The Emperor Jones

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF EUGENE O'NEILL

Eugene O'Neill was born in a hotel in New York City to Irish immigrants. Both of his parents toured with a theatre company and as such, O'Neill attended a Catholic boarding school. His father was an alcoholic and his mother was addicted to morphine, a family situation that influenced his later theatrical works. As a young man, he began working on ships and became involved with unions and labor movements in the US. He became ill with tuberculosis in his early twenties, after which he decided to dedicate himself to writing full-time. His first play, *Beyond the Horizon*, opened in 1920, and *The Emperor Jones* premiered later that year. *Jones* was his first big hit and it expressed commentary on O'Neill's thoughts on the United States' occupation of Haiti. O'Neill was married three times and had three children. In 1943, after suffering for most of his life from depression and alcoholism, O'Neill's hands began to tremble and he was mostly unable to write for the last ten years of his life. He died in a hotel room in Boston. Though he asked his third wife to wait 25 years to publish *Long Day's Journey into Night* (which O'Neill wrote in 1941-42), she published the play in 1956 and it won a Tony Award for Best Play.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Emperor Jones is a commentary on the United States' occupation of Haiti, and the play comments in broader terms on American imperialism around the globe. In 1915, amid rising global tensions prior to World War I, the US invaded Haiti as a show of strength and influence to intimidate Germany. There were a number of influential Germans living in Haiti at that time and because they married Haitians, they were able to circumvent Haitian laws forbidding foreigners from purchasing Haitian land. The 1915 Haitian-American Convention was a treaty that granted the US economic oversight over Haiti for a ten-year period. During that period, the US overhauled Haiti completely. It invested in infrastructure, established National Guards, and reinstituted impressed labor of Haitians to reach these goals, while also putting policies in place to redirect a major percentage of Haiti's economy to repay loans to the US and France. When Germany lost the war in 1918, the US maintained occupancy of Haiti even as President Woodrow Wilson spoke hypocritically about the need for countries to govern themselves. In this way, the character of Jones comes to represent America's knowledge that it was indeed exploiting Haiti, while the natives' victory over Jones suggests a hope that American imperialism would be overthrown.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Eugene O'Neill's plays all tend to feature characters who, like Jones, work exceptionally hard to keep up hope and reach their goals—but in the end, most of them end in despair and tragedy. O'Neill's most famous tragic play is his 1956 play *Long Day's Journey into Night*, which deals with a family's intense dysfunction and addiction problems. Much of his work uses elements of realism, drama techniques developed to best convey the social or psychological problems of real life on stage. This style of theatre is most commonly associated with playwrights such as Anton Chekhov (*The Cherry Orchard*, 1903) and Henrik Ibsen (*A Doll's House*, 1879). It's also worth noting that *The Emperor Jones* was first performed during the Harlem Renaissance, an explosion of artistic and intellectual work by black artists that took place initially in Harlem, New York. Despite the fact that O'Neill was white, *The Emperor Jones* was immensely popular among people of color because it featured a black actor in a leading role in a white theatre company. Because of this, *Jones* can be grouped with other work that came out of the Harlem Renaissance, such as Zora Neale Hurston's short story "Spunk" (though she's better known for her later works, namely *Their Eyes Were Watching God*) and Langston Hughes' poetry collection *The Weary Blues*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Emperor Jones
- **When Written:** Around 1920
- **Where Written:** New York City
- **When Published:** The play was first performed in 1920
- **Literary Period:** Expressionism, Realism
- **Genre:** Dramatic stage play
- **Setting:** An unnamed island in the West Indies
- **Climax:** Jones uses his silver bullet to kill the crocodile god
- **Antagonist:** Brutus Jones is arguably his own worst enemy, although he also fights racism and other forms of systemic oppression.

EXTRA CREDIT

Lead vs. Silver. In folklore, silver bullets are often the only things capable of killing monsters. However, in 2007, the television show "Myth Busters" tested to see if silver bullets were actually any better than conventional lead bullets. They found that despite the myths, silver bullets are slower and less accurate than their lead counterparts.

Family Drama. Eugene O'Neill disowned his daughter, Oona,

after she married Charlie Chaplin in 1943: she was 18, and Chaplin was 54. Despite this, Oona still inherited the family estate in Bermuda, as both her brothers committed suicide.

PLOT SUMMARY

It's late afternoon in the emperor's whitewashed throne room. An old black native woman pokes her head around a doorway and when she decides the coast is clear, she begins to sneak across the room. An old **white** sailor, Smithers, intercepts her halfway across the floor. When Smithers threatens her with a whip, the woman explains that all the natives have run away to the hills. As the woman runs away, Smithers whistles.

Moments later, Brutus Jones, the emperor, enters the throne room with an annoyed, sleepy look on his face. He's wearing a heavily decorated **uniform**. Jones yells and threatens to hurt whoever woke him up. Smithers catches Jones's attention, admits that he woke Jones up, and tells Jones that he has news. Jones sits on his throne and demands that Smithers tell him the news. Smithers sarcastically asks Jones where the court and the servants are, but Jones just yawns and says they're drinking rum in town—and Smithers should know this, given how much time he spends drinking with the natives. When Smithers scoffs that drinking is part of his job, Jones sneers. Smithers angrily reminds Jones that he helped Jones when he first arrived on the island. Jones puts a hand on his revolver and reminds Smithers to be polite. When Smithers apologizes, Jones insists that he's an entirely different person now. Smithers retorts that nobody else would hire Jones once it got out that he'd been in jail in the United States, but Jones simply looks at Smithers and says that he knows Smithers has been in jail too.

Jones explains that he's not acting as emperor for the glory: he puts on a show to entertain the natives, but he just wants their money. When Smithers says that the natives are out of money, Jones laughs and says that's not true, since he's still emperor. Smithers asks Jones about his law-breaking habits. Jones insists that the emperor doesn't have to follow the laws, especially since "big stealin'" like he does is what made him emperor. Smithers declares that Jones truly did trick the natives, and remarks on Jones's good luck. Jones is offended, but Smithers says that Jones's story about the **silver bullet** was luck: when Jones first came to the island, he got into an altercation with one of the natives and when the man's gun misfired, Jones shot him and then said that he could only be killed by silver bullets. The natives bought it, and Jones laughs that the natives are fools. Smithers asks Jones if the rumors are true and he had a silver bullet made. Jones says they are, and explains that he told the natives that he'll kill himself with it. Jones pulls out the bullet and tells Smithers that it's his good luck charm.

Jones explains that at the first whiff of trouble, he'll resign, take his money, and leave. Smithers knowingly asks Jones if he won't go back to the states, and Jones says he could, since he wasn't ever in jail there. Smithers is disbelieving and asks Jones about the stories that Jones killed white men in the states. Jones insists he's not scared of lynching. Further, Jones says he'll kill Smithers if he doesn't straighten up. Smithers tries to laugh, and Jones tells more of his story: he suggests he might've gone to jail for killing a black man who cheated him at dice, and then he might've also killed a prison guard. He says that all of this might not be true, but Jones will kill Smithers for telling anyone. Smithers seems terrified and reminds Jones that he's always been a friend, and finally tells Jones his news. When Jones rings the bell to call his servants, nobody comes. Jones is enraged. After a moment, he composes himself and declares that it's time to resign. Smithers warns Jones about Lem, the native chief, as Lem hates Jones. Smithers also warns Jones about the creepiness of the forest, but Jones brushes off these warnings. He insists that the natives are stupid, his escape will be easy, and if the natives do catch him, he'll commit suicide with his silver bullet. The sound of a tom-tom reaches the palace. Smithers explains that the natives have begun to prepare to cast spells. Jones insists he's not scared and reminds Smithers that he's an upstanding member of the Baptist Church. Smithers laughs and Jones bids him goodbye.

As night falls, Jones reaches the edge of the forest. The heat is oppressive and he mops sweat off his brow. Jones listens to the tom-tom and wonders if the natives have begun to cross the plain. To calm his nerves, Jones decides it's time to eat and he scans the ground in search of his white stone. He finds it, but instead of finding food under it, there's nothing. Jones discovers that there are many white stones, none of which have food under them—he's in the wrong spot. Jones is distraught and lights a match to see better. The tom-tom's rhythm quickens, and Jones flings the match away. He decides that lighting it was stupid, as it'll give his location away. Jones turns around to scan the plain as the "little formless fears," grub-like creatures with glittering eyes, crawl out of the forest. Jones turns to face the forest and asks the forest if it's mocking him. The formless fears laugh in reply, and Jones leaps in fright. He yells, pulls out his gun, and shoots at them. They scuttle into the forest, and Jones listens to the tom-tom. He tells himself that the fears were just pigs and urges himself into the forest.

Several hours later, the moonlight illuminates a clearing. Jeff, the black man Jones killed in the States, crouches and throws dice on the ground. Jones comes into view on the edge of the clearing and tries to cheer himself up. He picks at his uniform, which is torn. As Jones enters the clearing, he hears the clicking sound of the dice. He sounds afraid as he remarks that it sounds like dice. Suddenly, he notices Jeff. Jones is transfixed and he addresses Jeff, wondering with fear how Jeff ended up on the island. Jones asks Jeff if he's a ghost. Jeff doesn't reply, and Jones shoots Jeff. When the smoke clears, Jeff is gone. The

tom-tom's beat gets faster, and Jones runs back into the forest.

Just before midnight, Jones stumbles upon a road. His uniform is even more torn, and he yells that he's melting in the heat. Jones pulls off his coat and flings it away. As Jones rests, he wonders where the road came from. He's never seen it before and becomes terrified that there are ghosts around. Jones prays to God that he doesn't see any more ghosts. As Jones studies the moon, a silent chain gang of black convicts walks onto the road, supervised by a white prison guard. When Jones notices the chain gang, the gang begins working on the road. The guard looks angrily at Jones and motions for him to join the convicts, and Jones obeys as though he's in a trance. Jones has no shovel but he matches the shoveling motions of the others; despite this, the guard whips him anyway. Angry, Jones lifts his arms over his head as though he has a shovel in his hands to hit the guard over the head with. When he finally realizes he has no shovel, he pleads with the convicts to lend him one of theirs. Cursing, Jones pulls out his revolver and shoots the guard in the back. As he does, the forest and the chain gang disappear, the tom-tom increases tempo, and Jones crashes away into the woods.

A few hours later, Jones reaches a clearing with a stump in the middle of it. He falls to his knees to plead with Jesus to forgive him for killing Jeff and the prison guard, and for stealing from the natives. Jones looks at his tattered shoes and decides they're making his feet hurt more. He takes them off and holds them in his lap as a silent crowd of white Southerners, dressed in clothing from the 1850s, enters the clearing. They gather around the stump as an attendant leads in a group of slaves. Jones notices nothing until the auctioneer calls the crowd to attention and taps Jones on the shoulder, motioning for him to get on the stump. Jones leaps up in an attempt to get away, and the auctioneer describes Jones's strengths to the assembled planters. When the auctioneer begins the bidding, Jones realizes he's being sold at a slave auction. A planter finally purchases Jones and the auctioneer pushes Jones towards the man. Angrily, Jones draws his gun and shoots both the auctioneer and his purchaser. The clearing disappears and the tom-tom beats faster. Jones runs away.

After wandering for another two hours, Jones wanders into a clearing that's long and skinny, with vines creating an arched ceiling. His pants are so torn, he's wearing little more than a loincloth. Jones wails to God wondering what he'll do, since he only has his silver bullet left. He decides he needs to rest and throws himself onto the ground. The moonlight brightens incrementally and two rows of black men, also wearing loincloths, come into view. They sit along each side if the clearing, swaying as though they're in a ship. They begin to wail rhythmically, and Jones notices them. Though he tries to ignore them, Jones raises his voice to join theirs. As the voices fade, Jones continues his mad dash through the forest.

Early in the morning, Jones enters another clearing by a river, still wailing. He moves as though he's in a trance and sinks to his knees beside a pile of rocks that resemble an altar. Jones asks God to protect him as a Congo witch doctor jumps out from behind a tree. The witch doctor begins to dance and chant to the beat of the tom-tom, and Jones watches in fascination. The doctor dances a story of being pursued by devils and as the tension rises, Jones begins chanting and beating the ground in time. Suddenly, the witch doctor motions to Jones, and Jones understands that he's going to be offered as a sacrifice. From the river, the witch doctor calls a **crocodile god**. The crocodile stares at Jones as the witch doctor motions for Jones to approach it. The tom-tom reaches a fever pitch as Jones cries out, grabs his gun, and shoots the crocodile with his silver bullet. The crocodile returns to river and the witch doctor disappears, but Jones just lies facedown and cries.

