

Twentieth Century American Drama
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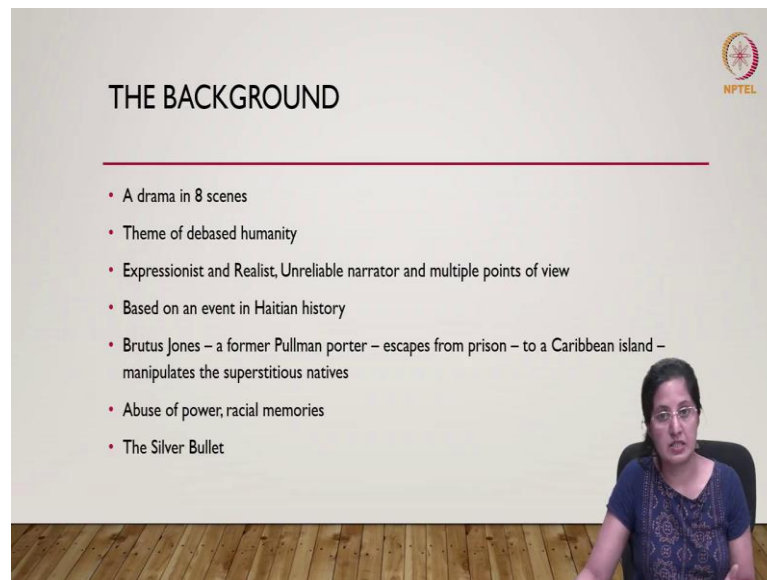
Lecture - 02
Eugene O'Neil's the Emperor Jones Part – 1

Hello, and welcome to today's session. Today we are beginning to discuss the play *The Emperor Jones* by Eugene O'Neil. So, we had begun talking about how the transformation from melodramatic techniques towards more realist and expressionist techniques had begun to happen from the turn of the century, from the later 19th century onwards, and began to be more pronounced in the early 20th century.

So, Eugene O'Neil began to experiment with the techniques of expressionism and realism from the early decades of the 20th century, and *The Emperor Jones* is one of his best-known plays. This play was initially not performed on Broadway first, but very soon, it became a huge hit; it was received very well and very soon, it began to be performed massively on Broadway itself.

So, the kind of success that the drama, the textual production and the performance received was immense, given that it was dealing with a range of themes that were very pertinent, very politically relevant to American society and the nation itself. At the same time, those were not the kind of themes which were usually dealt with in the context of artistic representations.

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The slide is titled "THE BACKGROUND" and features a list of bullet points. In the top right corner, there is a logo for NPTEL. In the bottom right corner, there is a video inset showing a woman with glasses and a blue top speaking.

- A drama in 8 scenes
- Theme of debased humanity
- Expressionist and Realist, Unreliable narrator and multiple points of view
- Based on an event in Haitian history
- Brutus Jones – a former Pullman porter – escapes from prison – to a Caribbean island – manipulates the superstitious natives
- Abuse of power, racial memories
- The Silver Bullet

The Emperor Jones is a drama in 8 scenes; it primarily deals with the theme of debased humanity. There are multiple characters: there is a black character who is the protagonist and, there is also a white character who is like a companion, but with mixed emotions. Through these different characters, the lead characters and mob characters, we get an insight into the psychological journey of individuals depending on their situations. Depending on the kind of locations that they inhabit, it could be racial, it could be gendered, or it could be based on their domicile, or nationality.

The questions of identity, belonging and, more importantly, the question of collective and individual memory come together to create a plot structure, to create a sort of a new theme that becomes very important in this play.

The play is expressionist and realist, and we have an unreliable narrator here, with multiple points of view as well. So, this is the kind of drama that requires a close reading from the reader. It also takes us through the varied trajectories of human emotions, about the way an individual thinks and the political, socio-cultural context that would come into play when a person is making a decision or when a person is experiencing a variety of emotions which are also contesting in nature.

