

NTELA

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**Revue du Centre Universitaire de Recherche
sur l'Afrique (CURA)**

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Couverture : Figure de chasseur bantou de l'Afrique centrale. Statuette collectée par le Laboratoire d'Anthropologie et d'Histoire (actuelle Faculté des Lettres, Arts et Sciences Humaines de l'Université Marien Ngouabi), entre les années 1975 et 1980. Dans les langues kongo de cette sous-région, le bon chasseur est justement appelé « *NTELA* ». Par métonymie, ce nom symbolise l'homme constamment animé par la quête des savoirs et des connaissances ; un scientifique qui cherche, qui trouve et qui partage ses trouvailles avec les autres au moyen de la publication.

Les opinions exprimées dans les différents textes publiés ici sont celles de leurs auteurs. Elles n'engagent nullement la Revue *NTELA*

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SOMMAIRE

Mot de la rédaction	11
----------------------------	----

Articles

I. SOCIOLOGIE-PSYCHOLOGIE-ANTHROPOLOGIE

Crédits des femmes rurales et exigences culturelles au Bénin : exemple des femmes du village de Tourou commune de Parakou Kassimou DEMBA DIALLO	17
---	----

Pratiques et comportements déviants pendant les gardes au sein des Forces Armées Béninoises Hermann Léopold HOUESSOU, Yarou GUERA CHABI YORO	35
--	----

Autonomisation des femmes et réduction de la pauvreté au Burkina Faso : cas des étuveuses de riz de Bama Félix OUEDRAOGO, Kiswendsida Parfait TAPSOBA, Madeleine KABORE épouse KONKOBO	45
--	----

Représentations sociales liées à la malvoyance chez les populations à Korhogo (Côte d'Ivoire) Ablan Anne-Marie ETTIEN	59
---	----

Accompagnement entrepreneurial et stratégies de maintien des Unités de Valorisation des Déchets plastiques en Côte d'Ivoire : une étude de cas de l'UVD de Yopougon De Bloganqueaux Soho Rusticot DROH	75
--	----

Influence du statut social subjectif des magistrats sur la représentation sociale du psychologue en milieu judiciaire Gabonais Pierre-Claver MIHORTO	91
--	----

La certification foncière à Affalicro : transition et arrangements Koffi Noël KOUASSI	111
---	-----

Accompagnement institutionnel et victimisation des aînés- anciens fonctionnaires en Côte d'Ivoire : exemple de la ville d'Abidjan et du village de Niguanou Alice Namodé DOSSO Épse BINATÉ, Taiba Germaine AINYAKOU et Charlotte Fatou FOFANA	127
---	-----

II. LITTÉRATURE-SCIENCES DU LANGAGE-ANGLAIS

Les chants du *Ndomo* et circulation des savoirs endogènes en milieu bamanan (Mali)

Afou DEMBÉLÉ 145

Immigration dans *le Ventre de l'Atlantique* de Fatou Diome et *Bleu-Blanc-Rouge* d'Alain Mabanckou

Ousmane Ag NAMOYE 163

Le déterminant démonstratif, entre valeur ostentatoire et ambiguïté sémantique référentielle dans les récits romanesques africains

Kouadio NGUESSAN 181

Les mots en *qu-* de la construction clivée dans la presse écrite congolaise

Système Tam'si MAVOUNGOU, Ferdinand OTSIEMA GUELLELY 197

Actes de discours et messages de sensibilisation dans le théâtre-forum de la compagnie *Kaddu*

Papa Alioune SOW, Ousseynou BA 217

Cantique de l'acacia ou le destin identitaire inassouvi de l'Afrique noire à l'épreuve de l'écriture tout-monde

Abibou SAMB 237

Literature in times of trauma: the American modernist aesthetic in John Steinbeck's *Cannery Row* (1945) and Saul bellow's *Herzog* (1964)

Mouhamed Abdoul Latif MBENGUE 257

Deconstructing Blackface Tradition in O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape*

Yao Katamatou KOUMA 271

Lotus in Toni Morrison's *home*: a symbolic representation of the black race's home

Ebony Kpalambo AGBOH 287

Challenging Hierarchies in the Marital Institution: A Reading of Ifeoma Chinwuba's *African Romance: Poetry in Dialogue* (2013)

Tchilabalo ADI 299

Écriture de soi et satire de la société dans les textes de Youssoupha

Dieudonné MOUKOUAMOU MOUENDO 317

MOT DE LA RÉDACTION

L'équipe de rédaction de la revue *Ntela* est heureuse de présenter à la communauté savante le volume 2 du numéro 4 de sa revue. C'est une parution qui compte pour le second semestre (juillet-décembre) de l'an 2022. Au regard de la diversité originelle des textes retenus pour ce volume, le comité de rédaction a jugé de les regrouper en deux rubriques plus ou moins équilibrées. Cela s'entend, puisque certaines disciplines ont été moins pourvues que d'autres.