At dawn, Lem, his soldiers, and Smithers approach the edge of the forest from the clearing. One soldier discovers the spot where Jones entered the forest. Smithers is disgusted, but Lem calmly tells Smithers that they'll catch Jones. As Smithers continues to insult the natives, Lem continues to reply with the same thing. When they hear snapping twigs in the forest, Lem sends in soldiers. Smithers reasons that the snapping could be Jones and the sound of rifles comes from the woods. Lem smiles and tells Smithers that Jones is dead. He explains that he and his men spent the night casting charms and melting their money to make silver bullets. Smithers laughs when he learns that the natives truly believe Jones's assertion that he can only be killed by silver bullets, and he calls Lem crazy. Soldiers emerge from the forest carrying Jones's dead body. Smithers mocks Jones's body and mocks the natives as they carry Jones away.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Brutus Jones – Brutus Jones, the protagonist of the play, is a black American who has become the emperor of an unnamed island in the West Indies. Prior the start of the play, Jones worked for ten years as a porter on Pullman sleeper trains, where he learned from listening to **white** passengers that "big stealin" is far more profitable than "little stealin'." Jones is incarcerated when he kills a black man, Jeff, for cheating him at a dice game, and then he murders a white prison guard before escaping to the island in the Caribbean where he sets himself up as emperor. Jones uses what he learned from his time in the United States to exert power over his black native subjects, and he elevates himself to the level of a god. To complete the façade, Jones also tells the natives that he can only be killed by a **silver bullet** and has one made in case he ever needs to commit suicide. When Jones first learns from Smithers that the natives are revolting, Jones shows that he's a quick thinker and is flexible in his plans, as he immediately moves up his escape

plan and leaves that night. However, Jones's cockiness and belief in his own success brings about his undoing. As he wanders through the forest, the natives send apparitions that make Jones progressively more terrified and more human. The apparitions force Jones to reckon with his personal past by sending both Jeff and the prison guard to haunt him, as well as apparitions of the history of slavery in the United States. Though Jones tries to fight these apparitions by praying and insisting they're not real, he works his way through his five lead bullets and finally uses his silver bullet to kill the **crocodile god** summoned by the witch doctor. In doing so, he symbolically kills his own charade of godliness. At this point, once Jones is truly a man, the natives are able to kill him and remove him from power.

Smithers – Smithers is a cantankerous **white** sailor and a friend of sorts of Jones's. From his opening conversation with Jones, the viewer learns that Smithers gave Jones his start on the island by employing him, which allowed Jones to eventually become emperor. However, it also becomes clear that Smithers is exceptionally racist: he can barely contain his rage that Jones is a powerful emperor, and he speaks poorly of the black natives as well. Though at times Smithers seems to feel some genuine affection and admiration for Jones, his racism colors everything he says and does in relation to Jones and the natives. Jones points out that in ten years of trading with the natives, Smithers hasn't learned a word of their language even though doing so would certainly help him profit—an indication that Smithers doesn't see anything the natives do as worth his time or consideration. Because Smithers appears only in the first and last scenes and isn't a strictly necessary character in terms of plot, the play situates Smithers as a narrator of sorts and asks the reader and viewer to identify with him and with his interpretation of events. This reinforces Smithers's racist point of view as "correct" per the logic of the play.

Lem – Lem is the chief of the natives on the island in the West Indies. He's an older man and very wise—he is spare with his words and says, simply and confidently, that he and the other natives will catch Jones. Finally, he explains to Smithers that he and the natives spent the night melting silver coins to cast **silver bullets** to kill Jones, a canny plan that is ultimately successful.

The Witch Doctor – The witch doctor is an old man from Congo who is sent to Jones as an apparition. He dances a story about fighting evil spirits and at the end he attempts to sacrifice Jones to a **crocodile god**. Jones uses his **final silver** bullet to destroy the crocodile god and the witch doctor.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Jeff – Jeff, an apparition created by the natives, is a ghost of sorts of the black man that Jones murdered back in the United States. Prior to the start of the play, Jones killed the human version of Jeff because Jeff cheated him in a game of dice.

The Prison Guard – The prison guard is a **white** guard whom Jones murdered while working on a chain gang. He appears in the play as an apparition sent by the natives.

The Planter – The planter is an apparition sent by the natives to torment Jones. During a ghostly slave auction, the planter purchases Jones.

The Auctioneer – The auctioneer is an apparition created by the natives. During one of the apparitions, the auctioneer sells slaves, including Jones, to planters in the pre-Civil War South.

The Old Woman – The old woman is one of Jones's subjects on the island in the West Indies. She's one of the last natives to leave the palace for the hills, and she explains to Smithers that the natives are rebelling.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

RACISM

The Emperor Jones tells the story of Brutus Jones, a porter on a train car who, after killing a black man and then a **white** prison guard in the United States, escapes to a Caribbean island. On the island, he quickly sets up an empire, with himself as emperor. He amasses vast wealth by levying heavy taxes on the black natives and by engaging in various forms of corruption. When he learns from a white trader named Smithers that his black native subjects are planning to revolt against him, he embarks on a journey through the forest to escape by sea. As Jones wanders through the forest at night, with the sound of the natives' drums constantly beating in the background, he is faced with various native-summoned apparitions that force him to confront the fact that in making himself emperor and exploiting the natives, he was "performing whiteness"—putting into practice the lessons he learned by watching the white people who mistreated and exploited him in the United States. Furthermore, he comes to realize that his race and all that comes with it isn't something that he can escape or deny.

The play opens with Jones already having established himself as emperor. He is extremely powerful—the natives believe that he is charmed and can only be killed by **silver bullets**. He's rich from the taxes and other sorts of corrupt business that his role allows him to engage in without consequences. In one sense, by turning himself into a rich and powerful emperor, Jones overturns the racist situation that defined his life of

exploitation and impoverishment in the United States. However, the play's take on racism isn't nearly that simple. Jones doesn't just set himself up as an emperor; rather, he makes himself emperor over other black people and uses his position to exploit and oppress those black people in order to enrich himself. Jones seeks power and exploits the less powerful, just as he himself was exploited by white people in the United States.

Furthermore, Jones explicitly states that he was able to successfully install himself as emperor and tax the natives dry by using what he learned from white people during his time working as a porter: that "big stealin'" brings fame and fortune. With this, the play then connects whiteness and white people to exploitation, corruption, and seeking power. It also makes the case that Jones, in making himself emperor, is acting like a white person. To this point, Jones does hold what can be described as "racist" views toward the natives he oppresses, whom he views as dumb and gullible. More broadly, this dynamic suggests that white racism and exploitation create a kind of cycle, in which white culture defines the terms of success—power and wealth—and then anyone who tries to gain that success will necessarily have to act like a white person in order to achieve it. White racism and exploitation, the play suggests, create only more exploitation and more racism.

After learning of the natives' imminent revolt against him, Jones flees into the forest, and confronts apparitions summoned by the natives. His interactions with these apparitions force him to relive his own personal history (which took place in the early twentieth century) and the history of slavery in the United States. As he wanders, he encounters apparitions of the black man and the white prison guard he killed, and then experiences being sold at a slave auction, being a passenger on a slave ship bound for the US, and finally, a sacrificial ceremony performed by a witch doctor in the Congo. As Jones descends through time and confronts these apparitions, the things that signify his façade of white power get stripped away and his belief in his own power erodes until he's nothing more than a scared, animalistic man with no power of any sort. Through these apparitions, the natives force Jones to admit that he's black, thereby insisting that it's impossible to escape this knowledge no matter how high he climbs. Within the logic of the play and in the light of the rampant racism of the time period in which it was written (around 1920), the play leaves the viewer with the assertion that black individuals like Jones who seek to better themselves by performing whiteness are doing so futilely: that they'll never escape the fact that they're black and will always be seen as such, and that even in trying to escape they are only ever reenacting the exploitation and racism that afflicted them in the first place.

The play's exploration of race is further complicated by the character of Smithers, a cantankerous, racist white sailor who seems to be enriching himself through Jones's own corrupt practices. Smithers appears in the first and last scenes of the play, and in those scenes he functions as a kind of narrator. In the first scene Smithers introduces Jones to the audience and in the last, he accompanies the black natives to the edge of the forest where they then kill Jones. By having Smithers open and close the play, he is established as an interpreter of events, and the viewer is encouraged to identify with him and with his interpretation. Put another way, the play literally sets up Jones to be viewed through a lens of whiteness, as provided by Smithers. There are a few implications of this structural dynamic. First, the fact that Smithers appears to respect Jones more than he does the natives highlights even further the way that Jones's own ascent to power is based on the racist and exploitative viewpoints he learned from white men. Second, even though Smithers occupies a very small place in the action itself, his role as interpreter affords him a great deal of power: his way of interpreting those events is given precedence. So, in a play about a black emperor, it is still a white man who holds the most power. Essentially, both thematically and structurally, the play seems to suggest that there is no escape for black people, no matter how high they ascend, from white racism and oppression.

HISTORY AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY

As Jones runs into the forest to escape the rebelling natives, he encounters apparitions summoned by the natives that force him to confront his history, both on a personal level and on a much grander scale. By forcing Jones to watch and experience his past and a condensed history of the black slave experience over the previous 200 years, the play asserts that it's impossible for a black person to truly escape the legacy of slavery, as that legacy continues to inform the lives of the black community regardless of what they do or where in the world they go.

Jones's initial relocation to the island in the Caribbean is an attempt to escape his own past and the larger history of slavery in the United States. He escapes to the island after first murdering another man in a dice game, which can be seen as exemplifying the kind of black on black violence that occurs specifically under a regime of **white** power that deprives black people of any other significant means of gaining money than illicit gambling. While imprisoned for the first murder, Jones then kills a white prison guard and escapes to the Caribbean. In doing so he literally kills a representative figure of white authority in the United States, and then escapes to a country where no such authority exists. Once in the Caribbean, Jones operates under the assumption that he'll truly be able to escape his past by escaping the place—the United States—in which that past took place. Jones does find that on the island he can elevate himself far higher than he ever would've been able to in the US. It's also significant that he undertakes this entire endeavor alone. By acting alone, Jones seems to feel that he is

able to divorce himself from the biases and cultural narratives that keep him trapped in the collective memory of slavery in the United States. Put another way, Jones seems to initially believe that memory and the past are inseparable from locale and community, and that simply by changing locale, a person can escape their past, escape their community, and go on to rewrite the direction of their future.

As Jones begins his journey through the forest, he sets out believing that he's going to remain separated from his past and the slavery-ridden history of his former black community and ancestors. However, the apparitions that the natives send to torment Jones make it abundantly clear that Jones's initial belief that he left his past behind in the United States is foolish and impossible. The apparitions first force Jones to accept his personal history by sending the ghost of Jeff, the black man he murdered, and then apparitions of the prison guard and other black convicts who also worked on the chain gang. They then immerse Jones in a slave auction, a slave ship, and finally, a religious sacrifice in the Congo. As these apparitions progress from one to the next, Jones interacts with them progressively more and more—though he only talks to Jeff (and in doing so, seems aware that Jeff is long dead), Jones participates unwillingly in the chain gang, and later seems unable to resist joining the black slaves in their wails and rocking in the slave ship. By making it seem with these later apparitions as though Jones participates out of instinct, the play suggests that Jones's very identity as an American black man inherently includes his slave ancestry and his even earlier African ancestry. Standing on the auction block and participating in tribal rituals are things that are, per the logic of the play, branded into the collective memories of African Americans, and are therefore part of Jones's history that cannot be ignored.

Though Eugene O'Neill's identity as a white man and the era in which the play was written complicates some of these ideas (it's possible, for instance, to read a very sinister message to black viewers that African Americans will never escape slavery and achieve any sense of equality) in a contemporary context, the same message serves as a poignant reminder that there are still racist systems at work in American society that oppress and dehumanize people of color daily.

POWER AND SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION

The Emperor Jones takes place in the time period in which it was written (late 1910s, possibly into the early 1920s), and it's very important to consider the play in the context of its time. As an African American and a Pullman porter, Jones would have been subjected to Jim Crow laws and other forms of systemic oppression that reminded him daily that he was black and therefore powerless. *The Emperor Jones*, then, explores what happens when someone like Jones internalizes these systems of power, and then goes on to perpetuate them in his own empire once he's given the chance to do so.

Prior to the start of the play, Jones spent ten years working as a porter on Pullman sleeper trains. In this line of work (which was considered one of the most desirable jobs for African Americans at the time), Jones would have been in close contact with **white** people in an environment that considered black porters to be lesser than the white passengers. Through immersion in this oppressive environment, Jones had the opportunity to listen to his white passengers speak and by doing so, he developed his own ideas about how people gain power. He comes to believe that small crime lands people in jail, while crimes on a larger scale—what he calls "big stealin'"—earn people fame and fortune.