The play is loosely based on an event in Haitian history, and we will perhaps talk a bit more about it when we get into some of the finer details of the play. The protagonist is Brutus Jones, he is referred to as Emperor Jones here, and he is a

former Pullman Porter who had escaped from a prison in America, and when the play begins, he is on a Caribbean island. He comes across as a character who is immensely powerful, and he also manipulates the superstitious beliefs of the native inhabitants of the island in order to rule over them.

Brutus Jones is the emperor of that island; he establishes a power structure in multiple ways, largely by manipulating the native inhabitants and also by compromising certain ideals of humanity that he has in himself. So, this is about an abuse of power and the hierarchical power structures established within that province or location.

It is also about racial memories; it is also about how the collective memory of race coupled with individual experiences that Brutus Jones had in America triggers emotions in him, and how that influences the decisions he makes, and how that memory, along with his desire for power work together. It is almost like a fatal combination as you would begin to see shortly in the play.

The play assumes a very dark tone. There is something sinister about the setting, the descriptions, the immediate background and the memories of the characters. Hence, it is a fascinating journey through the different phases of human emotions and human history.

The title originally meant for the play was 'The Silver Bullet.' The silver bullet is a metaphorical presence in the play, as Brutus Jones convinces the superstitious natives that he could only be killed with a silver bullet.

Since the silver bullet is a constant metaphorical presence in this play from scene one onwards, we find that it also operates as a pseudo safety net for Jones, at least for some time. It is also symbolic of the kind of tropes that could be used to convince people to believe in certain things against their rationality; such beliefs also become a foil and a fence within which a character like Brutus Jones continues to operate.

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• SCENE SIX
• SCENE SEVEN
• SCENE EIGHT

The Emperor Jones

CHARACTERS

BRUTUS JONES *Emperor*

HENRY SMITHERS *A Cockney Trader*



We will now start looking at the play, and we will pay attention to some of the aspects which get foregrounded in scene one itself.

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BRUTUS JONES *Emperor*

HENRY SMITHERS *A Cockney Trader*

AN OLD NATIVE WOMAN

LEM *A Native Chief*

SOLDIERS. *Adherents of Lem*




The Little Formless Fears; Jeff; The Negro convicts;

The Prison Guard; The Planters

; *The Auctioneer;*

The Slaves; The Congo Witch-Doctor; The Crocodile God.


The action of the play takes place
on an island in the West Indies



So, we are being introduced to the characters here: Brutus Jones, the titular character; Henry Smithers, a white man who is a Cockney Trader stuck on the Caribbean island; Lem, who is a Native Chief and a set of soldiers who are also adherents of Lem. An Old Native Woman enters the scene and is primarily responsible for letting us know what is happening at the beginning of the play. The

Little Formless Fears are also personified as characters. The little formless fears, Jeff, the Negro Convicts, the Prison Guard, and the Planters are all minor characters, but they are also very important in bringing out some of the emotions and giving an outline to the kind of person that Brutus Jones is.


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The Prison Guard; The Planters
; *The Auctioneer*;
The Slaves; The Congo Witch-Doctor; The Crocodile God.
The action of the play takes place
on an island in the West Indies
as yet not self-determined by white Marines.
The form of native government
is, for the time being, an empire.


The Emperor Jones

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The Auctioneer, the Slaves and the Congo WitchDoctor are also minor significant characters.

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The Emperor Jones

SCENE ONE

SCENE—The audience chamber in the palace of the Emperor—a spacious, high-ceilinged room with bare, white-washed walls. The floor is of white tiles. In the rear, to the left of center, a wide archway giving out on a portico with white pillars. The palace is evidently situated on high ground for beyond the portico nothing can be seen but a vista of distant hills, their summits crowned with thick groves of palm trees. In the right wall, center, a smaller arched doorway leading to the living quarters of the palace. The room is bare of furniture with the exception of one huge chair made of uncut wood which stands at center, its back to rear. This is very apparently the Emperor's throne. It is painted a dazzling, eye-smiting scarlet. There is a brilliant orange cushion on the seat and another smaller one is placed on the floor to serve as a footstool. Strips of matting, dyed scarlet, lead from the foot of the throne to the two entrances.

