the original sin of slavery three centuries ago, O'Neill here is making the point clear that racial oppression makes a mockery of the nation which to the whole world emerged as a "paradigm of freedom" right after World War I.[38]

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 very much resembles a slave, as his emperor's attire has now become the mere loincloth of the island natives he detested at the play's start: "*His pants have been so torn away that what is left of them is no better than a breech cloth*." Haunted, naked, and barefooted the Emperor Jones knows he now has only the last but most important silver bullet left and realizes "If I shoots dat one I'm a goner sho'."[39] But succumbing to his unconscious self he begins "swaying back and forth" 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

35 O'Neill, 1052.

36 O'Neill, 1053.

37 O'Neill, 1053-1054.

38 David Krasner, *American Drama 1945-2000: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 29.

39 O'Neill, 1055.

out the role of a slave in chains symbolizes his adherence to and bond with his African identity. Hence at the end of the scene, the tom-tom, which is gathering pace in every scene, is heard "with a more insistent, triumphant pulsation."[40] As Engel indicates, "[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."[41]

Here for the first time, Jones' affinity with the conscious soul or American self is found dislodged, as at the end of the scene Jones is left bewildered without attempting to break his unconscious magic spell, finally firing from the revolver that guaranteed his individuality as an American as in previous scenes, an act which eventually brings him back to conscious reality. However, R. Viswanathan (2007) contends that here O'Neill does not include any white characters as he does in the previous two scenes (in 1.4 he shot the white prison guard, and in 1.5 the white planter and auctioneer) 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.[42]

Hence the penultimate scene of Jones' inner struggle between conscious and unconscious selves reaches a climactic point in which Jones remains 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*." The curtain rises as Jones is discovered under a Lady Macbeth-like magic charm of "*a strange deliberation like a sleep walker or one in trance*" on a plain surrounded by a large tree, an altar, and a great river of his ancestors' desolate but 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*," (sic) Jones, in his stretched-out hang-over claims: "I remember – seems like I been heah befo'." [43] In fact, Jones has never been here before but these are his ancestors; it is his African-ness, the unconscious block of his soul which is completing the racial link between him and his African population of the pre-slave-trading era. He is now been taken in by the conjurer or voodoo man witch-doctor, the agent of the pagan crocodile god who, as suggested in the attempt at judging Jones beginning of the scene, is demanding sacrifice because of Jones' continuous denial of the African root or racial past. The witch-doctor, symbolizing the core pagan anthropocentric spirits, lures Jones to dance to the sacrificial altar, right after which a huge head of a croc god appears the tom-tom beats go wild as the pagan spirit begins to overtake Jones. The battle-royal between Jones' conscious and unconscious soul gathers extreme momentum as Jones, "*hypnotized*" 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.)*[44]

40 O'Neill, 1056.

41 Engel, 53.

42 R. Viswanathan, 'The Ship Scene in *The Emperor Jones*,' *The Eugene O'Neill Newsletter* 4.3 (Winter, 1980): no pagination, accessed January 10, 2007, http://www.eoneill.com/library/newsletter/iv_3/iv-3b.htm.

43 O'Neill, 1057.

44 O'Neill, 1058-1059.

The killing of the croc god and driving away the Congo witch-doctor convey some points here, as it implies Jones' putting the last nail into the coffin of his African Congolese past, and thus keeping his only American self intact and alive. This change is finally is encoded when at the end of the scene the tom-tom, which beat "*madly*"[45] some moments ago anticipating Jones' sacrifice to the pagan god, is now heard "*with a somber pulsation, a baffled but revengeful power*"[46] contrary to the "*triumphant pulsation*"[47] in the previous scene when Jones merged himself with the chained slaves. Further, his Christ-like pose at the end of this seventh scene proves that Jones, in denying and discarding the African Congolese god, has made his sacrifice towards the white Christian god and as a result reaffirms his affinity with American-ness, making the tom-tom beat, the proponent of African culture, "*revengeful*." Jones thus withdraws from and refuses to join the African collective. He is bound up and at the same time torn apart by the conflicting African and American values, as he consciously opts 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"[48] as part of the design to kill Jones, to whom the silver bullet is his "baby," and "rabbit's foot."[49] Through his physical and psychical striptease, "[Jones] strips away the layers of veneer of white society."[50] Brutus Jones nullifies his ancestral root or deterministic forces to embrace the American desire-standard, since according to Henry Schwarz (2000) "the goal of success in America is to 'become American,' negating one's particular personal history in the drive to approximate [the] 'typical American.'"[51]

