


**Twentieth Century American Drama**  
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**Lecture - 05**  
**Eugene O'Neil's *The Emperor Jones* - Part 4**

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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

as yet not self-determined by white Marines.

The form of native government

is, for the time being, an empire.



Hello, and welcome to today's session. So, today we are continuing to look at this play *The Emperor Jones* written by Eugene O'Neil, and so far, we have covered the first seven scenes. So, let us go back and take a look at the list of characters listed at the outset of the play. This will also give us a sense of the kind of real characters and the creations from Jones's past.

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CHARACTERS

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





At the outset, we were introduced to a set of characters, most of whom we have already met: Brutus Jones, the protagonist, Henry Smithers, who is a cockney trader and an ally to Jones. Smithers also who harbours a lot of resentment for Jones, but that does not essentially mean that he is on the side of the natives. The old native woman introduces us to this scene and it is through her that we get to hear at the beginning that all the subjects of Emperor Jones had fled to the hills and that a revolution is brewing.

Lem is the native chief whom we will meet eventually in the final scene, which we will be taking a look at today. The native soldiers are with Lem, and through them the revolution is getting executed.

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The Prison Guard; The Planters  
: *The Auctioneer*;  
The Slaves; The Congo Witch-Doctor; The Crocodile God.  
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The Emperor Jones



The formless fears that Jones encounters from the second scene onwards, gives us a sense of the impending disaster, the doom that Jones is about to face emotionally and psychologically as well. As the formless fears begin to take shape and along with the all these characters, they begin to come out of the forest .

We get to know that Jeff is the fellow black man who cheated Jones in a card game and thus, he ended up killing him. We see images of Negro convicts being auctioned. We are not very sure whether Jones was part of the slave trade or whether he was sold as a slave or this is something that Jones had witnessed or experienced.

It is most likely historical memory or racial memory which is coming back to haunt him. We are also introduced to the apparition of the white prison guard who he killed because the prison guard had kept hitting him for no reason.

It is right after that incident that he kills the white prison guard and breaks out of prison to escapes to this island. We are also introduced to the planters, who are part of the slave trade.

Scene eight shows the Negro convicts and the slaves navigated in a ship. Images such as this are embedded in Jones' past and they keep floating in and out from his collective memory.

It is important to note that the moment Jones encounters Jeff, the prison guard, the planters, and the auctioneer, he kills all of them. These characters are generated by his psyche, and Jones has various reasons for killing them.

There is a Congo witch-doctor who shows up in between and there is a brief soliloquy about religion where Jones makes reference to the Baptist church. But he is also left with very little choice when he encounters the Congo witch-doctor. The crocodile god summoned by the witch-doctor was killed by the last bullet left in Jones' revolver.

The description given at the beginning of the play: "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 as for the time being an empire". This is the setting that was already established in the last seven scenes.

Today we will move on to the final and the eighth scene which will bring a finality to Jones' life and also, a sense of closure. But at the same time, when we go through scene eight, we also realize that there are a number of open ended questions left.

We come to know that Jones' reign as an emperor and his life has come to an end, but there are a lot of other questions which the play leaves unanswered, which we will also very briefly engage with as we go through scene eight.

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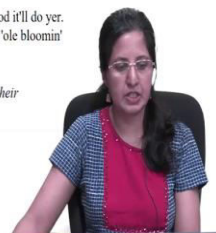
WITCH-DOCTOR springs behind the sacred tree and disappears. JONES lies with his face to the ground, his arms outstretched, whimpering with fear as the throb of the tom-tom fills the silence about him with a somber pulsation, a baffled but revengeful power.]

SCENE EIGHT

SCENE—Dawn. Same as Scene Two, the dividing line of forest and plain. The nearest tree trunks are dimly revealed but the forest behind them is still a mass of glooming shadows. The tom-tom seems on the very spot, so loud and continuously vibrating are its beats. LEM enters from the left, followed by a small squad of his soldiers, and by the Cockney trader, SMITHERS. LEM is a heavy-set, ape-faced old savage of the extreme African type, dressed only in a loin cloth. A revolver and cartridge belt are about his waist. His soldiers are in different degrees of rag-concealed nakedness. All wear broad palm-leaf hats. Each one carries a rifle. SMITHERS is the same as in Scene One. One of the soldiers, evidently a tracker, is peering about keenly on the ground. He grunts and points to the spot where JONES entered the forest. LEM and SMITHERS come to look.

SMITHERS [After a glance, turns away in disgust]: That's where 'e went in right enough. Much good it'll do yer. 'E's miles orf by this an' safe to the Coast, damn 'is 'ide! I tole yer yer'd lose 'im, didn't I?—wastin' the 'ole bloomin' night beatin' yer bloody drum and castin' yer silly spells! Gawd blimey, wot a pack!

LEM [Gutturally]: We coteh him. You see. [He makes a motion to his soldiers who squat down on their haunches in a semicircle.]



So, now we begin to look at scene eight. During the night when Jones was passing through the forest, he experienced hallucinations and witnessed apparitions coming out of the different clearings from the forest.

When scene eight begins, it is described as, “Same as Scene Two, the dividing line of forest and plain. The nearest tree trunks are dimly revealed, but the forest behind them is still a mass of glooming shadows”. As mentioned in the previous session, the stage descriptions and the description of the terrain also emerges as a character here because the forest itself is a character from which various characters begin to emerge.

Jones continues to hear the sound of the drum. “The tom-tom seems on the very spot, so loud and continuously vibrating are its beat. Lem enters from the left, followed by a small squad of his soldiers, and by the Cockney trader, Smithers. Lem is a heavy Lem is a heavy-set, ape-faced old savage of the extreme African type, dressed only in a loin cloth”.

Pay attention to the stereotypical imagery that has been recreated here. “A revolver and cartridge belt are about his waist. His soldiers are in different degrees of rag-concealed nakedness. All wear broad palm-leaf hats. Each one carries a rifle”. We do find something very interesting here. They are dressed in primitive ways, but the weapons that they carry are very modern. So, it tells us about the kind of violent tools that were accessible to them.

The native inhabitants are cut off from civilization. They are cut off from all other forms of access to modernity. Lem, the chief, carries a revolver and a cartridge belt, and all the soldiers are dressed in rags. They do not look like soldiers, and they are not power dressed like Jones at the beginning of the play.

