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北京航空航天大學
BEIHANG UNIVERSITY

毕业设计(论文)

A Lacanian Reading of O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*

主体的困境:

基于拉康的三界理论研究尤金奥尼尔的《琼斯皇》

学　院　名　称　外国语学院

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本科生毕业设计（论文）任务书

I、毕业设计（论文）题目：

主体的困境：基于拉康的三界理论研究尤金奥尼尔的《琼斯皇》

II、毕业设计（论文））选题的意义、价值和目标：

尤金·格拉德斯通·奥尼尔的《琼斯皇》是一部深刻揭示个体在社会和文化压力下挣扎的戏剧作品。通过主角布鲁图斯·琼斯的故事，奥尼尔不仅探讨了权力、种族和身份认同的问题，还展示了个体如何在复杂的社会结构中寻找自我定位。雅克·拉康的三界理论为我们提供了一个有力的分析工具，以理解琼斯在想象界（个体对自我形象的构建和理想化）、象征界（社会规则和语言的秩序）和现实界（个体与外部世界的直接经验）之间的动态关系。

本文选题的价值在于，它不仅能够深化我们对《琼斯皇》中人物心理和行为的理解，还能够揭示主体性在现代社会中的脆弱性和受社会环境影响的客观存在。通过拉康的理论，我们可以探讨琼斯如何在象征界中寻求权力和社会地位，如何在想象界中构建自己的理想自我，以及如何在现实界的残酷现实中体验到自我认同的崩溃。

研究的主要目标是通过对《琼斯皇》中主角的身份认同和主体认知的分析，探讨现代社会中个体如何在面对身份认同的挑战时保持心理的稳定和健康。此外，本文还将探讨戏剧艺术如何作为一种文化实践，反映和处理社会问题，以及如何通过戏剧创作为个体提供一种理解和应对现实挑战的途径。

通过这样的分析，本文希望能够为戏剧研究、文学批评以及心理学领域提供新的视角和理论贡献，同时也为理解当代社会中个体如何在复杂的社会结构中寻找自我定位提供深刻的洞见。

III、毕业设计（论文）工作内容：

本研究致力于深入剖析尤金·奥尼尔戏剧《琼斯皇》中人物主体性的想象、构建及其

解体过程，旨在为个体在存在困境中的自我突破提供深刻见解。为了达成此目标，本文采纳雅克·拉康的三界理论作为分析的基石，该理论为我们提供了一个独到的视角，以洞察个体在社会与文化压力下的主体性动态。研究首先将对现有学术文献进行广泛而深入的回顾，系统梳理并评估关于《琼斯皇》的批评理论与评论，为理解奥尼尔如何运用戏剧手法塑造人物主体性奠定坚实的理论基础。在理论框架构建部分，本文将详尽阐释拉康的三界理论，尤其是象征界、想象界和现实界在个体心理发展与自我认同构建中的关键作用。借助这一理论，我们将对《琼斯皇》的主角布鲁斯·琼斯进行深入分析，探究他在戏剧发展过程中主体性的构建、维持以及最终的解体。通过这一分析，本文旨在揭示个体在社会结构中的位置，以及他们在面对权力、种族和身份认同等社会议题时所展现的主体性脆弱性。在主体性分析部分，本文将运用拉康的三界理论对《琼斯皇》文本进行解读，分析琼斯如何在象征界追求权力与社会地位，如何在想象界塑造理想化的自我形象，以及如何在现实界的严酷现实中遭遇自我认同的崩溃。这一分析将展现琼斯的主体性如何在社会与文化的重压下受到挑战，以及这一过程如何映射出现代社会中个体普遍面临的困境。最终，本文将整合研究成果，对《琼斯皇》中的主体性问题进行批判性思考与质疑。我们将探讨戏剧艺术作为一种文化实践，如何反映和处理社会问题，以及如何通过戏剧创作帮助个体理解和应对现实挑战。通过这一系列综合分析，本文期望为戏剧研究、文学批评以及心理学领域带来新的视角和理论贡献，并为理解当代社会中个体在复杂社会结构中寻求自我定位的过程提供独到的洞察。

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学院：外国语学院　　系别：英语文学系

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本人声明

我声明，本论文及其研究工作是由本人在导师指导下独立完成的，在完成论文时所利用的一切资料均已在参考文献中列出。

作者：

签字：

时间：　　年　　月

主体的困境：基于拉康的三界理论研究尤金奥尼尔的《琼斯皇》

学　　生：李壕冬

指导教师：郑　飞　教授

摘要

尤金·奥尼尔是二十世纪美国最重要的剧作家之一，他不仅四次荣获普利策奖，更因其卓越的文学成就获得诺贝尔文学奖，赢得了全球的认可。其作品通过悲剧的严肃笔触，揭露社会现象，激发公众的思考与反省，体现对人类命运的深切关怀。在二十世纪二十年代创作的戏剧作品《琼斯皇》中，奥尼尔巧妙地运用了表现主义的艺术手法，通过描绘一位黑人皇帝在森林中与自身幻觉搏斗的形象，深刻地反映了黑人群体的悲剧性抗争，呈现出一幅震撼人心的戏剧画卷。在以往的学术研究中，国内外学者通常聚焦于该剧的表现主义技巧和种族议题。本论文则运用拉康的精神分析理论对《琼斯皇》进行解读，以想象界、象征界和实在界为分析框架，深入探讨剧中主角布鲁图斯·琼斯所面临的主体性困境。本文旨在揭示这一困境如何与当代社会的精神危机相互映照，从而为理解奥尼尔戏剧中的深层意义提供新的视角。

本文除引言和结语外，以拉康理论中的核心概念——想象界、象征界和实在界为线索自然分为三个章节。第一章着重探讨琼斯如何在想象界的误认中构建一个理想化的白人皇帝形象，这一形象与他作为非裔美国人的深层认同产生了冲突，为他的自我认同危机埋下伏笔。第二章进一步分析琼斯如何利用象征界的语言和符号来标记其在象征秩序中的位置，构建自己的社会身份与自我认知。第三章探讨现实界的琼斯皇帝身份在面对森林中的幻象时遭遇颠覆，他所依赖的象征符号被迫一层层剥离，呈现出其强大伪装之下的惨淡处境，从而揭示作为非裔美国人的琼斯所面临的不可逃避的主体困境。

通过对《琼斯皇》中主人公的拉康式精神分析，本文提出以下论断：在拉康的理论框架下，主体的误认和符号秩序的失效是不可避免的现象。琼斯所遭遇的困境并非个案，而是现代社会中普遍存在的问题。笔者认为，人类的终极追求并非彻底摆脱想象界和象征界的束缚，而是通过深化对现实界的理解，以期达到超越幻象和压迫的境界，并在此过程中确立一种使命感和稳固的主体身份认同。

关键词：《琼斯皇》；精神分析；拉康；主体；困境

A Lacanian Reading of O'Neill's The Emperor Jones

Author: Hongdong Lee

Supervisor: Professor Zheng Fei

Abstract

Eugene O'Neill, a significant figure in the American theater of the twentieth century, has been recognized not only by four Pulitzer Prizes but also by the Nobel Prize in Literature for his artistic achievements. His works are permeated with a deep concern for human destiny, revealing social phenomena through the serious brushstrokes of tragedy, stimulating public thought and reflection. In his play *The Emperor Jones*, written in the 1920s, O'Neill skillfully uses expressionist artistic techniques to reflect the tragic struggle of the black community through the image of a black emperor fighting with his own hallucinations in the forest, presenting a shocking dramatic picture to the audience. In academic research, scholars usually focus on the play's expressionist techniques and racial issues. However, this thesis aims to introduce Lacan's psychoanalytic theory into the interpretation of *The Emperor Jones*, using the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real as an analytical framework to deeply explore the subject's predicament faced by the protagonist Brutus Jones. This study will reveal how this predicament reflects the spiritual crisis of contemporary society and provide a new perspective for understanding the deep meaning in O'Neill's drama.

The structure of this thesis, in addition to the introduction and conclusion, is divided into three main chapters, each chapter is based on the core concept of Lacanian theory: the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real. Chapter One focuses on how Jones constructs an idealized image of a white emperor, but this image conflicts with his deep identification as an African American, sowing the seeds of his self-identity crisis. Chapter Two further analyzes how Jones uses language and symbols to construct his identity and spiritual world, a process that highlights his social status and shapes his self-perception unconsciously. Chapter Three argues that Jones's emperor identity is subverted when facing the illusions in the forest, and the symbolic symbols he uses are also stripped layer by layer, revealing the inescapable predicament he faces as an African American.

Through the Lacanian psychoanalysis of the protagonist in *The Emperor Jones*, this

thesis draws the following conclusion: within Lacanian theoretical framework, the subject's misrecognition and the failure of the symbolic order are seen as inevitable phenomena. The predicament encountered by Jones is not isolated but a common problem in modern society. Thus, the author believes that the ultimate pursuit of humanity is not to completely break free from the shackles of the Imaginary and the Symbolic, but to deepen the understanding of the Real, with the aim of transcending illusions and oppression, and in this process, to establish a sense of mission and a stable subject identity.

