

TOPOS OF THE ROAD IN THE PLAYS “PEOPLE’S MALAKHII”
BY MYKOLA KULISH AND “EMPEROR JONES” BY EUGENE O’NEILL

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Abstract. *The article presents a comparative analysis of the plays “People’s Malahii” by Mykola Kulish and “Emperor Jones” by Eugene O’Neill. Its aim is to identify the common and distinctive features of the artistic interpretation of the road topos, which serves as the structural and compositional centre of the analysed plays. The movement of the main characters in space ensures the development of the dramatic action as well as the revelation of the main characters of the plays: Malachai and Jones. The primary motivation for Malakhai and Jones is rooted in their respective obsessions: for Malakhai, it is the socialist restructuring of society, while for Jones, it is a relentless pursuit of power and wealth. In both cases, the emphasis is on the hopelessness and tragic inevitability of the characters’ paths, the stages of which are associated with Dante’s circles of hell. In the works of the Ukrainian author, these circles are represented in the form of urban institutions: streets, asylums, factories, and brothels, which symbolise the absurdity of Malakhai’s efforts, reducing them to “blue nothingness”. In Eugene O’Neill’s play, Jones’s journey ends in the forest and shifts into the realm of the subconscious, where memories of the Emperor’s immoral deeds are projected through the prism of his people’s impoverished past, provoking sharp pangs of conscience and a desire for atonement. The thorny path of the characters ends in a tragic resolution; however, while the Ukrainian playwright’s fanaticism of Malakhai reaches its extreme, leading to the final renunciation of family values, the American Jones comes to the realisation of his own guilt and the desire to reconnect, even after death, with his roots.*

Keywords: *topos, character, comparative analysis, dramatic action, composition, interpretation, subconscious, national tradition, self-identification.*

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**ТОПОС ДОРОГИ В П'ЕСАХ «НАРОДНИЙ МАЛАХІЙ»
МИКОЛИ КУЛІША ТА «ІМПЕРАТОР ДЖОНС» ЮДЖИНА О'НІЛА**

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Анотація. *Стаття присвячена компаративному аналізу п'єс “Народний Малахій” М. Куліша та “Імператор Джонс” Ю. О'Ніла. Мета статті – визначити спільні і відмінні риси художньої інтерпретації топосу дороги, який є структурно-композиційним центром аналізованих п'єс. Переміщення головних персонажів у просторі забезпечує розвиток драматичної дії, а також розкриття характерів головних персонажів п'єс: Малахія і Джонса. Основним рушієм дій та вчинків Малахія і Джонса є їхнє засліплення нав'язливими ідеями, зокрема соціалістичною перебудовою суспільства у першого та прагненням до влади й наживи в другого. В обох випадках акцентовано на безперспективності і трагічній приреченості шляхів персонажів, етапи яких асоціюються з Дантовими колами пекла. В українського автора вони репрезентовані у формі міських інституцій: вулиць, божевільні, заводу та будинку розпусти, які символізують безглуздість поту Малахія, зводячи їх до “голубого ніщо”. У п'єсі Юджина О'Ніла дорога Джонса обривається в лісі та переміщується у сферу підсвідомого, у площині якого спогади про аморальні вчинки імператора проєктуються крізь призму знедоленого минулого його народу, викликаючи гострі докори сумління та бажання спокути. Тернистий шлях персонажів завершується трагічною розв'язкою, проте, якщо в українського драматурга фанатизм Малахія сягає крайньої межі, призводячи до остаточного зречення родинних цінностей, то до американця Джонса приходить усвідомлення власної провини та прагнення з'єднатися, бодай після смерті, зі своїм корінням.*

Ключові слова: *топос, порівняльний аналіз, драматична дія, композиція, інтерпретація, персонаж, підсвідомість, національна традиція, самоідентифікація.*

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Introduction

Mykola Kulish (1892–1937) and Eugene O'Neill (1888–1953) emerged as prominent figures in the realm of theatrical development and innovation in Ukraine and the United States during the early decades of the twentieth century. Both playwrights were affiliated with the avant-garde movements in literature and theatre, actively participating in experimental endeavours in both form and content. While drawing inspiration from contemporary European trends, they remained firmly rooted in their respective national traditions, providing fresh interpretations of socio-cultural realities and phenomena within the context of their artistic creations. For instance, O'Neill, without associating his work with a specific method or literary trend, viewed the role of a playwright as the ability to “get to the root of the disease” (O'Neill 1988: 249), thus emphasising the significance of addressing fundamental issues.