They wear palm-leaf hats, but they all carry a rifle. This is very significant because violence is a very important theme in this play, and the access that these natives have despite their primitive life to the same kind of gadgets used for violence by American soldiers and their emperor is notable.

“Smithers is the same as in Scene One.” This description is very significant. In the beginning, we find that the uniform that Jones wears is important as a very elaborate description of what each character is wearing is given at the outset. It is not merely a

description; it also signifies the kind of power, position, hierarchical order in which each of the characters is placed.

When Smithers is described as being the same as he was in Scene one, it is in stark contrast to what Brutus Jones had become. Jones was evidently more powerful, in terms of appearance and the power he wielded, and Smithers, who never became an emperor, still retains his power, which should be considered noteworthy.

Smithers seems to have retained the power he wielded over the last ten years. After Jones arrived, things perhaps became easier for Smithers, and now, he could rule the empire, unlike how Brutus Jones did. Things have turned out to be better in the two years since Jones had arrived. Though Smithers had to work as a shadow under him, he stands to gain from the deal.

“Smithers is the same as in Scene One. One of the soldiers, evidently a tracker, is peering about keenly on the ground”. The native soldiers who are there with Lem are well prepared, despite their appearance. “He grunts and points in the spot where Jones entered the forest. Lem and Smithers come to look”. In this scene, when Lem, Smithers, and the soldiers are present, we do not see Jones. Last week we met Jones only at the end of scene seven, where it was described that “the tom-tom was filling the silence about him with a sombre pulsation a baffled, but revengeful power”.

After Jones kills the crocodile god summoned by the witch-doctor, we find the witch-doctor disappearing from the scene. The death of the crocodile god symbolizes impending doom. Jones by the end of scene seven “lies with his face to the ground, his arms outstretched, whimpering with fear.”

So, that is the last image we have of Jones. When scene eight begins, the audience is not privy to what has happened to Jones. The tracker points to the spot where Jones entered the forest, and they are about have a look.

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mgm ueam yet otobay urum anu castm yet shuy spcus: Cawu umney, wot a pack:

LEM [*Gutturally*]: We cotch him. You sec. [*He makes a motion to his soldiers who squat down on their haunches in a semicircle.*]

SMITHERS [*Exasperatedly*]: Well, ain't yet goin' in an' 'unt 'im in the woods? What the 'ell's the good of waitin'?

LEM [*Imperturbably—squatting down himself*]: We cotch him.

SMITHERS [*Turning away from him contemptuously*]: Aw! Garn! 'E's a better man than the lot o' you put together. I 'ates the sight o' 'im but I'll say that for 'im. [*A sound of snapping twigs comes from the forest. The soldiers jump to their feet, cocking their rifles alertly. LEM remains sitting with an imperturbable expression, but listening intently. The sound from the woods is repeated. LEM makes a quick signal with his hand. His followers creep quickly but noiselessly into the forest, scattering so that each enters at a different spot.*]

SCENE EIGHT

17



“Smithers [After a glance, turns away in disgust]: That’s where ’e went in right enough. Much good it’ll do yer”. Smithers reminds Lem and his soldiers of his previous insinuation that they would lose him. Smithers resents Jones, but he also believes in Jones’ power and craftiness, and so, he also thinks that Jones is cunning enough to get away from the natives.

Smithers uses derogatory words to talk about the silly spells that Lem and the others seem to have cast on Jones. But Lem, in his guttural voice, continues to repeat the refrain: “We cotch him. [He makes a motion to the soldiers who squat down on their haunches in a semi-circle.] Smithers is losing his patience, but he is confident that they will not be able to find Jones, let alone kill him. Lem hardly speaks anything but the guttural utterance assuring that they will catch Jones.

So, Smithers turns away from him contemptuously. Now that he is with the natives, helping them hunt down Jones, it does not mean he is an ally to them. He looks down upon them as he knows that the natives cannot harm him, and the superiority that he has and the hierarchical order is clear here. Though Lem does not seem to mind, the power structure is quite clear over here.

“‘E’s a better man than the lot o’ you put together.” As mentioned in the beginning, Smithers does resent Jones, but he also has a lot of genuine admiration for Jones - for

what he has done and for the kind of person that he has become. Smithers also knows that he will never be able to surpass what Jones has become.

Even for Jones, it is a short-lived period of success. Though it looks very surreal now, when looking back, we find those two years of success sandwiched between the dark, violent, and traumatic reality that he is currently experiencing.


In that sense, it is possible to say that only the first and final scenes are entirely realistic. A lot of expressionist techniques are used, and numerous apparitions and hallucinating experiences have also happened in between the scenes. Scenes two to seven are bookended by scene one and scene eight, which are the only realist scenes in the play.

In the beginning, when we meet Jones for the first time, he was an emperor ruling over the natives though he had committed two murders and broken out of jail from the United States. to escape to one of the islands in the West Indies. We do not meet Jones in the final scene so, let us quickly see what happens to Jones.

“Lem makes a quick signal with his hand. His followers creep quickly but noiselessly into the forest, scattering so that each enters at a different spot”. The forest is the turf of the native inhabitants.

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The Emperor Jones



SMITHERS [*In the silence that follows- in a contemptuous whisper*]: You ain't thinkin' that would be 'im, I 'ope?

LEM [*Calmly*]: We cotch him. SMITHERS: Blarsted fat 'eads! [*Then after a second's thought- wonderingly*]. Still an' all, it might 'appen. If 'e lost 'is bloody way in these stinkin' woods 'e'd likely turn in a circle without 'is knowin' it. They all does.


LEM [*Peremptorily*]: Sssh! [*The reports of several rifles sound from the forest, followed a second later by savage, exultant yells. The beating of the tom-tom abruptly ceases. LEM looks up at the white man with a grin of satisfaction.*] We cotch him. Him dead.

SMITHERS [*With a snarl*]: 'Ow d'yer know it's 'im an' 'ow d'yer know 'e's dead?

LEM: My mens dey got 'um silver bullets. Dey kill him shore.

SMITHERS [*Astonished*]: They got silver bullets?

LEM: Lead bullet no kill him. He got 'um strong charm. I cook um money, make um silver bullet, make um strong charm, too.



“In the silence that follows-in a contemptuous whisper.” That seems to be Smithers’ default attitude towards the natives and it does not change, even at the end of the play.