Key Words: *The Emperor Jones*; Psychoanalysis; Lacan; Subject; Predicament

Contents

Introduction

0.1 Eugene O'Neill and *The Emperor Jones*

Eugene O'Neill is one of the greatest playwrights in American history and is known as the father of American drama. His lifetime was marked by four Pulitzer Prizes for Drama and one Nobel Prize in Literature. The Nobel Prize in Literature citation in 1936 described his dramatic works as vital energy, sincerity, and intensity of feeling, stamped with an original conception of tragedy. Until this day, he remains the only American playwright to have been awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. Tennessee Williams, one of the three great American dramatists of the 20th century, who is often mentioned alongside O'Neill, stated that even after the ascendancy of such dramatic talents as Thornton Wilder and Arthur Miller, as his only true American superior, saying "O'Neill gave birth to American theatre and died for it" (Dowling 350). In 2011, Tony Kushner said, "there's really not much in the way of serious American theatre before O'Neill came along" (Dowling 9).

O'Neill's dramatic works, as can be seen from the Nobel Prize in Literature speech, usually express profound suffering. However, contrary to the familiar image, O'Neill calls himself a "tragic optimist" (Dowling 10). He believes that experiencing tragedy is the fundamental color of being human, yet the tragedy of life endows people with great significance. If a person does not engage in a doomed struggle with fate like Sisyphus, he is merely a foolish animal. In his view, the so-called doomed struggle is only a failure in a philosophical sense. For a specific person, those who are brave in the struggle will always win. Fate can never conquer a person who moves forward bravely. O'Neill once said:

> The point is that life itself is nothing... It is the dream that keeps us fighting, willing-living! Achievement, in the narrow sense of possession, is a stale finale. The dreams that can be completely realized are not worth dreaming... A man wills his own defeat when he pursues the unattainable. But his struggle is his success!... Such a figure is necessarily tragic. But to me he is not depressing, he is exhilarating! (Dowling 11)

It is precisely because O'Neill harbors such tragic thoughts that most of his plays focus on the conflicts between the individual and society, fate and the self, as well as the struggles

and suffering of people when facing adversity. *The Emperor Jones* is a very typical play of this kind.

The Emperor Jones is an expressionist play written in 1920. The play centers around a black emperor named Brutus Jones, depicting his hallucinations and mental breakdown during his escape. Known for its unique theatrical effects and profound analysis of the protagonist's psychological state, *The Emperor Jones* stands out as an outstanding representative of O'Neill's early works and is an important milestone in the history of American drama, earning O'Neill an international reputation. In fact, the story prototype of this play was something O'Neill heard from his old friend Jack Croak. Croak said that this dictator, who had killed many people, deceived the Haitians with a lie: "they'd never get him with a lead bullet; that he would get himself first with a silver one" (Dowling 204), just like Brutus Jones. At the same time, *The Emperor Jones* also reflects O'Neill's views on politics to some extent. At that time, the US Navy had just crushed a rebellion against the long-term occupation of Haiti by the United States. This operation ultimately resulted in the deaths of about 3000 Haitians, including women and children (Dowling 206). Therefore, O'Neill vaguely set the background in the preface of *The Emperor Jones* as "an island in the West Indies as yet not self-determined by White Marines" (O'Neill 1030), satirizing the absurd legitimacy of the "big stealin' " of United States for overseas interests.

0.2 Literature Review

The Emperor Jones, as a great example of expressionist theatre, premiered on Broadway in 1920, not only marked one of peaks of O'Neill's theatrical writing, but also won him global fame. The creation of this play not only shows O'Neill's innovation in dramatic form, but also reflects his deep exploration of human nature, as well as his deep sympathy and understanding of the complexity of human spirit. Since the early 1920s, there has been an endless stream of interpretations and comments on this play in English academic circles. Critics have made in-depth analysis of the play from various angles, exploring its artistic characteristics and connotation, among which the more important angles are expressionism, racism, colonialism. In contemporary Chinese academic circles, however, the study of *The Emperor Jones* has not received widespread attention. In spite of this, several studies have attempted to explore the

play through the sociocultural contents and the perspective of expressionism, providing a new analytical framework and insight for understanding O'Neill's dramatic art.

Amidst the chiaroscuro of expressionist inflections, the singular milieu of *The Emperor Jones* garners a plethora of commentary devoted to its expressionist qualities. In his publication "O'Neill's Shakespeare" from 1993, Normand Berlin draws parallels between the influence of *The Emperor Jones* and Shakespeare's *Othello*, noting thematic affinities, spectral apparitions, introspective soliloquies, the crucible of character development, and meticulous stagecraft details (Berlin 28). In his analytical piece "First Flames: The Emperor Jones", Wainscott suggests that O'Neill's ambition is to exert a prodigious sway over the audience's sensory faculties—auditory and visual—utilizing profound drumbeats, the protagonist's internal disintegration, the liberation and cyclical return to the essence of humanity. This ambitious objective is achieved through an amalgamation of sound, light, and the singular exhibit of a lone character wrestling with inner demons and existential torment (44). The paper "'Black Is White, I Yells It out Louder 'n Deir Loudest': Unraveling the Wooster Group's 'The Emperor Jones'" by Johan Callens highlights the deconstructionist approach, use of blackface and cross-gender performance, and its engagement with themes of racial and gender identity, colonialism, and the play's cinematic and theatrical history.

The issue of race is an indispensable aspect of *The Emperor Jones*. Cornel West, the renowned African American literary theorist and philosopher, believes that "race is constitutive of American civilization. It's not additive; it's not an appendage. It's integral to American life" (Dowling 11). When *The Emperor Jones* first premiered in New York, many critics believed that Eugene O'Neill had shown great concern about the plight of African Americans, which made him both praised and criticized. Some critics who held positive opinions view *The Emperor Jones* as a milestone due to its portrayal of the plight of African Americans under white oppression and persecution. Kenneth Macgowan, for example, is one of them, considering it "the most curious and perhaps the most interesting play and production to be seen in New York" (108). He believed that O'Neill had a profound understanding of the "Negro dialect and psychology" and thought that O'Neill "has done more with the eye than any playwright has attempted on our stage" (Bryer and Dowling 118). On the contrary, some critics took a negative view of the show, accusing it of presenting

stereotypical images of black people. In recent years, some comments have taken a more neutral position to analyze the racial issues faced by Jones. Shannon Steen examines that Jones uses the black body to reflect and construct white subjectivity, exploring the melancholic and racialized fantasies of identification and the complex ways in which the modernist stage constructs racialized subjects for both performers and spectators (339).

Along with the racial issue came the closely related issue of colonization. Peter R. Saiz argues that *The Emperor Jones* explores the master-slave relationship under colonialism, cultural resistance, identity, and the violence of colonialism through the dual identity of the protagonist Brutus Jones, who is both a colonizer and a colonized. The play anticipates the inevitability of the black revolution and reflects the profound psychological impact of colonialism on individuals.

Compared to the extensive research abroad, domestic studies on *The Emperor Jones* are relatively limited, primarily focusing on two aspects: expressionism and socio-cultural contexts. Zhang Qin published a paper on foreign literature studies, comparing O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* with Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and provides a detailed analysis of the expressive techniques in both plays, emphasizing the significant role of illusions and images in conveying the theme (84). Liu Minghou, in "O'Neill's Expressionist Plays", mentions that *The Emperor Jones* is a masterpiece of expressionism by O'Neill that breaks the concept of time and space and externalizes the inner world. Liu believes that O'Neill skillfully uses sound, chorus, and masks to reveal the characters' psychology, successfully unifying form and subject matter, which has earned *The Emperor Jones* international acclaim (63). Liu Cunbo explores the realm of symbolic techniques in his paper, "On Symbolic Techniques of The Emperor Jones", by thoroughly analyzing the expressive elements in the play such as the drumbeats and gunshots, endowing these auditory phenomena with symbolic meaning (76). In contrast, Zheng Minjiang highlights the characteristics of expressionist playwriting from a different perspective, noting that *The Emperor Jones* does not succeed through realistic depiction of objective reality, but rather focuses on expressing subjective feelings, surging passions, the creation of illusions, and the flow of subconscious thoughts (546). Guo Jide believes that *The Emperor Jones* is "one of the most influential representative works of expressionism in the United States, and a modern tragedy" (5). In Zhan Hu's writing, he

thoroughly discusses the symbolic implications of O'Neill's theatrical design, deeply interpreting the symbolic meaning and expressive effect of colors in *The Emperor Jones* (Guo 71). Wang Dan further explores the narrative time of *The Emperor Jones* from the perspective of narratology, arguing that narrative temporal factors such as sequence, duration, and frequency are deliberately utilized, playing a significant role in the construction of the dramatic theme. She believes that *The Emperor Jones* breaks down the barriers between personal history, psychological development, and the social historical context by utilizing a more complex narrative time to interweave narratives of different themes into a cohesive whole (81). These analyses emphasize the importance of expressionist elements in *The Emperor Jones* and how these elements help convey the play's themes and emotions. Through techniques such as inner monologues, symbolism, and auditory effects, O'Neill successfully creates a drama that deeply explores the inner world of the characters and issues of race.

In addition to expressionist techniques, cultural discussions based on *The Emperor Jones* are also an important direction. Some scholars believe that *The Emperor Jones* reflects the cultural foundation of O'Neill's creation. Zheng Fei, in her monograph *From Passion to Forgiveness: The Evolution of Love in Eugene O'Neill*, mentions that *The Emperor Jones* critically inherits and develops the ancient Greek tragic cultural tradition from the aspects of tragic themes, patterns, themes, and tragic spirit, creating a tragic character driven by an unknown fate in the conflict between modern society's ideals and reality (49). Some scholars, on the other hand, point out the differences between Chinese and Western cultures. Zhu Xuefeng mentioned that the Chinese premiere of *The Emperor Jones* was a resounding failure, in stark contrast to the grand success of its 1920 premiere in the United States. He believes that this situation arose due to the Chinese audience's lack of understanding of American society and certain psychological concepts, which reflects the limitations of the dramatic aesthetic preferences and experiences of Chinese audiences at the time (110). Zheng Haiyang discussed the influence of *The Emperor Jones* on Chinese playwrights such as Cao Yu and Hong Shen, suggesting that it was *The Emperor Jones* that led Chinese expressionist drama from imitation to maturity (154).

