

The Ghost of the Unconscious Past: A Comparative Study of O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* and Dante's *Inferno*

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Abstract

This study sets out to examine the relationship between Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* and Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* from three different viewpoints including socio-political, theological and psychological. The main focus of this study is to scrutinize the nature of O'Neill's combination and inclusion of the themes and ideologies in Dante's work into his own play and give them a modernist aura.

Key Words: Eugene O'Neill, *The Emperor Jones*, Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, Socio-political, Theological, Psychological

Introduction

Eugene O'Neill is generally known as the founding figure of modern American theatre with his expressionist as well as realist plays. The distinction does not seem to be exact since during his career as a playwright, O'Neill showed inclination towards mixing both schools without being completely adhered to either. This oblique inclination towards mixings and combinations, not only of schools but also of different works of literature, is what this study sets out to investigate. O'Neill's body of works gradually shifted from his early one-act plays to the more sophisticated and finished later works yet his early plays are more concerned with themes and characters, symbolically portraying the mentality of the modern man entrapped in the jungle of industrial, capitalist society with racial and religious images haunting his imagination. However ironically, for O'Neill to be able to picture the imperial man in modern times, he had to resort to the Classical canon of the Western literature.

There is a general consensus among critics on the influence of Classical and especially Renaissance literature on O'Neill's work. The brilliant example of these influences, among many of his plays, is one of his early expressionistic

plays, *The Emperor Jones* (1920). This play is not only indebted to the classical literature of antiquity but also borrows some of its ideological framework and plot elements from the Victorian classics, as well as legends and folk tales of the European culture. Studying the racial, religious and psychological themes and motifs in *The Emperor Jones*, there are subtle similarities between this play and such prominent classics of the Renaissance literature especially, *The Divine Comedy* (1321) by Dante Alighieri. The central unifying concept and the focal point of this paper is the similarities between these two works in addressing colonial and imperialistic ideology as well as theological and psychological themes.

Starting from the Western Classical heritage, before beginning to compare and contrast O'Neill and Dante, it may be useful to scrutinize the notion of O'Neill's indebtedness to classical literature and from there on we could advance the argument, whether he was in any way influenced by such figures as Dante, and if the answer should be affirmative, in what manner and to what extent this influence affected his dramatic works. It might be especially helpful to start this investigation with some biographical information on O'Neill's background and family history. The influence of his Irish Catholic household on the playwright's work is crucial in development of his plays considering the fact that, "the direct engagement with autobiography came late but, from the outset, O'Neill's plays were concerned with secrets and concealment: with dysfunctional families" (Chothia 193). Eugene's father, James O'Neill, was once a prominent Shakespearean actor who kindled Eugene's fascination with the Renaissance and Classical literature (Manheim 211). The first encounter of the young O'Neill with theatre must have been through his father's acting career and his praise of Shakespearean drama and also "access to all three of his sets of the Complete Works as well as the Victorian melodramas" (Chothia 197).

O'Neill himself mentions his prolific reading habit of both Classical and Modern literary works: "I read about everything I could lay hands on: the Greeks, the Elizabethans - practically all the classics - and of course all the moderns.

Ibsen and Strindberg, especially Strindberg" (Clark 25). He is in a way master of combination, revision and retelling of different stories from across ages. O'Neill in many of his plays combines and contrasts different notions and ideologies as well as different works of literature. The range of these amalgamations is as far reaching as "a combination of Greek myth with the then current philosophical-psychological ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud" (Ranald 65). James A. Robinson also mentioning O'Neill's winning of the Nobel Prize, states that:

The international award seemed particularly appropriate for a playwright openly indebted to major European dramatists and thinkers, including Aeschylus, Sophocles, Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. (69)

The combinatory nature of O'Neill's works formed under the influence of such figures as Aeschylus and Shakespeare, however substantial, has been the subject of many reverberating debates and studies. Reiterating these influences results in succumbing to repetition of what other commentators such as Normand Berlin, in his seminal work *O'Neill's Shakespeare*, have fruitfully explored. However Berlin is not oblivious to the possible impressions that Dante could have on O'Neill: "Dante's glorious poem, going through hell and purgatory, is a divine comedy because it ends in paradise. The morality structure, I believe is what made O'Neill think that the affirmative ending was the only one possible" (131). He also considers O'Neill along with such masters as Homer, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Dante and Beckett as the writers who "speak to us directly, despite those added layers of signification and regardless of time and space" (ibid. 7). However, Dante's magnum opus, *The Divine Comedy*, is one of the major works the influence of which, especially on *The Emperor Jones* has not yet been fully emphasized or explained.