“You ain’t thinkin’ that would be ’im, I ’ope?” And the only response Lem continues to give is, “we cotch him” So, he says that, “still an’ all, it might happen. If ’e lost ’is bloody way in these stinkin’ woods ’e’d likely to turn in a circle without ’is knowin’ it. They all does”.

Jones may not come back as an emperor, but Smithers does not believe that the natives will ever be able to catch him. Lem hushes him. “The reports of several rifles sound from the forest followed by a second later by savage, exultant yells.” The natives seem to have got to Jones.

The beating of the tom-tom abruptly ceases And the war crime the call for revolution, and the ceremony which began at the beginning of the play has almost come to an end. “[Lem looks up at the white man with a grin of satisfaction.] We cotch him. Him dead.”

It is a triumphant moment for Lem, and Smithers was not prepared for it, though it does not change anything drastically for him. “Smithers [With a snarl]: ‘Ow d’yer know it’s ’im an’ ’ow d’yer know ’e’s dead? Lem: My mens dey got ’um silver bullets. Dey kill him shore.”

At the beginning of the play, the silver bullets provided Jones a sense of security. His sense of pride rested largely on the myth that he was protected by silver bullets. Somehow, Jones had successfully convinced the natives that he could be killed only with a silver bullet, and they too had believed him blindly.

We find that Jones’ sense of hubris also came from the confidence that he could convince them and that the natives may never try to attack him, because they were convinced that he could be killed only with a silver bullet.

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strong charm, too.

**SMITHERS** [*Light breaking upon him*]: So that's wot you was up to all night, wot? You was scared to put after 'im till you'd moulded silver bullets, eh?

**LEM** [*Simply stating a fact*]: Yes. Him got strong charm. Lead no good.



**SMITHERS** [*Slapping his thigh and guffawing*]: Haw-haw! If yer don't beat all 'ell! [*Then recovering himself—scornfully*.] I'll bet yer it ain't 'im they shot at all, yer bleedin' looney!

**LEM** [*Calmly*]: Dey come bring him now.

[The soldiers come out of the forest, carrying

**JONES'** *limp body. There is a little reddish-purple hole under his left breast. He is dead. They carry him to LEM, who examines his body with great satisfaction. SMITHERS leans over his shoulder—in a tone of frightened awe.* Well, they did for yer right enough, Jonsey, me lad! Dead as a 'erring! [*Mockingly.*] Where's yer 'igh an' mighty airs now, yer bloomin' Majesty? [*Then with a grin.*] Silver bullets! Gawd blimey, but yer died in the 'eighth o' style, any'ow! [*LEM makes a motion to the soldiers to carry the body out left. SMITHERS speaks to him sneeringly.*]

**SMITHERS:** And I s'pose you think it's yer blet.din' charms and yer silly beatin' the drum that made 'im run in a



This is not something that Smithers was prepared for. “Smithers: They got silver bullets? Lem: Lead bullet no kill him. He got ‘um strong charm.” So, the natives did believe that Jones had a strong charm. The luck which was protecting him could be broken only with the use of silver bullets.

“Lem: I cook um money, make um silver bullet, make um strong charm, too.” This shows that they use indigenous methods to melt the silver coins and make silver bullets out of it.

“Smithers [*Light breaking upon him*]: So that’s wot you was up to all night, wot? You was scared to put after ‘im till you’d moulded silver bullets, eh?” Now, it is beginning to make sense. All through the night, they were trying to melt the silver coins that they had, and they were moulding it into silver bullets.

“Lem [*simply stating a fact*]: Yes. Him got strong charm. Lead no good.” He continues to believe that it was only the silver bullets that got to Jones. Smithers finds that here his superiority has not been contested or questioned at all.

“Slapping his thigh and guffawing” - Lem makes a raw, rustic gesture that signifies and reiterates his power in some strange ways. He says, “haw-haw! If yer don’t beat all ‘ell! I’ll bet yer it ain’t ‘im they shot at all, you bleedin’ looney!”. Smithers will not be convinced until he sees Jones for sure, and so, they bring his body.

“The soldiers come out of the forest, carrying Jones’s limp body. There is a little reddish-purple hole under his left breast. He is dead. They carry him to Lem, who examines his body with great satisfaction. Smithers leans over his shoulder-in a tone of frightened awe.”

“Well, they did for yer right enough, Jonsey, me lad! Dead as a ‘erring! Where’s yer ‘igh an’ mighty airs now, yer bloomin’ Majesty?” It is not as if there is anyone lamenting Jones’s death, despite the kind of stature that he had at the beginning, which is very tragic. . It also shows us that they were able to get to Jones only after he is stripped of his ‘mighty airs’ and the external things which were holding him together.

If you remember, there was a scene where Jones hallucinates of losing the shovel. He always needed such external things to protect him. Ironically, what gets to him is the same myth that he had perpetuated about him - that could be killed only with silver bullets. We find that his hubris becomes his fatal flaw and the myth he created becomes the cause for his own death as well.

Lem is entirely justified in feeling a great satisfaction when they were getting rid of the tyrannical emperor who ruled over them, only to meet his own interests, and to serve Smithers in the process.

As for Smithers, Jones was just another black man working for him in some perverse, indirect ways. So, even after he sees Jones’ dead body, there is not a moment of remorse. Smithers mocks Jones’ death because it happened just the way he had predicted in scene one, that he would die in style with his silver bullet. “Lem makes a motion to the soldiers to carry the body out left. Smithers speaks to him sneeringly.”

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**SMITHERS** *[Slapping his thigh and guffawing]:* Haw-haw! If yer don't beat all 'ell! *[Then recovering himself—scornfully.]* I'll bet yer it ain't 'im they shot at all, yer bleedin' looney!

**LEM** *[Calmly]:* Dey come bring him now.

*[The soldiers come out of the forest, carrying*

*JONES' limp body. There is a little reddish-purple hole under his left breast. He is dead. They carry him to LEM, who examines his body with great satisfaction. SMITHERS leans over his shoulder—in a tone of frightened awe.]* Well, they did for yer right enough, Jonsey, me lad! Dead as a 'erring! *[Mockingly.]* 'Where's yer 'igh an' mighty airs now, yer bloomin' 'Majesty? *[Then with a grin.]* Silver bullets! Gawd blimey, but yer died in the 'eighth o' style, any'ow! *[LEM makes a motion to the soldiers to carry the body out left. SMITHERS speaks to him sneeringly.]*

**SMITHERS:** And I s'pose you think it's yer blet.din' charms and yer silly beatin' the drum that made 'im run in a circle when 'e'd lost 'imself, don't yer? *[But LEM makes no reply, does not seem to hear the question, walks out left after his men. SMITHERS looks after him with contemptuous scorn.]* Stupid as 'ogs, thl' lot of them! Blarsted niggers!