As a theatrical work that presents the existential state of characters, psychoanalyzing the characters in the play is also an important issue that scholars pay attention to. Michele

Mendelssohn believes that *The Emperor Jones* demonstrates the complex relationships between race, language, and identity. Through the psychological and linguistic journey of the protagonist Brutus Jones, it reveals the impact of colonial and post-colonial states on his identity (19). Wang Weichang compares Brutus Jones and Macbeth from the perspective of the Oedipus complex, pointing out the similarities between the two in terms of personal unconscious and collective subconscious, and provides a comprehensive psychoanalytic analysis (62). Li Xia starts from Jung's theory of collective unconsciousness, analyzes the psychological changes of the protagonist Jones and believes that O'Neill has created a rich and complex black character, presenting the harm of various dark social realities to an ordinary black soul, delving from personal unconsciousness to collective unconsciousness and elevating the revelation of character's inner activities to a higher level (112). It can be found that most psychoanalytic interpretations are only conducted from the perspectives of personal unconsciousness and collective subconsciousness, and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory is relatively less used.

0.3 Theoretical Framework

Psychoanalysis originated from Sigmund Freud's exploration of the deep structure of the human psyche. Traditional interpretations of characters mainly focused on behavior and consciousness, while at the end of the 19th century, Freud, through clinical practices such as hypnosis and free association, discovered repressed desires and conflicts in the subconscious. He proposed that these subconscious contents have a profound influence on human behavior and emotions. Freud's theory gradually evolved, forming the psychoanalytic school, which emphasizes key stages of psychological development, defense mechanisms, and the dynamic balance between the id, ego, and superego. After Freud, Carl Jung, who was one of Freud's early followers, proposed the concept of the collective unconscious, suggesting that humans share a universal, inherited set of symbols and images, known as archetypes. Jacques Lacan, as the most important psychoanalyst after Freud, put forward the slogan "Return to Freud" (Leader 34). However, his return was not a complete regression to Freud's theory but an integration of Freud's psychoanalytic theory with structuralism and linguistics, emphasizing the role of language in shaping the structure of the human subconscious and proposing the

concept of the “Big Other”, which refers to the influence of social and cultural structures on individual psychology. After Lacan, his theories were reinterpreted by Marxists, feminists, and others, becoming an important critical tool widely applied in academic criticism.

Eugene O’Neill, as an important playwright in the history of American drama, profoundly depicted the inner world and psychological conflicts of his characters. Many of O'Neill's plays, such as *Long Day’s Journey into Night* and *The Iceman Cometh*, exhibit a deep excavation of the characters’ psychology, which coincides with the psychoanalytic theory’s focus on subconscious motives and psychological conflicts. He himself mentioned the influence of psychoanalytic theory on his work (Dowling 223). Using psychoanalytic theory to interpret O’Neill’s works can help readers understand the characters’ behavioral motives more deeply, revealing their psychological struggles and internal conflicts. In fact, Lacan himself applied his theory to the interpretation of literary works, the most famous of which is “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter’” (Lacan 6). In 1988, John Muller and William Richardson also edited and published *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida and Psychoanalytic Reading*, aiming to use “The Purloined Letter” as a case to discuss the relationship between psychoanalysis and literary criticism, and to discuss the response and commentary of psychoanalysis as a reading and critical technique (Wu 8). This also indirectly proves the feasibility of using psychoanalytic theory to interpret O’Neill’s plays. From another perspective, Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory and O’Neill’s dramatic works both have significant social tendencies. Lacan’s theory provides a way to understand the individual’s position and role in society and culture, emphasizing the role of language and symbolic order in forming individual identity. O’Neill’s dramatic works, through in-depth exploration of the characters’ psychological conflicts and social issues, reflect the complexity and diversity of American society in the 20th century. Both reveal the complex relationship between the individual and society, as well as the individual’s struggle in the face of social pressures and cultural expectations. Applying Lacan’s theory to O’Neill’s creations helps readers to understand more comprehensively the profound social messages conveyed by these works and their continued impact on contemporary society.

This thesis will use the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real as the framework, which are the three orders of subject existence in Lacanian theory, to discuss the identity

construction and the subject contradictions inherent in the protagonist of *The Emperor Jones*. Here are the brief explanations of these three registers:

The Imaginary is the area of images, illusions, and the early formation of the ego, which is associated with early childhood experiences and the mirror stage, where a child recognizes his or her own image in a mirror or other reflective surface. In the Imaginary, individuals make a mis-recognition with an idealized image and construct a fictitious sense of wholeness and unity. However, this image is ultimately unrealistic and leads to a sense of lack or incompleteness.

The Symbolic is the realm of language, culture, and social systems, which is characterized by the use of symbols, signs, and linguistic structures that provide meaning and allow for communication. The Symbolic is shaped by societal conventions, rules, and norms that influence individual subjectivity and identity. Language and social practices mediate humans' experience of reality and structure people's understanding of themselves and the world. The Symbolic is crucial for the formation of social identities and the establishment of social order.

The Real is a dimension of existence that is beyond symbolic representation and linguistic mediation, which refers to the raw, unfiltered reality that eludes complete understanding and symbolization. The Real is characterized by the irrational, unpredictable, and traumatic aspects of life that cannot be fully captured by language. It represents the disruptive force that undermines the stability and coherence of the Symbolic. The Real is associated with intense emotional experiences and encounters with the limits of symbolic frameworks.

According to Lacan, these three orders are interconnected and shape human subjectivity. They are not discrete entities, but rather overlapping dimensions through which individuals perceive, understand, and relate to the world. It should be noted that scholar Wu Qiong points out in his writings that using the Three Orders as the thematic framework may lead to a misunderstanding of Lacan. There is a risk of falling into the danger of having only the framework without content (17), which is needed to pay attention to.

0.4 Thesis Structure

According to the play of *The Emperor Jones* and Lacan's three Orders, a framework has been developed that analyzes the mis-recognition, construction, and dissolution of the subject, ultimately concluding that the constructed subject is fragile. The following are the contents of each chapter:

Chapter One will mainly discuss the process of Jones's mis-recognition within the order of the Imaginary. Utilizing Lacan's theoretical framework, this chapter analyzes how Jones constructs an idealized identity through self-imagination and tries to sustain this image in the perception of others. However, as the narrative progresses, Jones increasingly becomes aware that this idealized self-image does not correspond with his actual feelings and experiences. The imagination of Jones's identity involves self-projection and mis-recognition, and these illusions start to impact his relationships with others and his comprehension of self-worth. Moreover, the chapter will also delve into how Jones evolves from a smuggler to an emperor and the process by which he culturally transitions from being black to white.

While Jones completed the misunderstanding of his self-image, Chapter Two provides an in-depth analysis of how Jones achieves self-construction within the symbolic order through speech, discourse, and symbols. Jones's identity as an emperor is achieved through the symbols he employs in his language, which not only solidify his societal position but also shape his subjectivity unconsciously. This chapter will touch upon the process of Jones building his social status through language and how he constructs self-perception by incorporating and adopting the speech of others. Furthermore, the chapter also examines how Jones constructs his power and identity through symbolic items, such as his costumes and silver bullets.

Based on the two instances of subject alienation completed by Jones, Chapter Three delves into how Jones's identity ultimately collapses in reality and how he faces the irreducible invasion within the Real. This chapter will analyze the effects of Jones's personal and racial traumas on his subjectivity and how these traumas lead to the failure of his identity and symbolic representation. It also discusses Jones's escape through the forest and how he confronts his deepest fears, guilt, and despair. Ultimately, this chapter highlights that Jones's tragic end is connected to his intrinsic division as a human subject and external reality, as he

is unable to escape the dilemma of cultural identity or resist the oppression of social structures.

To sum up, in *The Emperor Jones*, Jones's experiences across the three registers indirectly articulate O'Neill's contemplation on the spiritual state of America, as well as his deep empathy for the plight of African Americans. Jones's predicament is not an isolated case but is a reflection of the universal struggles inherent in modern humanity. Perhaps human rebellion is doomed to fail, but as O'Neill believed, it is through this struggle that we find our humanity and the essence of our existence.

Chapter One Power, Racial and Desire: The Mis-recognized Jones in the Imaginary

Brutus Jones's story begins with the Imaginary, where he interacts with inner images and illusions. Within this realm, Jones actively constructs an idealized identity and strives to maintain this image in the eyes of others. However, as the story progresses, he gradually realizes that this idealized self does not align with his true feelings and experiences. His subject imagination is filled with self-projections and mis-recognition, and these illusions begin to impact his relationships with others and his understanding of self-worth, making him initiate the first step of self-alienation. Lacan describe this state as "donned armour of an alienating identity" (Lacan 78), which is interpreted by Sean Homer as follows:

> Lacan insists that the ego is based on an illusory image of wholeness and mastery and it is the function of the ego to maintain this illusion of coherence and mastery. The function of the ego is, in other words, one of mis-recognition; of refusing to accept the truth of fragmentation and alienation. (25)

Focusing on this process of self-alienation, Jones achieves a shift in power status and racial culture, both of which are obvious. The former means that Jones changed from a stowaway to an emperor, and the latter means that Jones changed from a black man to a white man in a cultural sense. On a more fundamental level, Jones's transformation was preceded by a series of misconceptions that took him from a chaotic beast to an African American, which is called civilized, living in the early 20th century.