It is late afternoon but the sunlight still blazes yellowly beyond the portico and there is an oppressive burden of exhausting heat in the air



When we read through the play, we will realize that Eugene O Neil has given very extensive descriptions for the readers to be able to imagine the setting, and in his descriptions, we find that there are a lot of subjective elements that come into play too. This is why the unreliability in this drama works at multiple levels; unreliability also work through the voice that the narrator lends to this play. The readers are led to think in certain ways and to fit within specific frameworks when trying to understand the setting or analyze the characters.

Scene one opens with the description, “The audience chamber in the palace of the Emperor – a spacious, high – ceiled room with bare, white – washed walls. The floor is of white tiles. In the rear, to the left of the center, a wide archway giving out on a portico with white pillars. The palace is evidently situated on high ground for beyond the portico nothing can be seen, but a vista of distant hills...”.

”The room is bare of furniture with the exception of one huge chair made of uncut wood which stands at center, its back to rear”. This is the Emperor’s throne, which belongs to Brutus Jones. “It is painted a dazzling, eye – smiting scarlet. There is a brilliant orange cushion on the seat another smaller one is placed on the floor to serve as a footstool. Strips of matting, dyed scarlet, lead from the foot of the throne to the two entrances”.

So, there is a very strong and solid presence of whiteness when the play begins; there are whitewashed walls, white pillars and white tiles. Thus, there is a certain whiteness that stares at our faces from the beginning of the play.

At some level, this play is also ironically situated in a white world, which is not temporarily white, but the systems which are being replicated, the kind of judiciary which is being challenged And the moral systems replicated as well as challenged here, all belong to the white world.

We will keep coming back to this point, the kind of recollections that Brutus Jones has, when we are going through the play. It is important to note that the play operates mostly in flashbacks; sometimes, we get an insight into the past through the articulations of the characters and sometimes from their vague memories.

Reconstruction happens at every stage of this play, with the reader trying to reconstruct the story of Brutus Jones's past. His past is mapped onto a white world because he lives in America for the longest time until he is convicted as a criminal and escapes from jail; we will encounter these details very soon in the play.

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As the curtain rises, a native Negro woman sneaks in cautiously from the entrance on the right. She is very old, dressed in cheap calico, bare-footed, a red bandana handkerchief covering all but a few stray wisps of white hair. A bundle bound in colored cloth is carried over her shoulder on the end of a stick. She hesitates beside the doorway, peering back as if in extreme dread of being discovered. Then she begins to glide noiselessly, a step at a time, toward the doorway in the rear. At this moment,

SMITHERS appears beneath the portico.

SMITHERS is a tall, stoop-shouldered man about forty. His bald head, perched on a long neck with an enormous Adam's apple, looks like an egg. The tropics have tanned his naturally pasty face with its small, sharp features to a sickly yellow, and native rum has painted his pointed nose to a startling red. His little, washy-blue eyes are redrimmed and dart about him like a ferret's. His expression is one of unscrupulous meanness, cowardly and dangerous. He is dressed in a worn Tiding suit of dirty white drill, puttees, spurs, and wears a white cork helmet. A cartridge belt with an automatic revolver is around his waist. He carries a riding whip in his hand. He sees the woman and stops to watch her suspiciously. Then, making up his mind, he steps quickly on tiptoe into the room. The woman, looking back over her shoulder continually, does not see him until it is too late. When she does SMITHERS springs forward and grabs her firmly by the shoulder. She struggles to get away, fiercely but silently.



When the curtain rises, a native Negro woman sneaks in cautiously from the entrance on the right. Here is a description of the woman who is very old, barefooted, and we find that there is something very vulnerable, weak, and submissive about her; Smithers too makes his entrance at the same time.

Look at the way Smithers is described here, “He is a tall, stoop-shouldered man about forty. His bald head perched on a long neck with an enormous Adam's apple, looks like an egg. The tropics have tanned his naturally pasty face with its small, sharp features to a sickly yellow”.