Jones's realization about the way the world works reflects the greater system of race relations in the United States: Jim Crow laws and other legalized forms of oppression made it legal to jail or otherwise punish African Americans for crimes that weren't policed nearly as harshly if the perpetrator was white. In fact, most racially motivated white crime, no matter how brutal, wasn't prosecuted *at all*. Jones and Smithers discuss lynching at one point, a practice of extra-judicial hanging of black people that white people used to create an environment of intense fear and exert often unchecked power over their black neighbors. This entire system—both the legal system that privileged white people and the extrajudicial violence that ensured black people were too frightened to fight against the system—enabled not just an environment in which it was possible for white people to commit these humanitarian crimes of disempowering, killing, and intimidating African Americans, but also allowed them to reap major economic benefits for doing so by exploiting black labor. In essence, then, Jones's recognition of "big stealin'" functions as a condemnation of the entire system of racist white society, which legally functioned as a kind of theft of black bodies, labor, and wealth.

Coming out of this system after serving time in jail for killing both a black man and a white prison guard, Jones escapes to an island in the Caribbean to install himself as emperor. Rather than take the opportunity to dismiss the systems that kept him down in the United States, Jones instead perpetuates them with disastrous results. Upon arrival on the island, Jones doesn't choose to view the black natives as people worthy of respect, just like he is. Instead, he conceptualizes them as dumb and gullible and takes the opportunity to subjugate them in much the same way white people did to him when he lived in America. Jones taxes the natives as much as he possibly can and keeps them functioning in a state of fear at all times, which consequently allows him to live in luxury as the emperor of the island. Further, though the play never includes scenes in which Jones speaks to the natives, it implies that he enjoys talking down to them—or at the very least, he enjoys talking badly about them to others. Interestingly too, even before he learns that the natives have already begun their revolt, Jones is

acutely aware of the fact that a native uprising is inevitable. This in turn suggests an understanding—on both Jones's and the play's part—that existing under these circumstances is untenable and damaging, and cannot last.

When considered in terms of the racial oppression that Jones faced in the United States during the 1910s, the play suggests that these systems of power are insidious and, horrifically, are internalized by the victims. Though Jones seeks to remedy his own oppression by seizing power and subjugating others, his eventual death at the hands of his subjects makes the consequences of perpetuating systems like this abundantly clear. In this way, the play offers the possibility that the only way to truly escape oppression is to escape the system that enables that oppression.

GODLINESS, HUMANITY, AND FEAR

When Brutus Jones crowns himself emperor of the Caribbean island, he elevates himself to the level of a god. His subjects are forced to worship and serve him without question, and he conceptualizes himself as far superior to them in every way. As a final touch, Jones plays into the natives' superstitions by telling them that he can only be killed by a **silver bullet**. However, after the natives revolt against him and Jones journeys through the forest to escape the uprising, he slowly sheds the things that mark him as a powerful, godlike figure and must then accept his own humanity. Ultimately he must face his death, as all humans must.

When the audience first meets Jones, he's storming through his **white** palace and is dressed in an ostentatious military **uniform**. Both the color of the palace and his uniform are intended to convey the fact that he's a powerful figure who is above being treated like any other man. The myth surrounding his ability to be killed only by a silver bullet supports this façade, as it implies that he's not truly a human man and is instead something above and beyond humanity. Further, Jones sees the fact that he was able to convince the natives that this is true as proof that he is truly superior, suggesting in turn that his godliness comes in part from his ability to hoodwink his subjects by using their beliefs to his advantage. The one thing that Jones lacks, and the one thing that therefore sets him apart from the rest of humanity per the logic of the play, is fear. For example, though Jones believes that an eventual native uprising is inevitable, he's entirely confident in his escape plan, which will allow him to escape unscathed, rich, and able to move on and continue living in luxury elsewhere.

With fear, or the lack of it, established as the one thing that separates Jones from his subjects, the apparitions that the natives send to torment Jones through his night in the forest can be seen as an attempt, first and foremost, to reintroduce fear into his understanding and consequently to reconnect him with his humanity. When Jones first sets off, he's jaunty, cocky, and confident in his escape. He's prepared with sturdy boots, his pistol loaded with five lead bullets and one silver bullet (in case he needs to commit suicide to keep up the charade with the natives), and enough food stashed at the edge of the forest to last him through the night. He believes both that his plan is too airtight to fail, and that the natives are too dumb to be able to successfully give chase.

The natives, however, are prepared to return Jones to a human state by reintroducing fear into his emotional vocabulary. At the same time, they've also found a way to reduce Jones from his godlike state by treating it in a pragmatic way: since Jones has convinced the natives that he can only be killed by a silver bullet, they spend the night fabricating silver bullets to kill him. As Jones travels through the woods, he becomes progressively more disheveled and sheds his uniform, ending the play wearing little more than a loincloth. This is a physical representation of his loss of his sense of his own godliness and a return to his own humanity—in the end, his body is all he has. Similarly, as Jones encounters the natives' apparitions, he becomes increasingly more fearful. He uses his lead bullets to destroy each apparition, and finally, uses his silver bullet to destroy the **crocodile god** summoned by the witch doctor—a symbolic representation of the death of Jones's own sense of godliness. By the time Jones completes his circular journey and returns to the edge of the woods where he began, mostly naked and without bullets, Jones is truly human, terrified of what he's created in the natives and scared for his own life. The natives promptly take his life, using their own silver bullets.

Though Smithers mocks the natives' use of silver bullets as ridiculous (he is fully aware that Jones can absolutely be killed with lead bullets), there is a symbolic power to it. In using silver bullets to kill Jones, the natives simultaneously kill Jones the man and the idea of Jones the god. Jones's death, then, truly brings Jones down to earth by asserting his humanity and mortality as inarguable facts. The fact of his death exemplifies the cost of believing oneself to be above death and other worldly consequences, and exposes his initial belief in his own godliness—or, more broadly, the thought that anyone is superior to others in such a way as to act as a god over them—as the foolish and dangerous thought that it always was.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE COLOR WHITE

Given the racial tensions at work in the play, the color white—describing both people and objects—is a symbol of power. The white people that Jones encounters, including both the living (Smithers) and the unreal

(the auctioneer and the prison guard), have very real power in the play because of the color of their skin, while Jones is considered less powerful because he's black. In this way, Jones's decoration of the throne room in his palace is a very conscious choice. By painting the walls stark white, Jones attempts to take on some of the power that the play suggests is inherent to whiteness, and he loses his power once he vacates his palace. Unlike white people, whose power is embedded in their skin, Jones's power came from outside sources that he couldn't take with him in his flight.

JONES'S UNIFORM

When the reader or audience first meets Jones, his uniform is ostentatious and dripping with decoration—it's the true mark of an emperor. As Jones encounters the apparitions in the woods, however, his uniform gradually tears, and he takes it off to escape the heat. In this way, while the uniform itself represents Jones's emperorship, its gradual disintegration symbolizes Jones's return to being truly human. This offers the reader or viewer a way to track Jones's progress from godlike figure to man.

THE SILVER BULLET

The silver bullet represents Jones's tenuous hold on power. Jones clings to his one silver bullet the same way he clings to his emperorship, and refuses to let either of them go. When he finally does shoot the **crocodile god** with his final silver bullet, it symbolizes Jones's final step in his return to being a man. Further, the fear involved in Jones's decision to use the silver bullet makes it abundantly clear that Jones has truly returned to being human, and that with the acceptance of fear, Jones also rejects his godliness.

THE CROCODILE GOD

In Scene VII, the witch doctor summons the crocodile god and attempts to sacrifice Jones to it. This happens when Jones is finally overcome by fear, so he no longer resembles the confident, larger-than-life emperor he was only twelve hours earlier. Because of this, when Jones shoots the crocodile with his **silver bullet** and sends it back to the river, he symbolically destroys his own godliness and his own good luck charm, thereby accepting that he's nothing more than a man like any other.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dover Publications edition of *The Emperor Jones* published in 2011.

Scene 1 Quotes

And I'm bloody glad of it, for one! Serve 'im right! Puttin' on airs, the stinkin' nigger! 'Is Majesty! Gawd blimey! I only 'opes I'm there when they takes 'im out to shoot 'im.

Related Characters: Smithers (speaker), The Old Woman, Brutus Jones

Related Themes:

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

The old woman just shared with Smithers that the natives escaped to the hills and are planning an attack on Jones. With this exclamation, Smithers shows the reader or viewer his own racist views: that Jones, a black man, is wholly undeserving of the kind of power he has as emperor. In turn, this is indicative of a general power structure that exists (though not on this island, exactly) in which white people have power simply because of the color of their skin, while black people are subjugated, demeaned, and treated as less than human because of their own skin color. On the island, however, Jones has been able to escape that system to a degree, given that he's the emperor. Despite that, Smithers' very existence and role in the play, and the fact that he has so many lines like this that express contempt for a powerful black man, shows that Jones is still unable to truly escape the systematic oppression of the United States and colonialist Europe.

Talk polite, white man! Talk polite, you heah me! I'm boss heah now, is you fergettin'?

Related Characters: Brutus Jones (speaker), Smithers

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

When Smithers tries to point out to Jones that when Jones arrived on the island, he wasn't so high and mighty, Jones takes offense and reprimands Smithers. Jones's particular word choice when he calls Smithers "white man" shows that even if his island empire is very separate from governments and systems in the rest of the world, the conventional racial

hierarchy still persists here. Jones must remind Smithers that they are different, and it's very much an insult to Smithers to remind him of his whiteness while a powerful black man dresses him down. This shows too how Smithers' power comes from the color of his skin; it's something that's inherent to him. Jones, on the other hand, must rely on his title, his uniform, and his palace to remind people that he's powerful. His power isn't something inherent to him—because he's a black man.

No use'n you rakin' up ole times. What I was den is one thing. What I is now 's another.

Related Characters: Brutus Jones (speaker), Smithers

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

After Smithers apologizes for reminding Jones of his humble origins, Jones insists that the past is the past, and the present is very different. This suggests that Jones believes that he's truly escaped his past and has been able to write a new future for himself, entirely separate from the person he was in the US. This is one way that Jones actively separates himself from his humanity. In doing this, he refuses to take into account the things he's done in the past, either to learn from them or even just accept that they happened. In turn, then, this allows Jones to more successfully create his empire and his new, godlike identity as the ruler of the empire. He does this primarily by separating himself as much as he can from the things he believes marked him as black in his old life, and instead, he takes on things that help him create a persona of whiteness (at this point, namely his white palace and his uniform, as well as his derisive attitude towards his native subjects and Smithers).

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.

Related Characters: Brutus Jones (speaker), Smithers

Related Themes:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

Jones confides to Smithers that he made himself emperor for the money alone, not the glory. However, the way that Jones conceptualizes how glory works shows that he has a very nuanced understanding of power and humans' natural attraction to that power. Jones is aware that the natives desperately want to see power performed. Further, even though it's inarguable that Jones is a tyrannical emperor because he keeps his subjects in line and paying taxes solely out of fear and intimidation, it's also important to note that conducting his empire this way has been very profitable for him. This shows, in the end, that Jones understands humans, how they work, and what they want, even if he's blind to the fact that he himself is human as well.

Smithers: Look at the taxes you've put on 'em! Blimey! You've squeezed 'em dry!

Jones: No, dey ain't all dry yet. I'se still heah, ain't I?

Related Characters: Smithers, Brutus Jones (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Jones insists that the natives still have money to pay taxes, as evidenced by the fact that he's still emperor. Jones, of course, is unaware that the natives have escaped to the hills to plan their revolt, a fact that both the reader/viewer and Smithers are aware of. This creates dramatic irony and shows that Jones is very overconfident in his abilities and interpretations of the state of his empire. This is a result of Jones elevating himself to the level of a god, as it forcibly distances Jones from his own humanity and sense of empathy for his subjects. Jones's overconfidence also foreshadows his downfall at the end of the play, while providing him with a goal to work towards: letting go of his superiority complex and coming to terms with the fact that he's human, just like his subjects, and so shouldn't have exploited them as if they were less than human (even if he himself had been similarly exploited in the past).

> For de little stealin' dey gits you in jail soon or late. For de big stealin' dey makes you Emperor and puts in de Hall o' Fame when you croaks. 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.

Related Characters: Brutus Jones (speaker), Smithers

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Jones explains to Smithers his understanding of how crime and justice functions in the world: when carried out on a small scale, a perpetrator is punished, while large-scale crime yields fame and fortune. It's worth noting that Jones learned this from his white passengers on the Pullman sleeper trains, which automatically casts this interpretation in a racial light. Taking race into account, this becomes a damning explanation of the way that race is either rewarded or punished in the United States. Especially because of the time period in which the play takes place, it's important to keep in mind that Jones would've been subjected to Jim Crow laws, the Plessy v. Ferguson Supreme Court case that created the precedent for "separate but equal" public facilities, and overwhelmingly punished black crime far more harshly than it did white crime. In this way, Jones's "little stealin'" stands in for black crime, while "big stealin'" is a way of referencing crime that only individuals in power (like white people, or Jones as emperor) can pull off. Essentially, this shows that Jones came to power on his island because he performed whiteness (particularly wealthy whiteness) and committed crimes on that privileged scale, rather than sticking to smaller scale crimes.