It is important to highlight that Kulish and O'Neill were not merely observers but also actively engaged in the complex social and political dynamics of their countries. The authors' personal experiences had a profound and tragic influence on their lives and artistic endeavours. Regarding M. Kulish's creative legacy, it endured a fate similar to that of the author himself, fading from scholarly and literary discussions for several decades. Nevertheless, since the 1990s, the Ukrainian literary scholars have made significant strides in studying and analysing the writer's works.

The convergence of sociocultural factors (involving intricate socio-political processes that contributed to the establishment of national theatres), creative elements (characterised by the fusion of modern European dramatic elements with the authors' native literary traditions), and biographical influences (stemming from the active engagement of the playwrights in socio-historical movements) provides a solid foundation for exploring the typological characteristics of the plays "People's Malakhii" (1927) by Kulish and "Emperor Jones" (1920) by O'Neill. These dramatic works have not yet been subjected to a comparative analysis, thus emphasising **the relevance** of the proposed study. **The research aim** is to identify both the shared and distinctive attributes related to the actualisation of the road topos as a central structural and compositional component in the analysed texts.

Materials and methods of the research

In this research, we applied the comparative-typological method, which helped to identify common and distinctive features of Kulish's and O'Neill's plays within the cultural-historical paradigm that arose in the early twentieth century. The study is based on the theory of commonalities, which arise not from explicit or implicit connections but from analogous historical and cultural circumstances. Edward Kaspersky delineates three planes of comparison, each following its own logic: comparing temporally distant literary phenomena; analysing spatially distant literary works; and examining semiotically different discourses and forms of culture (Kaspersky 1998: 533–534). According to this categorisation, our study fits into the second plane, the primary feature of which is the bridging of spatial distances and the analysis of different cultures and literatures in search of their structural correspondences.

In our interpretation of the artistic space, we draw upon the research of Polish scholar Sofiia Skvarchynska, who introduces the demarcation of space-time depending on the literary genre (1954: 35) and different presentations of spatiality in terms of quality, quantity, and modification. The researcher emphasises the interdependence of space and literary genre, asserting that epic, unlike drama, has complete freedom in combining and narrowing space (Skvarchynska 1954: 47). In this aspect, we also considered Roman Kozlov's study "Artistic time and artistic space in dramas", wherein the author derives the concept of a dramaturgical chronotope, understanding it as a specific artistic structure that "encompasses all temporal and spatial elements of a dramatic work, thus creating favourable conditions for understanding the content of the work and its interpretation" (Козлов 2005: 15). Strictly speaking, the chronotope serves as a tool for shifting emphasis from the structural arrangement to the substantive content of the narrative, thus shaping the critical principles underlying the author's thought process.

The peculiarity of the drama as a literary genre lies in its close resemblance to real life, enabling writers to create a social model within a specific time and place. Spatial organisation in drama serves not only as a descriptive tool but also "carries profound expressive, emotional, and artistic significance" [Марчук 2016: 137]. In this respect, as Nonna Kopystianska argues, textual space can be viewed as a set of codes that readers interpret individually (Копистянська 2012: 87). Furthermore, the same physical space can encompass diverse experiences for different people, both personal and shared.