1.1 Power Image: From Stowaway to Emperor

Although Brutus Jones is already emperor of this "island in the West Indies as yet not self-determined by White Marines" at the beginning of the play (O'Neill 1030), yet through his conversations with Smithers, the Cockney trader, and his confessions and confessions in the face of his visions, it is clear to the audience that Jones was not a man of high birth, but an underclass, or even a murderer. If he had not become the emperor of this small island through hard work and luck, he would never have been able to get out of his inferior existence. According to Diya M. Abdo, Brutus Jones, who lives at the bottom of society and desperately wants to control his own destiny, is always trying to improve himself and leave his mark on

the world (47). From this perspective, Jones's desire to control his own destiny corresponds to Lacan's "body part from the ego's control" (Lacan 87). Therefore, it is not without reason that Brutus Jones imagines himself as an emperor. In general, there are two factors involved in Jones's fantasy of himself as emperor, one pointing to Jones's ego characteristics, the other pointing to the influence of others on Jones.

From the moment Jones was introduced, O'Neill presented Jones as a man of ability and ambition, both physically and mentally:

> He is a tall, powerfully−built, full−blooded Negro of middle age. His features are typically negroid, yet there is something decidedly distinctive about his face−an underlying strength of will, a hardy, self−reliant confidence in himself that inspires respect. His eyes are alive with a keen, cunning intelligence. In manner he is shrewd, suspicious, evasive. (1032)

The ability and ambition of Brutus Jones are obvious. Not only is he physically strong and a "powerfully−built" man, but more importantly, he had "something decidedly distinctive" in his face and was portrayed by O'Neill as a man of determination and confidence. It is worth noting that O'Neill, far from portraying Jones's character in a well-limbered, simple-minded stereotype, highlights Jones's mental strengths. This is not an accident. In *Eugene O'Neill: The Contemporary Reviews*, Hubert H. Harrison shrewdly points out that some people did not approve of the play because it "does not elevate the Negro", and expressed his opposition to this view. He argues that O'Neill was not portraying "the soul of an ignorant and superstitious person of any race". The intention O'Neill in writing this play is not to serve as some kind of propaganda or appeal, but to reflect life, both from the external perspective of reality and from the imagined perspective of inner experience (134). O'Neill's biographer Robert Dowling also wrote in *Eugene O'Neill: in A Life in Four Acts*, O'Neill himself agreed with Harrison's interpretation, and called it "one of the very few intelligent criticisms of the piece that have come to my notice" (370). This assessment is not surprising for O'Neill, who himself was deeply averse to the use of theatre as a tool of publicity.

In addition to these direct comments on Jones, the presence of the other characters in the play also indirectly awakens and sets off Jones's abilities and ambitions. The first is black Lem, as the local black revolutionary leader, he once sent his men to assassinate Jones, but

Jones completed the reverse killing. It is at this time that Jones mistaking himself for a more powerful being than the local black people. Therefore, he takes this opportunity to become the emperor of the local black people and realizes the leap of power identity. The existence of Lem not only awakes Jones's ambition to imitate the colonists, but also makes this fake emperor maintain a dismissive attitude toward the local blacks from beginning to end. When Smithers thinks he would be caught, he says, "think dese ign'rent bush niggers dat ain't got brains enuff to know deir own names even can catch Brutus Jones?" (O'Neill 1040). That is why Jones is eventually captured by Lem's soldiers. Jones probably never imagines that ole Lem would go to great lengths to get those silver bullets in order to get rid of the colonial emperor.

Another the other is Smithers, the Cockney trader, as a white man who helps Jones smuggle into the area, Smithers also has a chance to become the emperor of the island, but he only becomes a consigliere to Jones. In his conversation with Jones, the audience may find out why. When they talk about money, Jones says Smithers will have more money in his pocket if he has taken the trouble to learn the local language. Even Jones is explicit in his assessment of Smithers: "you're too shiftless to take de trouble" (O'Neill 1036). Set off by Smithers, Jones is a untroubled man. He could build a silver bullet to consolidate his power, to show local blacks that he is strong. He could learn the local language and teach them English in order to better exploit their money. Besides, he can bleed the locals dry in order to get more money. Jones is indeed capable, having made the transition "from stowaway to emperor within two years" (O'Neill 1035). Unfortunately, he only changes from a colonized to a colonizer, and cannot escape the fate of being overthrown.

Under the other role played by the two important roles in the play, Jones eventually misrecognizes his powerful colonial image and then confirms his colonial identity. But such an identity based on misperception is highly risky. When the local black people, led by Lem, revolts against Jones, and Smithers points out that he is nothing more than a criminal smuggler who has broken the law in the United States, it means that Jones's status as emperor ceases, both physically and spiritually. This corresponds to the plot of Jones giving up his role as emperor and fleeing later in the play. In the play, through the characters Lem and Smithers, viewers can see how Jones's path to power is based on a misperception of others' abilities and

self-aggrandizement. Lem serves as a symbol of resistance, and his presence not only challenges Jones's authority, but also reveals Jones's deep insecurities. Oppositely, Smithers's character exhibits a very different attitude to life and values than Jones. He has the opportunity to be a contender for power, but chooses a more secure and low-key lifestyle. The existence of Smithers, and his assessment of Jones, reflects how Jones's ambitions and efforts may be seen by some as nothing more than a futile and pointless nuisance. The contrast not only highlights Jones's character traits, but also hints at the loneliness and vulnerability of his path to power.

Apart from these two others that appear in the role list, the social other is perhaps even more important. As a porter from a humble background, "in ten years on de Pullmans", he has heard many of the tenets of life that he had adopted in his train car. One of the most typical is the following sentence: "for de little stealin' dey gits you in jail soon or late. For de big stealin' dey makes you Emperor and puts you in de Hall o' Fame when you croaks." Jones claims this is what he learned from those "white quality talks" during a decade in a train car. When he gets the chance to use it, it is he that "winds up Emperor in two years" (O'Neill 1035). Although the view of the great thief is reasonable in reality, it is fundamentally a misalignment between law and reality. This view reflects an inequity in the application of the law, whereby minor crimes are severely punished while major crimes may be spared by the protection of power, contrary to the basic principles of the rule of law. In the long run, it is not conducive to the long-term stability of society, but will sow the seeds of dangerous factors.

Jones's misidentification and construction of identity are based on his misunderstanding of social rules and self-expansion. He takes the words he heard on the train as a recipe for success, ignoring the moral and legal risks behind these actions. When he proclaims himself emperor and builds his empire in a short time, he seems to fulfill those success credo heard on the train. However, this success is built on sand and will quickly collapse when confronted with external challenges and doubts. Thus, late in the play, Jones renounces the role of emperor and chooses to flee, admitting that the role of emperor is only a "job" for him (O'Neill 1044). This shift is not only a denial of his power path, but also a complete collapse of his power identity. He finally realizes that he is not a real colonist, but just a stowaway who has lost his way in the game of power. He begins to realize that the success creed he has heard

on the train is not the true way to success, but a misreading and distortion of success. Jones's path to power, from stowaway to self-proclaimed emperor, may seem like an inspirational story, but it is actually built on a misperception of other people's abilities and self-aggrandizement. He tries to re-establish the authority of the colonists in this new land by imitating their behavior. However, he does not realize that real power is not gained through intimidation and exploitation, but by the consent and support of the people. Jones's failure, fundamentally, is a failure to understand the true meaning of "power" and to establish a true self-identity.

1.2 Race Image: From Black to White

If the power image is the first mis-recognition of Brutus Jones, then the second mis-recognition is that he can become a member of the white cultural circle and master white discourse. There is no question that Jones's racial identity cannot be avoided. Since the play was performed in the United States in 1920, race-related references have dominated criticism. There was both praise and criticism. James Weldon Johnson, in *Black Manhattan*, was free to say that no play had ever been more critically acclaimed than *The Emperor Jones*, He called it "another important page in the history of the Negro in the theatre" (Dowling 214). These reviews demonstrate the groundbreaking and influential nature of *The Emperor Jones* in its exploration of racial issues, as well as the importance of Jones's racial image.

As a black man, Jones is able to build his own empire on the island, which to some extent reflects his identification with American culture, especially his imitation of white culture. By disparaging his racial peers and striving to emulate the comportment of white authority, Jones molds an image of self within the Imaginary that is neither prototypically black nor genuinely white.

On the one hand, Jones is extremely disparaging of the black race. Even though he is also black, he still uses the derogatory term "nigger" to refer to local black people, and even to himself. There may be some self-deprecation in this, but it is more likely that he viscerally agrees that Smithers represents the discrimination of white culture against black culture. After all, Smithers is the one who says "nigger". Lem, by contrast, addresses local blacks as "my mens" (O'Neill 1061), which is enough to show the gap between black discourse and white

discourse. It might even be said that he feels a natural sense of inferiority in the face of Smithers because he is a black man who has been discriminated against. Therefore, he will perform better in other aspects, even at the cost of describing his black compatriots as "squeezed 'em dry" in order to distinguish himself from the racial image of black people (O'Neill 1035).

Smithers, on the other hand, helps him smuggle himself to the island and helps Jones become emperor until now, indicating a similar stance. This stance is not only as colonists, but also on behalf of the white culture represented by the English language. In the play, Jones insists that he is Baptized, believing that "de Baptist Church done pertect me" when he faces with the tricks of an African witch doctor. What is more thought-provoking is that when Smither points out that Jones has not cared much about the Baptist church since he arrived on the island, Jones responds: "I'se after de coin, an' I lays my Jesus on de shelf for de time bein'" (O'Neill 1042). This utilitarian mentality is characteristic of white American culture. This kind of self-image is actually a profound misidentification of self-identity, reflecting Jones's identification with white culture.