> You'd 'ave been in jail if you 'ad, wouldn't yer then? And from what I've 'eard, it ain't 'ealthy for a black to kill a white man in the States. They burns 'em in oil, don't they?

Related Characters: Smithers (speaker), Brutus Jones

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

Smithers questions whether Jones actually killed a white man in the United States, and brings up the fact that Jones would've likely been killed had he done so. Though Smithers is right—it's extremely impressive that Jones, who did actually kill a white prison guard, escaped with his life—this is one instance in the play when Smithers isn't given as much power as he often is because of the color of his skin. Because Smithers is an Englishman, he didn't grow up living and breathing the racist systems at work in the United States like Jones did (though England has its own history of colonialism and slavery). This allows Jones to be the expert and allows him to more successfully control the narrative of his own life and of what life in general is like in the US, as he's the only one of the two with firsthand experience.

> 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.

Related Characters: Brutus Jones (speaker), Smithers

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

When Smithers reminds Jones that the forest is dark, dangerous, and the home of the natives, Jones scoffs and insists that the natives are too dumb to be able to properly give chase. With this, Jones showcases his internalized racism in several different ways. First, it's important to pay attention to how Jones speaks about the natives. The natives are black, just like Jones is, but he refuses to see them as humans just like him, and instead conceptualizes them as dumb, uncivilized, and wholly sub-human—in this way echoing the language of racist whites. On the other hand, Jones also elevates white people and culture when he talks about the white men chasing him with bloodhounds. This implies that chasing someone with hounds, as the white people did, is a superior way to do things. In this way, even though Jones is dismissing both the natives and the white people who couldn't catch him, he very clearly sets up a hierarchy that situates the black natives at the very bottom.

Doesn't you know dey's got to do so 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 pertect me and land dem all in hell.

Related Characters: Brutus Jones (speaker), Smithers

Related Themes:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

As Smithers continues to remind Jones of how scary the forest is at night, Jones asserts that he has God on his side to help him get through the night. At this point in the play, the fact that Jones was once a member of the Baptist Church indicates that he was once a part of a belief system that positioned him as a man in the service of an actual deity. To a degree, Jones still buys into this system—but only when it serves him, as he hopes it will during his journey through the woods. This shows just how highly Jones thinks of himself, and shows as well that he believes that he alone has the power and the ability to be a god and ask for help from another god at will, without doing any of the devotional religious work that would put him in connection with his own humanity, or a sense of perspective and humility.

Does you think I'd slink out de back door like a common nigger? I'se Emperor yit, ain't I? And de Emperor Jones leaves de way he comes, and dat black trash don't dare stop him—not yit, leastways.

Related Characters: Brutus Jones (speaker), Smithers

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

As Jones heads for the woods, he insists on walking out the front of his palace instead of escaping unnoticed out the back. For Jones, this is a symbolic way of asserting his dominance and showing Smithers and the natives that Jones still believes he's powerful and superhuman. This is, of course, linked to Jones's lack of fear, which is what the play pinpoints as the reason why he's able to elevate himself to the level of a god.

Again, Jones's language betrays the hierarchy he set up on the island, in which he as the emperor (but still a black man) takes control over other black people and then thinks of those people as less-than because they're black. To further elevate himself, Jones surrounds himself with things that symbolize whiteness, such as the white palace itself and his uniform. In this way, Jones aligns himself with the power he believes is inherent to whiteness, and supports his reasoning that the natives are less-than because they cannot use these symbols themselves.

Scene 2 Quotes

How come all dese white stones come heah when I only remembers one? Nigger, is you crazy mad? Is you lightin' matches to show dem whar you is? Fo' Lawd's sake, use yo' haid.

Related Characters: Brutus Jones (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

Jones is perplexed when he finds that there isn't just one white stone in the clearing where he hid his food; there are many, and his dinner isn't under any of them. Though the play isn't clear about whether this is a trick that the natives play on Jones or whether it's simply a product of Jones's misguided sense of superiority, the presence of so many white stones begins to complicate both Jones's control of his past and his narrative, as well as the power he assigns to whiteness. Up until this point, Jones has aligned himself with things that signify whiteness and power as a way to borrow some of that power for himself. The single white stone obscuring his food was intended to do the same thing, as it would be the first step to help him make his grand escape and set up shop elsewhere. Now that there are many white stones that mean nothing, they force Jones to come face to face with the fact that he isn't in control anymore, and he's definitely no longer powerful. Similarly, because the presence of so many white stones calls Jones's memory of this place and of hiding his food into question, the play begins to call all of Jones's history into question. This suggests that Jones's interpretation of the past is faulty or unreliable (and also questions the power assumed to be inherent in whiteness), and shows that he'll need to come to

a new way of understanding his past and his history as he moves forward.

Scene 3 Quotes

Dis am a long night fo' yo', yo' Majesty! Majesty! Der ain't much majesty 'bout dis baby now. Never min'. It's all part o' de game. Dis night come to an end like everything else.

Related Characters: Brutus Jones (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

As Jones wanders into the clearing where the ghost of Jeff is rolling dice, he laments that he doesn't look much like an emperor anymore. In particular, Jones's uniform is torn, which symbolizes his gradual decline from his powerful role as emperor to becoming nothing more than a man. When Jones continues to refer to himself as Majesty, it shows that even if Jones doesn't think he looks like an emperor anymore, he still thinks of himself as one—his outside appearance and his uniform do not match the powerful, superhuman figure inside. This shows how far Jones has yet to go in his journey to discovering his humanity. Per the logic of the play, Jones's power isn't something innate to him. It's something he has when he makes use of the symbols and imagery of power, and once those things are gone, so is his power itself.

Scene 4 Quotes

Damn dis heah coat! Like a straight-jacket!...And to hell wid dese high-fangled spurs. Dey're what's been a-trippin' me up an' breakin' my neck. Dere! I gits rid o' dem frippety Emperor trappin's an' I travels lighter.

Related Characters: Brutus Jones (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

As Jones continues his journey through the woods, he begins to shed parts of his uniform to escape the heat and travel more easily. In doing so, Jones shows that he understands that these things are simply symbols of the fact that he's the emperor, and further, that they're useless on their own.

On another level, Jones's interpretations of his clothing items show how the power structure symbolized by the uniform itself traps everyone, the victims and the perpetrators alike. While Jones once used the power invested in him by the uniform to subjugate and oppress the natives, now the uniform does the exact same thing to him. Particularly because the uniform makes Jones hot, it forces him to become aware of humanity in that it makes it exceptionally clear that Jones sweats, just like every other person does.

Oh, I'se sorry I evah went in for dis. Dat Emperor job is sho' hard to shake.

Related Characters: Brutus Jones (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 38

Explanation and Analysis

After abandoning some of his clothing, Jones laments that he became emperor in the first place, as getting out of the position is difficult. This once again shows how the power system Jones created isn't a system that benefits him completely. Now that he's no longer in power, he's at the mercy of what he's created, and his former subjects very much resent him for exploiting them for the last two years. Because Jones's system is based off of the unequal racial power system in the United States, this idea also extends to encompass that power structure as well. Both systems, that of the US and the one that Jones created, are extremely difficult to shake, as Jones is discovering.

Yes, suh! Yes, suh! I'se comin'.
God damn yo' soul, I gits even wid you yit, sometime.

Related Characters: Brutus Jones (speaker), The Prison Guard

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

After the ghostly chain gang arrives to work on the road in the forest, the prison guard beckons for Jones to join the gang as a prisoner. The fact that Jones obeys without a second thought drives home how entrenched he is in the power structure that denies black people rights and even their humanity. Returning to that state isn't something that Jones even has to think about—tt's something that he almost instinctively remembers, and it takes him several minutes to remember that this iteration of the prison guard is a ghost and doesn't actually hold the same kind of power over Jones that the real prison guard once did. Similarly, Jones's threat to the guard shows that he's fully aware that killing the single prison guard didn't destroy the system that gave the guard his power. Even if Jones killed an authority figure, and one who represented white power, that doesn't mean that the power itself is gone. Unlike Jones, who takes on the power by possessing symbols of power, the guard's power is an essential part of him (within the American, European, and colonialist structures of society) simply because he's white.

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

Related Characters: Brutus Jones (speaker), The Prison Guard

Related Themes:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

In a fit of rage, Jones pulls his gun on the ghost of the prison guard and shoots him. The reappearance of the prison guard in the first place is a chilling reminder to Jones that he'll never be able to escape the system of oppression that he thought he left behind in the states. Even on the Caribbean island, where Jones thinks he's safe and exempt, the ghosts of racism will still continue to haunt him. When Jones shoots the guard, the play suggests that Jones is destined to continue repeating his past, and will be unable to ever change it. Both times, Jones is able to make the prison guard disappear by behaving violently towards him. However, by presenting Jones with the same problem time and again, the play shows that this kind of violence is cyclical, and not something that Jones will be able to truly free himself from.

Scene 5 Quotes

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

Related Characters: Brutus Jones (speaker), Lem, The Prison Guard, Jeff

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43

Explanation and Analysis

Here Jones prays to the Christian God, regretting that he killed Jeff and the prison guard, and then exploited the natives on the island. This is a major step for Jones, as it's the first time that he truly expresses remorse for any of the things he's done. Because of this, this is when Jones begins to get closer to his own humanity. Notably, he does so by praying to a different god, which suggests that he thinks of himself as less than a god at this point, and instead must lean on another deity for support. All of this was brought on because the natives made Jones fear for his life and fear that he's losing his mind. Essentially, they've made him look his humanity in the face and take note of its existence.

Scene 6 Quotes

> Oh, Lawd, what I gwine do now? Ain't got no bullet left on'y de silver one. If mo' o' dem ha'nts come after me, how I gwine skeer dem away? Oh, Lawd, on'y de silver one left—an' I gotta save dat fo' luck. If I shoots dat one I'm a goner sho'!

Related Characters: Brutus Jones (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

As Jones crawls into the "clearing" that becomes the ghostly slave ship, he laments that he's out of options and has only his silver bullet left to protect him. Interestingly, Jones

seems fully aware that his silver bullet is the final thing connecting him to his godliness and sense of security. By this point in the play, Jones is far away from his palace, and his uniform is little more than a loincloth. Both of those symbols of power, then, are absent, leaving Jones with nothing but his very human body. When Jones recognizes that shooting his silver bullet will bring about his demise, it suggests that Jones hasn't yet made the final leap to being truly human. Because the bullet symbolizes his godliness, not his humanity, shooting the bullet and ridding himself of it will by necessity deprive him of his power and his state of being superhuman.

Scene 7 Quotes

❝❝ What—what is I doin'? What is—dis place? Seems like—seems like I know dat tree—an' dem stones—an' de river. I remember—seems like I been heah befo'.

Related Characters: Brutus Jones (speaker), The Witch Doctor

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

Jones wanders into the final clearing by the river, where there's a rocky altar set up, and feels as though he recognizes the place. Taking this scene as a whole, Jones's feeling of familiarity suggests that this kind of instinctive memory and familiarity is something inherent to individuals who are descended from slaves (at least in O'Neill's view). In turn, this implies that the entire legacy of slavery, from people's origins in Africa to the subjugation African Americans experience in the US in the early 20th century, is part of a person like Jones's experience that he cannot separate himself from. This shows that Jones's project of setting up his empire here on an isolated island, away from the racism and oppression of the US, was doomed from the start. Though he took it on to try and separate himself from this history, the history finds him anyway and punishes him for forgetting it—and in this scene, he shoots his final, silver bullet and destroys his godliness once and for all.

Scene 8 Quotes

❝❝ 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? Silver bullets! Gawd blimey, but yer died in the 'eighth o' style, any'ow!

Related Characters: Smithers (speaker), Lem, Brutus Jones

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

After Lem's soldiers bring Jones's dead body out of the woods, Smithers insults Jones's body and his superiority complex in life. Smithers, as the figure in charge of interpreting the first and last scenes for the reader or viewer, makes it clear to the audience that Jones was misguided from the start—as a black man, Jones never had any right to hold the kind of power he did on the island (per Smithers' racist logic). Further, Smithers was aware that Jones could be killed with lead bullets like any other man, which makes Smithers the only character who was aware that Jones was actually human for the entire play. However, when Smithers fails to recognize that the silver bullets held a great deal of meaning and symbolism for both Lem's soldiers and for Jones, he insists that his belief system is the one that everyone, characters and audience alike, adhere to. In this way, Smithers gets the final word and the ultimate interpretation of events, one that casts Jones as a silly and misguided man who sought power far above his station and met his rightful end for trying.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

SCENE 1

The play opens onto the emperor's throne room. The walls and floor are **white**, and a wooden throne with red and orange pillows sits in the middle of the empty room. Through the arched doors, hills covered in palm trees stretch for miles. An old black woman sneaks into the throne room, looking as though she's afraid of being discovered. Assured she's alone, she tiptoes through the room—only to be intercepted by Smithers, a cruel white sailor. He grabs her by the shoulders and she frantically begs Smithers to not tell the emperor about her.