The concept of the topos, an integral part of spatial analysis, lacks a clear definition despite its wide usage. In modern literary studies, topos is described as 1) a place where meanings unfold, which can be linked to any fragment of real space, and 2) a "commonplace" consisting of stable language formulas, recurring themes, and plots found in national literature. For example, the topos of the road can be viewed as both a specific place

with defined coordinates and a recurring image with spatial connotations. Yanina Abramovska emphasises the functional aspect of topos as an argument, often containing a powerful axiological component that contrasts and complements values (Абрамовська 2008: 352). Therefore, opposing but complementary pairs of topos are frequently observed. This paradigm is evident in the analysed works, where the motif of the road symbolises binary oppositions such as self/alien and reality/illusion.

Research Results

In “People’s Malakhii” by Kulish and “Emperor Jones” by O’Neill, the road topos serves as a recurring structural and compositional element. The characters’ movement in space drives the progression of the play’s action, unveiling its ideological and artistic content. The road serves as a unifying force, connecting all the images and plots into a cohesive narrative; it helps “to go beyond the local space and embrace various geographical loci, revealing the search for self-awareness” (Яцків 2021: 163). In this context, the stages function as pivotal episodes that shape specific situations and bring forth certain aspects of the main character’s personality. The heroes’ movement in space serves as a direct reflection of their human essence, as demonstrated in Kulish’s “People’s Malakhii” and O’Neill’s “Emperor Jones”, where the protagonists are driven by fanatical ideas that determine their actions and deeds.

The first stage in the plays of both Ukrainian and American playwrights is the native home, where Malakhii Stakanchyk and Jones start their journey. In Kulish’s play “People’s Malakhii”, the farewell scene is notable for its funeral-tragic tonality, which aligns with the broader characteristics of Ukrainian folk tradition. Everyone present is crying; Malakhii’s wife faints, and his fellow villagers do not understand the purpose of Malakhii’s journey or the reasons that prompted him to take such a step. They agree that he is simply running away from home: “*It would not be so difficult if he had died voluntarily, even today. Forty-seven years, think about it, family, honour to honour, and here you are! Running away*” (Куліш 1990: 6). The wife, seeing something wrong in her husband’s actions, despairingly predicts the tragic end of the trip: “*My heart has failed! I also hear that he is on his way to death*” (Куліш 1990: 6). Instead, Malakhii, convinced of his mission to change humanity for the better, confidently answers his neighbours: “*I am not running away. I am going! If you only knew, it is as if I hear music and see the blue distance. What a delight! I am going!*” (Куліш 1990: 7). It is symbolic that before going out, in a fit of inspiration, he releases his favourite bird from the cage, saying, “*So I sat in the cage for the best years of my life. Fly, my bird, and you into the blue distance. Forgive*” (Куліш 1990: 9). Malakhii’s exalted tone and emphasis on the sincerity of his intentions are starkly dissonant with the external atmosphere of sadness and complete incomprehension. We observe here the effect of the communicative gap, “when the characters speak but do not hear each other” (Devdiuk 2022: 240). This technique, frequently employed by Kulish, lends the scene a grotesque resonance and draws attention to the absurdity of the situation, which symbolises the inconsistency of the Bolshevik ideology with the family values and national mentality of Ukrainians.

As for the protagonist of O’Neill’s play, the African-American character Jones, he embarks on his journey from a luxurious palace located on an island off the American coast. In contrast to the eccentric Malakhii, who later discovers the “Olympus of proletarian wisdom and power” and sees the “blue distance of socialism”, Jones emerges as a decisive, strong-willed, and self-confident ruler. Over the course of his two-year stay on the island, he transforms from a fugitive prisoner into an Emperor, subjugating an entire tribe of local inhabitants and persuading them of his immortality.

Emperor Jones serves as an illustration of an individual who, disregarding all moral principles, declares himself to be superhuman and attains success by exploiting the fears of the uncivilised masses. On the other hand, Malakhii embarks on a journey with the aim of achieving the “*immediate reform of humanity*”, a purpose that is comprehensible only

to him. Meanwhile, the Emperor is driven by the pursuit of profit and personal enrichment. However, in both instances, men's decisions ultimately result in tragedy.