The influence of Dante on O'Neill is most evident in his early expressionist plays such as *The Hairy Ape* (1922), *The Fountain* (1923) and

especially *The Emperor Jones* (1920). Robert J. Cardullo examines *The Hairy Ape's* similarity to Dante's *Commedia* from varying aspects; ranging from the novelties in language usage to the contextual similarities in plot and character (Cardullo). Margaret Randal also mentions some similarities between the characters of *The Fountain*, especially Beatriz with her namesake in Dante's *The Divine Comedy* (65).

The influence of Dante on *The Emperor Jones*, however, has received little or no attention. The first common feature, the two works share is that they are both quest stories. The plot of *The Emperor Jones* revolves around the eponymous character's quest for material gain by exploiting the "common bush niggers" (162) and to reach a safe haven after a revolution to overthrow him from power. There is also a spiritual journey which Jones undergoes to attain salvation to no avail. Dante's work likewise, but in a reverting order, concerns itself with the idea of quest: The quest to run away from sin and a material world to a safety which is Paradise. *The Divine Comedy* follows Dante's adventure from the depths of hell to the peaks of paradisaical joy. The quest in both works, no less, is not a purely Homeric one. Both journeys start from a dark forest which has myriads of complex symbolic significance, as they both represent the chaotic state of unsettled mind and soul which is contaminated by the vices and corruption that have obliterated the right path:

In the middle of the journey of our life, I came to myself in a dark wood, for the straight way was lost. (1.1-2)

Brutus Jones is not a young man also. He is described as "full-blooded negro of middle age" (150) who symbolically loses his path in the middle of the jungle. Jones's turning in circles which brings him back to where he started his journey resembles that of *Inferno's* circles of hell which take Dante deep into the innermost layers of hell but ultimately brings him back. However unlike Dante, for Jones this is a journey without redemption and prosperity but rather a journey back to peril and death. This is the kind quest which Christopher Booker

describes as "Going Nowhere", the hallmark of the twentieth century stories. Booker conjectures three possible endings or as he calls them 'pseudo-endings' for them. First, "the story may end in some shocking act of violence, erupting more or less from nowhere" (438) without anything being resolved. Second, "the story may become circular, with its ending referring back in some way to its beginning" (ibid. 439) again with the same outcome and the third mode is "where a storyteller deliberately tries to make a virtue of the fact that nothing has been resolved" (ibid). *The Emperor Jones* combines all three to achieve a certain disclosure and at a same time non-closure. There is a multifaceted nature in the construction of both quests which is discussable in a three-fold argument; socio-political, theological and psychological. These distinctions are not rigidly solid, isolated notion and in some instances collide and overlap one another.

The socio-political implications of *The Emperor Jones* is manifested in Jones's power over the inhabitants of an unnamed and imaginary Caribbean island, by the use of racial and capitalistic power plays which he imitated after his white counterparts. Early in the play he mentions his indebtedness to the white capitalist politics when he scolds Smithers for his inaptitude and incompetency in his mischievous activities:

Dere's little stealin' like you does, and dere's big stealin' like I does. For de little stealin' dey gits you in jail soon or late. 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.
(154)

Brutus Jones is an opportunist who exploits the ignorant natives by the use of superstitious beliefs, the ability to talk their language and pretending to have the same beliefs as theirs. Neither Jones nor O'Neill is original in their setting up a colonial state. United States starting from late 19th century onwards decided to take a more active part in the global power play and therefore joined

the other imperial powers of Europe. T.V. Reed however, traces back this imperial will-to-power even to a much earlier era in US history when "America managed to become an imperial power even while it was still a colony of another imperial power" (107) and discards the ironic belief that America is an "anti-colonial imperial power" (ibid). O'Neill, influenced by the current U.S. foreign policy of his time, pictures and predicts an imperial power which exerts its dominance by "less direct military control and more indirect economic control, control through local puppet leaders" (Durkheim 134). Emperor Jones by the virtue of his skin color and pretention of assimilation into the Caribbean culture of the island turns into what Fanon calls "the native bourgeoisie" which in the absence of a socialist revolution assumes power and "uses its class aggressiveness to corner the positions formerly kept for foreigners" (155).