This opening scene allows the viewer or reader to understand outright that Jones (the emperor) is exceptionally powerful. This old woman is clearly afraid of him, and the fact that the throne room is painted white is meant to signal that he's powerful in the same way that white people are powerful. With this, it shows the extent of Jones's control—he doesn't even need to be here to exert his strength.

Smithers asks scornfully if the woman has been stealing, and she insists she hasn't. Smithers doesn't believe this, but admits that there's something strange going on, given that the palace is silent and all the black servants are gone. Threateningly, Smithers raises his whip and the woman cowers. She explains that the natives have all run away into the hills and she's the only one left. Smithers is astonished, but meanly admits that he's glad. He continues that the emperor deserves an uprising for putting on airs, given that he's black, and says he hopes that he's around to see the natives shoot the emperor.

Notice how Smithers speaks down to both this black native woman and about Jones—his racism shines through, even if Jones is technically more powerful than he is. This shows that even if Jones has established this empire here, he hasn't been able to fully escape being the object of white people's racism. This is also an early hint that Jones will be unable to escape this race-based oppression on any level.

Smithers suddenly asks if the emperor is still asleep, and the woman assures him that he is. Smithers releases the woman, who races away in fear, and he whistles loudly out one of the doors. Smithers reaches for his gun and calls out threats to the old woman, but finally lets her go with only a racist insult.

Smithers' concern about the emperor being asleep or not suggests that Jones isn't someone to mess with. This shows that there's actual danger involved in disobeying him, and continues to illustrate Jones's degree of power over his subjects.

Jones, the emperor, enters the throne room, dressed in a blue and red military **uniform** covered in gold chains and brass buttons. When he sees that none of his servants are around, he shouts in irritation and threatens to beat whoever woke him up. Smithers, seeming half afraid, reveals himself to Jones and admits that he whistled, but explains that he has news. Jones contemptuously sits on his throne and asks Smithers to tell him the news.

Like the white room, the uniform is intended to show that Jones is a true emperor, both in terms of where he conducts his business and in what he looks like. However, the fact that both the white throne room and the uniform are things that aren't inherent to Jones, or an intrinsic part of him, suggests that this is just a role he's filling or has created for himself.

Smithers asks Jones if he noticed anything funny earlier, and Jones declares that nothing is amiss. Sarcastically, Smithers inquires as to the whereabouts of Jones's court, but Jones replies that they're where they always are when he sleeps: in town, drinking rum. Jones mirrors Smithers' sarcasm and asks how he's not aware of this, since Smithers drinks with the court every day. In an attempt to mask his offense, Smithers insists that drinking with people is part of his job.

Just as Jones is performing a role as emperor, his court members appear to perform their roles as courtiers in much the same way: as soon as the performance is no longer required, they don't do it. This begins to suggest that in the logic system of this play, power is something that Jones and his court can inhabit and then put down at will.

Jones scoffs at the mention of Smithers' job, and Smithers, enraged, reminds Jones that he helped him when Jones first came to the island—and back then, Jones didn't act high and mighty. Menacingly, Jones reaches for his revolver and tells Smithers to speak politely, since Jones is the boss now. Smithers holds Jones's gaze, but finally backs down and insists he meant no harm. Jones accepts the apology and says that there's no use in bringing up the past, as he's an entirely different person now. Further, he says that Smithers didn't help him out of kindness: Jones did dirty work and "brain work," and he was therefore once a valuable employee to Smithers.

Here, Smithers actively and openly idealizes a time when Jones, a black man, wasn't in power. Jones is very correct in pointing out that he's no longer the same person he was then, as he's now significantly more powerful than he was when he was Smithers' employee. However, as Jones speaks, he begins to show that he thinks very highly of himself and of his skills. Though this isn't necessarily a bad thing, when taken alongside Jones's current status, it means that he thinks of himself as very superior.

Smithers reminds Jones that nobody else would hire him when they found out that Jones had broken out of jail in the United States. Jones replies that Smithers couldn't have been able to look down on him for being in jail, given that he's been in jail before too. Enraged, Smithers asks who told Jones this lie, but Jones insists that there are things he can see in a person's eyes. He pauses for a moment before admitting that Smithers did give him his start, but it didn't take long at all to subdue the natives. With pride, Jones says he went from a stowaway to emperor in two years' time.

As a black man in the US, Jones would've been subjected to Jim Crow laws and other forms of systemic racism that kept him from becoming successful there. Notice, however, that even though Jones is technically superior to Smithers on this island, he is ruler over the black natives first and foremost. Essentially, Jones is replicating the power structure he saw in the US, even to the point where he has to oppress other black people.

Smithers asks Jones if he has money hidden somewhere safe, and Jones shares that his money is hidden in a foreign bank where he's the only person who can get it. He asks Smithers if Smithers thought he's been playing at being emperor for the glory. Jones continues, saying that the glorified part of being emperor is just to keep the natives' attention; they want a "circus show," and he gives it to them in exchange for their money. Becoming suddenly serious, Jones reminds Smithers that he paid Smithers back long ago and continues to protect Smithers' corrupt trading even as he makes laws against it.

Even if Jones is self-centered and thinks highly of himself, he also shows that he's adept at figuring out how to manipulate others by giving them what they want: he gives the natives their "circus show" and protects Smithers' illegal activities in order to maintain their loyalty. In doing this, Jones shows that he understands that his power isn't entirely absolute. He's still giving these people something that they want, even if it's basic and conditional.

Smithers cautiously points out that Jones has been doing the same sort of thing with taxes, and the natives are out of money. Jones laughs again and says the natives aren't totally broke, since he's still emperor. Smithers smiles secretively and then changes the subject, insisting that Jones breaks the laws as fast as he makes them. Jones explains that the emperor doesn't have to follow the laws. He takes a serious tone and tells Smithers that there's "little stealing," like Smithers does, and then there's "big stealing," like he does. The little stealing lands people in jail, while big stealing gets a person crowned emperor. He shares that he learned this listening to **white** passengers on the trains, and now that he's had the chance to steal big, he's become emperor in only two years.

Jones's breakdown of little versus big stealing is a damning interpretation of the racialized systems of oppression in the US: people of color are overwhelmingly punished more harshly for minor crimes, while their white counterparts get away with or are even rewarded for crimes on a much grander scale (and even within white society alone, "white collar" criminals are punished much less harshly than "blue collar" criminals). This shows that Jones associates this kind of success with whiteness specifically, and makes it abundantly clear then that his emperorship offers him the opportunity to perform whiteness.

Admiringly, Smithers agrees that Jones successfully tricked the natives. He's never seen anyone with such luck. Jones is offended that Smithers thinks this was all luck, but Smithers insists that the trick with the **silver bullet** is absolutely luck. Jones laughs and agrees, but explains that he made that luck by cheating: when the native that Lem hired misfired from only ten feet away, Jones just shot him. He asks Smithers to repeat what Jones said at the time, and Smithers complies. He recounts that Jones said that he was charmed, and only silver bullets can kill him.

In regard to the silver bullet, Jones cheated his way into becoming something more than just an ordinary man with power: he's now a full-on god in the eyes of the natives. This explains where some of the natives' fear comes from, as they believe that Jones is more powerful than he actually is. Smithers' admiration tells the reader that this is indeed something that Jones should be proud of, and it's something worth admiring.

Jones says that he's smart and he thinks quickly, which isn't luck. Smithers points out that the natives will never be able to obtain **silver bullets**, and it was only luck that the native's gun malfunctioned. Laughing, Jones says that the natives are all fools—they all kneeled down and bowed like Jones was a biblical miracle, and from then on, they've done whatever he has told them to do.

Smithers seems to miss that his point is the point—Jones believes that this ruse guarantees his safety, given that it's unthinkable that the natives will ever be able to come up with the one thing that can supposedly kill Jones. Again, though this was indeed smart thinking on Jones's part, it also illustrates how cocky he is, and how he depends on the natives' impoverished state to maintain his power.

Smithers sniffs, and Jones suggests that "talkin' big" is what makes a man powerful, assuming he can make people believe that the talk is real. He continues that he knows he can fool the natives, and that's enough to maintain the charade. Jones points out that he learned some of the native language and taught the natives some English, which was hard work. He reminds Smithers that in ten years, Smithers hasn't learned a word of the language, even though it would absolutely help him profit.

The things Jones has done to truly get to know the natives show that he absolutely has the potential to be a good leader, and not the tyrannical emperor he appears to be now. This provides evidence of the strength of the power structure Jones experienced in the US. Essentially, though he has some of the tools to break it, the system itself is easier to emulate than to escape.

Smithers blushes and changes the subject. He asks Jones if the rumors are true that he actually had a **silver bullet** made, and Jones explains that he did. Jones says that he told the natives that when the time comes, he'll kill himself with it, as that reinforces the idea that he's the only man in the world who can bring on his own death—it's no use for them to even try. Jones laughs and says that this means he can take walks without fearing for his life.

It's a relatively common mythological motif for silver bullets to be the only thing that can kill monsters or demons, so by telling the natives that he can only be killed in this way, Jones elevates himself far above simply being human. This both legitimizes his rule of the natives and reinforces the power structure he has created here.

Astonished, Smithers asks again if Jones actually had a **silver bullet** made. Jones pulls out his revolver, unloads it, and pulls out five lead bullets and one silver one. Jones looks at it admiringly and yells at Smithers to get back when Smithers reaches out his hand for the bullet. Jones explains that he's not afraid of Smithers stealing, but the silver bullet is his lucky charm.

The fact that Jones needs the lucky charm suggests that he's not as different from the natives as he'd like to think, given that he too buys into some minor forms of superstition. This works to create connections between Jones and the natives, and show the reader or viewer how similar they (and all humans) are.

Smithers venomously makes fun of Jones having a good luck charm, but says that he'll need all the help he can get before too long. Jones replies that he has six months before the natives become sick of him, and at that point he'll be ready to escape. He continues, saying that he knows his time as emperor will be short, and he has no intention of remaining on the island. Instead, when he smells trouble, he'll resign as emperor, take his money, and leave. Jones refuses to tell Smithers where he'll go, and Smithers says knowingly that Jones certainly won't go back to the states. Jones insists that the story about his escape from jail isn't true.

When Jones attempts to control his own story and the elements that Smithers knows or talks about, it's an attempt by Jones to rewrite history (as dictators are wont to do). On the island he does have the opportunity to escape all of the baggage that comes with being a black man in the United States: the history of slavery, the continued racial tensions, and Jones's personal violent history and experiences with the US justice system. This shows Jones attempting to separate himself from all of these things that are parts of his past.

Smithers expresses disbelief, and Jones sharply asks Smithers if he thinks that Jones is a liar. Quickly, Smithers brings up Jones's lies that he killed **white** men in the states. Jones angrily asks why those are lies, and Smithers insists that Jones would've been in jail if he'd killed white men. He goes on to say that he's heard that it's dangerous for black men to kill white men in the US, as the white men then burn the black men in oil. Coolly, Jones says that lynching doesn't scare him. He levels a stare at Smithers and says that maybe he did kill a white man in the States, and he might kill another one before too long.

Smithers' disbelief encourages the reader or viewer to also question Jones's story, given Smithers' position of authority as a narrator of sorts. Because Smithers is an Englishman, he's also given some distance from the racism and social structure of the US: he's only heard that it's dangerous for black people to target white people; he doesn't have the firsthand experience that an American would. This shows that this particular power structure is somewhat unique to the US.

Trying desperately to laugh off this threat, Smithers insists that he was only joking, and reminds Jones that he said himself he's never been to jail. Jones suggests that maybe he (Jones) did go to jail for fighting with razors over a crap game (dice), and got 20 years when the black man he fought with died. Then, he suggests that he might've gotten in an argument with a prison guard while working on a road, and when the guard whipped him, Jones hit him with a shovel. Finally, he suggests he escaped the chain gang—though, maybe he did none of those things. Jones says that he tells this story so that Smithers understands that if he goes blabbing it all over, Jones will kill him.

With this, Jones attempts to reassert his dominance and his power over his own story by making sure that Smithers doesn't spread it. Again, however, the way that Jones couches his narrative doesn't give the reader solid evidence either way that Jones did or didn't do these things, which creates the sense that Jones's personal history is still unknown and murky. Regardless, the threat against Smithers ensures that Jones will maintain his sense of power over this particular white man.