Unfortunately, Jones tries to gain power and respect by imitating the way white colonists exploited black people, but he fails to realize that this imitation could not really change his racial identity or gain him real acceptance in white society. This is evident in Smithers's treatment of Jones. When Jones is finally killed by Lem's soldiers, Smithers treats Jones dismissively:

> SMITHERS-leans over his shoulder-in a tone of frightened awe) Well, they did for yer right enough, Jonsey, me lad! Dead as a 'erring! (mockingly) Where's yer 'igh an' mighty airs now, yer bloomin' Majesty? (then with a grin) Silver bullets! Gawd blimey, but yer died in the 'eighth o' style, any'ow! (O'Neill 1061)

Therefore, the second misconception of Brutus Jones, that is, he thinks he can enter and master the voice of white people by imitating and adopting the way of white culture, which is in itself a misunderstanding of self-identity. Jones tries to elevate himself by becoming the emperor of the black people, but he fails to realize that no matter how much he imitates the behavior and culture of white people, his racial identity will always be an insurmountable obstacle for him. For Brutus Jones, his attempt to gain identity and power by imitating white

culture is essentially similar to the misidentification of the mirror stage described by Lacan. Jones projected his image onto the ideals of white culture, hoping to gain acceptance and respect from white society through imitation. However, as Wu Qiong points out in *Read Your Symptoms*, the true mis-identification lies not in the imitation itself, but in the individual's identification with the object of the imitation. Jones's impersonation did not make him truly white, but rather locked him into a quest for identification that he could never achieve (157).

More importantly, Jones's second misperception, that he could be part of white culture and wield the power of its discourse, reveals a deeper social reality. In the social context of that time, racial segregation and discrimination are common, and black people are often marginalized and excluded. In more direct evidence, when Jones mentions that he would run away if he doesn't become emperor of the island, Smithers says that Jones will not dare to return to the United States, and says, "it ain't ealthy for a black to kill a white man in the States. They burns 'em in oil, don't they", which shows that in America at that time, if a black person breaks the law, the penalties are likely to be more severe (O'Neill 1038). Mendelssohn also points out in his article that Jones in *The Emperor Jones* and Yank in *The Hairy Ape*, "partake of the same naivete", have a sense of belonging in the culture and society that marginalize them and imprison them (26). So it is in the real world. Even though *The Emperor Jones* has received critical acclaim from the industry, "how hostile the pushback would be from white supremacists" forced the company to change the course of its national tour, never again toured anywhere south of Richmond (Dowling 214). This also indicates that the safety that Jones desires is difficult to achieve, both in the play and in reality.

1.3 Desire Image: From Animal to Human

In Lacan's view, from the moment of birth, a person is no longer a purely biological natural existence, but something inscribed by language, something inscribed by the desire structure of others, such as parents. Therefore, even their hunger needs are not entirely animalistic (Wu 379). If we further ponder Lacan's theory, it can consider that Lacan's theory points out an important difference between humans and animals: animals are "captured in their environment" (Leader 20), while humans are not only captured by the natural environment, but more importantly, they are also captured by the other. This can be observed

in the difference between desire and need. Lacan, building on Freud's foundation, believes that needs are always linked to a specific object, such as food or sex, and the goal is to obtain direct satisfaction; whereas desire is always related to the repressed experience of the original need, it is unconscious, and its goal is not direct satisfaction, but to seek the fulfillment of desire and the substitutional satisfaction of desire through perceptual re-emergence. Based on the difference between desire and need, Lacan removes the animalistic instinctual need from his theory of desire and introduces the dimensions of language and the other (Wu 377). Corresponding to Jones, it can be found that Jones exhibits the human-specific desire and the yearning for the other's desire.

As a human, Jones's actions and desires are clearly not limited to basic physiological needs. In the presence of Smithers, the other of white culture, his behavior and thoughts reveal complex psychological activities and a desire for power, status, and even a desire for recognition from white culture. In the scene one, the dialogue between Jones and Smithers reveals his desire for power and the pursuit of others' recognition: "From stowaway to Emperor in two years! Dat's goin' some" (O'Neill 1035). This statement shows Jones' pride in his transformation from a stowaway to an emperor, even a kind of showing off in front of the other, which can be traced back to the white people's remarks about big theft on the train. It is precisely because Jones often heard such remarks from those in higher positions that his desires expand. In the scene three, when Jones struggles in the forest, facing his fears and desires, his inner monologue reveals that his desires are not merely to fulfill basic physiological needs, but are related to his past experiences, the expectations of the other, and social status: "Majesty! Der ain't much majesty 'bout dis baby now" (O'Neill 1047). Here, Jones reflects on his status and identity, and the "majesty" is no longer just a title, but is closely connected to his desires and self-identity. His fears and insecurities are not just due to physical hunger or fatigue, but because he has lost his social status as an emperor and the recognition of others. This pursuit of power and status is a distinctly human desire, not a simple survival need of animals.

At the same time, in his conversation with Smithers, Jones also mentioned how to gain wealth by manipulating others, which is a mimicry of colonial culture. "I done the dirty work for you—and most of the brain work, too, for that matter—and I was worth money to you,

that's the reason" (O'Neill 1034). Here, Jones admits to the disgraceful actions he took for wealth, but he does not consider this behavior wrong; instead, he praises himself for using brain. Considering the existence of scenes of slave trade in Jones' hallucinations later in the play, and the ongoing colonial behavior in the 20th century, it can be assumed that Jones is deeply influenced by colonial culture. Therefore, Jones becomes an emperor on this island in the Caribbean, starting his own colonial rule. When faced with the loss of colonial power and status, Jones, in order to maintain power and control, is willing to take extreme measures, just like in the past, including violence against those who threaten his position. In the past, he killed the black Jeff and the white guard; now, he tries to use the revolver in his hand to kill the rebellious black soldiers and banish the hallucinations that bother him. At this point, Jones can no longer give up the power and status he desires and return to a state of mere need.

In Summary, Jones, in the mirror of the other, is a complex character whose identity is shaped and distorted by the societal and cultural forces around him. His journey from a stowaway to an emperor is a testament to his ambition and ability to adapt and manipulate his environment to achieve power. To a certain extent, he completed a struggle with fate that is bound to fail, as described by O'Neill, and achieved a transformation from animal to human. However, this struggle is built on a foundation of mis-recognition and self-deception, as he attempts to emulate the colonizers he once despised and seeks validation from a culture that will never fully accept him due to his racial identity. Jones's mis-identification with the white colonial power and his attempt to assimilate into a culture that marginalizes him highlight the internal conflict and struggle for self-affirmation. His rise and fall are a reflection of the broader societal issues of racial discrimination, power dynamics, and the human desire for recognition and respect. Despite his physical strength and mental cunning, Jones's inability to reconcile his self-image with the reality of his situation leads to his ultimate downfall.

Chapter Two Speech, Discourse and Symbols: The Constructed Jones in the Symbolic

After completing the imagination of self-image, Brutus Jones consciously or unconsciously identifies with an African American image in a white culture and completes the alienation of himself in the Imaginary order. What Jones will do next is using the signifier existing in the Symbolic to complete their alienation in this register. It should be further clarified that in Lacan's theory, Alienation refers to "the process through which the subject first identifies with the signifier and is thereafter determined by the signifier" (Homer 71), that is, the signifier of identity will influence the shaping of the subject in turn. This coincides with Jones's experience: the speech, discourse, and symbols that Jones uses to shape his identity as emperor on the one hand solidifies his social position, and on the other hand unconsciously shapes his subject, so that his self-perception is also constructed. Unfortunately, this construction leads to an extremely bad state of affairs in what Lacan calls the subject "is a fundamentally split or divided entity" (Leader 65). In his paper, Mendelssohn proposes that Jones is divided and swayed by race, language, and identity, and that Jones is trapped by his dual identity (20). Jones is both a former colonized and a present colonizer, while he is physically black but psychologically identified with white culture. These two contradictions run through Jones's identity and state of mind.

In Lacan's view, the subject's unconscious speech behavior and the language used all mean a structure shaped by the subject's signifier, that is, "the unconscious... is structured like a language" (Lacan 737). Therefore, this thesis believes that Jones's speech, the discourse he chooses and the symbols he uses unconsciously not only visually represent the positioning he gives himself, but also use these symbolic energy indicators to mark the position of the subject, achieving the effect of "defining the subject's position within the symbolic order" (Homer 45). At this point, Jones has completed his dual positioning of the spiritual world and the material world, although this positioning is contradictory.

2.1 Jones in Speech: The Construction of Social Status

As a psychoanalyst, Lacan has a certain keen awareness of speech. He believes that the subject, as a kind of speaking being, always implies the division of statement and speech in its

speaking act, which can mark the position of the subject in the Symbolic. For Jones, his words also mark his place in the Symbolic, helping to construct his identity as a white colonial emperor and his original trauma as an African American. In fact, Jones is unconsciously aware of this, he uses these words: “ain’t a man’s talkin’ big what makes him big-long as he makes folks believe it” (O’Neill 1036), which reveals his unconscious use of speech.