Jones, like Dr. Faustus, has sold his soul for material attainment by disregarding human ethics, and plays all his foul and manipulative tricks as a tyrannical emperor in the pursuit of power and money. In this play the character is a prototype for the idea of amassing wealth illegally by tyrannizing over natives, thereby implementing a theory of colonial capitalism. Jones himself, however, is a taboo subject, a byproduct of the original sin of slavery in the history of an American system driven by the profit motive. Jones follows the colonial capitalism he has internalized to accumulate money on this island of natives, as it is by no means possible for him to accomplish this in the United States itself.

Under the white mask the black man Jones sets white souls on fire when he asks for Faustus-like forgiveness for redoing and reenacting the unforgivable crime of colonial oppression under the false premise of doing missionary work in the forms of bringing monotheistic Christianity to a godforsaken land submerged in paganism and educating the heathen:

> *And down heahwhar 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!*[52]

45 O'Neill, 1058.

46 O'Neill. 1059.

47 O'Neill, 1056.

48 O'Neill, 1061.

49 O'Neill, 1037.

50 Virginia Floyd, *The Plays of Eugene O'Neill: A New Assessment* (NY: Ungar, Rpt. 1987), 209.

51 Henry Schwarz, 'Mission Impossible: Introducing Postcolonial Studies in the US Academy,' *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, Eds. Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 9.

52 O'Neill, 1052.

Michael Hinden (2007) claims 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 opens up a discourse of his nation's cardinal crime. Hence Jones as an individual becomes secondary to the primary show of the stained history 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 Edenicharmony 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.*[53]

O'Neill was hit hard by black intellectuals of the period like Claude McKay, James Weldon Johnson, Von Wiegand, and later by John Cooley and others for projecting Jones and Lem as marketable literary stereotypes.[54] In an alternative view, however, O'Neill's program seems to have corresponded with that of another Black Renaissance philosopher, Alain Locke, whose call for "propaganda" to "deal with oppression [of blacks] indirectly"[55] can be exemplified through O'Neill's invocation of tragic black history under the guilt-ridden white mask of Brutus Jones. Moreover, Jones is considered "no stereotype of Negro character" Nathan Huggins' 1971 landmark history *Harlem Renaissance*, in which *The Emperor Jones* is only "incidentally a Negro play" since when the "artifices that have propped [Jones]up have been removed [he becomes] any man,"[56] destroyed by greed. Writing four years earlier, 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.' He tries those on the children of nature and nature gets him."[57] Jones is in this way similar to the Shakespearean tragic hero Othello and hence the question of blackness or whiteness of skin is deemed unimportant in investigating the reasons for their demises, as according to Normand Berlin, "both [Othello and Jones] ultimately are destroyed from within."[58]

In *Performing O'Neill: Conversations with Actors and Directors*, James Earl Jones, who himself has played both Brutus Jones as well as Hickey in O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*, and whose father once played Joe Mott in a production of the latter drama, has commented on how the portrait and persona of the Emperor Jones is carved out to create an all-American déjà vu:

> *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*

53 Michael Hinden, '*The Emperor Jones*: O'Neill, Nietzsche and the American Past,' *The Eugene O'Neill Newsletter* 3.3 (Jan. 1980): no pagination, accessed January 10, 2007, http://www.eoneill.com/library/newsletter/iii_3/iii-3b.htm.

54 Pfister, 135.

55 Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 202.

56 Huggins, 296-297.

57 Thomas H Dickinson, *Playwrights of the New American Theatre* (NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1967), 105-106.