We get to know that he is a white man and “native rum has painted his pointed nose to a startling red. His little washy blue eyes are redrimmed and dart about him like a ferrets. His expression is one of unscrupulous meanness”. So, very little is left to our imagination at this point.

The readers are directly told of the unscrupulous meanness of Smithers, which unveils itself in many ways from the beginning; he is cowardly and dangerous as

well. The fatal combination attributed to Smithers indicates that he is unscrupulously mean, cowardly and dangerous, which is why he does not have a problem in doing reckless things throughout this play.

“He is dressed in a worn Tiding suit of dirty white drill, puttees, splers and wears a white cork helmet”. So, we see the whiteness coming back in different forms, settings, behaviour, recollections and certain symbols. “A cartridge belt with an automatic revolver is around his waist. He carries a riding whip in his hand. He sees the woman and stops to watch her suspiciously. Then, making up his mind, he steps quickly on tiptoe into the room. The woman, looking back over her shoulder continually, does not see him until it is too late” which also means that the woman perhaps had been trying not to show her face to him.

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does SMITHERS springs forward and grabs her firmly by the shoulder. She struggles to get away, fiercely but silently.

SMITHERS [Tightening his grasp-roughly]: Easy! None o' that, me birdie. You can't wriggle out now. I got me 'oaks on yer.



WOMAN [Seeing the uselessness of struggling, gives way to frantic terror, and sinks to the ground, embracing his knees supplicatingly.]: No tell him! No tell him, Mister!

SMITHERS [With great curiosity]: Tell 'im? [Then scornfully.]: Oh, you mean 'is bloamin' Majesty. What's the game, any 'ow? What are you sneakin' away for? Been stealin' a bit, I s'pose. [He taps her bundle with his riding whip significantly.]

WOMAN [Shaking her head vehemently]: No, me no steal.

SMITHERS: Bloody liar! But tell me what's up. There's somethin' funny goin' on. I smelled it in the air first thing I got up this mornin'. You blacks are up to some devilment. This palace of 'is is like a bleedin' tomb. Where's all the 'ands? [The woman keeps sullenly silent. SMITHERS raises his whip threateningly.] Ow, yer

SCENE ONE



“When she does Smithers springs forward and grabs her firmly by the shoulder. She struggles to get away fiercely, but silently”. The conversation which begins between Smithers and the old woman reveals the hierarchical relationship between them - the woman is trying to, perhaps, sneak away, but Smithers has caught hold of her.


Take a look at the kind of language he begins to use on the woman. “What are you sneakin’ away for? Been stealin’ a bit, I s’pose”. This is a relationship based on mistrust. We know that throughout this play, this is another thing which comes across as very interesting, as even the characters who are always dealing with each

other in very close quarters share a mutual distrust. What dominates more than anything else is a feeling of distrust between most of the characters and between Emperor Jones and Smithers too.

When the woman says that she is not there to steal, Smithers begins to swear at her. “Bloody liar! But tell me what’s up. There’s somethin’ funny goin’ on. I smelled it in the air first thing I got up this mornin’. You blacks are up to some devilment. This palace of ‘is like a bleedin’ tomb.” The racial and moral dichotomy, the tension, and the relationship of mistrust are very clear here.

So, here is a white man caught in a world where he does not automatically belong, but he certainly has a superior stance, as we can see in the play. He begins to swear at the woman by referring to her as ‘you blacks’, which also gives us a sense of a larger group, forcing him to address them as ‘you blacks’. From the character description and the way the conversations proceed, we get to know that Smithers is a white man too.

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The Emperor Jones

won't, won't yer? I'll show yer what's what.


WOMAN [*Coveringly*]: I tell, Mister. You no hit. They go—all go. [*She makes a sweeping gesture toward the hills in the distance.*]

SMITHERS: Run away—to the 'ills? **WOMAN**: Yes, Mister. Him Emperor—Great Father. [*She touches her forehead to the floor with a quick, mechanical jerk.*] Him sleep after eat. Then they go—all go. Me old woman. Me left only. Now me go too.