La première rubrique est composée de huit (8) contributions placées sous l'étendard du triptyque « Sociologie, Psychologie et Anthropologie ». Trois textes sont le fruit d'un travail réalisé en équipe. Le premier, abordant la question de l'autonomisation des femmes au Burkina Faso, porte le sceau de Félix Ouedraogo, Kiswendsida Parfait Tapsoba et Madeleine Kaboré épouse Konkobo. Le deuxième traitant des « pratiques et comportements déviants pendant les gardes au sein des Forces Armées Béninoises », a pour auteurs : Hermann Léopold Houessou et Yarou Guera Chabi Yoro. Le troisième article est de Dosso Epse Binaté, Alice Namodé, Ainyakou Taiba Germaine et Fofana Charlotte Fatou qui investissent sociologiquement le champ des « aînés, anciens fonctionnaires victimisés ». Les cinq autres articles résultent de réflexions individuelles. Ceux portant sur les « crédits des femmes rurales du Bénin » et les « représentations sociales liées à la malvoyance chez les populations à Korhogo » sont respectivement l'œuvre de Kassimou Demba Diallo et de Ablan Anne-Marie Ettien. Dans le même élan, les contributions se référant à l'« accompagnement entrepreneurial et stratégies de maintien des Unités de valorisation des déchets plastiques en Côte d'Ivoire », l'« influence du statut social subjectif des magistrats en milieu judiciaire gabonais » et « la certification foncière à Affalikro » sont, chacune, le fruit des recherches de Droh De Bloganqueaux Soho Rusticot, Pierre-Claver Mihorto et Koffi Noël Kouassi.

Plus dense, la seconde rubrique intitulée « Littérature, Sciences du langage et Anglais » se construit autour de dix (10) articles. Deux (2) d'entre eux seulement sont la conséquence des efforts collectifs. Il s'agit de « mots en *qu*- de la construction clivée dans la presse écrite congolaise », qui a pour auteurs : Système Tam'si Mavoungou et

Ferdinand Otsiema Guellely, ainsi que « Actes du discours et messages de sensibilisation dans le théâtre-forum », qui porte les signatures de Ousseynou Ba et Papa Alioune Sow. Les neuf (09) autres textes de la rubrique sont respectivement signés Afou Dembélé, Ousmane Ag Namoye, Kouadio Nguessan, Adibou Samb, Mouhamed Abdoul Latif Mbengue, Katamatou Kouma, Yao Kpalambo Agboh, Tchilabalo Adi et Dieudonné Moukouamou Mouendo.

Les thèmes retenus dans cette seconde rubrique concernent, entre autres, les chants, les savoirs endogènes, l'immigration, le déterminant démonstratif, le clivé, l'identité, la symbolique de la représentation et les discours/messages de sensibilisation. Cette diversité thématique explorée est une preuve patente du dynamisme de la recherche en Afrique, dans des domaines qui concernent *a priori* l'homme dans sa complexité, sa singularité et ses spécificités. Grosso-modo, il s'agit de thématiques d'une richesse insoupçonnée, qui évoquent les expériences quotidiennes de certains États africains comme le Bénin, le Congo (Brazzaville), la Côte d'Ivoire, le Gabon et le Togo d'où sont venues ces contributions.

Pour le numéro 5 à venir de la revue *Ntela*, l'appel à contribution sera lancé courant février 2023. Pour l'instant, l'équipe de rédaction profite de ces moments spéciaux où une grande partie de l'humanité se prépare à célébrer un nouvel an, pour adresser aux contributeurs de ce volume, aux évaluateurs, aux contributeurs de demain et à l'ensemble de la communauté savante, ses vœux les meilleurs pour l'année 2023.