Although O'Neill "saw power as the expression of the human desire to control and dominate that has more to do with social relations than political institutions," (Diggins 37) he laments the role of these institutions in "not serving to preserve liberty but standing in the way of the birth of true freedom" (ibid. 130). He therefore, introduces his version of the Althusserian *ISA* into his pseudo-political play, which is the primitive superstitious religiosity. Karl Marx believes that any "superstitious belief in authority was to be removed from the statutes" of a communist society (qtd. in Farrell 9). The rumors of Jones's invulnerability to the regular bullets, which he himself fabricates after a failed assassination to keep his superstitious subjects in awe, has deep roots in popular folklore of many European as well as American myths and fairy tales. In Celtic myths, Dobharchú an Irish folkloric beast is described as thus: "the unsleeping black-and-white striped king of the OTTERS was, in Irish legend, a supernatural being who hunted and killed humans. The king was difficult to kill, for he was vulnerable only to silver bullets" (Monaghan 131). Another Eastern European legend which O'Neill might have possibly draw this plot element from, is a Bulgarian folklore about a rebel named Delyo, dating back to 18th century, who fought Ottoman authorities that controlled some regions of the former Bulgaria. He was rumored

to be impervious to regular swords or bullets so his enemies forged silver bullets to kill him (LLC Books). The post-colonial discourse of the colonial subject fighting back and the isomorphic treatment of Jones as a monster, needed to be killed by a silver bullet, without much attention to the possible political implications it might have, raises questions about O'Neill's unbiased choice of this motif. The plot thickens, considering the fact that the play was written two years after the First World War ended, at the time when Ottoman Empire as one of the Central Powers which, had lost many of its colonies in Africa and Middle East due to Powers' defeat, was about to be replaced by a new power player.

Dante also had a profound interest in socio-political discourses of his time. In the introduction to *Inferno* Durling mentions that "Florence had always been deeply implicated in Italian and European politics, especially the great struggle between the emperors and the popes, and its phenomenal expansion during Dante's lifetime made its involvement ever deeper" (5). He also mentions Dante being tried for the "opposition to the pope" (ibid. 9). There is therefore, no wonder that he put several popes and cardinals in hell:

These were clerics, who have no hairy covering to
their heads, and popes and cardinals, in whom
avarice does its worst. (7.46-48)

The characters which he encounters in the *Inferno* are a blend of ancient and contemporary characters just as the ones O'Neill's Jones encounters in the forest. In both works some of these entities are mythological beasts, demigods or demons, some are people who the protagonist knows personally and others by reputation. A famous example, from *Inferno*, for the latter part is the contemporary story of Francesca and Paolo which Wallace Fowlie believes, were known to the poet personally (44).

Dante, like O'Neill, was also interested in the imperialist politics of his national state and supported the domination of Roman Empire over the whole world for the first time in *Convivio* (1307). Charles T. Davis conclusively

discusses that "the longing for the restoration of a universal empire, and its necessity for the attainment of human happiness, are also a central theme of the *Commedia*" (258). Dante also advises in favor of militaristic and repressive means to maintain power over the subjects of the Holy Roman Empire and believes that "men must be saved not only from within but also from without" (ibid. 257). Ironically, in O'Neill's play, Jones might have been saved from within by his final confessions but not from without.

The Islamophobic sentiments especially after the rise of a new power of the Ottoman Empire combined with the religious and political crusades which were still ensuing in Dante's time and therefore a potential threat to the Holy Roman Empire and Christianity resulted in an unjustifiable and hateful portrayal of Prophet Muhammad and his cousin Ali in his *Inferno*:

See how Mohammed is torn open! Ahead of me
Ali goes weeping, his face cloven from chin to
forelock. (28.31-33)

Dante's racial prejudice is much more overt than that of O'Neill's, although the time gap must be considered while comparing the two. O'Neill's work was written in a decade when women in the U.S. finally got their right to vote and black preachers like Marcus Garvey led the nationalist movement for Afro-Americans' social equality and freedom (Zinn 382). It is hardly comparable to the Renaissance era of Dante when some women were burned at stakes as witches, or religious inquisition courts condemned scientists as heretics. The fact however remains that racism in Dante's *Inferno* is too patent a pattern in his work not to notice, so much so that some human rights groups labeled it as being "racist, homophobic, anti-Islamist and anti-Semitic" and asked it to be banned from school curriculums (Flood).