SMITHERS [*His astonishment giving way to an immense, mean satisfaction*]: Ow! So that's the ticket! Well, I know bloody well wot's in the air—when they runs orf to the 'ills. The tom-tom 'll be thumping out there bloomin' soon. [*With extreme vindictiveness.*] And I'm bloody glad of it, for one! Serve 'im right! Put tin' on airs, the stinkin' nigger! 'Is Majesty! Gawd blimey! I only 'opes I'm there when they takes 'im out to shoot 'im. [*Suddenly.*] 'E's still 'ere all right, ain't 'e?

WOMAN: Yes. Him sleep.

SMITHERS: 'E's bound to find out soon as 'e wakes up. 'E's cunnin' enough to know when 'is time's come. [*He*



The woman, in very broken sentences, is beginning to tell Smithers that they all have gone away - ”They go — all go (*She make a sweeping gesture towards the hills in the distance*)”. So, even without the woman saying much, Smithers figures it out and asks her whether they ran away to the hills.

“Yes, mister. Him emperor — Great Father. (*She touches the forehead to the floor with a quick mechanical jerk.*) Him sleep after eat. Then they go - all go. Me old woman. Me left only. Now me go too”. We get a sense of the opening scene here. Emperor Jones had gone to sleep after eating, while all the others fled to the hills, and the old woman left behind will very soon disappear as well.

“Smithers: (*His astonishment giving way to an immense mean satisfaction*). So, the kind of emotions that goes through Smithers’ mind is very interesting. He comes across as a very close ally to Jones, but at the same time, he also gets a lot of satisfaction when things begin to go wrong for Jones.

Because he is also placed in this in-between world, unable to choose a side as he does not fit in anywhere, Smithers knows that at some level, that he has a moral hierarchical racial superiority. But, at the same time, the settings within which he finds himself do not allow him to articulate or execute perform any of those forms of superiority.

“So, that is the ticket, well. I know bloody well what is in the air - when they run off to the hills”. We can notice that this is something that Smithers had been expecting. There is a sense of surprise, but he also derives a mean satisfaction from the news, which is why we were told at the beginning that he is cowardly and mean.

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SMITHERS: 'E's bound to find out soon as 'e wakes up. 'E's cunnin' enough to know when 'is time's come. [*He goes to the doorway on right and whistles shrilly with his fingers in his mouth. The old woman springs to her feet and runs out of the doorway, rear. SMITHERS goes after her, reaching for his revolver.*] Stop or I'll shoot! [*Then stopping — indifferently.*] Pop orf then, if yer like, yer black cow. [*He stands in the doorway, looking after her.*]

[*JONES enters from the right. 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 keen, cunning intelligence. In manner he is shrewd, suspicious, evasive. He wears a light blue uniform coat, sprayed with brass buttons, heavy gold chevrons on his shoulders, gold braid on the collar, cuffs, etc. His pants are bright red with a light blue stripe down the side. Patent-leather laced boots with brass spurs, and a bell with a long-barreled, pearl-handled revolver in a holster complete his make up. Yet there is something not altogether ridiculous about his grandeur. He has a way of carrying it off.*]

JONES [*N of seeing anyone—greatly irritated and blinking sleepily—shouts*]: Who dare whistle dat way in my palace? Who dare wake up de Emperor? I'll git de hide fravled off some o' you niggers sho!

SMITHERS [*Showing himself—in a manner half-afraid and half-defiant*]: It was me whistled to yer. [*As JONES frowns angrily.*] I got news for yer.

JONES [*During an interval of some minutes, which fall to be seen in his costume (dark blue uniform). Oh, the way*]



The old woman reveals that the Emperor is asleep, to which Smithers says that Brutus Jones will anyway find out what had transpired as soon as he wakes up and also says, “he is also cunning enough to know when his times come“. When the scene starts, something is happening, something for which we do not know how well prepared they are, but from the way the dialogue is progressing, we get to know that this is an inevitable thing that was bound to happen. Thus, the surprise element is very limited here.