*[Curtain Falls.]*




It is important to note that Lem does not bother to respond much. He keeps his calm and does not retaliate or say anything more than what is required. The final scene of the play ends with Smithers he is lashing out at all of them in a very contemptuous and derogatory manner.

“And I s'pose you think it's yer bleedin' charms and yer silly beatin' the drum made 'im run in a circle when 'e'd lost 'imself, don't yer? *[But Lem makes no reply, does not seem to hear the question, walks out left after his men. Smithers looks after him with contemptuous scorn.]* Stupid as 'ogs, thl' lot of them! Blarsted niggers!”

The attitude that Jones and Smithers had towards the natives does not change even at the end. Jones has disappeared from the scene entirely, and that tells us that nothing much has changed in terms of the racial structure, the hierarchy, and the institutions in place.

So, if I may take you back to the beginning of this play to where the description says, “the action of the play takes place on an island in the West Indies as not yet self determined by white Marines.” But the system which was replicated in the island has been successfully running in the United States of America already. This is why we find that Brutus Jones was able to successfully replicate that system and run a perfectly successful show for about two years.

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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

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



What caused Jones' downfall was his hubris, his complete disregard for the natives and the fact that he had also elevated himself to the stature of a God. The myth and the infallibility that he had created about himself works to his disadvantage.

In scene seven, when the crocodile god summoned by the Congo witch-doctor was killed by Jones, we realize that it signifies the impending doom of emperor Jones himself because he had made himself up to be a godlike figure.

The crocodile that gets killed is also a godlike figure. So, a number of symbols are foregrounded throughout this play. We will take a very quick look at it as a quick recap.

As the play begins, we are presented with several white symbols, and the concept of whiteness becomes contrasted with blackness that Jones personifies and the forest and the figures that surround Jones at the end of the play.

We find that the contrast becomes metaphorical as the use of the colour white keeps recurring in various ways. The white stone that Jones was unable to find indicates his desire to look for legitimized systems that were internalized during his stay in America.

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exhausting heat in the air



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.



He himself also says that there were things that he had picked up from the white passengers while he was working as a pullman porter in America.

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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 [Not 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 fraveled 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 cousin' with 'em most evore day?



We also find that the sound of the drum from the first scene sets the tone for the play; it warns us about an impending danger. The sound of the drums was the only thing that was retained from scene one till scene eight. The other characters disappear from scene two onwards, and there are characters who emerge from the formless fears in scene two and the witch-doctor and the crocodile god in scene 7.

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The Emperor Jones

SMITHERS *[Stung but pretending indifference—with a wink]:* That's part of the day's work. I gotter—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 heah 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 coves 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' no kind feelin's dat time. I done de dirty work fo' you—and most o' de brain work, too, fo' dat matter—and I was



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SMITHERS: Well, blimey, I give yer a start, didn't I—when no one else would. I wasn't afraid to 'ire yer like the rest was—'count of the story about your breakin' jail back in the States.

JONES: No, you didn't have no s'cuse to look down on me fo' dat. You been in jail you'self more n once.

SMITHERS *[Furio—usly]:* It's a lie! *[Then trying to pass it off by an attempt at scorn.]* Garn! Who told yer that fairy tale?

JONES: Dey's some tings I ain't got to be tole. I kin see 'em in folk's eyes. *[Then after a pause—meditatively.]* Yes, you sho' give me a start. And it didn't take long from dat time to git dese fool, woods' niggers right where I wanted dem. *[With pride.]* From stowaway to Emperor in two years! Dat's goin' some!

SMITHERS *[With curiosity]:* And I bet you got yer pile o' money 'id safe some place.

JONES *[With satisfaction]:* I sho' has! And it's in a foreign bank where no pusson don't ever git it out but me no matter what come. You didn't s'pose I was holdin' down dis Emperor job for de glory in it, did you? Sho! De fuss and glory part of it, dat's only to tum de heads o' de low—flung, bush niggers dat's here. Dey wants de big circus show for deir money. I gives it to 'em an' I gits de money. *[With a grin.]* De long green, dat's me every time! *[Then rebukingly.]* But you ain't got no kick agin me, Smithers. I'se paid you back all you done for me many times. Ain't I perfected you 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! *[He chuckles.]*



We find that the characters are summoned in a psychological sense by Jones himself.

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JONES: Dey's some tings I ain't got to be tole. I kin see 'em in folk's eyes. *[Then after a pause—meditatively.]* Yes, you sho' give me a start. And it didn't take long from dat time to git dese fool, woods' niggers right where I wanted dem. *[With pride.]* From stowaway to Emperor in two years! Dat's goin' some!

SMITHERS *[With curiosity]*: And I bet you got yer pile o' money 'id safe some place.

JONES *[With satisfaction]*: I sho' has! And it's in a foreign bank where no pusson don't ever git it out but me no matter what come. You didn't s'pose I was holdin' down dis Emperor job for de glory in it, did you? Sho'? De fuss and glory part of it, dat's only to turn de heads o' de low-flung, bush niggers dat's here. Dey wants de big circus show for deir money. I gives it to 'em an' I gits de money. *[With a grin.]* De long green, dat's me every time! *[Then rebukingly.]* But you ain't got no kick agin me, Smithers. I se paid you back all you done for me many times. Ain't I pertected you 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! *[He chuckles.]*

SMITHERS *[Grimacing]*: But, meanin' no 'arm, you been grabbin' right and left yourself, ain't yer? Look at the taxes you've put on 'em! Blimey! You've squeezed 'em dry!

JONES *[Chuckling]*: No, dey ain't all dry yet. I se still heah, ain't I?

SMITHERS *[Smiling at his secret thought]*: They're dry right now, you'll find out. *[Changing the subject abruptly.]* And as for me breakin' laws, you've broke 'em all yerself just as fast as yer made 'em.



The sound of the drum connects scene one to scene eight, and as mentioned earlier, these are also the only two scenes that are entirely set in a realist manner.

(Refer Slide Time: 26:27)

#### The Emperor Jones

For de 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.