Many speeches of Jones marked the position of his white colonists as having identified themselves as emperors. “I’m boss heah now, is you fergettin’?” (O’Neill 1034). This is not only Jones’s way of reminding Smithers that he is in charge of the island, but also his emphasis on the emperor’s social status, especially for his fellow ruling class white Cockney. Meanwhile, part of Jones’s speech means that he is always an African American. As mentioned earlier, Jones, like Smithers, likes to use the discriminatory term “nigger” to refer to black people, and even to himself. This is not an isolated phenomenon in the United States at that time, but a kind of structured discrimination against black people. From Lacanian view, Jones’s image identification with African Americans means that he accepts the signifier from his parents’ speech as an element of identification. Lacanian call it the “name of the father”, which is not a real person but a symbolic function (Leader 73). Finally, part of Jones’s speech hints at the vision he is about to encounter, namely the failure of symbolization. When Jones learns that the local blacks are already preparing a revolution to overthrow them, Jones naturally says the following words: “when I sees dese niggers gittin’ up deir nerve to tu’n me out, and I’se got all de money in sight, I resigns on de spot and beats it quick” (O’Neill 1037). This indicates that Jones foresees the possible loss of his power, namely that he would flee as soon as he saw that someone was about to oppose him.

Jones frequently asserts his authority and power in his conversations with Smithers, as evidenced by his statement, “I’m boss here now, is you forgettin’?” (O’Neill 1043). This not only indicates his current social status but also reflects his attempt to construct a strong, independent self-image. In Lacanian theory, such an ego is formed through the Mirror Stage, where Jones uses language to confirm and reinforce his position in the symbolic order. Jones gains power by imitating the behavior and language of white people, as he says, “I knows I kin fool ‘em-I knows it-and dat’s backin enough fo’ my game” (O’Neill 1042). In this speech, Jones expressed his confidence in gaining power and control by deceiving others, revealing

how he uses language as a tool to manipulate others and consolidate his authority. However, deep down Jones still identifies with his African-American identity. In addition to claiming that he will take the money back to America, Jones's monologue while fleeing in the forest also reflects his understanding of his identity: "Oh, Lawd, Lawd! Oh Lawd, Lawd!... Lawd Jesus, hear my prayer! I'se a po' sinner, a po' sinner!" (O'Neill 1052). In his despair, Jones prays to God, calling himself a "poor sinner", which indicates that he has not forgotten his origins and the struggles of being an African-American. Jones's contradictory sense of identity, which yearns for power and independence, but cannot completely shake off his roots as an African American, is revealed through his speech.

Through these examples, the audience can see that Jones's speech is a key part of his identity. Lacanian theory provides us with a framework to understand how this speech relates to an individual's position in the symbolic order, the construction of the self-image, internal fragmentation, and the expression of desires. Jones's speech is a reflection of his social interactions, internal conflicts, and personal desires, all of which together form his complex identity: on the surface, he appears to be an emperor, but in reality, he is still an African American.

2.2 Jones in Discourse: The Construction of Self Perception

In addition to speech, language is also a very important part of Lacan's theory. Although language, as a product of human creation, is part of the Symbolic, similar to the theory of the mirror phase, language unconsciously constructs the subject's self-knowledge, what Leader calls "the relation to the image will be structured by language" (47). In this context, language has already embodied Foucault's discourse with its own power and become an element in shaping self-conception. If the audience pay attention to this, they would have noticed that Jones likes to borrow the discourse of others and accept the signifiers from their discourse as elements of identification.

Jones exploits the fears and beliefs of the islanders about supernatural forces to create a myth about the silver bullet as a way to consolidate his authority. His claim that only a silver bullet can kill him derives from the island's black culture and belief system in supernatural forces. In this way, Jones not only physically but also psychologically controlled the local

black people, convincing them that he is invincible and thus ensuring his firm grip on power. Lem's obsession with the silver bullet later proves this: "my mens dey got um silver bullets. Lead bullet no kill him. He got 'um strong charm. I cook um money, make um silver bullet, make um strong charm, too" (O'Neill 1061). Perhaps Jones's self-identity collapses in the face of questioning, but his discourse still serves the purpose in the situation.

Meanwhile, as part of white discourse power, Baptist elements are also utilized by Jones to construct his own identity. Jones mentions in his conversation with Smithers that he is also a member of the Baptist Church and argued: "de Baptist Church done pertect me and land dem all in hell" (O'Neill 1042), which suggests that Jones used religious discourse as a symbol of protection and strength. As mentioned earlier, Jones does not really believe in these teachings, or he would not have left his God behind when making money. Thus, religion for Jones is nothing more than an instrumental and powerful discourse. Although Jones has previously shown contempt for religion, he turns to his professed religious faith for comfort and protection when facing with death threats. When he feels fear from the bottom of his heart and encounters horrible visions, he confesses that he is "a po' sinner" (O'Neill 1052), and hopes that God will forgive him for his sins, which unfortunately can only be his wishful thinking.

These examples show that Jones continually borrows and adopts the discourse of others in order to consolidate his own identity and power as emperor. However, this power based on the words of others is fragile because it depends on the approval and response of others. When Jones loses this recognition, so does his identity and power, which is reflected in his eventual isolation and fear in the series. It is thought-provoking, though, that the discourse Jones borrows eventually collapses for him. For the local blacks who rebel against him, however, the discourse created by Jones is no less potent, and even more convinced than Jones himself. Through these citations and analyses, the audience can see that discourse not only plays a key role in constructing social relations and power structures, but also unconsciously shapes an individual's self-perception, as elaborated in Lacan's theory.

In conclusion, Lacan's theory of discourse provides a lens through which we can understand the complex dynamics of power, identity, and subjectivity in *The Emperor Jones*. The characters in the play, including Jones and Lem, are not just passive recipients of

discourse but are actively constituted by it, shaping and being shaped by the symbolic order in which they exist. Jones's rise and fall from power serve as a cautionary tale about the precarious nature of identity built on the discourses of "the big other" and the dangers of becoming too entwined in narratives that are ultimately beyond one's control. The play thus offers a profound exploration of the interplay between language, power, and the construction of the self, highlighting the complex and often unpredictable ways in which discourse can influence human behavior and societal structures.

2.3 Jones in Symbols: The Construction of Stage Props

Apart from obscure speech and discourse, symbols are also very important concepts in Lacan's theory. In Zizek's interpretation, once reality is symbolized, caught in a network of symbols, things themselves appear in words and concepts rather than in immediate physical reality (Wu 272). This quote relates to an important idea in Lacan's theory, namely the relationship between reality and the Symbolic, which in Lacan's theory is the order constructed by language and symbols that is the foundation of human culture and social structure. When reality is symbolized, it means that things in the real world no longer exist only in physical form, but are given meaning and concepts through language and symbolic systems. Considering *The Emperor Jones*, this concept can be understood in two ways:

The first is the identity of emperor. Jones calls himself emperor, a symbolic title that represents power and domination. In the play, Jones's authority is maintained not through physical force but through language and symbolic acts. Jones knows it very well, which is why he said "ain't a man's talkin' big what makes him big-long as he makes folks helieve it?" (O'Neill 1036). The related role of speech mentioned earlier. What will be emphasized next is the symbolization of Jones's costumes. When he first appears in the play, in addition to his body and expression, his costumes are also very interesting:

> He wears a light blue uniform coal, sprayed with brass buttons, heavy gold chevrons on his shoulders, gold braid on the collar, cuffs, etc. His pants are bright red with a light blue stripe down the side. Patent leather laced boots with brass spurs, and a bell with a long−barreled, pearl-handled revolver in a holster complete his make up. Yet there is something not altogether ridiculous about his grandeur. He has a way of

carrying it off. (O'Neill 1033)

As an important part of stage props, Jones's costumes have been described as dramatic and visually striking, reinforcing his emperor status. The gold stripes, brass buckles, gold V-shaped armband and gold braid on his uniform, as well as his bright red trousers and patent-leather shoes with spurs, are symbols of authority and status. These details convey through visual symbols Jones's self-image and how he wants others to see him. Despite his sartorial exaggeration, Jones's "grandeur" is not exactly "ridiculous", suggesting that Jones, through his demeanor and behavior, manages to make his costumes seem reasonable rather than cynically amusing. This reflects his deep understanding of the symbolic and how to build and maintain his authority through outward symbols unconsciously.

Another symbolic stage prop is the silver Bullet that is used throughout the play. It is not only a physical object, but also the embodiment of Jones's power and fear. The presence of the silver bullet makes Jones feel safe, but it also hints at the punishment that may follow the loss of the bullet. Not only does Jones regard the silver bullet as his treasure and not allow Smithers to touch it, but he directly names the silver bullet for its symbolic meaning, namely through it "to cheat 'em out o' gittin' me" (O'Neill 1041). The presence of the silver bullet makes Jones feel safe, but it also reminds him of his crimes and possible punishment. Jones relies on the silver bullet as a psychological support that symbolizes his illusion of invincibility. As Jones flees through the forest and faces despair, he realizes he cannot afford to lose the silver bullet, as it is his good luck charm and the source of his power. As Jones flees through the forest and feels desperate, he uses his revolver to break his illusion, but when he is down to the last silver bullet, he begins to panic, thinking that he must not lose the last silver bullet that symbolizes his invincibility. That's why, when he is forced to shoot, he catapults his only silver into the crocodile god called up by the African witch doctor. He tries to maintain his power and control, but in the end, it is just a futile attempt. When Jones has used his silver bullet, he loses his last protection, which causes his spiritual world to completely collapse and he becomes completely lost in the real world. He unconsciously realizes that he cannot escape capture and punishment, which marks the end of his identity and power.

Jones's escape through the forest is not only a physical chase, but also a symbolic

journey into his inner world. His fear, guilt, and despair are symbolized through the speech and actions of the play, becoming a symbolic reality that the audience can perceive. This reality is no longer a direct physical reality, but is constructed and understood through a network of symbolic worlds.