The naming of his protagonist by O'Neill is also curious. The first name of the character is Brutus which has several connotations. It is both reminiscent of the English word '*brute*' meaning a violent and savage person or animal which

dehumanizes Jones and also Marcus Junius Brutus, the infamous Roman politician, remembered by his leading role in the plot concerning the assassination of Julius Caesar. Marcus Brutus has a cameo both in Dante's *Inferno* and Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Dante in his journey through the nine circles of suffering in hell encounters Brutus in the last innermost circle called *Judecca*, after Judas Iscariot, Biblical betrayer of Christ. The ninth circle is described as a place for traitors to their lords and benefactors or in other words traitors to their masters. This circle is the dwelling place of the four vilest creatures in Dante's ideology; the three-headed Lucifer, Brutus, Cassius, and Judas. Brutus Jones both by seizing the power after his white masters and pretending allegiance toward a pagan religion, by the traditional Christian standards, is a betrayer of the cause. He deserves to die not because he is a dictator but because he is a traitor who should abdicate the unrightfully seized throne, repent and be a subject again or die. The Crocodile God which threatens Jones by devouring him has some affinities with the Lucifer in *Inferno* who is repeatedly munching Brutus's head and in both cases the characters convulse with fear and pain but are speechless.

Expressionist theatre is defined as such plays which "dramatized the conflict of the generations, violently rejecting the father figure and expressing a faith in youth in messianic terms" (Chambers 266). *The Emperor Jones* is an expressionist play and considering O'Neill's background, it is only logical for him to aim to shatter the image of the father both theologically and psychologically. In such a symbolic play, O'Neill selects God as the ultimate father figure which has its roots deep in the Christian theology. In Bible there are many passages naming God as the ultimate father both for Jesus Christ, his son, and others such as Isaiah who prays to the God expressing his devotion as thus: "O LORD, You are our Father; We are the clay, and You our potter" (*New King James, Isa.* 64.8). In the book of Matthew also there are many passages calling unto God as the father: "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (6.14).

Jones at the beginning of the play is symbolically in a palace, a place which in Christian terminology is usually associated with God's heavenly palace or Paradise but as the palace is about to fall he takes refuge in the forest or wilderness. In the book of Psalms, God is described as sitting enthroned over the Flood in his heavenly palace (29.10). It is noteworthy that in the same passage it is mentioned that, "the voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; The LORD shakes the Wilderness of Kadesh" (29. 8). In the next verse it is immediately added that his majestic voice "strips the forests bare" (29. 9). It is clear from the passage above that Bible symbolically puts Lord's voice against the *Wilderness* as an opposing, ordering force.

In the thirteenth canto of *Inferno*, a forest is mentioned wherein Dante draws the reader's attention to two souls running in it while naked and pursued by some ravenous hounds:

And behold two on our left, naked and scratched,
Fleeing so fast that they were breaking every
Opposing branch in the forest. (13.115-117)

This scene, which takes place within the circle of the suicides, recounts the story of a noble by the name of Arcolano that "according to the early commentators, he voluntarily sought [death] as a solution to the ruin caused by his squandering" (Durling 215). Jones's suicidal intention with the silver bullet or the final death-defying act of confronting the natives resembles a similar subplot. There are also a number of other similarities in the play to the above passage quoted from Dante's work where Jones after uttering his exasperation by the excessive heat, which may be an indication of a hellish environment, states that: "I'm meltin' wid heat! Runnin' an' runnin' an' runnin'!" (175). He strips naked afterwards and over the course of the play while running from one specter or another many scars and scratches from the tree branches are reported to be inflicted upon his naked body.