It is worth mentioning that there is an ethnic element present in both plays. In the Ukrainian author's play, it manifests as a lamentation over Malakhii's sudden departure and concerns about his future fate. In the American play, it is represented by the haunting beat of the tam-tam drums, instilling unease in the Emperor's soul. The ritual dance performed by the indigenous people to the rhythm of the tam-tam aims to grant them strength and courage to overcome the despised imposter. Sensing the diabolical origin of his power, the indigenous people invoke the spirits to aid them in conquering their own fear and dethroning the Emperor from his position. "*The blacks are holding a bloody meeting, engaging in a war dance, building up their courage before they come after you*" (O'Neill 2011: 28). They eventually succeed in their attempt.

So, Malakhii and Jones embark on their respective journeys, disregarding the warnings of those around them and driven by their unwavering confidence and enthusiasm. The Ukrainian character, having cast off the influence of religion, departs from the darkness of his native village towards the illuminating path of socialism. In contrast, the American personage moves from a spacious and bright palace to a sombre forest. Despite the stark differences in their physical journeys, both protagonists remain guided by their delusions, leading inevitably to tragic consequences.

The second phase (stage-station) of Malakhii's life commences in Kharkiv, the former capital of Ukraine. The scene near the RNA building, where the protagonist endeavours to emphasise the urgent necessity for human reform, is portrayed with elements of expressionist poetics. On the street, a multitude of people engage in heated arguments, failing to comprehend Malakhii's intentions and desires. By labelling the passersby with generic names such as Dama (Lady), Pannochka (Miss), Toi shcho v halife (the one who is wearing breeches), Didok (an old man), and Baba (an elderly lady), the author highlights their stereotypical and schematic nature. This portrayal provides an insight into the societal dynamics of the Ukrainian city during that period. Malakhii tries to tell them about the need for immediate human reform according to his project. However, neither the commissars nor the crowd understand its essence, so they do not hide their dissatisfaction or even their fierce indignation. In the end, the crowd is joined by Malakhii's relatives – his daughter Liubunia and Kum – who aim to return the man home, emphasising the absurdity of the situation and his grand reforms. The latter succeeds in persuading the councillors that the associate is insane and encourages him to visit a psychiatric hospital with a trick.

The next phase of Malakhii's fervent "ascension" takes place within a mental clinic. It is here that he finally achieves the realisation of his project: the reform of the patients. To further highlight the absurdity of his intentions, elements of a dream are introduced into the plot, presented in a grotesque and parodic manner. After delivering his report on the immediate reform of individuals, Malakhii receives unanimous approval from the people's commissars, which emboldens him to take decisive action. This action involves covering people with a blue veil while Malakhii, assuming the role of a priest, performs a magical gesture with his hand. As a result, individuals emerge from under the veil transformed into extremely kind, polite, and angelic beings. In this dream sequence, Malakhii envisions the "blue beyond," a vivid and imaginative portrayal where the world around him undergoes a gradual transformation. Reality shifts into blue valleys, blue mountains, and blue rains, until it ultimately dissolves into a state of blue nothingness. This imagery emphasises the surreal and fantastical nature of Malakhii's vision.

Inspired by a dream, Malakhii proclaims himself the people's commissar by smudging clay on his forehead, symbolically drawing a parallel to Emperor Jones, the self-proclaimed leader of a savage tribe in the American playwright's work. However, the external attributes of the Ukrainian character are noticeably more modest, reduced to a minimum: a stick, a bag of crackers, a red ribbon draped over his left shoulder, a bridle, a trumpet, and a sunflower crown held in his hand for special occasions. In contrast, according to O'Neill's notes on his play, Emperor Jones is depicted wearing "*a light blue uniform coat*

adorned with brass buttons, ornate gold chevrons on his shoulders, gold braid on the collar, cuffs, and so forth. His pants are bright red with a light blue stripe running down the sides. He wears patent leather-laced boots with brass spurs, and a belt clasping a long-barreled, pearl-handled revolver in a holster completes his attire. Nevertheless, there is an air of dignity about his grandeur that cannot be entirely dismissed" (O'Neill 2011: 18).