Smithers threatens to shoot the old woman, and she disappears from the scene; Jones enters next. Look at the how Jones is described and contrast that with the description given to Smithers.

“Jones enters from the right. 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”. The typical negroid features that the author here is talking about is very interesting: *“an underlying strength of will, a hardy, self-reliant confidence in himself that inspires respect“.*

The tone and vocabulary used to describe Jones is very different from that used for Smithers. “His eyes are alive with a keen cunning intelligence. In manner he is shrewd, suspicious, evasive. He wears a light blue uniform coat, sprayed with brass buttons, heavy gold chevrons on his shoulders...”

Everything about him, his demeanour, the way he is powerfully dressed conveys something about the position and the power he is wielding.

“His pants are bright red with a light blue stripe down the side. Patent leather laced boots with brass spurs, and a belt with a long-barreled, pearlhandled revolver in a holster complete his makeup. Yet there is something not all together ridiculous about his grandeur he has a way of carrying it off”.


This part is very important for here is a black man who had been invested with a great degree of power in that setting - he dresses accordingly and is strongly built like a typical negroid. We will come back later to talk about the internalized racial representations here that are very biased.

Nevertheless, we find that Smithers and Brutus Jones are in complete contrast to each other, from the way they are described at the outset in scene one. We find that Jones is the protagonist here, in terms of his emotion, the way he presents himself, and the kind of power he wields within this particular system, all of which we are yet to be introduced.

Jones is also irritated, partly because there was no one around when he woke up and also because he heard Smithers whistling when the old woman was running away, and says, “Who dare wake up de Emperor?” Look at the way he is referring to himself; he is very conscious about the kind of power he possesses and makes sure that he utilizes that power.

Power and the way it gets performed in these particular settings are very important in this drama as we will continue to witness power getting performed in various ways. Here, power is connected to gender, race, and it is also specific to the context or the immediate settings inhabited by the characters, and we find that it changes radically depending on the socio-cultural setting.

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JONES [*N of seeing anyone—greatly irritated and blinking sleepily—shouts*]: Who dare whistle dat way in my palace? Who dare wake up de Emperor? I'll git de hide fravel'd off some o' you niggers sho!

SMITHERS [*Showing himself— in a manner half- afraid and half- defiant*]: It was me whistled to yer. [*As JONES frowns angrily*] I got news for yer .

JONES [*Putting on his suavest manner, which fails to cover up his contempt /or the white man*]: Oh, it's you, Mister Smithers. [*He sits down on his throne with easy dignity*] What news you got to tell me ?


SMITHERS [*Coming close to enjoy his discomfiture*]: Don't yer notice nothin' funny today?

JONES [*Coldly*]: Funny? No. I ain't perceived nothin' of de kind !

SMITHERS: Then yer ain't so foxy as I thought yer was. Where's all your court? [*Sarcastically*] The Generals and the Cabinet Ministers and all?

JONES [*Imperturbably*]: Where dey mostly runs de minute I closes my eyes—drinkin' rum and talkin' big down in de town. [*Sarcastically*] How come you don't know dat? Ain't you sousin' with 'em most every day?

SCENE ONE



The descriptions within the bracket tell us that sometimes, stage direction, the kind of expressions and the emotions that the characters are supposed to feel give us a lot of clues. They give us clues about the nuances, the kind of certainties that exist between the characters.

Smithers: "*Showing himself—in a manner half –afraid and half –defiant*".

This in-betweenness is very important as we will find that Smithers continues to come across as a character who has mixed emotions about Jones since his feelings always keep oscillating between extreme forms of emotions. He absolutely resents Jones, but he also adores him, and both are very genuine emotions. He is not a well-wisher, but at the same time, he is an ally to Jones. "Jones: (*Putting on his suavest manner, which fails to cover up his contempt for the white man*)". We find that the relationship between Jones and Smithers is very problematic. Though they are companions, trying to rule over the natives together, and take advantage of them, make money, and manipulate them, they also have their own system, their own order within that world which is very away physically and systemically away from America. The kind of emotions that they have for each other and the relationship they share is problematic.