La rédaction

Deconstructing Blackface Tradition in O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape*

Yao Katamatou KOUMA*

Abstract

In recent years, the reemergence of blackface tradition in American popular culture arouses controversies among many critics. However, Eugene O'Neill, early in the first half of the twentieth century, published two expressionist plays, *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape* to deconstruct the racist connotations of blackface in order to redefine them. In light of psychoanalytic theory, this study examines how O'Neill manipulates those negative stereotypes and reinvents a new tragedy proper to American realities. It concludes that, beyond the racist cliché against Black people, blackface is a tool to caricature modern American society.

Keywords: blackface, illusion, misfortune, rise, tragedy.

Résumé

Ces dernières années, la réémergence du traditionnel maquillage noir dans la culture populaire américaine suscite des polémiques chez beaucoup de critiques. Cependant, Eugene O'Neill, tôt dans la première moitié du vingtième siècle, a publié deux pièces de théâtre expressionnistes, *The Emperor Jones* et *The Hairy Ape*, pour déconstruire les connotations racistes du maquillage noir dans le but de les redéfinir. À la lumière de la théorie psychanalytique, cette étude examine comment O'Neill manipule ces stéréotypes et réinvente une nouvelle forme de tragédie propre aux réalités américaines. Elle conclut qu'au-delà des clichés négatifs à l'égard des noirs, maquillage noir est un outil pour caricaturer la société moderne américaine.

Mots-clés : maquillage noir, illusion, infortune, essor, tragédie.

Introduction

In 2017, the African American screenwriter, Jordan Peele, won the Academy Award for his film, *Get Out*. The protagonist, Christ (Daniel

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Kaluuya), featured by burnt cork mask, aroused many controversies among several critics who interrogate the reemergence of black minstrelsy in American popular culture. S. Johnson (2012, p.1) attests that not long ago he was approached by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in Toronto, to be interviewed on a radio talk show regarding the question “why has there been a resurgence in the use of blackface in contemporary society?” His answer was that blackface tradition has not left (S. Johnson, 2012, p.1) American culture since its introduction by black entertainers from southern plantations (J. Bloomquist, 2015, p.2., et *al.*). Still, it is not scholarly documented enough. J. Harbord (2015, p.9) believes, it is rather ignored and rejected because of its racial connotations.

However, early in the twentieth century, E. O'Neill published *The Emperor Jones* (2001a) and *The Hairy Ape* (2001b), two expressionist plays, to deconstruct the established racial connotations against blackness and to “conjure up a new type of tragic drama that would apply to the specificity of the United States” (A. Sanchez, 2010, p.3). The minstrel stereotypes, formerly used to caricature negative blackness, become a metaphorical tool used in a new form of tragedy proper to American realities.

The thrust of this study is to draw additional scholarly attention to the deep permeation of blackface into American popular culture by updating O'Neill's viewpoints of blackness.

The objective is to examine how, in the two plays, O'Neill deconstructs the racist blackface meanings to reinvent a new concept of tragedy. More pointedly, this paper shows how the playwright subverts the mainstreaming context of some blackness features to shape his perception of tragedy that suitably articulates the modern American society.

Psychoanalytic theory is the main literary tool broadly used here. Though it is not a monolithic framework, it basically posits that human latent desires, feelings and emotions are repressed and kept secret in the subconscious to reemerge through unconscious or conscious behaviors. Human behaviors become a gate to probe into his psyche that informs about the quest of interior equilibrium. P. Schimmel (2014, p.27) underscores that “Freud himself engaged in a process that unearthed buried and unruly psychic elements or forces, he was compelled to find accommodation for them in his mind, and to achieve a new integration within himself”. Freud's yearning for mental balance compels him to

Yao Katamatou KOUMA : Deconstructing Blackface Tradition in O'Neill's...

release and to cope with uncontrollable emotions. In this study, each character's impulses are considered the result of unaccomplished desires that resurface. It is an attempt to fill in the gap caused by repressed wills.

The methodology consists of collecting through the character's attitudes the most tangible blackness traits, to decode them, and to examine their impacts on him and his environment.

This study falls into three sections. The first explores how blackface tradition shapes the characteristics of the new hero. The second assesses his rise, and the last deals with his misfortunes.