If Malakhii's clothing style epitomised his allegiance to socialist ideals, then Jones' attire reflected the materialistic values of 1920s America, with its cult of business and prosperity. Despite being on opposite ends of the spectrum, both systems ultimately led to the destruction of the individual and their moral values, resulting in the "nothingness" proclaimed by Malakhii, a trajectory exemplified by Emperor Jones' movements. Driven by the fear of being hunted down by the indigenous people, he ventures towards the port. However, to reach it, he must traverse a dark and foreboding forest, described by the author as *"the massed blackness of the forest like an encompassing barrier. As the scene opens, nothing can be distinctly made out"* (O'Neill 2011: 18).

At this point, the second stage of Jones' journey begins, mirroring Malakhii's various stays in different locations within Kharkiv. Similar to Kulish, O'Neill incorporates scenes of illusion and sleep to depict the character's subconscious instincts, particularly the fear that grips Jones as he ventures into the woods. Here we clearly observe the movement of the author's thought "from the banal surface of life to its secret depths" (Bloom 2007: 94).

From within the thicket, Jones perceives the approach of a black man named Jeff, whom he had previously killed. Startled, the Emperor instinctively fires his revolver, causing the silhouette of the black man to vanish. The sound of the gunshot snaps Jones back to reality. It helps him recognise that it was a hallucination induced by extreme exhaustion. Simultaneously, his awakened consciousness triggers a recollection from his actual past: the painful memory of him having taken the life of someone dear to him, an act that led him to prison (*"You fool nigger, dey, ain't such things! Hunger 'facts yo' head and yo' eyes . Rest! Don't talk! Rest! You need it. Nigger I kills you dead once. Has I got to kill you again? You take it den"* (O'Neill 2011: 38)).

The Emperor settles down to rest, but in his state of sleepy delirium, he envisions the approach of an entire group of black people *"dressed in striped convict suits; their heads are shaved; one leg drags limpingly shackled to a heavy ball and chain. Some carry picks, the others shovels. They are followed by a white man dressed in the uniform of a prison guard"* (O'Neill 2011: 38). The Emperor fires a second shot, causing the apparitions to vanish, and he gradually regains his sanity. Filled with desperation and seeking an understanding of the situation, Jones turns to God, offering prayers and seeking forgiveness for his sins, particularly the acts of killing Jeff and the prison warden. Exhausted, he pauses for a moment to catch his breath, feeling the weight of his actions. Overwhelmed with regret, he removes his elaborate Emperor shirt adorned with gold studs, lamenting his decision to embrace the role of an Emperor: *"Oh, I'se sorry I evah went in for dis. Dat Emperor job is sho' hard to shake"* (O'Neill 2011: 43). In the light of Carl Jung's theory of archetypes, as explored in his collection "The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious" (1959), Jones' removal of the elaborate Emperor shirt signifies a symbolic shedding of a false persona. According to Jung, the persona is the outward face we present to the world, shaped by societal expectations and norms. This external facade often masks our true inner nature, known as the self. By taking off the Emperor's shirt, Jones symbolically rejects the superficial role he has been playing, attempting to reconnect with his authentic self. This act encapsulates Jung's notion of individuation, the process of becoming the person that one is inherently destined to be, integrating various aspects of the conscious and unconscious mind.

While Jones starts to reflect on his past actions and question his identity during this stage of displacement, Malakhii, on the contrary, burrows deeper into his illusions. He persists in his 'reformer' endeavours, seemingly blind to any introspection or potential disillusionment. Escaping from the hospital, he eventually finds himself at the vast Hammer and Sickle plant, where he once again proclaims himself a reformer, this time reinforcing his status with actions. However, the workers, much like the previous individuals who witnessed

