
POSTCOLONIALITY REFLECTED IN EUGENE O'NEILL'S THE EMPEROR JONES

Article Particulars

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Abstract

Post-colonial Studies is a wide discipline with many theories and elements. In this paper, I have tried to investigate some key elements of the post-colonialism and applied them to the Scene I, of the play, The Emperor Jones. The elements of post-colonialism had to be dugged out from the above text. The attempt here was to see the text from the different perspective, to construe it from the post-colonial perspective, although it was staged in early twentieth century and not a post colonial play. The dramatis was very dexterous in writing this play, the relationship between the native of the island, the Emperor and Smithers put forth scrupulously and how they deal with each other, especially what they think about each other has been the basis of this paper, how Europeans are prejudiced towards non-whites, consider non-white inferior to them and how colour-minded they are would be the sole focus of this study. Elements of post-colonialism for the analysis would be imperialism, ambivalence, race and alterity or otherness.

Keywords: *Post-colonialism, imperialism, ambivalence, race, alterity or otherness.*

Introduction

Post-colonialism is the study of European imperialism and how it affected the local culture and dominated the 'other' (or non-white). Post-colonialism deals with the effects of colonization on the culture and society, however; since 1970s the term has been used by literary critics to discuss the various effects of colonization on the colonized. It is the study and analysis of European conquest, the various institution of European colonization, the discursive operation of colonial empire, the subtleties of the subject and resistance of those subjects, pre and post independent nations and communities. Historical, political, sociological and economic analysis of such communities and nations has traces and impact of European imperialism. The word 'post' bears the meaning of after the colonialism is an understanding of working of postcolonial culture which traces the articulation between and across the politically defined historical pre colonial, colonial and post independent cultures. According to Aijaz Ahmed "it is a Tran historical thing always present and always in process in dissolution in part of the world or another" (1995:9).

Some of the elements of the post-colonialism in the assignment are imperialism, ambivalence, race, alterity or otherness. The simple definitions of these terms are:

Imperialism

Imperialism means one powerful country controls the other country, often after defeating them in a war, later on these countries become their colonies and they exploited them. These colonies formed solely for the purpose of business and use raw material of the colonies. Many European countries had formed these sorts of colonies in Asia, Africa, South America, and Caribbean Islands. They treated the native people inferior, like slave they even sold these slaves-that gave birth to the slavery. Hence many colored people were had the status of slave in America, these slaves used to work on their farm. The control gained by the power and reason cited that these people are uncivilized and we are came here to civilize them. But in reality these colonies formed to make profit and exploit the native people.

Ambivalence

The term first developed in psychoanalysis to describe a colonial fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite. It also refers to a simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from an object, person or action (Young 1995:161). It describes the complex mix of attraction that characterizes the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer (Bhabha: 1984). The ambiguous way in which in which colonized regard one another. The colonizer often regards the colonized as both inferior yet exotically other, while the colonized regard the colonizer as both enviable yet corrupt.

Race

Race is the division and classification of human beings by physical and biological characteristics. Race often used by various groups to maintain power or to stress solidarity. In the 18th and 19th centuries, it was often used as a pretext by European colonial powers for slavery or the 'white man's burden'.

Alterity or Otherness

Alterity is derived from the Latin *alteris*, meaning 'the state of being other or different, diversity, others'. Its English derivatives are alternate, alternative, alteration and alter ego. The term alterite is more common in French and has antonym *identite*. The term was adopted by the philosophers as an alternative to otherness to register a change in the Western perceptions of relationship between consciousness and the world. In the post-colonial theory, the term has often been used interchangeably with otherness and difference. The self-identity of the colonizing subject, indeed the identity of imperial culture is inextricable from the alterity of the colonized other, an altering determined, according to Spivak, by a process of othering. Alterity is an arena for superpowers where the difference in skin colour, geography, sex and other historical matters of difference are socio-politically discoursed.

Discussion

Postcolonial studies equip us with so many elements that are to be traced in the texture of a work. The Emperor Jones contains such elements though it is not a post-colonial play, nor the dramatists wanted it to be, but the post-colonial theory is as such that it is applicable in the every era of human civilization, even those nations who colonize other nations themselves were colonized in the history, thus we can say that the whole world is colonized.

Brutus Jones is a Negro only in appearance; he has none of the characteristics commonly associated with the Negro such as laziness and lack of initiation. By look and training he is American Whiteman. During the ten years in which he had served as Pullman cart-porter, he acquired the white man's efficiency, selfishness, shrewdness, cynicism and cupidity. All his actions are motivated by greed for power and money.