Whereas Dante shows religious prejudice for Judeo-Islamic religions and sects, O'Neill shows instances of religious intolerance and contempt, first for the primitive natives and their beliefs, and secondly and most notably for Jones's own religious mindset. Jones is confessedly a follower of the Baptist church:

Doesn't you know dey's got to do wid a man was member in good standin' o' de Baptist Church? Sho' I was dat when I was porter on de Pullmans, befo' I gits into my little trouble. Let dem try deir heathen tricks. De Baptist Church done perfect me and land dem all in hell. (164)

Jones here mentions that he was a member of the Baptist church before he got into a "little trouble" (164). Here O'Neill subtly points out the fragility of Jones's religious belief. His belief in salvation through submission and remission is ridiculed by the modern existentialist and Marxist ideologies in the play and Presbyterian Calvinism or Catholic Baptist ideology which was the dominant religious perspective among many Irish-Americans. Although O'Neill later, under the influence of Nietzschean philosophy abandoned Catholicism, it is obvious that he is in no way a supporter of any alternative sect or religious ideology especially that of the Baptist church. Among many of minor divisions of Christianity, especially in the Southern states of America, Alan Scot Willis argues that, Baptist church was more progressive in its attitude toward racial equality despite its somehow dubious stand before the outbreak of the World War II, their attitude were more genial towards the Afro-American community of the south. They based their ideology upon "the biblical mandates of racial equality and unity, the international dimensions of the race question, and the personal responsibility of each Christian to work for better race relations" (Willis 4). Thus we may conclude that a similar, yet in O'Neill's case, more subtle lack of tolerance for the religious ideology of *the other*, stigmatizes both works.

The spiritual journey or quest turns out to be quite a failure in Jones's case, because O'Neill believed that through his religion, Jones would not be able

to make his peace with God and achieve the religious comfort he desires. Contrary to the Christian doctrine, confession and asking for God's forgiveness is not enough to save his soul or his skin. He lacks conviction and belief in God's Grace. He puts his belief in his gun and the silver bullet, which as mentioned is a symbol of superstitious mindset, and when they are gone, Jones is also gone. He can only find peace in death because O'Neill, adopting the Nietzschean doctrine, believes that there is no "truth to live by or a God to live for" (Diggins 63). In Dante's case, however, there is still a God to live for and therefore the journey through forest and the wilderness of the *Inferno* has no closure there. He will ultimately attain peace and union with God in *Paradiso*.

As a result it may be deduced that in an autobiographical sense, the play is also the story of O'Neill himself, turning away from the Christian God and Catholicism and instead adopting a Nietzschean or rather existentialist point of view with which he found himself fascinated.

Expressionism in general and expressionist plays in particular is preoccupied with dreams and unconscious state of mind. J. L. Styan believes that "in its early stages expressionist drama was a dramatization of the subconscious, a kind of scripted dream" (4) which undermines the rational development of the well-made play (ibid). August Strindberg's expressionist plays such as *A Dream Play* (1901) which is considered as the forerunner example of the genre, as it is evident from the title of the work, "foreshadows many expressionist techniques and themes in its presentation of the unconscious" (Galens 257).

The forest/palace dichotomy could be approached from a psychological viewpoint as well. J. E. Cirlot points out that, "forest-symbolism is complex, but it is connected at all levels with the symbolism of the female principle or of the Great Mother" (112). He further advances this argument by stating that: "Since the female principle is identified with the unconscious in Man, it follows that the forest is also a symbol of the unconscious" (ibid). He supports this idea by referring to Jungian psychology where sylvan terrors tend to be predominant in

children tales representing unconscious and consequently obscuring reason (ibid). Freud also in such works as *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (1920) speaks of gardens and "natural scenery" as "a frequent symbol of the female genitals" (130). For Freud parks are comparable with the realm of fantasy which is a reservation from the intercalation of the reality principle as he mentions that "the creation of the psychic realm of fancy has its complete counterpart in the establishment of "preserves" and "conservation projects" " (ibid. 324) that are threatened by the industrial enterprise and human manipulation and that "the psychic realm of phantasy is such a reservation withdrawn from the principles of reality" (ibid).

A palace on the other hand is usually a symbol of reason and consciousness. Hamlet tells of vices and passions "oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason" (1.4. 28). Cirlot also associates the palace symbol with the image of God by declaring it as, "a symbol of the occult Centre—of the 'unmoved mover'" (248). It is fair to say that for some scholars such as Ferber and Freud even the palace imagery is a symbol or manifestation of some feminine quality. Freud mentions that "from mythology and poetry we may take the city, fortress, palace, citadel, as further symbols of woman" (134). However, it must be clarified that these places are associated with the female image as long as they are maiden or unbreached. In *The Emperor Jones* the palace is breached and the only female figure, who is an old maid, symbolically leaves the palace in the beginning of the play.