his proposed transformations, openly ridicule Narmakhnar. They do not understand his calls to come to the “*new Favour Mountain on the twelfth of August, in the old way – the sixth*”, to carry “*red poppies, marigolds, and most of all, bring dove dreams. There we will sanctify ourselves, sanctify ourselves*” (Куліш 1990: 50). Within the factory premises, the “reformer’s” attempts face a resounding failure; the intense process of pouring molten iron is in full swing, and the workers immerse themselves in their tasks, nearly knocking Malakhii off his feet. Disheartened, he departs from the workshop, left astonished and outraged by the workers’ behaviour. Their unwavering focus on their labour renders them completely indifferent to the urgent need for personal reform: “*They have their own red dreams. What a tragedy! I closed my eyes and left. A symphony of labour thundered after him*” (Куліш 1990: 51). The most tragic aspect of Malakhii’s predicament, akin to Jones’, lies in their shared fate as victims of circumstance. The events that unfolded in Kharkiv for Malakhii, as Yurii Sherekh notes, could have occurred with equal impact in Paris, New York, or Tokyo. In light of this observation, the scholar concludes: “Man-hunting, hypocrisy, falsehood, walling off the truth of life by the conventions of everyday and bureaucratic norms, boundless selfishness, and venality are not at all the monopoly of Soviet Kharkiv; they are features of human society in general” (Шепех 2008: 344).

Meanwhile, Jones, caught in a suspended state within the forest, alternates between being awake and asleep. His mind traverses a fluctuating landscape, where vivid recollections from his past elicit profound remorse, only to be replaced by hallucinatory visions that arise in his delirium. In this manner, the protagonist’s journey delves into the realm of the unconscious, stirring dormant historical memories that, according to Carl Jung, emerge from the collective unconscious experience inherited from his ancestors. Within his dreams, he encounters both African Americans and plantation owners: “*The auctioneer begins his silent spiel. He points to Jones, appeals to the planters to see for themselves. Here is a good field hand, sound in wind and limb as they can see. Very strong still in spite of being middle-aged. Look at that back. Look at those shoulders. Look at the muscles in his arms and his sturdy legs. Capable of any amount of hard labor. Moreover, of a good disposition, intelligent and tractable. Will any gentleman start the bidding? The planters raise their fingers, make their bids. They are apparently all eager to possess Jones. The bidding is lively; the crowd is interested*” (O’Neill 2011: 68).

The scene depicting the slave trade holds significant importance within the drama. It serves as a pivotal moment for Jones, allowing him to establish a connection with his people, comprehend their anguish and suffering, and consequently confront his own capabilities as someone who claims authority over an indigenous tribe.

To intensify the horror induced by the dream, Jones pulls the trigger a third time. This shot is aimed at the shadow of the auctioneer, causing the apparitions to dissipate, yet the distinct thuds continue to echo. Utterly bewildered, consumed by despair, and overwhelmed by mortal fear, the former Emperor turns to God, desperately seeking salvation: “*Lawd Jesus, heah my prayer! I’s e a po’ sinner, a po’ sinner! I know I did wrong, I know it!*” (O’Neill 2011: 70). He no longer had any bullets left, except for the silver one, which was intended to scare the local residents who were about to catch up with him. Jones acknowledges: “*Oh, Lawd, on’j de silver one left – an’ I gotta save dat fo’ luck. If I shoots dat one I’m a goner sho’ I Lawd, it’s black heah! Whar’s de moon? Oh, Lawd, don’t dis night evah come to an end? Dere! Dis feels like a clear space. I gotta lie down an’ rest. I don’t care if dem niggas does cotch me. I gotta rest*” (O’Neill 2011: 71). Ultimately, in a state of profound exhaustion, Jones succumbs to sleep. Bereft of a shirt and boots, his pants torn, and his legs wracked with agony, he finds solace in the realm of dreams. Within this dream, he encounters a group of African Americans led by a priest, emerging from the dense thickets of the forest. Their intention is to offer him as a sacrificial offering to the gods. Adorned in animal skins and scantily dressed, the people commence a spirited dance, brandishing animal bones and scalps, ultimately casting Jones into the river, where crocodiles lurk. Emerging from his dazed state, Jones regains consciousness within the water, uttering the words, “*de silver bullet! You don’t git me yit!*” (O’Neill 2011: 74). With unwavering

determination, he fires another shot, aiming at the bright green glow emanating from the eyes of the crocodile. It results in the permanent dissolution of his hallucinatory visions.