In play The Emperor Jones Brutus Jones is the Emperor of a Caribbean Island, but basically he is criminal from USA who is sentenced life imprisonment for the murdering Jeff. In the fit of fashion he kills the prison guard and escapes and reached the island. He is intelligent, shrewd and self-confident and within two years he becomes the Emperor of the island but he had no army to gain control over the native people of island he does it by his intelligence and shrewdness. The natives of the island are backward and superstitious people, once the native chief, Lem, tried to kill Jones and fires from the point blank but somehow he survives and he fools them saying that he had charmed life and only silver bullet can kill him and all the people surrenders and he becomes their Emperor, thus we can call Jones a modern Imperialist who from his colony just to make money that's what he tells Smithers:

"You didn't s'pose I was holdin' down dis emperor job for de glory in it did you? Dey wants de big circus show for their money. I give it to 'em an' gits de money" (p. 98) 1
He does not want to hold this job for his life:

"Was you thinkin' I'se aimin' to hold down dis job for life?" (p. 102) Ibid

He is an imperialist and wants to make money quickly and does not care about the people he rules and impose heavy taxes on them though they are poor, Smithers says to him:

".....You been grabbin' right and left yourself, ain't you? Look at the taxes you've put on 'em! Blimey! You've squeezed 'em dry!" (p. 98) Ibid

He replies

"No, dey ain't all dry yet. I'se still heah, ain't i?" (p. 100) Ibid

He justifies his action saying *"Ain't I de Emperor?"* He has every right to exploit the people because he is their Emperor and he does not do small stealing like Smithers he does big stealing and for this they have made him emperor.

He considers native islanders inferior to him and calls them *"Bush Niggers, Trash Niggers"*. When Smithers informs him that natives are planning against him he says that he knows that and he has already made his escape plan, he says that he has

stashed his money in foreign accounts and he just waiting for a right moment to escape from the island. He boastfully says that no one could catch him:

"Think dese ign'rent bush niggers dat ain't got brains enuff to know their own names even can catch Brutus Jones?" (p. 108) Ibid

Here we realize that he considers them inferior to him backward and foolish and different from him though he himself is a Nigro. He is very confident about his escape and tells Smithers that he knows jungle very well and has stashed some food on his path so he will not die hungry.

The ambivalence one of the element quite evident in the play, both the Jones and Smithers dislike each other still they talk with each other. Jones helps Smithers in establishing his business he has easy access to Jones though he is Emperor. Smithers, too, dislikes natives and still he drinks rum with them as his nose has become red by drinking local rum. Jones too dislikes natives and still he continues to rule them get treatment from native charmer. Smithers is impressed by the shrewdness of Jones by his planning of escape but he does not show it to him and he is also jealous of him because he has become emperor in two years while he could not though he was there for ten years.

Race is another element in reflected in the play, both Jones and Smithers considers natives inferior only because they are black and backward. Smithers treatment to a woman at the beginning of the play is quite evident of this fact when he sees her sneaking away accuses her of stealing:

"What are you sneakin' away for? Been stealin' a bit I s'pose". (p. 94) Ibid

And taps her bundle with his whip when she refuses to tell him anything he raises his whip to bit her this shows his hegemony.

Smithers, being white man, does not respect Jones though he is Emperor only because he is black he calls Jones 'stinkin' nigger! 'Is Majesty!' He called his place 'bleedin' tomb' on the contrary the native woman calls Smithers 'mister' and Jones 'Great Father'. He persistently reminds Jones about his criminal past. When Jones spreads the rumour that he has killed white man in the States he says that they burns the Negroes in oil, which kills white man in the states:

"You'd 'ave been jail if you 'ad, wouldn't you then? (With venom) And from what I've 'eard, it ain't 'ealthy for a black to kill a white man in the states. They burs 'em in oil, don't they?" (p. 104) Ibid

Alterity or otherness another element reflected in the play. It is evident from the appearance of Smithers and the native woman:

The native woman described as *"very old, dressed in cheap calico, bare footed, a red bandana hanckerchief covering all but a few strays wisps of white hair. A bundle bound in colored cloth is carried over her shoulder on the end of a stick" (p. 92) Ibid*

While Smithers as *"a tall, stoop-shouldered man about forty His bald head, perched on a long neck with an enormous Adam's apple; looks like an egg. The tropics have tonned his naturally pasty face with its small, sharp features to sticky*

yellow; and native um has pointed his nose red.His little, washy-blue eyes are red-rimmed and dart about him like a ferret's.His expression is one of unscrupulous meanness, cowardly and dangerous.He is dressed in a warn riding suit of dirty white drill, puttees, spurs, and wears a white cork helmet.A cartridge belt with an automatic revolver is around his waist.He carries a ridding whip in his hand" (p. 92)

Here Smithers represents European man who wears hat, carries whip has automatic revolver, wears ridding suit on the other hand the native women is bare footed, carries a bundle at the end of stick.Again when native woman tells him that she was not stealing he called her liar and thinks that blacks are always on some conspiracy.Though he is there for ten years he does not learn the local language.He considers them uncivilized and backward because they believe Jones lie that he had charmed life and he could only be killed by silver bullet and accepts him as their Emperor. Smithers bears his European origin in mind and considers both Jones and natives different from him.

Conclusion

The Emperor Jones is of different genre play but by applying the post-colonial terms such as imperialism, ambivalence, race and alterity or otherness we could learn the play from different perspective i.e. post-colonialism.By this different facets of the play immersed this study helped us to unearth the hidden meaning of the play and how, very strongly, the ideas of race, otherness, imperialism reflected in the play.Dramatist by creating Jones as a black Emperor shown that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely and black man can also form his own colony and exploit the people and it'snot only the white man's birth right to rule. Jones here represents white man: as a modern imperialist.

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