Terrified, Smithers reminds Jones that he's always been a friend, and Jones relaxes and tells Smithers he should plan on staying that way. Smithers says that to prove he's Jones's friend, he'll tell him the news he mentioned earlier. Jones says it must be bad news, given the look on Smithers' face. Smithers ignores this and suggests that it might be time for Jones to resign and use his **silver bullet**.

Smithers' apparent glee that Jones's empire is on the way out is indicative of his racism: the fact that Jones, a black man, is in power is extremely offensive to him and goes against his belief regarding how the world should work.

Jones is confused, and asks Smithers to elaborate. Smithers asks Jones if he's noticed that none of his guards or servants are around, and Jones nonchalantly says that they're all asleep, per usual—all he has to do is ring the bell and they'll run to him and insist they were awake and working. In a mocking tone, Smithers tells Jones to ring the bell. Jones looks alert and suspicious, but he maintains his tone of voice as he agrees and pulls out his bell. He rings it loudly and then goes to both doors to look. Nobody comes. Smithers looks pleased with himself and says that the ship is sinking and the rats have already left.

Again, Jones shows a remarkable understanding of the terms of his power: he knows that he has to put up with his servants sleeping in order to maintain the status quo. This shows again that Jones has an impressive grasp on what it means to be human and violently oppressed and afraid, even if he is (supposedly) superhuman and relatively free himself at the moment.

Enraged, Jones throws the bell and yells obscenities about the natives. He notices Smithers again and composes himself, laughs, and says he probably became overconfident. Jones says it's time to resign right now. Smithers compliments Jones's change of plan, and Jones says there's no point fighting it. He confirms that the natives ran to the hills and says that he needs to get going. As he heads for the door, Smithers says that all the horses are gone. Jones looks momentarily alarmed, but decides he'll just go on foot. He checks the time and discovers he has three hours before sunset.

When Jones admits that he became overconfident in his own abilities, it continues to suggest that he is aware on some level that he's conceptualized himself as being more powerful than he actually is. This opens the play up to begin to bring Jones back down to being truly human and powerless, particularly if he's going to leave his palace. By leaving this white place, Jones will leave behind some of the symbolic (and oppressive) power he created.

Smithers cautions Jones and says that Lem, the native chief, is certainly behind the revolt. He says that Lem hates Jones so much, he'd rather chase Jones than take a break to eat dinner. Jones insults Lem and says he's not scared, and that Lem will die if he gets in Jones's way. Smithers reminds Jones that he'll need to go through the forest, and the natives can track people in the dark without a problem. Smithers says that a person would need to hurry to make it through the forest in twelve hours, even if he knew all the trails.

Notice Jones's insistence that he's not afraid. This lack of fear is one of the things that elevates him above being simply human and makes him a godlike figure, which sets up fear as one thing that Jones will need to learn in the forest as he returns to a human state. As Smithers attempts to scare Jones, he's also attempting to regain some of his own power, which he feels entitled to as a white man.

Indignantly, Jones insists he's not a fool: he's been going out in the forest to "hunt" for a while now, planning his escape. Contemptuously, he says that the ignorant natives aren't smart enough to know their own names, let alone catch Brutus Jones. He says that the **white** men chased him with bloodhounds in the states, and he just laughed—and it will be so easy to trick the black natives, it's almost shameful. Jones lays out his plan: he'll enter the forest by nightfall, and by morning he'll be on the coast, where a French boat is waiting to pick him up and take him to Martinique. There, he'll be safe and rich.

Jones hasn't just turned himself into a god: he's gone so far as to consider the natives barely human. This shows one of the major consequences of having the kind of power he does, as it allows him to think of his subjects as not human, and therefore not worthy of being treated like humans. This line of thinking is also racist, as Jones holds these beliefs about the natives because they are black and "uncivilized."

Smithers asks what'll happen if the natives do catch Jones, and Jones insists they won't. When pressed on the matter, Jones says he has five lead bullets to shoot the natives, and then he'll shoot himself with his **silver bullet**. Smithers jeers that Jones will die in style, and Jones says that he'll play this game as long as he can, and when he's done, he'll go out with a bang. Collecting himself, Jones reminds himself that these "trash" natives won't be able to kill him, and his silver bullet is just good luck anyway. He boasts that he can outrun, outfight, and outguess anyone, anywhere, anytime.

Though Jones doesn't mention fear specifically, his plan for the end of his life suggests that his greatest fear isn't being dead—it's being human and powerless, like he was in the states and like the natives on the island are. This makes it abundantly clear that there are major psychological consequences to experiencing the kind of oppressive power structure that Jones did in the US, as death is preferable to existing within it.

From the hills, Jones and Smithers hear a faint beating of a tom-tom. It beats at the rate of a human pulse. Jones looks suddenly worried and asks what the drum is for. Smithers looks maliciously at Jones and says that the drum is for Jones—the "ceremony" has begun. When Jones asks, Smithers explains that the natives are holding a meeting, dancing a war dance, and generally working up their courage before they start after Jones. Jones spits that the natives will need that courage.

It's significant that the tom-tom is beating at the rate of a resting human pulse. Because of this, it shows that the natives aren't just chasing Jones to topple him, they're chasing him to reconnect him with his humanity. The tom-tom then represents Jones's humanity and rising fear as it pursues him throughout the rest of the play.

Smithers says that the natives are also holding their "heathen" religious service, and are casting charms to help them. Jones asserts that it'll take more than charms to scare him, but sensing that Jones is actually shaken, Smithers says quietly that later, when the forest is pitch black, the natives will send ghosts after Jones. He says that the forest is a strange place, even in daylight, and you never know what might happen in there. Smithers admits that even he gets the shivers there.

Despite Smithers' contempt for the natives, he's actually helping them make Jones human again by beginning to sow the seeds of fear in Jones. Similarly, Smithers essentially tells the reader/viewer that he too is human by admitting that the forest scares him. Incidentally, this also sets Smithers up as a character who doesn't need to change over the course of the play, since he's already human (and a particular kind of racist white "outsider" figure in particular).

Jones sniffs and declares that he's not scared of things like Smithers is. He says that the forest is his friend, and the natives are more than welcome to send ghosts, since he doesn't believe in them anyway. He says that he's a member in good standing of the Baptist Church, and the natives can do their best—but they'll all end up in hell, while the Church will protect Jones. He reminds Smithers again that he also has his lucky **silver bullet**.

Though exploitation like Jones carried out is absolutely part of the history of Christianity, it's also not Christ-like at all. This shows that Jones very much wants to have his cake and eat it too, as he wants the protection of a religious system that he's done nothing to support for the last two years, and has even actively denied. This then echoes the way slaveowners in the US used Christianity to justify their brutal and extremely unchristian practices.

Smithers laughs and says that it doesn't seem like Jones has given much thought to the Baptist Church since he became emperor, and he's heard that Jones follows the local witch doctors now. Jones insists he only pretends to, and that it's part of his game. He says that as soon as he discovers one of the natives' beliefs, he "embraces" it wholeheartedly. Jones says it doesn't do him any good to do missionary work, since he's just after money. He says that he's putting Jesus on the shelf for a while. Abruptly, Jones checks his watch and exclaims that he doesn't have time to waste. Jones reaches under his throne and pulls out a fancy hat. He bids Smithers goodbye and says he might see him in jail sometime.

Again, by conceptualizing religion as something he can pick up and put down at will because of who he is (emperor), Jones insists that he's above or beyond actually following the teachings of a particular system. This is a result of the fact that he thinks of himself as a kind of god, and because of his own godliness he doesn't need other gods or belief systems to maintain his good life. In the worldview of a godlike emperor, what he does is automatically good—he doesn't have to strive to obey a moral system beyond his own actions and desires.

Smithers wishes Jones luck, and Jones insists he'll have such a head start that the natives will never catch up. Smithers asks Jones to give his regards to the ghosts, but Jones just grins. He says that if he meets a ghost with money, he'll tell it to not haunt Smithers so that Smithers doesn't steal the ghost's money. Smithers is flattered, and asks Jones if he's taking any luggage. Jones explains that he travels light and he has food hidden on the edge of the forest. Grandly, Jones gestures around and wills the entirety of the palace to Smithers.

Smithers' and Jones's parting suggests that even if the two don't particularly like each other, there is some sense of companionship between them. This begins to allude to the possibility that Jones may actually want more meaningful relationships than he has with the natives (in which the relationships are based purely in power and fear), and may want to reconnect with his humanity and have friends, or at least peers who can understand his experiences.

Jones walks to the main entryway and looks around, and Smithers asks if Jones is really going to go out the front. Jones insists he's not going to sneak out like a common black person; he's still the emperor and will leave like an emperor. Jones listens to the drum for a moment, comments that it must be a big drum, and says goodbye to Smithers again. As Jones whistles and walks off, Smithers remarks that Jones has nerve. Suddenly, Smithers reminds himself of his anger, insults Jones, and hopes that the natives get him. Smithers looks around and decides to look through the treasure.

Jones very clearly lays out a hierarchy of black people, and situates himself at the top. This shows that Jones himself has internalized many racist ideas, especially those he experienced as a Pullman porter. It is worth noting, though, that as Jones leaves the white palace he abandons it as a symbol of his power. His power is therefore actively diminishing, and as it decreases, Jones becomes less white and more black, per the logic of power in the play.

SCENE 2

Jones reaches the edge of the forest as night falls. He looks around, appears satisfied that he's where he's supposed to be, and then falls to the ground in exhaustion. He talks to himself and pants that he made it just in time as he pulls out a bandana and wipes at his sweaty brow. Jones remarks that being emperor is a poor way to prepare for such a long, hot hike, but he laughs and assures himself that the worst is yet to come.

What Jones is beginning to understand is that the kind of power he experienced as emperor is a really terrible way to prepare to lose *all that power and reenter the system of oppression as an oppressed man. As Jones tries to talk himself up, he also attempts to reassure himself that he won't actually have to give up his status simply because he left the site of his power (that is, the white palace).*

Jones looks at the forest, and with awe he admits that Smithers was right: the forest is extremely dark. He turns away; to avoid looking at the forest, he speaks to his feet. Jones praises his feet as he takes off his boots and inspects them for blisters. They're only beginning to get hot, and he reminds his feet that they have a long way to go. Sitting back, Jones listens to the tom-tom and grumbles obscenities about the natives, wondering if they'll ever get sick of beating their drum. He wonders if they're starting their chase and looks back across the plain, but decides that the rapidly falling night would make them impossible to see anyway. He shakes his head and assures himself that the natives are miles behind, and there's no reason to worry.

It's worth noting that there's an inverse relationship here between what Jones can physically see and what he'll be forced to see on an emotional level. As the daylight and the forest rob him of the ability to survey his empire, the thing that shows that he has power, he instead has to look inward at himself. In doing so, Jones begins to move away from his role as emperor and is forced to look at the kind of human he is (here, one that is struggling, in pain, and believes himself inherently superior to those around him).

Changing the subject, Jones re-laces his boots and decides he's getting nervous because he's hungry. When he finishes putting on his boots, he scans the ground, looking for a particular **white** stone. He spots it and crawls to it, thrilled by the prospect of food—but there's nothing under the stone. Jones reasons that he isn't quite in the right spot, and he reaches for another white stone. There's nothing under it either. Frantically, Jones scrambles around, turning over white stones without success.

In this instance, Jones's inability to locate the particular white stone (whether because he's actually in the wrong spot or because the natives are playing tricks on him) suggests that his hold on power—as symbolized by whiteness—is disappearing. Here, whiteness is everywhere, but while it once made Jones feel powerful, it now makes him utterly powerless.

Jones jumps to his feet and decides he must be in the wrong place, but he cannot figure out how he got lost when he followed the path. He almost whines as he says he's hungry and needs to eat to work up strength, and he resolves to somehow find his food. Jones remarks that it's pitch black now, and he lights a match to look around. The tempo of the tom-tom increases as Jones, bewildered, wonders where all the **white** stones came from, since he only remembers one. With a gasp, Jones flings the match from him, puts it out, and wonders if he's going mad: lighting a match is stupid, and will only show the natives where he is. He looks over his shoulder, his hand on his gun, and wonders again where his food is.

Again, Jones desperately wants to regain his sense of sight so that he can make sense of his world, his empire, and where he fits in it—but in the dark, all he has is his fear. The fact that Jones's memory is apparently faulty also begins to call what Jones told Smithers about his past into question, as it suggests that Jones is an unreliable narrator when it comes to speaking about himself and the things he's done.

As Jones scans the plain, the "little formless fears" creep out of the forest towards him. They're grub-shaped and black, about the size of a child, and have glittering eyes. Jones turns to face the forest and studies the tops of the trees for a moment before declaring that nothing looks recognizable, and the forest is strange. He asks the woods if they're trying to trick him, and the formless fears laugh at Jones mockingly. They squirm towards him as Jones looks down, notices them, and yells in terror. He leaps back and pulls out his gun, threatening to shoot.