If the unbreached palace could be a symbol of mother, Jones's preliminary state in the palace could be resembled to the Lacanian imaginary order where he is happy and soundly sleep. Jones is also narcissistic in his behavior. He is contemptuous toward natives and also Smithers, boasting that he "ain't no white-liver" (164) like he is. Sean Homer elaborating on Lacan's discussion concerning Hamlet states that: "Lacan associates narcissism with the imaginary order [...] and the mother/child dyad" (78). Jones's later pleading with God to save him in a humbled manner signifies his desperate attempt to enter

the symbolic realm of the father. The rebellious crowd and uprising therefore could be interpreted as a symbol of castration and the law of the father which aims to bring what Crilot mentions as "occult Centre" (248) to the palace. Homer also defines the notion of castration, from Lacan's point of view, as "a symbolic process that involves the cutting off, not of one's penis, but of one's jouissance and the recognition of lack" (95). Jones therefore, refusing to accept the law of the father escapes to the forest to return home. The theme of returning home or to a paradisaic state, as well as the forest as a symbol of the female genitalia indicates that Jones finds an alternative, in returning back to the womb rather than accepting to enter the symbolic order. The ideology behind womb fantasies has a close relationship with Thanatos or death drive which manifests itself in the play by Jones's death (Smith 148). Jones is condemned to death because he cannot make the transition from the imaginary to the symbolic order which ultimately results in his psychosis. His hallucination could be best described as the projections of his troubled unconscious which symbolically starts from the instant he sets his foot in the forest.

In Dante's *Inferno* however, in contrast to O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*, the quest has a guide which signifies the presence of a psychoanalyst who as if in a hypnotized state guides Dante through the world of his unconscious forest. On the other hand, Jones's unconscious forest, without a guide, is a chaos of images and apparitions. In the *Inferno* there are highly ordered layers of unconscious states, symbolically shown as the nine circles of punishment which Dante delves deep into only step by step with the help of his guide/psychoanalyst. He ultimately gets ready to enter the heavenly realm of the father or the symbolic order and leaves behind the wilderness. This stage is symbolically shown by Dante escaping out of hell and into the Purgatory by climbing up Satan's ragged fur. Luce Irigaray approaches the theme of ascension from a feminist point of view:

And so, the openness of the mother [ouverture de la mère], the opening on to the mother [ouverture à la mère], appear to be

threats of contagion, contamination, engulfment in illness, madness and death. Obviously, there is nothing there that permits a gradual advance, one step at a time. No Jacob's ladder for a return to the mother. Jacob's ladder always climbs up to heaven, to the Father and his kingdom. (418)

As it is evident in *The Emperor Jones*, there is no step by step advance toward the union with the mother unlike that of the Dante toward the father. Jones's unconscious is rife with the images of enslavement, "illness, madness and death" (418) whereas Dante generally with a calm and stoic manner goes through lengthy philosophical conversations, both with the tormented souls and Virgil, his guide. In one of these conversations, the ascension or the climb is mentioned by Virgil as an arduous but rewarding act:

A longer ladder must we climb; it is not enough
to have left those others behind. If you understand
me, now act so that it may help you. (24.55-57)

It is to note that Virgil while instructing Dante to keep his strength for a greater trial, uses the word 'ladder' symbolically meaning both the climb out of the inferno and the mountain of Purgatory as well as the climb toward God the father.

Conclusion

Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* from different viewpoints whether, socio-political, theological or psychological borrows its thematic opulence as well as racial stereotyping, religious intolerance and androgynous unconscious from Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*. O'Neill's modernity is in retelling of this classic tale without a heavenly intervention. A new empire has risen with the same mentality and religious prejudice as its classic predecessors and although O'Neill himself cannot escape the current imperialistic dialectic yet the unfortunate ending of his protagonist signals his reluctant inclination towards

freedom from the ever-present ghost of authority in one way or another. Jones's repentance is not being heard perhaps because the Christian God as Nietzsche believed was dead or quite disinterested in the plight of the ordinary men as existentialists believed. Whichever of these speculations, be true, it is an undeniable fact that O'Neill had Dante's *The Divine Comedy* in his mind while writing *The Emperor Jones*, yet he changed it in a way to suit the taste of the modern man who is no longer tolerant of an authoritative father.

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