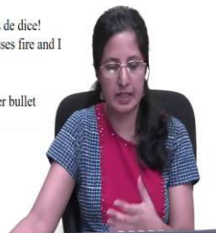
SMITHERS *[Unable to repress the genuine admiration of the small fry for the large]*: Yes, yer turned the bleedin' trick, all right. Blimey, I never seen a bloke 'as 'ad de bloomin' luck you 'as.

JONES *[Severely]*: Luck? What you mean luck?

SMITHERS: I Supssee you'll say as that swank about de silver bullet ain't luck—and that was what 'first got the fool blacks on yer side the time of the revolution, wasn't it?

JONES *[With a laugh]*: Oh, dat silver bullet! Sho' 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?



We also find that the clothes and material accessories that Jones possessed begin to deteriorate.



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**JONES** [*Judicially*]: Oh, I see good for six months yit 'fore dey gits sick o' my game. Den, when I sees trouble comin', I makes my getaway.

**SMITHERS**: Ho! You got it all planned, ain't yer?

**JONES**: I ain't no fool. I knows dis Emperor's time is sho't. Dat why I make hay when de sun shine. Was you thinkin' I see 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 see got all de money in sight, I resigns on de spot and beats it quick.

**SMITHERS**: Where to?

**JONES**: None o' yo' business.

**SMITHERS**: N ot back to the bloody States, I'll lay my oath.

**JONES** [*Suspiciously*]: Why don't I? [*Then with an easy laugh*] You mean 'count of dat story 'bout me breakin' from jail back dere? Dat's all talk.

**SMITHERS** [*Skeptically*]: Ho, yes!



We can see that he is losing his accessories one after the other. His clothes are in, complete tatters and he also loses his shoes which symbolize him being stripped of all external authority and the powers he had.

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**JONES** [*In the same tone—slightly boastful*]: Maybe I goes to jail dere for gettin' in an argument wid razors ovah a crap game. Maybe I gits twenty years when dat colored man die. Maybe I gits in 'nother argument wid de prison guard was overseer ovah us when we're wukin' de roads. Maybe he hits me wid a whip and I splits his head wid a

SCENE ONE

6



#### The Emperor Jones

shovel and runs away and files de chain off my leg and gits away safe. Maybe I does all dat. An' maybe I don't. It's a story I tells you so's you knows I see de kind of man dat if you evah repeats one word of it, I ends yo' stealin' on dis yearth mighty damn quick!

**SMITHERS** [*Terrified*]: Think I'd peach on yer? Not me! Ain't I always been yer friend?

**JONES** [*Suddenly relaxing*]: Sho' you has—and you better be.



Even in Jones' dreams, we find conflicting images and notions which keep visiting him in terms of religion. He hopes that the Baptist Church and Christianity will save him. Even though he does not want to be associated with the native religion, we find out that he is.

Jones does not have much of a choice when the witch-doctor comes, and he thinks that he is also a part of the sacrifice, which is why, in his desperation, he kills the crocodile god. So, these images are extremely metaphorical; they also signify the larger dilemmas that Jones has been experiencing as a black man.

There is a sense of denial in Jones in the first scene as he does not accept the things that he had done in the past. He does not accept the reality that a revolution is growing outside, that the growing sound of the drum could perhaps signal his doom.

He is in total denial. But during the phase of hallucination, we find that he may come to terms with the reality that he is facing.

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**SMITHERS** [*warningly*]: Maybe it's gettin' time for you to resign—with that bloomin' silver bullet, wot? [*He finishes with a mocking grin.*]

**JONES** [*Puzzled*]: What's dat you say? Talk plain.

**SMITHERS**: Ain't noticed any of the guards or servants about the place today, I 'aven't.

**JONES** [*Carelessly*]: Dey're all out in de garden sleepin' under de trees. When I sleeps, dey sneaks a sleep, too, and I pretends I never suspicions it. All I got to do is to ring de bell and dey come flyin', makin' a bluff dey was wukin' all de time.

**SMITHERS** [*In the same mocking tone*]: Ring the bell now an' you'll bloody well see what I means.

**JONES** [*Startled to alertness, but preserving the same careless tone*]: Sho' I rings. [*He reaches below the throne and pulls out a big, common dinner bell which is painted the same vivid scarlet as the throne. He rings this vigorously—then stops to listen. Then he goes to both doors, rings again, and looks out.*]

**SMITHERS** [*Watching him with italicious satisfaction, after a pause—mockingly*]: The bloody ship is sinkin' an' the bleedin' rats 'as slung their 'ooks.

**JONES** [*In a sudden fit of anger flings the bell clattering into a corner*]: Low-flung, woods' niggers! [*Then catching Smithers' eye on him, he controls himself and suddenly bursts into a low chuckling laugh.*] Reckon I



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overlays my hand dis once! A man can't take de pot on a bob-tailed flush all de time. Was I sayin' I'd sit in six months mo'? Wen, I se changed my mind den. I cashes in and resigns de job of Emperor right dis minute.

**SMITHERS** *[With real admiration]*: Blimey, but you're a cool bird, and no mistake.

**JONES**: No use'n fussin'. When I knows de game's up I kisses it good-bye widout no long waits. Dey've all run off. to de hills, ain't dey?

**SMITHERS**: Yes—every bleedin' man jack of 'em.

**JONES**: Den de revolution is at de post. And de Emperor better git his feet smokin' up de trail. *[He starts for the door in rear.]*

**SMITHERS**: Goin' out to look for your 'orse? Yer won't find any. They steals the 'orses first thing. Mine was gone when I went for 'im this mornin'. That's wot first give me a suspicion of wot was up.

SCENE ONE

7



Jones comes to terms with not just the reality that he has experienced, but also the historical reality in which he had not directly participated. The slave trade, the presence of the auctioneer, and the spectators, the slave ship are all signifiers of where he finds himself implicated in that history whether he wants to or not.

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#### The Emperor Jones

**JONES** *[Alarmed for a second, scratches his head, then philosophically]*: Well, den I hoofs it. Feet, do yo' duty! *[He pulls out a gold watch and looks at it.]* Three-thuty, Sundown's at six-thuty or dereabouts. *[Puts his watch back with cool confidence.]* I got plenty o' time to make it easy.

**SMITHERS**: Don't be so bloomin' sure of it. They'll be after you 'ot and 'eavy. Ole Lem is at the bottom o' this business an' 'e 'ates you like 'ell. 'E'd rather do for you than eat 'is dinner, 'e would!