The "little formless fears" show Jones that both fear and power can take surprising forms: even though these creatures are small and it's unclear what they'd do if they reached Jones, they still have the power to scare him and remind him that his hold on power and confidence is tenuous at best.

Jones fires, and the rhythm of the tom-tom increases again. The little formless fears scuttle back into the forest as Jones stands and listens, seeming more confident with the gun in his hand. He speaks to himself again and says that the formless fears were certainly just wild pigs who probably rooted up his food. Jones assures himself that they weren't ghosts. Suddenly, Jones exclaims that he gave his location away when he fired the gun, and it's time to enter the woods. He hesitates at the edge and then urges himself on, telling himself that there's nothing to be scared of.

As the tempo of the tom-tom increases, so does Jones's fear. Because the play links fear to being human, the gradual increase in tempo then allows the reader or viewer a way to follow Jones's return to humanity as he journeys through the forest. Similarly, by insisting that nothing is recognizable to his eyes, Jones has no choice but to look inwards at his humanity.

SCENE 3

By nine that night, the moon is up, and it casts an eerie glow on a clearing in the forest. The tom-tom beats in the distance. As the moon rises higher, Jeff appears in the clearing, throwing dice again and again. Jeff pays no notice when Jones comes into view at the edge of the clearing. Jones, talking to himself in a voice that's obviously trying to disguise his fear, notes that the moon is up now. He tells himself to cheer up as he wipes his sweaty face and picks at his torn **uniform**. Jones wonders what time it is, but decides to not light a match to check his watch.

As Jones's uniform tears, it shows how the façade or performance of being emperor is beginning to similarly come undone. The fact that Jones doesn't notice Jeff at first shows how self-centered Jones has become. He's so caught up in his own misery and impending downfall that he's entirely unaware that there's another being nearby—a consequence of his inflated sense of superiority.

Jones wonders how long he's been walking, and comments on the oppressive heat. He refers to himself as "yo' Majesty," and then laughs at how silly that sounds given the circumstances. He tries to cheer himself up and declares that this is all part of the game, and he'll soon emerge safe and rich on the other side of the woods. Jones begins to whistle a tune, but stops quickly, afraid it'll give him away. He pauses to listen for the tom-tom and remarks that it sounds like it's getting closer. Jones decides it's time to move fast.

When Jones laughs about "yo' Majesty," he shows that he understands that his power was very much contingent on location and context: his emperorship was rooted in his palace, and the power won't follow him. This shows that some parts of a person's history are rooted in a particular place, though the logic of the play suggests it's things more like Jones's "undeserved" power as a black man that work in this way.

As Jones fully enters the clearing, he notices the clicking sound of the dice. He remarks with fear in his voice that it sounds like someone shooting crap (a dice game), and decides he needs to leave right away. Quickly, Jones begins to cross the clearing, but stops with a gasp when he notices Jeff. Jones moves towards Jeff, transfixed at the sight of his mechanical motions, and with relief remarks that he's glad to see Jeff. He tells Jeff that "they" said that Jeff died from Jones's razor cuts, and suddenly stops. With a wild look in his eyes, Jones asks how Jeff ended up in the forest. Jeff continues to pay no notice to Jones.

Jones's relief at seeing Jeff indicates that he does feel some empathy for Jeff, or remorse for hurting him like he did. This is evidence that Jones's humanity does exist—it's just been buried. Meeting this ghost of Jeff playing crap also tells the reader that Jones's possibly true, possibly false story to Smithers about his time in the states was true, which in turn means that Jones also spent time in jail and killed a white guard. His history is returning to haunt him.

Jones keeps watching Jeff roll the dice, his fear mounting. He stutters and asks Jeff if he'll look up, and then asks Jeff if he's a ghost. With a mixture of rage and terror, Jones pulls out his revolver and shoots at Jeff. When the smoke clears, Jeff is gone. Jones stands and watches for a moment, and seems reassured. He tells himself that ghost or not, the bullet got rid of Jeff. Jones looks over his shoulder with a start as he notices that the tom-tom is getting louder and faster. He laments his foolishness for shooting and giving himself away, and he plunges into the shadows of the forest.

Jones's rage comes from being reminded that his attempt to escape his past by relocating to the Caribbean was ineffective. While Jones's reign as emperor was confined to a particular time and place, the fact that Jones murdered a man is something that he'll have to live with for the rest of his life, no matter his location or level of power. Accepting that is the way that Jones will accept his humanity.

SCENE 4

By eleven o'clock, the moon is high in the sky. A road runs through the forest, illuminated by moonlight. Jones stumbles onto it, his **uniform** more torn and looking very ragged. When he notices he's on a road, he seems surprised. He stands and blinks in confusion for a moment before throwing himself to the ground, panting and sweaty. Suddenly, Jones yells that he's melting in the heat. He curses his jacket and then rips it off, flinging it away into the woods. Naked to the waist, he sighs and declares that he feels better. He looks down at his feet and decides to take off his spurs too, since they've been tripping him. He throws them away after his jacket.

The oppressive heat is another way that Jones is forced to confront his own humanity. It's an insistent reminder that he's human, and like any other human, he's going to sweat and struggle to stay cool in this kind of heat. As he begins to remove his uniform himself, Jones begins to more actively move towards discarding things that signify his power and status. This consequently brings him closer to his own naked humanity.

Jones sighs again and remarks that he'll be able to travel faster without the "frippety" emperor **uniform**. He pauses and listens to the tom-tom, noticing that even though he's covered a lot of ground, the drum doesn't sound any further away. Jones reasons that he's holding his lead and they'll never catch him, assuming his legs don't give out. Sighing, he laments ever becoming emperor, and notes that it's a hard role to get out of now.

As Jones remarks that his emperorship will be hard to get out of, he shows that he is beginning to understand that he cannot escape his past. Just as he had to reckon with the fact that he killed Jeff, this journey to escape the natives will force Jones to accept and understand that he did a terrible thing by oppressing and exploiting the natives.

Jones looks around and suspiciously wonders where the road came from, since he's never seen it before. He reasons that the woods are just strange at night. Suddenly terrified, he shouts that he doesn't want to see any more ghosts, but soon returns to a level voice and tries to bolster his confidence. He assures himself that ghosts aren't real, and reminds himself that the Baptist Church said as much all the time. Jones asks himself if he's a civilized person or ignorant like the black natives, and tells himself that Jeff wasn't real—he decides he's just hungry, and his hunger is making him see things.

Even though Jones is beginning to make the shift towards being more human, he's not yet to the point where he can see the natives as similarly human to himself. This demonstrates the intensity of both Jones's internalized racism and the power structure that allowed him to think less of the natives in the first place. Similarly, Jones's use of "civilized" here is a coded way of saying that he's still trying to embody whiteness, and the sense of superiority that comes with it.

The fear returns to Jones's voice as he pleads with God to not let him see any more ghosts. Jones tells himself to rest, and he sits down and gazes at the moon. As he remarks that the night is already half over and he'll reach the coast and be safe by morning, a silent, chained procession of black convicts enters. A **white** prison guard with a whip and a rifle supervises them. When the guard signals, the convicts stop. Jones suddenly looks away from the sky and notices the chain gang. He chokes out a prayer as he watches the guard crack his whip. The convicts begin working on the road with picks and shovels, but they make no sound.

Unlike Jeff's ghost, the prison guard is a figure who at one point held substantial power over Jones. Because of this, this situation is one in which Jones must confront the uncomfortable fact that he did indeed at one point have significantly less power than he does now (or did extremely recently) as emperor. This is notable exactly because Jones's emperorship was built on the assumption that he could escape these memories, and the guard's reappearance asserts that that was a foolish thought.

The prison guard fixes his stare on Jones and points at Jones with his whip. He motions for Jones to take his place with the other convicts. As though hypnotized, Jones mutters "yes, suh!" and joins the convicts, dragging one foot as though chained like the others. As he shuffles over to them, he mumbles under his breath that he'll get even with the prison guard.

When Jones obeys, the play suggests that this kind of subordination isn't something that Jones can ever forget. He'll never forget that he was once powerless and at the mercy of white men like the prison guard, and the fact that he behaves this way now suggests that this internalized hierarchy of oppression is on a certain level inescapable.

Though he has no shovel, Jones "shovels" with the others, matching their mechanical motions. Abruptly, the prison guard steps towards Jones and angrily lashes him across the shoulders. Jones winces and then cowers as the guard walks away. As Jones stands up, incensed, he lifts his arms as though to use his invisible shovel as a club, and jumps at the guard's back. When Jones moves as if to hit the guard over the head, he finally seems to realize that his shovel isn't real and cries out in despair.

When the guard reprimands Jones for what appears to be no reason, it supports the play's assertion that this cycle of violence and oppression is senseless and rooted in a misguided sense of racial superiority. Essentially, the guard has no reason to be superior to Jones except for the color of his skin.

Jones asks where his shovel is, and then pleads with the other convicts to give him one of their shovels. They only stare at the ground. The prison guard stands as though he's expecting a blow, and Jones reaches for his gun in a sudden rage. He yells that he'll kill the guard, calling him a "**white** devil," and shoots the guard in the back. As he fires, the forest closes in on the road and the convicts disappear. Jones crashes away into the forest, and the tom-tom beats even faster.

This scene is presumably a reenactment of what happened when Jones killed the prison guard in real life. The fact that Jones doesn't have a shovel and therefore cannot complete the task that's evidently expected of him suggests that Jones is now missing something important in his life—perhaps his humility and empathy. At the same time, his missing shovel shows him how throughout his life he has used external objects and situations to elevate himself, while neglecting his internal life and basic humanity.

SCENE 5

Around one in the morning, Jones reaches a circular clearing with a large, dead stump in the middle of it. He throws himself into the clearing, looks around as though he's being hunted, and slinks to the stump. His **pants** are shredded, and his shoes are falling off his feet. After looking around for a moment, Jones puts his head in his hands, rocks, and moans for God. Suddenly, Jones throws himself to his knees and pleads with Jesus. He tells Jesus that he knows he's a sinner, and he knows it was wrong to kill Jeff when he realized Jeff was cheating at dice. Jones continues and says that his anger just overcame him when he killed the prison guard, and he's sorry for stealing from the natives here. He asks Jesus for forgiveness.

It's important to remember that Jones's anger (particularly when he talks about his anger in the past) stems from being at the mercy of an oppressive system that consistently demeaned him and offered him no way out. Jones is very much an example of a man who snapped under the pressure of living in such a powerless state for so long. However, as Jones begins to experience remorse about his anger and what it caused him to do, the play asserts that actions like Jones's are an ineffective way to deal with the system in the long term (although it's also possible that O'Neill, as a white man, is being especially emphatic about condemning black-on-white violence).

With fear in his voice, Jones asks Jesus to keep the natives away and to stop the sound of the tom-tom. Jones seems comforted by his prayer and stands, assuring himself that the Lord will save him. He sits back down on the stump and insists that he's not scared of real men, just the ghosts. Shuddering, Jones looks down at his feet and groans. As he studies his tattered **shoes**, Jones decides they're only making his feet hurt more. He takes off his shoes, holds them, and tells them that they were once beautiful, but mournfully says he's not looking much like an emperor anymore.

As Jones becomes more fearful and therefore more in touch with his own sense of humanity, he also begins to rely more heavily on prayers (and by extension, a god other than himself) to get him through this desperate time. His tattered shoes, as part of his uniform, signal to the reader or viewer that Jones is no longer a powerful emperor, as he's no longer dressed like one by any stretch of the imagination.

As Jones sits and stares at his **shoes**, a silent crowd enters the clearing. The crowd is comprised of **white** people dressed in clothing from the 1850s, and all look well-off. Young Southern belles chat with the men, silently, and middle-aged plantation owners watch the auctioneer. The entire group looks unreal and stiff as they gather around the stump. After a minute, an attendant leads a group of slaves towards the stump. The attendant arranges them in a line beside Jones. The planters inspect the slaves as though they're animals, and the young men point as the belles giggle. The tom-tom continues to beat, and Jones continues to stare at his shoes.

As with the other apparitions, the fact that Jones doesn't notice that all of this is going on around him suggests that he is still blind to his own history. In the case of this apparition in particular, Jones's ignorance suggests that he doesn't think of the history of slavery as being something that's a part of him, even though he's likely descended from slaves. The fact that the natives (who are also likely descended from slaves) sent this apparition shows that this is indeed a part of Jones's history that he needs to recognize and come to terms with.

The auctioneer holds up a hand and takes his place next to the stump. Once he has the attention of the crowd, he taps Jones on the shoulder and motions for him to stand up on the stump. When Jones looks up and notices everyone standing around him, he screams and leaps onto the block in an attempt to escape. As Jones cowers, the auctioneer points to Jones and addresses the planters, silently motioning to Jones as he talks about his strength and sturdiness. When the auctioneer opens up the bidding, the planters raise their fingers. They all seem to want to purchase Jones.