As we can see, the protagonists' journeys in both plays, depicted as tragic and hopeless, draw parallels with Dante's circles of hell. In Kulish's play, Malakhii's futile efforts are symbolised by urban institutions, leading to a sense of despair. Meanwhile, O'Neill illustrates Jones' journey into the forest and his subconscious, invoking memories that spark regret and a desire for redemption.

In the final scenes of both plays, the authors demonstrate the ultimate transformations in the characters' perceptions of the world. It is noteworthy that the denouement of the play "Emperor Jones" unfolds at daybreak the following day, on the outskirts of the forest, where a defiant black tribe, led by their chief Lem, arrives amidst the rhythmic beats of tam-tams. It is worth noting that Lem, akin to the priest who appeared in Jones' dream, is depicted as being "*dressed only in a loin cloth. A revolver and cartridge belt are around his waist. His soldiers are in different degrees of rag-concealed nakedness*" (O'Neill 2011: 76).

The search for Jones is underway, as he has lost his way and spent the entire night wandering in circles through the forest. In the meantime, the indigenous people have obtained a unique silver bullet designed to end the life of the supposedly "immortal" Emperor. They successfully use this bullet, discovering a barely alive Jones on the outskirts of the forest. It is through death that the protagonist finally finds the tranquillity and grandeur he had yearned for. Gazing upon the lifeless body of Jones, his merchant companion utters in a dignified manner: "*where's yer 'igh an' mighty airs now, yer bloornin' Majesty? (then with a grin) Silver bullets! Gawd blimey, but yer died in the 'eighth o' style, any'ow!*" (O'Neill 2011: 78). According to Steven Bloom, Jones' demise was deemed "successful" (Bloom 2007: 46), as it served as the logical culmination of his adventurous existence. Shedding light on the societal factors that propelled the murderer and adventurer to the pinnacle of power, the author offers partial justification by highlighting the influence of "well-intentioned" mentors disguised as white individuals. By eavesdropping on their conversations, Jones comes to the realisation that there exist varying degrees of theft: "*dere's little stealin' like you does and dere's big stealin' like I does. For de little stealin' dey gits you in jail sooner or later. For de big stealin' dey makes you Emperor and puts you in de Hall o' Fame when you croaks*" (O'Neill 2011: 79). At the same time, the moment of Jones' murder can be seen as a symbolic rebirth for him. In the beginning of the play, he is filled with pride for breaking away from his ancestors and altering the course of history. However, by the end, after experiencing a process of purification, he reunites with his people, reconnecting with them on a deep, intrinsic level.

The dramatic culmination of the play "People's Malakhii" unfolds within a house of debauchery, where Malakhii is brought by the nurse Olia, who orchestrates a meeting between him and Liubunia. Despite everything, Liubunia still holds onto the hope of finding her father and bringing him back home. However, Malakhii remains unresponsive, rejecting his familial identity and persisting in shouting old slogans: "*I say, there is no daddy!... And there is no godfather! There is a People's Commissar Malakhii! Narmahnar! The first!*" (Купчин 1990: 70).

In the brothel, Malakhii enthusiastically embarks on his reforms, targeting the prostitutes who sell "love in boxes". However, similar to the factory workers, the girls remain indifferent to his teachings and undermine his efforts by engaging in a dance with him, symbolising the futility of Malakhii's actions. It is during this dance that news of Liubunia's suicide reaches the man, but he remains unmoved. In a state of near delirium, he claims that the girl "*didn't hang herself but drowned in the sea, specifically in the blue sea*" (Купчин 1990: 75). Meanwhile, Malakhii continues playing the pipe chaotically, mentioning how others mistreated him and how he, as a universal shepherd, will graze his sheep and play.