**JONES** *[Scornfully]*: Dat fool no-count nigger! Does you think I se scared o' him? I stands him on his thick head niore'n once befo' dis, and I does it again if he come in my way... *[Fiercely]* And dis time I leave him a dead nigger fo' sho'!

**SMITHERS**: You'll 'ave to cut through the big forest—an' these blacks 'ere can sniff and follow a trail in the dark like 'ounds. You'd 'ave to 'ustle to get through that forest in twelve hours even if you knew all the bloomin' trails like a native.

**JONES** *[With indignant scorn]*: Look-a- 'eah, white man! Does you think I se a natural bo'n fool? Give me credit fo' 'avin' some sense, fo' Lawd's sake! Don't you s'pose I se looked ahead and made sho' of all de chances? I se gone out in dat big forest, pretendin' to hunt, so many times dat I knows it high an' low like a book. I could go through on dem trails wid my eyes shut. *[With great contempt]* I Think dese ion'rent hush niggers dat ain't out



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nigger fo' sho'!

**SMITHERS:** You'll 'ave to cut through the big forest—an' these blacks 'ere can sniff and follow a trail in the dark like 'ounds. You'd 'ave to 'ustle to get through that forest in twelve hours even if you knew all the bloomin' trails like a native.

**JONES** *[With indignant scorn]:* Look—a—heah, white man! Does you think I se a natural bo'n fool? Give me credit fo' havin' some sense, fo' Lawd's sake! Don't you s'pose I se looked ahead and made sho' of all de chances? I se gone out in dat big forest, pretendin' to hunt, so many times dat I knows it high an' low like a book. I could go through on dern trails wid my eyes shut. *[With great contempt.]* Think dese ign'rent bush niggers dat ain't got brains enuff to know deir own names even can catch Brutus Jones? Huh, I s'pects not! Not on yo' life! Why, man, de white men went after me wid bloodhounds where I come from an' I jes' laughs at 'em. It's a shame to fool dese black trash around heah, dey're so easy. You watch me, man! I'll make dem look sick, I will. I'll be' cross de plain to de edge of de forest by time dark comes. Once in de woods in de night, dey got a swell chance o' findin' dis baby! Dawn tomorrow I'll be out at de oder side and on de coast whar dat French gunboat is stayin'. She picks me up, take me to Martinique when she go dar, and dere I is safe wid a mighty big bankroll in my jeans. It's easy as rollin' off a log.

**SMITHERS** *[Maliciously]:* But s'posin' somethin' 'appens wrong an' they do nab yer?

**JONES** *[Decisively]:* Dey don't—dat's de answer.



Interestingly, what gets to him is also the very thing from which he is fleeing. So, he flees America because he feels he is being wronged again. Though he committed two murders, he also feels implicated within a system which is unjust to him.

He escapes from that system successfully. But even within the forest when he is trying to run away from the very empire that he had created, when the subjects of the empire are revolting against him, we find that other than the real people from his life who were also murdered, the historical reality from which he has been trying to escape also catches up with him.

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#### SCENE 1WU

SCENE—Nightfall. The end of the plain where the Great Forest begins. The foreground is sandy, level ground dotted by a few stones and clumps of stunted bushes covering close against the earth to escape the buffeting of the trade wind. In the rear the forest is a wall of darkness dividing the world. Only when the eye becomes accustomed to the gloom can the outlines of separate trunks of the nearest trees be made out, enormous pillars of deeper blackness. A somber monotone of wind lost in the leaves moans in the air. Yet this sound serves but to intensify the impression of the forest's relentless immobility, to form a background throwing into relief its brooding, implacable silence.

[JONES enters from the left, walking rapidly. He stops as he nears the edge of the forest, looks around him quickly, peering into the dark as if searching for some familiar landmark. Then, apparently satisfied that he is where he ought to be, he throws himself on the ground, dog-tired.]

Well, heah I is. In de nick o' time, too! Little mo' an' it'd be blacker'n de ace of spades heahabouts. [He pulls a bandana handkerchief from his hip pocket and mops off his perspiring face.] Sho! Gimme air! Ise tuckered out sho' nuff. Dat soft Emperor job ain't no trainin' fo' a long hike ovah dat plain in de brili' sun. [Then with a chuckle.] Cheah up, nigger, de worst is yet to come. [He lifts his head and stares at the forest. His chuckle peters out abruptly. In a tone of awe.] My goodness, look at dem woods, will you? Dat no-count Smithers said dey'd be black an' he sho' called de turn. [Turning away from them quickly and looking down at his feet, he snatches at a chance to change the subject—solicitously.] Feet, you is holdin' up yo' end fine an' I suitinly hopes you ain't blisterin' none. It's time you git a rest. [He takes off his shoes, his eyes studiously avoiding the forest. He feels of



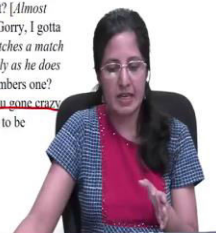
This is where one realizes how certain stereotypes are embedded into this play. So, if we look at how the play is organized, we find that the first scene takes up the bulk of the play and that is where we get to know about the past of Jones.

The first scene helps us connect various events which happen to him and the hallucinations that he experiences from scene two till scene seven. So, scene one acts as a major, realist anchor point to which all the other elements could be connected emotionally, historically, metaphorically, and in a psychological sense as well.

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#### The Emperor Jones

fidgety about? [But he sits down and begins to lace up his shoes in great haste, all the time muttering reassuringly.] You know what? Yo' belly is empty, dat's what's de matter wid you. Come time to eat! Wid nothin' but wind on yo' stomach, o' course you feels jiggedy. Well, we eats right heah an' now soon's I gits dese pesky shoes laced up! [He finishes lacing up his shoes.] Dere! Now le's see. [Gets on his hands and knees and searches the ground around him with his eyes.] White stone, white stone, where is you? [He sees the first white stone and crawls to it—with satisfaction.] Heah you is! I knowed dis was de right place. Box of grub, come to me. [He turns over the stone and feels in under it—in a tone of dismay.] Ain't heah! Gorry, is I in de right place or isn't I? Dere's 'nother stone. Guess dat's it. [He scrambles to the next stone and turns it over.] Ain't heah, neither! Grub, whar is yu? Ain't heah. Gorry, has I got to go hungry into dem woods—at de night? [While he is talking he scrambles from one stone to another, turning them over in frantic haste. Finally, he jumps to his feet excitedly.] Is I lost de place? Must have! But how dat happen when I was fellowin' de trail across de plain in broad daylight? [Almost plaintively.] Ise hungry, I is! I gotta git my feed. Whar's my strength gonna come from if I doesn't? Gorry, I gotta find dat grub high an' low somehow! Why it come dark so quick like dat? Can't see nothin'. [He scratches a match on his trousers and peers about him. The rate of the beat of the far-off tom-tom increases perceptibly as he does so. He mutters in a bewildered voice.] How come all dese white stones come heah when I only remembers one? [Suddenly, with a frightened gasp, he flings the match on the ground and stamps on it.] Nigger, is you gone crazy mad? Is you lightin' matches to show dem whar you is? Fo' Lawd's sake, use yo' haid. Gorry, Ise got to be