When they are interacting for the first time, Smithers is half-afraid and half-defiant towards Jones, and Jones is trying to cover up the contempt that he feels for the white man. So, we find the racial and hierarchical order, getting reversed here, and this tension remains at the core of this play.

"(*He sits down on his throne with easy dignity*)" Though his actions cannot be entirely justified, Jones is a confident man. He is sure of himself and in this setting, he is at his finest self, as far as his personality is concerned. We see that Smithers is about to disclose the news that all his subjects, as the woman informed, had run away to the hills.

Smithers is building the conversation because he clearly senses that Jones is intelligent enough to know that something is not right, and Smithers is trying to build this up in a very dramatic way while enjoying the discomfort it is causing to Jones. Then, Smithers comes straight to the point and asks very sarcastically, "Don't yer notice nothin' funny today?" to which Jones replies, "No. I ain't perceived nothin' of de kind!"

The emotions and tone are very important here, as Smithers asks very sarcastically, "Where's all your court? The Generals and the Cabinet ministers and all?" Clearly, this is a system that they have devised, although it is not an approved governmental

system; It is not a kingdom in the usual sense of the term since he is a self-declared emperor, and this is a hierarchy, and they had devised specific positions to suit themselves.

The sarcasm is not misplaced here, and Jones continues to maintain his composure. “Where dey mostly runs de minute I closes my eyes drinkin’ rum and talkin’ big down in de town. How come you don’t know dat? Here is an insinuation; Jones is implying that Smithers would also usually be party to them when they are drinking and partying.

Jones is aware that the moment he goes to take a nap, the native inhabitants do things their own way, and this knowledge is interesting at the beginning because, on the one hand, he is trying to be a tyrannical ruler. He has imposed his rule over them and is taking advantage of their superstitious beliefs, but on the other hand, he is aware of the silly, petty things that they do behind his back, and he allows them to do it.

Jones knows that Smithers is also sort of party to it, but he chooses to not make an issue out of it, and this knowledge that the audience has now and this relationship that he has always maintained with his subjects is very interesting because he also knew where to draw the line. He also knew that this was something temporary and that it could come to an end at any point, so the human in him is very careful not to trigger or provoke them beyond a point because he is just there to get things done in a way that suits him best.

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The Emperor Jones

SMITHERS [*Sung but pretending indifference—with a wink*]: That's part of the day's work. I gottter—ain't I—in my business?

JONES [*Contemptuously*]: Yo' business!

SMITHERS [*Imprudently enraged*]: Gawd blimey, you was glad enough for me ter take yer in on it when you landed here first. You didn' 'ave no 'igh and mighty airs in them days!

JONES [*His hand going to his revolver like a flash—menacingly*]: Talk polite, white man! Talk polite, you heah me! I'm boss beah now, is you fergettin'? [*The Cockney seems about to challenge this last statement with the facts but something in the other's eyes holds and cows him.*]

SMITHERS [*In a cowardly whine*]: No 'arm meant, old top.

JONES [*Condescendingly*]: I accepts yo' apology. [*Lets his hand fall from his revolver.*] No use'n you rakin' up ole times. What I was den is one thing. What I is now's another. You didn't let me in on yo' crooked work out o'



So, Smithers is offended at this, but he pretends to get over it, and they have this conversation that takes us back to a few years, giving us a glimpse of the kind of people they are, the kind of men they are and the kind of past that they share. There is a history here which almost forces them to tolerate each other. They need each other because they all have come with some baggage, and we get a glimpse of it.

In a very technical sense, this is the kind of flashback and individual memory, which will keep recurring in this drama to give a sense of what happened to the characters before they reached where they are now in the play. The opening of this play is in a very appropriate setting, where the power the palace wields is about to give away, and Jones is at the threshold, and we get to know of what happened before that through these series of recollections and flashbacks and snippets of conversation.

We will get to know about what lies ahead as and when the action progresses. The play happens in the in-between time known as the luminal, twilight time.