58 Normand Berlin, *O'Neill's Shakespeare* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, Rpt. 2000), 37-41.

documentary on American capitalist sentiment […]. But Brutus Jones was the ultimate capitalist, the ultimate exploiter. And that's not black, that's American.[59]

This goes hand in glove with Edwin Engel's view: "It is in Jones himself that we are to observe sharp criticism of the civilization of the modern white man."[60] Brutus Jones is black only in physical appearance and in speech; he is white in as much as he has become a colonial master inflicting pain on his subjects to profit off of their resources, also betraying his own racial identity in the process. He is the American success story frolicked in blackface.

Bibliography

Abdo, Diya M. "*The Emperor Jones*: A Struggle for Individuality." *The Eugene O'Neill Review* 24.1-2 (Spring/Fall 2000): 28-42.

Berlin, Normand. *O'Neill's Shakespeare*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, Rpt. 2000.

Dickinson, Thomas H. *Playwrights of the New American Theatre*. NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1967.

Diggins, John Patrick. *Eugene O'Neill's America: Desire under Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. 1903. NY: Dover, 1994.

During, Simon. *Cultural Studies: A Critical Introduction*. NY: Routledge, 2005.

Engel, Edwin. *The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953.

Floyd, Virginia. *The Plays of Eugene O'Neill: A New Assessment*. NY: Ungar, Rpt. 1987.

Hinden, Michael. "*The Emperor Jones*: O'Neill, Nietzsche and the American Past." *The Eugene O'Neill Newsletter* 3.3 (January 1980): no pagination. Accessed January 10, 2007. http://www.eoneill.com/library/newsletter/iii_3/iii-3b.htm.

Huggins, Nathan Irvin. *Harlem Renaissance*. London: Oxford University Press. 1971.

Krasner, David. *American Drama 1945-2000: An Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006.

Murray, Edward. *The Cinematic Imagination*. NY: Ungar, 1972.

O'Neill, Eugene. "The Emperor Jones." In *Eugene O'Neill: Complete Plays, 1913-1920*. NY: Library of America, 1988.

Pawley, Thomas D. "Eugene O'Neill and American Race Relations." *Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 9.1 (1997): 66-87.

Pfister, Joel. *Staging Depth: Eugene O'Neill and the Politics of Psychological Discourse.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995, rpt. 1999.

Poole, Gabriele. "'Blarsted Niggers!': *The Emperor Jones* and Modernism's Encounter with Africa." *The Eugene O'Neill Review* 18.1-2 (1994): 21-37.

Shafer, Yvonne. *Performing O'Neill: Conversations with Actors and Directors*. NY: St. Martin's Press, 2000.

Schwarz, Henry. "Mission Impossible: Introducing Postcolonial Studies in the US Academy." In *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, Edited by Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000.

59 Yvonne Shafer, *Performing O'Neill: Conversations with Actors and Directors* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 83-84.

60 Engel, 49.

Viswanathan, R. "The Ship Scene in *The Emperor Jones*." *The Eugene O'Neill Newsletter* 4.3 (Winter, 1980): no pagination. Accessed January 10, 2007. http://www.eoneill.com/library/newsletter/iv_3/iv-3b.htm.

Watt, Stephen M. "The 'Formless Fear' of O'Neill's Emperor and Tennyson's King." *The Eugene O'Neill Newsletter* 6.3 (1982): no pagination. Accessed January 10, 2007. http://www.eoneill.com/library/newsletter/vi_3/vi-3f.htm.

Shahed Ahmed is an associate professor in the Department of English at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Bangladesh. He received his Bachelor of Arts (Honors) in English in 1997, and Master of Arts in English in the following year from National University, Bangladesh. He earned his Ph.D. in English from Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh in 2010. His Ph.D. dissertation on Eugene O'Neill has recently been published by the official website of the playwright (http://www.eoneill.com/library/dissertations.htm). He has published numerous articles in reputed scholarly journals, edited a play by English Restoration playwright William Wycherley, a book on applied English linguistics, and has made presentations at several international conferences. His research interests chiefly concern Drama, ELT, and Culture and Media Studies.