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[With his back is turned, etc

*LITTLE FORMLESS FEARS creep out from the deeper blackness of the forest. They are black, shapeless, only their glittering little eyes can be seen. If they have any describable form at all it is that of a grubworm about the size of a creeping child. They move noiselessly, but with deliberate, painful effort, striving to raise themselves on 'nd, failing and sinking prone again. JONES turns about to face the forest. He stares up at the tops of the trees, seeking vainly to discover his whereabouts by their conformation.]*

Can't tell nothin' from dem trees! Gorry, nothin' round heah look like I evah seed it befo'. I 'se done lost de place sho' 'nuff! *[With mournful foreboding.]* It's mighty queer! It's mighty queer! *[With sudden forced defiance—in an angry tone.]* Woods, is you tryin' to put somethin' ovah on me?

*[From the formless creatures on the ground in front of him comes a tiny gale of low mocking laughter like a rustling of leaves. They squirm upward toward him in twisted attitudes. JONES looks down, leaps backward with a yell of terror, yanking out his revolver as he does so—in a quavering voice.]* What's dat? Who's dar? What is you? Git away from me befo' I shoots you up! Yo' don't? ...

[He fires. There is a flash, a loud report, then silence broken only by the far-off

*, quickened throb of the tom-tom. The formless creatures have scurried back into the forest. JONES remains fixed in his position, listening intently. The sound of the shot, the reassuring feel of the revolver in his hand, have somewhat restored his shaken nerve. He addresses himself with renewed confidence.]*



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SCENE TWO

11



### The Emperor Jones

SCENE THREE

*SCENE—Nine o'clock. In the forest. The moon has just risen. Its beams, drifting through the canopy of leaves, make a barely perceptible, suffused, eerie glow. A dense low wall of underbrush and creepers is in the nearer foreground, fencing in a small triangular clearing. Beyond this is the massed blackness of the forest like an encompassing barrier. A path is dimly discerned leading down to the clearing from left, rear, and winding away from it again toward the right. As the scene opens nothing can be distinctly made out. Except for the beating of the tom-tom, which is a trifle louder and quicker than in the previous scene, there is silence, broken every few seconds by a queer, clicking sound. Then gradually the figure of the negro, JEFF, can be discerned crouching on his haunches at the rear of the triangle. He is middle-aged, thin, brown in color, is dressed in a Pullman porter's uniform, cap, etc. He is throwin a pair of dice on the eround before him, pickin them up, shaking them, castin*



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*relief.] Jeff! I see sho' mighty glad to see you! Dey tol' me you done died from dat razor cut I gives you. [Stopping suddenly, bewilderedly.] But how you come to be heah, nigger? [He stares fascinatedly at the other who continues his mechanical play with the dice. JONES' eyes begin to roll wildly. He stutters.] Ain't you gwine look up—can't you speak to me? Is you—is you—a ha'nt? [He jerks out his revolver in a frenzy of terrified rage.] Nigger, I kills you dead once. Has I got to kill you again? You take it den. [He fires. W hen the smoke clears away JEFF has disappeared. JONES stands trembling—then with a certain reassurance.] He's gone, anyway. Ha'nt or no ha'nt, dat shot fix him. [The beat of the far—off tom—tom is perceptibly louder and more rapid. JONES becomes conscious of it—with a start, looking back over his shoulder.] Dey's gittin' near! Dey's comin' fast! And heah I is shootin' shots to let 'em know jes' whar I is. Oh, Gorry, I see got to run. [Forgetting the path he plunges wildly into the underbrush in the rear and disappears in the shadow.]*

SCENE FOUR

SCENE—Eleven o'clock. In the forest. A wide dirt road runs diagonally from right, front, to left, rear. Rising sheer on both sides the forest walls it in. The moon is now up. Under its light the road glimmers ghastly and unreal. It is as if the forest had stood aside momentarily to let the road pass through and accomplish its veiled purpose. This done, the forest will fold in upon itself again and the road will be no more.

JONES stumbles in from the forest on the right. His uniform is ragged and torn. He looks about him with numbed surprise when he sees the road, his eyes blinking in the bright moonlight. He flops down exhaustedly and pants

SCENE THREE



So, given the heavy investment in the psychological trauma and dilemma and the archetypal memories that Jones is facing from scene two till the end of scene seven, it is unsurprising that this play has been read through the lens of Jungian archetypes.

Even psychology comes in handy while reading a play like this. There are a number of characters, and there are many critics who believe that this needs to be read more in an expressionist way and less in a realist way.

But what makes this play stay rooted in the realist tradition is the way it is bookended, how the action is bookended between two strong realist scenes. Because it is scene one and scene eight that help us locate the psychological journey in between.

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SCENE THREE

10



The Emperor Jones

[They stand fixed in motionless attitudes, their eyes on the ground. The

GUARD seems to wait expectantly, his back turned to the attacker. JONES bellows with baffled, terrified rage, tugging frantically at his revolver.]

I kills you, you white debil, if it's de last thing I evah does! Ghost or debil, I kill you again!

[He frees the revolver and fires point blank at the GUARD'S back. Instantly the walls of the forest close in from both sides, the road and the figures of the convict gang are blotted out in an enshrouding darkness. The only sounds are a crashing in the underbrush as JONES leaps away in mad flight and the throbbing of the tom-tom, still far distant, but increased in volume of sound and rapidity of beat.]

SCENE FIVE



In one of the earliest lectures, it was mentioned that only when he begins his journey towards his interior self that he becomes vulnerable to external attack. Now, we can see that when he is descending into his core self, it leaves him extremely vulnerable.