In conclusion, Brutus Jones's identity and power are constructed through symbolic elements such as speech, discourse and symbols, which jointly shape his self-perception and social status as an emperor. Lacan's theory emphasizes the role of symbolism in the formation of individual identity. Jones positions himself in symbolism through speech and behavior. Meanwhile, symbols such as his costumes and silver bullet become the symbolic images of his power, enabling him to obtain corresponding symbolized subject. However, this symbolic identity is fragile because it depends on the approval and reaction of others, and because there is always something that cannot be reduced. When Jones loses this identity, his power collapses, ultimately leading to his mental and physical disorientation. This reflects the powerful influence of language and symbols in shaping individual self-perception and social structure, and sows the seeds of the incompleteness and fragmentation of Jones's subject position in the order of the Symbolic.

Chapter Three Trauma, Invasion and Dilemma: The Collapsed Jones in the Real

After the "doubly alienated" of mis-recognized in the Imaginary and accession in the Symbolic, Jones's identity is finally implemented in reality. Everyone on the island, including himself, recognizes his identity and symbolization, and hails him as the emperor of the island "as yet not self-determined by White Marines" (O'Neill 1030). But it is important to note that the reality here is not in the Real in Lacan's psychoanalysis. In his work *Introducing Lacan*, Darian Leader explained as follows:

> What we ordinarily speak of as 'reality' would best be defined as an amalgam of symbolic and imaginary: imaginary to the extent that we are situated in the specular register and the ego offers us rationalizations of our actions; and symbolic to the extent that most things around us have meaning. (61)

Therefore, in the interpretation of Lacan psychoanalytic theory, although Jones has already completed the imagination and construction of his own subject and completed the partial reduction of the Real, Still, some things "are excluded from our reality" (Leader 61) and become an unreducible "object a" in Lacan's eyes (Lacan 697). This means that Jones will sooner or later face "an indivisible brute materiality that exists prior to symbolization" (Homer 82), which is his own previous trauma and the failure of his symbolization. This is also the dilemma that Jones faces: on the one hand, Jones lives within the other and the social order, and inevitably alienates himself; on the other hand, this alienation is doomed to be incomplete, and the contradiction of identity is bound to happen to Jones.

3.1 Primary Trauma: The Effect upon Jones's Subject

Jones's trauma can be traced back to Jones's personal experiences and racial encounters. The former is the injustice and personal frustration Jones has suffered in the United States because of race, including his experiences with criminal behavior and prison escape, and the latter is the fear and unease he has deep in his heart because of his racial identity. From the perspective of the former, this is a kind of individual unconscious mentioned by Freud. From the perspective of the latter, it may be able to see traces of Jung's "collective unconscious". Although O'Neill always maintained that his work was not influenced by psychoanalysis, in

fact, O'Neill himself later admitted, "if I have been influenced unconsciously, it must have been by Jung's book more than any other psychological work" (Dowling 223). Therefore, it can be said that there is a certain basis for psychoanalysis of the protagonists in O'Neill's plays. But from Lacanian perspective, Jones's unconscious illusion is neither an individual unconscious nor a collective unconscious, it is "the effect of a trans-individual symbolic order upon the subject" (Homer 69). To put it simply, it is the effect that social order and ideas exert on Jones, which is a kind of primary trauma. In general, Jones experiences two types of unconscious visions in the play, corresponding to personal trauma and racial trauma.

The first is the personal trauma Jones has suffered. Even before Jones entered the forest, Smithers begins using ghost to scare Jones, who has done a lot of bad things: "ternight when it's pitch black in the forest, they'll 'ave their pet devils and ghosts 'oundin' after you" (O'Neill 1041); "give my regards to any ghosts yer meets up with" (O'Neill 1043). These words no doubt plant the seeds of terror in Jones's subconscious mind. When Jones enters the forest, his guilt and fear are amplified by these cues, causing him to begin to see "little formless fears", which may be a manifestation of his subconscious fears or an external manifestation of his guilt. These ghosts represent Jones's inner demons, incarnations of his past behavior, that now find him and haunt him. Through psychological manipulation, Smithers takes advantage of Jones's fear and guilt to plant the idea of terror in him. When Jones enters the forest, these thoughts are amplified and manifest in the form of hallucinations or psychological delusions, making Jones feel more panicked and confused. Although he fights off the first ghosts with a single bullet, Jones then encounters Jeff, who is black, and the guard, who is white, further revealing his inner trauma. In Jones's subsequent confession, the audience realizes that Jones has killed both of them: "when I cotches Jeff cheatin' wid loaded dice my anger overcomes me and I kills him dead! Lawd, I done wrong! When dat guard hits me wid de whip, my anger overcomes me, and I kills him dead" (1052). He confesses his sins to God and confesses that he killed Jeff and the guard out of anger, showing that he knows deeply that his actions are wrong and that they have deeply affected him personally. These crimes not only haunt him morally, but also challenge his identity on a social and racial level. He kills not only his own black people, but also a white man, the former makes him ashamed to remain in the black community, the latter makes it impossible for him to remain in the

United States. His inability to get his African-American identity recognized in the trans-individual symbolic order left an indelible primary trauma on Jones's individual psyche.

Then there is the racial trauma Jones encountered. From scene five to scene seven, Jones encounters and even participates in the following three situations: the slave trade on the southern plantation, the slave ship on the Atlantic Ocean, and the sacrificial ceremony on the African continent. Considering the whole timeline, it is highly unlikely that Jones himself experiences all three scenes at the same time. So, there must be a good reason O'Neill designs such a journey to Jones's roots. For Manuel, the significance of O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* does not lie in Jones's personal and collective unconscious, but "in the ultimate confrontation of African Americans with their destiny" (79), this destiny is not only a struggle against external oppression, but also a search for internal identity. If the slave trade in the southern plantation and the slave ship on the Atlantic are the oppression of the black race under the domination of the white culture, then the sacrificial ceremony on the African continent is also the oppression of the black original culture. According to Lacan's theory, there is no difference between them, which all belong to "a trans-individual symbolic order". In fact, O'Neill's deplayion also proves that there is such a structural effect upon the subject in human society. This order influences individuals' self-perception and behavior through language, culture, and social structures. O'Neill shows this structural influence through Jones's experience, revealing how social and cultural factors shape the psychology and behavior of individuals and leave them with far-reaching trauma.

Through Jones's personal and racial trauma, the audience is able to see the effect of a trans-individual symbolic order upon the subject. They both constitute Jones's primary trauma: as an African American, Jones is not only subjected to the structural oppression of white culture on black culture, but also to the rejection of black culture for killing compatriot. Jones is unable to find his own identity in the midst of such trauma, and despite shooting back again and again, he ultimately fails. He lost his identity, and so does his symbolization.

3.2 Irreducible Invasion: The Failure of Jones's Symbolization

In Lacan's theory, the Real cannot be completely reduced by the Imaginary and the Symbolic, it always leaves some residual, and the subject continues to desire because of these unsymbolized residual, so it will eventually encounter the irreducible "Das Ding" based on

language and symbols, which means the supporting place of representation (Wu 452). When the subject and "Das Ding" meet, the Real will inevitably invade the Symbolic, resulting in the failure of the symbolization. In the play *The Emperor Jones*, what Jones encounters in the dark forest is the so-called "Das Ding", which shocks both his inner world and the outer symbolic order.

The first is the failure of reduction in Jones's language. In a conversation with Smithers, when Jones is told that the forest is very dangerous, he claims: "Trees an' me,we'se friends, and dar's a full moon comin' bring me light" (O'Neill 1042). He thinks that trees and the moon would help him escape the black soldiers, yet which is proved to be a naive misconception. As the plot progresses, these natural elements do not help him, but instead become an obstacle. The trees gain a will of their own, while the light of the moon becomes imperceptible and disturbing. For a time, the trees become an obstacle to Jones, not only possessing a "veiled purpose" of their own (O'Neill 1049), but also as if by magic, driving Jones astray and eventually back to the edge of the forest, where he is captured by Lem soldiers (O'Neill 1061). The moon also pronounces "a barely perceptible, suffused, eerie glow" (O'Neill 1047), and later "almost completely shut out" (O'Neill 1055), fails to bring him light as he wished.

The second is the failure of symbolism in Jones's costumes. As has already been mentioned, Jones's costumes, from his uniform to his shoes with spurs, give him the presence of an emperor. When he leaves the palace, he proudly wears his Panama hat, which disappears before he encounters a vision of Jeff, the black man. Otherwise, the sweat is elegantly wiped off with a handkerchief, but later only "mops off his face on his sleeve" (O'Neill 1047). As Jones's journey progresses, the heat and constant running become too much for him, and he even begins to take the initiative to shed his emperor costume:

> I'm meltin' wid heat! Runnin' an' runnin' an' runnin'! Damn dis heah coat! Like a straitjacket! (He tears off his coat and flings it away from him, revealing himself stripped to the waist.] Dere! Dat's better! Now I kin breathe! (looking down at his feet, the spurs catch his eye.) And to hell wid dese high-fangled spurs. Dey're what's been a-trippin' me up an' breakin' my neck. (He unstraps them and flings them away disgustedly.) Dere! I gits rid o' dem frippety Emperor trappin's an' I travels lighter.

(O'Neill 1049)

This not only shows the ineffectiveness of the symbols, but also confirms that Jones is never a born emperor in his own identity. By the time Jones is on the verge of complete collapse, he is "only in a loin cloth" (O'Neill 1060), even with the local blacks, fully achieving the transformation from a white emperor to a black slave. This allows him to completely strip away all previous pretense and come closer to the local blacks he once ruled over. This complete undressing of the emperor underscores his return from self-proclaimed ruler to a man struggling merely to survive.