It is symbolic that Malakhii, much like Jones, is depicted as a wanderer, tormented and suffering, driven by "an elusive and uncertain goal" (Хороб 2002: 337). Ultimately, the nature of Malakhii's advocacy of human reform remains unclear, as he distances himself

from his family and condemns his daughter to a life of wandering and eventual death. It leaves the impression that he represents a vision of a person detached from family ties, an archetype that Soviet ideology would later attempt to create. The tragedy of Malakhii is that he “loses not only personal but also national self-identification under the pressure of the established social-totalitarian system” (Devdiuk 2022: 240).

It is evident that both protagonists inhabit a world of their own creation. Initially, they exert control and influence over this world, but later on, it spirals out of their grasp and begins to shape their lives. Despite the main characters' attempts to resist, they ultimately falter. Regarding the culmination of their journeys, their final destination remains somewhat ambiguous. Malakhii, driven to madness, discovers the elusive realm of socialism primarily within his dreams, while Jones, vanquished, meets a fate that is logically fitting. Consequently, an individual who, due to external circumstances or their materialistic pursuits, is fated to wander the streets ultimately finds themselves at a dead end, devoid of any promising prospects or meaningful direction.

Conclusions and Prospects

To sum up, we may assert that both “People’s Malakhii” by M. Kulish and “Emperor Jones” by Eu. O’Neill share a common structural and compositional element, namely the motif of the journey. It plays a significant role in the dramas, providing a framework for the plot and character development. The motif of the journey drives the action of the plays and helps reveal the depths of the main characters’ personalities. They are consumed by a relentless idea that propels them forward. Malakhii, as a fervent advocate for immediate socialist change, disregards the ridicule of others and risks the well-being of his family. On the other hand, Jones represents a product of the American dream, justifying any means necessary, even if it entails engaging in immoral acts and committing crimes.

The research has demonstrated that both characters, at the outset of their respective works, find themselves at different stages of realising their plans: Malakhii is in the initial phase, while Jones is in the final one. Consequently, their motivations for embarking on their urgent journeys differ. Malakhii leaves on his adventure, driven by a personal calling that he alone comprehends, disregarding the pleas of his family members. In contrast, Jones sets out due to the fear of retaliation from the island’s inhabitants, who had been under his oppressive rule for two years. Malakhii’s journey towards his dream unfolds across various locations in Kharkiv, including the streets, a mental institution, a factory, and ultimately a brothel. However, due to the incessant mockery from those around Malakhii, his path becomes a chaotic trek through the “thorny circles of hell” (Khorob), from which there is no turning back. In return, Jones’ escape, which is described as a rediscovery of his true self, takes place mostly in the forest and goes into the unconscious, evoking a historical recollection of a hellish process mixed with themes of sacrifice and redemption.

The phantasmagorical portrayals of dreams and the subconscious, depicted through symbolic and allegorical realms, exhibit distinct variations in the respective works of M. Kulish and Eu. O’Neill. In the Ukrainian play, the grotesque dream images that arise during Malakhii’s stay in the insane asylum vividly emphasise the futility and insignificance of his efforts to achieve the “blue beyond of socialism”, reducing them to mere “blue nothingness.” The urgent calls for reform, accompanied by gestures and facial expressions, though real, appear as hallucinations. The agitator himself gives the impression of being insane, completely distancing himself from his family and people. In the American playwright’s work, in the scene depicting Jones’ nocturnal wanderings in the forest, the depths of the subconscious are artistically projected, embodying the images of his ancestors from the past. As we can see, by connecting the past with the present in a cause-and-effect relationship, the author portrays Jones’ life journey within the context of the historical fate of the African-American people, of which he is a part. Unlike Malakhii, who failed to grasp that Christian precepts are incompatible with socialist-communist ideals, Jones delves into his roots and, as a result, undergoes an act of redemption, finally finding forgiveness and

tranquility. Nevertheless, in both narratives, the emphasis is placed on the tragic inevitability of their actions and the inherent futility of their pursuits.

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