The real characters and the characters who are part of his hallucination appear to serve a purpose, which is sometimes to give an added accent to his personal story or sometimes to corroborate something which is part of his historical past and racial past.

(Refer Slide Time: 31:52)

Oh Lawd, Lawd! Oh Lawd, Lawd! [Suddenly he throws himself on his knees and raises his clasped hands to the sky—in a voice of agonized pleading.] Lawd Jesus, heah my prayer! I'se a po' sinner, a po' sinner! I knows I done wrong, I knows it! When I catches Jeff cheatin' wid loaded dice my anger overcomes me and I kills him dead! Lawd, I done wrong! When dat guard hits me wid de whip, my anger overcomes me, and I kills him dead. Lawd, I done wrong! And down heah whar dese fool bush niggers raised 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! [Then beseeching terrifiedly.] And keep dem away, Lawd! Keep dem away from me! And stop dat drum soundin' in my ears! Dat begin to sound ha'nted, too. [He gets to his feet, evidently slightly reassured by his prayer—with attempted confidence.] De Lawd'll preserve me from dem ha'nts after dis. [Sits down on the stump again.] I ain't skeered o' real men. Let dem come. But dem odders... [He shudders then looks down at his feet, working his toes inside the shoes—with a groan.] Oh, my po' feet! Dem shoes ain't no use no more 'ceptin' to hurt. I'se better off widout dem. [He unlaces them and pulls them off—holds the wrecks of the shoes in his hands and regards them mournfully.] You was real, A—one patin' leather, too. Look at you now. Emperor, you'se gittin' mighty low!

[He sits dejectedly and remains with bowed shoulders, staring down at the shoes in his hand as if reluctant to throw them away. While his attention is thus occupied, a crowd of figures silently enter the clearing from all sides. All

are dressed in Southern costumes of the period of the fifties of the last century. There are middle-aged men who are evidently well-to-do planters. There is one spruce, authoritative individual—the AUCTIONEER. There is a crowd of curious spectators, chiefly young belles and dandies who have come to the slave-market for diversion.





So, a few of the questions that have always been asked about this play is the kind of racial politics that it deals with, the stereotypical images, descriptions of some characters and the qualities attributed to them. All these elements have made this play very interesting in discussions about race as well as memory.

The character of Smithers functions as a foil to Jones. There is no love lost between them, and they don't come across as equal companions or allies. Jones was given an opportunity because Smithers was smart enough in his racially superior way to know how he could use Jones as an insider and how he could use Jones as a pawn to play his game. Because this is not just about individuals gaining power or race, it is also about money and the expansion of the empire in some form or the other.


This is also about imperial politics which is at work even though it is different. So, here we find that the character of Smithers is very significant in conveying to us the underlying politics of this play and the fact that ultimately the system does not change in a radical sense.

From scene one, we get to know that Smithers had spent almost a decade in that land, and he is still alien to the island.

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THE OBVIOUS UNDO OF THE WHITTORE. THE

SCENE FIVE 14




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The Emperor Jones

AUCTIONEER holds up his hand, taking his place at the stump. The group strain forward attentively. He touches JONES on the shoulder peremptorily, motioning for him to stand on the stump—the auction block.

JONES looks up, sees the figures on all sides, looks wildly for some opening to escape, sees none, screams and leaps madly to the top of the stump to get as far away from them as possible. He stands there, covering, paralyzed with horror. The AUCTIONEER begins his silent spiel. He points to JONES, appeals to the planters to see for themselves. Here is a good field hand, sound in wind and limb as they can see. Very strong still in spite of his being middle-aged. Look at that back. Look at those shoulders. Look at the muscles in his arms and his sturdy legs. Capable of any amount of hard labor. Moreover, of a good disposition, intelligent and tractable. Will any gentleman start the bidding? The PLANTERS raise their fingers, make their bids. They are apparently all eager to possess JONES. The bidding is lively, the crowd interested. While this has been going on, JONES has been seized by the course of dejection. He dares to look down and around him. Over his face about twenty times



He is less acquainted with the way the American society works, and Jones himself. Smithers is more of an American due to his whiteness, and it is the blackness of Brutus

Jones that alienates him in America. It gives Jones a temporary presence and success on this island, but the blackness continues to get the better of him.

We understand that it is not really about another white man attacking him or another white system leading to his collapse. If we carefully analyse the events which happened from scene two till scene seven again, we get to know that what he has internalized becomes the reason for his downfall.

From what we hear from Smithers and from what we know about Brutus Jones' past, we know that he is very smart. He is a quick thinker, and he does not need anyone to support him while he is planning. During that night, he becomes conscious, not just about what happened to him during his past in America, but also about his inferiority, vulnerability, and susceptibility to succumb to violence easily because of how he is historically positioned, and that's when it all started to go wrong for Jones.

Think about one or two instances where a character like Brutus Jones is made to interact with the public. Firstly, in his life as a Pullman porter, he overhears the white passengers talk and he does not have a life or an identity that he can assert. Later, he ends up in jail. He breaks out of jail, and eventually, he reaches this island.

Here, the only public performance that he has to put up is to show his power in a very violent way and keep all the others as subservient figures. Even during his hallucinations, we find that the other time is when he is publicly displayed in the slave trade.

That is the historical reality he is dealing with, and very ironically, the play does not allow him to come out of that. When left on his own, he encounters a few realities. Religion does not come to his help, he cannot escape from the historical realities, and eventually, they all make him more vulnerable to an attack from the natives, .

So, one would imagine that he is strong and crafty enough to continue to play with the superstitious beliefs of the natives. But, things have come to such a point that his personal and historical reality begins to catch up with him.

This is why the play has also been appreciated for providing an excellent critique and insight into how the human mind works, especially when it is faced with various determinants such as race, memory, power structures.

There are contesting and traditions in this play. There is a native tradition, a tradition of modernity, and an in-between tradition that Smithers signifies. So, this is a play that could open up in many different directions for other frameworks and discourses. I hope you would be inclined to explore more after having read through the entire play. With this, we come to the end of today's session, and we have successfully come to the end of the play *The Emperor Jones*, which is also the first play that we read as part of this course.

I thank you for your attention. I encourage you to read more about how *The Emperor Jones* has been situated in a canonical sense, the various ways in which it has been read and performed, and the retellings of this play.

So, with this we wrap up today's session. And I look forward to meeting you in the next session.