In addition, Tom-tom's voice has also been aural impact on Jones's nerves, symbolizing a power that cannot be described in words, only exists in the Real. On the one hand, this force should match Jones's own heartbeat: "it starts at rate exactly corresponding to normal pulse beat-72 to the minute-and continues at a gradually accelerating rate from this point uninterruptedly to the very end of the play" (O'Neill 1041), whose continued presence makes Jones feel that there is nowhere to run, causing him to run constantly. On the other hand, as it continued to accelerate, it not only shakes Jones's nerves physically, but also completely breaks him psychologically. When Jones fights off the witch doctor and the crocodile God with one last silver bullet, he "lies with his face to the ground, his arms outstretched", while the tom-tom beats with a "somber pulsation, a baffled but revengeful power" (O'Neill 1059). Abdo states that "the tom-tom's throb is baffled because it cannot understand the outcome of this encounter" (41), which shows that tom-tom, as a symbolic force, represents a power that exists in the Real beyond words and symbols. This power has no inclination of its own, but merely exists there, and merely accomplishes some sort of irreducible invasion of the Symbolic.

Through Jones's encounter in the dark forest, O'Neill unconsciously shows the audience the Real invasion of the Symbolic and the failure of the symbolization. On the one hand, Jones's language and symbols fail in the face of the Real; on the other hand, tom-tom's voice, as the symbolic power of the Real, continuously shocks Jones's nerves and finally breaks him completely. All these reveal the weakness and struggle of the subject in the face of the Real in Lacan's theory, and emphasize the irreducible influence of the Real on the Symbolic. This irreducible force eventually leads to the double collapse of Jones's inner world and outer

symbolic order, which shows the profound contradiction and conflict of human beings in the face of their inner desires and outer social orders.

3.3 Unsolvable Dilemma: The Impossibility of Jones's Struggle

The reason why Jones's ending is doomed to be a tragedy is related to Lacan's understanding of the tragedy of subjectivity. In his writing, Chen Qijia points out that the subject must be tragic because, in Lacan's theory, it must be "bar-cut": to the extent that human subject consciousness is intrinsically constructed, it requires a God or a similar being, so that he can at least sometimes have a moment of illusionary respite from absolute suffering. But after Nietzsche, God is no more. The fate of this destroyed subject cannot but be laid bare before every conscious spiritual consciousness, and no means of escape can be found (5). In other words, Lacan argued that human subjectivity is built on linguistic and social structures that are inherently divisive and alienating. Our sense of self is formed through relationships with others and the use of language, but this process inevitably leads to the loss of our true desires and the desire for a complete self. Applying these points to the role of *The Emperor Jones*, it can be seen that Jones's tragic end is connected to his subjectivity as a human being. He was once a powerful emperor, but was eventually destroyed by his own fears, ambitions, and past actions. His tragedy is that, despite his attempts to construct his sense of self through power and control, he ultimately cannot escape his inner division and outer reality.

Jones's inner division lies in his cultural identity. As has already been noted, Jones, who is biologically black, has been deeply influenced by white culture. He becomes involved in the language of the local black people and the life of the witch doctors, while maintaining spiritual ties with the Baptist Church. While making fun of himself as a nigger, he exploits the local black people, eager to take money to the so-called "safe" America. This puts him in the midst of both black and white discourse, that is, as a black man, he lacks white desire. Therefore, his status as a black emperor is subjected to the revolutionary resistance of the local blacks as well as not recognized by the whites represented by Smithers. When he has killed the black Jeff and the white guard in a fit of rage in the United States, he is already ostracized and marginalized by both cultures. For Jones, he has become a spiritually homeless person at this point, as well as a destroyed subject, and cannot find a way to escape. His escape and death in the forest symbolizes his inability to escape the dilemma of cultural

identity. His tragic ending is not only a sad personal fate, but also a profound reflection of cultural conflicts and social contradictions.

The play's outer reality is actually more thought-provoking. Because Jones suffers oppression in the white world, he chooses to resist and kill the white guard who oppresses him. But then he becomes an emperor in the black world, oppressing his compatriot. This corresponds almost perfectly to Nietzsche's understanding of the baseness of human nature: "whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the-process he does not become a monster. And when you look long into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you" (89). This phenomenon has occurred many times in history, when revolutionaries or rebels overthrew the old system of oppression, only to establish a new system of oppression themselves. O'Neill is sensitive to this. He told a press conference in 1946:

> Some day this country is going to get it-really get it. We had everything to start with-everything-but there's bound to be a retribution. We've followed the same selfish, greedy path as every other country in the world. We talk about the American Dream and want to tell the world about the American Dream, but what is that dream, in most cases, but the dream of material things? I sometimes think that the United States, for this reason, is the greatest failure the world has ever seen. We've been able to get a very good price for our souls in this country-the greatest price perhaps that has ever been paid. (Dowing 16)

Once upon a time, the American dream of freedom and democracy was deeply rooted in the hearts of Americans, and these words from *The Declaration of Independence* were deeply rooted in the hearts of every American: "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (Jefferson 102). However, the reality of "self-determined by White Marines" incidents abound. Jones rebels against the structural oppression he is subjected to, killing white jailers with a shovel in the past and slinging silver at the crocodile God. But his struggle is in vain. Even when he makes it out of the woods and back to the United States, he is still the colonized and the colonizer. Either to be oppressed or to oppress others. It seems that the American dream of all men being created equal has been forgotten, replaced by the pursuit of money and power. At this point, mankind

has finally reached the unsolvable dilemma: the subject must resist, but such resistance is meaningless.

In a word, as a representative of the American national drama, O'Neill "always siding with the disempowered" (Dowling 15). He believes that his entire effort in writing is to arouse sympathy for the unfortunate and oppressed, hoping that Americans will wake up from the material American dream and not forget the fundamental concern for mankind, which is the true American spirit.

Conclusion

To explore the profound implications of the character Brutus Jones in Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*, this thesis conducts a psychoanalytic interpretation of Jones's subjectivity based on Jacques Lacan's the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real, which is argued that Jones's subjectivity undergoes a process of mis-recognition, construction, and collapse. Chapter One posits that Jones has a series of mis-recognitions in his mirror image of race and power, leading him to develop an identity as a black emperor within white culture based on his African American identity, which sows the seeds of a crisis of self-identity. Chapter Two suggests that Jones shapes his emperor status and self-perception through language and symbols, but such a subject construction is not stable. Chapter Three argues that under the influence of primary trauma and failed symbolization, Jones not only loses his emperor identity but also his African American identity, which reflects the predicament and dilemma of modern subjects.

The Emperor Jones reveals through its profound narrative and complex character development the predicament faced by African Americans, represented by Jones, in their subjective experiences: on one hand, they identify with their American identity, aspiring and believing that they can achieve the status and wealth they desire through their intelligence and hard work, and they continue to strive for this; on the other hand, they must also confront the structural discrimination brought by their original environment and racial identity, engaging in futile resistance under the oppression of social order and concepts. This predicament is summarized as the subject must exist when it is not and cannot not exist: modern subjects must gain social recognition in order to survive, and thus inevitably alienate themselves through mis-recognition and the symbolic order. However, such alienation will ultimately lead to a crisis of identity.

Eugene O'Neill became a pioneer and achieved the highest accomplishments in American national drama precisely because he understood the American-style tragedy that befell all Joneses. His experiences made him aware of the psychological state of Americans in the post-Nietzschean era: In an age where spiritual beliefs have been lost, people have lost the meaning of existence, but the absence of meaning only brings greater suffering. Therefore, the subject must strive to struggle, to find meaning in meaninglessness, and to exist when the

subject's reality does not exist. When all this happens in America, it means that individuals must strive to struggle to achieve a success in the style of the American dream. O'Neill was clear that the so-called "success" of Americans is actually "possession". Through this possession, Americans lose their subjectivity and are only engaged in an endless cycle of "possession-losing" to erase the pain and loss brought by meaninglessness. Unfortunately, from Lacanian perspective, whether it is the American dream or the dream of any other country, it is merely the symbolic reduction of the Real. The desires fulfilled by people living in this register are ultimately the desires of others, and the subject's self ultimately becomes the "self in the eyes of the other" in the Imaginary, which is an alienated self. Both O'Neill and Lacan recognize that a person who gains the whole world but loses his soul, which is not beneficial to the individual, is inevitable. They are also powerless to solve this dilemma, which is also the predicament pointed out by the title of this thesis.

As a play from the early 20th century, the living conditions of African Americans depicted in *The Emperor Jones* may have greatly improved. However, if we shift our perspective from "African Americans" to "whole human being", we can see the heavy burden that modern subjects bear in society. From birth, the subject's experience is dependent on the mirror of the other and the order of society. Yet, the mirror image is ultimately a form of mis-recognition, and the order is a form of oppression. Under such circumstances, finding something to prevent oneself from falling into madness, mania, or self-destruction is the greatest happiness that a modern subject can hope for.

From the perspective of O'Neill, this "tragic optimist", even though the cycle of "possession-losing" may seem endless, it is within these cycles that individuals may discover the true meaning of their lives and the value of their subjectivity. The ultimate goal is not to escape the Symbolic or the Imaginary, but to navigate through them with a clear understanding of the Real, and to find a sense of purpose and identity that transcends the misrecognitions and oppressions of society. It is in this journey, fraught with trials and tribulations, that we can glimpse the resilience of the human spirit and the possibility of transcending the limitations imposed by our social constructs.

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A Lacanian Reading of O'Neill's The Emperor Jones

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