Here the play positions the act of ascending the auction block as something that's imbedded in the collective memory of African Americans. Jones's leap upwards was instinctual and a leap of self-preservation, but it's also exactly what was expected of him. This suggests that even if Jones does think of himself as separate from this history of oppression, it is truly an intrinsic part of him.

Desperately, Jones looks around. The look on his face changes slowly from terror to realization, and with a stutter, he asks the "**white** folks" why they're looking at him and what they're doing. Becoming suddenly angry, Jones bellows, "is dis an auction?" He asks if the auctioneer is selling him like before the Civil War as he pulls out his gun. The auctioneer pushes Jones off the stump and towards his purchaser, the planter. Jones glares from one to the other and declares that he'll show them that he's a freeman. He shoots first the auctioneer and then the planter in quick succession, and the forest folds in on the clearing. Jones cries with fear as he races away, and the tom-tom becomes even faster.

When the apparitions disappear as a result of Jones shooting them, the natives are essentially encouraging Jones to give in to his fear in order to make them go away. This brings him closer to his humanity by continually ratcheting up his fear and offering him ways to self-soothe, even if it's becoming evident that Jones won't be able to keep this up for much longer. He's down to his one silver bullet, and by extension, has only that one bullet to keep him attached to his conception of himself as a god.

SCENE 6

Two hours later, Jones' pleading is audible as he approaches a clearing. The clearing isn't a true clearing; vines form a low, arched ceiling, and the moonlight can barely filter through. Jones asks God what he'll do now, since he only has his **silver bullet** left, and he needs to save that for luck. He remarks that it's very dark, and wonders if the night will ever end. Cautiously, Jones feels his way forward and decides that he absolutely must rest. As he enters the clearing, he flings himself facedown on the ground. His **pants** are so torn and tattered that they're little more than a loincloth.

In a physical sense, Jones is very human at this point: his body is exposed and exhausted, and he no longer has the uniform or his palace to signal to others that he's powerful and superhuman. Jones is also aware that the silver bullet is his final connection to the sense of godliness he created during his rule. The darkness of this clearing again mirrors how Jones must confront his humanity and his inner demons now that he can't physically see anything else.

The moonlight seems to brighten incrementally, and two rows of shadowy figures come into view. They sit along either side of the long, narrow clearing, their backs to the trees. They're all black and wear nothing but loincloths. Slowly, they begin to sway, making it appear as though they're swaying with the rolling of the sea from inside a ship. They begin to murmur in unison and the sound grows until it becomes a wail. The wail rises and falls rhythmically, guided by the tom-tom.

By immersing Jones in a slave ship, the play makes it clear that Jones is undergoing a journey and a transformation that he had no desire to take on. Like the slaves, this journey through the woods is one that is dehumanizing to Jones, as it strips away anything that previously made him powerful or important.

Jones startles and looks up. When he notices the figures, he buries his face in the ground. As the next wail rises, Jones adds his voice to the sound. He sits like the other men and follows their swaying motion as he cries with them. As the lights and the voices fade, Jones scrambles away, his cry petering out as he runs. The tom-tom quickens again, and seems almost triumphant.

When Jones joins in with the slaves, it suggests that being in this kind of a situation is something that's part of the collective memory of African Americans with slave ancestors. Jones has no choice but to participate; it's a part of his subconscious self, and he cannot ignore it anymore.

SCENE 7

At five in the morning, Jones, still wailing rhythmically as he did in the previous scene, stumbles into another open clearing, this time by a river. Next to the river, there's a structure of boulders that looks like an altar. Jones has a stony, obsessed look on his face, and he moves as though he's in a trance. He takes in his surroundings and looks vaguely puzzled before sinking to his knees in a devotional pose next to the altar.

Remember Jones's earlier disdain for the local religion. When he kneels in front of the altar here, it suggests that the local religion (or a religion from his pre-slavery ancestors in Africa) is another thing that is part of Jones's history and memory, because the native people are also black and descended from African slaves—even if Jones thinks of them as being lesser than he is.

Suddenly, Jones straightens up and seems aware of what he's doing. He looks around, horrified, and says that he feels as though this place is familiar. He admits that he's scared, and asks God to protect him. Jones crawls away from the altar and cowers on the ground, crying hysterically. The witch doctor appears from behind a tree, bearing a bone rattle and a "charm stick."

Now that Jones's grasp on his own divinity is tenuous at best, he must turn to other belief systems to find the help and the comfort that he so desperately desires. Because it appears that Christianity is not going to serve him, while the local religion is interacting with him whether he likes it or not, the play asserts that religion and godliness aren't things that humans can truly control according to their own whims.

The witch doctor silently surveys the clearing, positions himself between Jones and the altar, and begins to dance and chant. As he does, the tom-tom becomes extremely loud, and the witch doctor matches his movements to the tom-tom's beat. Jones jumps to his feet before sinking back down to his knees. With a look of fascination on his face, Jones watches the witch doctor's dance.

Again, Jones's transfixion comes from the unpredictable, uncontrollable nature of this religion—especially when Jones has spent the last two years essentially mocking it (though it's unclear if the witch doctor comes from the Caribbean tribe's religion or a religion of pre-slavery Africa, or a conglomeration of both). Now, he must pay for his transgression by submitting to this figure.

The witch doctor appears to dance a story of a deity demanding a sacrifice. He mimes being pursued by devils, chasing them off, and then being pursued again. His dance becomes even wilder as his mimed terror mounts, and he croons incantations. Jones appears hypnotized watching this, and begins chanting and beating his hands on the ground in time. Jones sways as the witch doctor howls in despair and mimes that the evil forces are demanding a sacrifice and must be appeased.

The witch doctor's dance very much mimics Jones's journey through the woods, which offers an additional explanation for why Jones cannot help but watch: even now, he's still self-centered. When the dance demands a sacrifice, it foreshadows that Jones isn't going to make it through this night, and will have to pay for foolishly elevating himself to the level of a god.

The witch doctor points with his charm stick to a tree, the river, the altar, and then to Jones. He commands something to Jones, and Jones understands that he will be offered as the sacrifice. Jones puts his forehead on the ground and moans again for God to have mercy on him.

At this point, Jones is entirely powerless and at the mercy of others. His powerlessness and his inability to fight back is indicative of the power of the system the natives have created (or ancient religious systems in Africa), which in turn puts Jones back in touch with the systems of power that subjugated black people in the US.

As Jones moans, the witch doctor jumps to the edge of the river and seems to call to something in it. The witch doctor slowly steps backwards as a **crocodile** with glittering eyes appears over the edge of the bank. The crocodile looks at Jones, and Jones returns its stare with fascination. The witch doctor motions for Jones to approach the crocodile, and Jones belly crawls closer to it. He continues to ask God for protection and mercy.

Jones is very close to fully giving up his sense of his own godliness, particularly since he seems to have no power to resist the witch doctor's instructions. Again, this is mostly because Jones is currently overcome by fear, which returns to him a more human state. Pleading with God shows too that Jones is at a very humble point right now.

The **crocodile** crawls further out of the river as the witch doctor's chanting and the tom-tom reaches a fever pitch. Jones cries out and pleads for Jesus to hear his prayers. As he cries out, Jones reaches for his gun. He shouts that **his silver bullet** will keep the crocodile from getting him, and he shoots the crocodile between the eyes. The crocodile slinks backwards into the river, and the witch doctor jumps away into the forest. Jones lies facedown in the clearing, crying with fear. The tom-tom seems even fiercer and more powerful as it again picks up its tempo.

Because the crocodile is conceptualized as a god and as a symbol for Jones himself, shooting the crocodile is an action that destroys both the vision and Jones's divinity. This is supported by the fact that Jones is now too scared to continue running; any sense of self-preservation or belief that he'll make it through (beliefs that were rooted in his sense of superiority) are now absent.

SCENE 8

As dawn breaks over the edge of the forest, the tom-tom seems so loud that the forest nearly vibrates. Lem, the native chief, approaches the trees from the clearing, accompanied by several of his soldiers and Smithers. Lem and his soldiers wear loincloths and carry guns. One of the soldiers points to the ground, where it appears as though Jones entered the forest, and he grunts. Lem and Smithers approach to inspect the ground. After a brief inspection, Smithers turns away in disgust and declares that Jones certainly entered the forest here, but he's surely safe on the coast by now. He angrily tells Lem that he knew Lem wouldn't be able to catch Jones, and says that Lem wasted his night beating the drum and casting "silly spells."

In this final scene, the racist worldview of the play itself becomes more evident (particularly to modern readers/audiences). Even though the reader/viewer knows that the natives have spent the night doing real damage to Jones with their spells, the way that Lem and the other native characters are written—in the way they're dressed, and how they speak in grunts—does indeed cast them as uncivilized beings who are lesser than Smithers or even Jones. Even though he's wrong, Smithers reinforces this idea (and attempts to reinforce his own sense of superiority) by insulting the natives and doubting them.

Lem only says, in an unconcerned tone, that they'll catch Jones. He motions to his soldiers and they crouch down in a semicircle. Smithers asks if they're going to go into the forest after Jones, and Lem repeats that they'll catch Jones. Smithers turns away, curses, and declares that even though he hates Jones, Jones is a better man than all the natives put together.

When Smithers says that Jones is a better man than the natives, what he actually implies is that Jones is "whiter" in his actions, and therefore easier for Smithers to relate to and understand. Both Jones and the natives are black, but Jones is more immediately connected to a Eurocentric society, and acts in a way that white people (particularly white people who are overtly racist and oppressive) can understand.

From the forest comes the sound of snapping twigs, and the soldiers jump to their feet and cock their rifles. Lem doesn't move from his stance. As they hear more snapping twigs, Lem signals for his soldiers to enter the forest. The forest swallows them, and the clearing is silent again. Smithers allows the silence to stand for a moment before whispering in a derisive tone that the snapping cannot possibly be Jones. Once again, Lem repeats that they'll catch Jones, and Smithers insults the natives.

Again, Smithers' inability to consider that the natives are capable of tricking Jones is indicative of his racism and his belief that the natives are inherently ignorant and primitive. To this point, Lem is very much portrayed as a "noble savage" type of character: powerful and mysterious yet simplistic, certainly not white or Western, and single-minded in his native beliefs.

Smithers thinks for a moment and reasons that the sound could very well be Jones, as the forest could've turned Jones in a circle easily. Suddenly, Lem shushes Smithers, and the sound of rifles firing comes from within the forest. Lem's soldiers yell triumphantly, and the beat of the tom-tom stops. Lem looks at Smithers with a smile and says that Jones is dead.

Remember that the tom-tom would've been beating exceptionally fast by this point, symbolizing that Jones's fear (and probably his heartbeat as well) was at a fever pitch. Now that the tom-tom is silent, Jones is faced only with his death—the only thing that will free him from his fear, and make him fully human.

Snarling, Smithers asks how Lem knows that Jones is dead. Lem explains that his men have **silver bullets**, and when Smithers looks astonished, Lem elaborates that since lead bullets couldn't kill Jones, the natives spent all night casting charms and melting their money to make silver bullets. The sun's rays reach Smithers' face as he repeats what Lem said. Lem says, simply, that Jones's charm was strong, and lead bullets wouldn't have killed him. Smithers laughs and says that the native soldiers probably shot someone else. He calls Lem a "loony."

Here, lighting Smithers and not Lem is another way that the play tells the reader/viewer that Smithers is indeed superior to all the other characters on a visual and structural level. The sun literally makes Smithers whiter and brighter, aligning him more fully with symbols of power. Lem is also still squatting and low to the ground, which further reinforces Smithers' superiority.

Lem ignores this and tells Smithers that his soldiers are bringing out Jones's body now. Sure enough, the soldiers emerge from the trees, carrying Jones's dead body. Jones has a single bullet hole in his chest, right where his heart is. Lem examines the body as Smithers leans over, a look of frightened awe on his face.

Even though Jones's death brought him back to his own sense of humanity, his death also suggests that black Americans of slave descent will never be able to fully escape and free themselves from that legacy. In the end, nothing has really changed in terms of the overarching power structure of the Americas.

Smithers mocks Jones's dead body, calling him "your majesty" and asking where his "airs" are now. Smithers smiles and remarks that Jones did die in style, with **silver bullets** and all. Lem motions for the soldiers to carry Jones away, and Smithers turns to Lem. He asks Lem with a sneer if he really thinks the charms and the beating of the tom-tom is what did it, but Lem doesn't reply and follows his men away. Smithers looks after Lem for a moment and insults the natives again.

With Jones dead, Smithers now takes on the role of the truly superior individual in the play. As the narrator figure, ending the play with insults to both Jones and the natives gives Smithers and his racism and sense of superiority the final word. This shows that even beyond the play itself, this system of racial violence and oppression will continue. The "emperor Jones" was just a brief anomaly, and all has now returned to normal.

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