1. O'Neill's Construction of the New Hero

O'Neill's new hero construction process is a transposition of an old zip coon character's traits. According J. Stanley Lemons, zip coon is a preposterous, citified dandy, an intelligent and elegant black man who excessively puts on airs concerned with pompous speech filled with malapropisms¹. A zip coon is a buffoon black man who overestimates his intelligence and social status. D. Pilgrim (2000, p.1) says:

It is one of the most insulting of all anti-Black caricatures. The name itself, an abbreviation of raccoon, is dehumanizing...the coon was portrayed as a lazy, easily frightened, chronically idle, inarticulate, buffoon...subhuman creatures good for nothing more than eating watermelons, stealing chickens, shooting crap, or butchering the English language.

The above extract highlights the main characteristics of a coon. In the blackface minstrel show, a coon represents the most insulting stereotypes of blackness in American history. However, unlike Greek classical tragedy, where the hero is from the highest and noblest social rank, O'Neill collects the most offensive patterns of blackness and subverts them to craft his perception of the hero. It is a caricature of a coon character.

The first trait is sub-humanness. In *The Emperor Jones*, Brutus Jones, the protagonist, is outlined as follow: a "[...] *blooded Negro of middle age. His features are typically negroid*" (E. O'Neill, 2001a, p.3). Negroid traits include sub-humanness which is highly pronounced through the protagonist of Yank, in *The Hairy Ape*. It reads:

¹ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2712263>

This accentuates the natural stooping posture which shoveling coal and the resultant over-development of back and shoulder muscles have given them. The men themselves should resemble those pictures in which the appearance of Neanderthal Man is guessed at. All are hairy-chested, with long arms of tremendous power, and low, receding brows above their small, fierce, resentful eyes (E. O'Neill, 2001b, p.1).

The Neanderthals are early humans who lack modern human abilities. Darwin believes that they are rather archaic humans as compared to contemporary ones. He argues, people had evolved in the same manner as other species. And there is a particularly close evolutionary relationship between people and the “anthropomorphous” apes, grounded in the distribution of the especially humanlike African apes, that the last shared ancestor of people and apes lived in tropical Africa (R. G. Klein, 2009, p.1). Darwin stresses the closest similitudes between normal human beings and apes. He assumes that apelike humans may be the early progenitors of man (C. Darwin, 1981, p.11). In this light, the physical aspects of O'Neill's hero are a form of readaptation of the apelike human characteristics. Thus, they shape not only his bodily appearance, but also, inform about his emotional behaviors and temperance.

Second, formerly known as a blackness pattern in blackface minstrelsy, violence is the new hero's tangible peculiarity. Throughout *The Hairy Ape*, Yank is portrayed as a contemptuous, brutal, and threatening person: “*He springs to his feet and advances on Paddy threateningly then stops, fighting some queer struggle within himself lets his hands fall to his sides contemptuously...He suddenly bursts forth vehemently, growing more and more excited*” (E. O'Neill, 2001b, p.6). Yank appears like a savage animal governed by uncontrollable impulses. Sometimes “*He turns in a rage on the men, bumping viciously into them but not jarring them the least bit. Rather it is he who recoils after each collision. He keeps growling*” (E. O'Neill, 2001b, p.20). He roars but turns away from his target. Anger, which includes violence, anxiety, and rage, is a personality disorder symptom in blackface tradition. According to J. Yakeley and J. R. Meloy (2012, p.237).

One of the clearest threads that has emerged in understanding the heterogeneity of violence through psychoanalytic thinking ... is the existence of primarily two modes of violence, affective (reactive, impulsive, emotional, hot blooded, self-preservative) and predatory (instrumental, cold blooded, premeditated), with relatively distinctive

Yao Katamatou KOUMA : Deconstructing Blackface Tradition in O'Neill's...

behavioral manifestations and neurobiological underpinnings. From a developmental object relation perspective, habitually violent individuals are often organized at a borderline or psychotic level of personality with the requisite difficulties in reality testing, predominance of part self and object representations, pre-oedipal defenses, and problems with self-regulation of affect.

Yank's animalistic behaviors can be compared to the two forms of violence defined in the above extract. It is the manifestation of affective and predatory psychic disorders that negatively influence the representation of self, objects and reality. This borderline personality trouble also transpires through his linguistic incompetence.

Third, linguistic deficiency is another racist slur against Blacks in minstrelsy which is manipulated to fit in the new tragic hero construction. O'Neill's two protagonists, Jones, in *The Emperor Jones*, and Yank in *The Hairy Ape*, are remarkably expressive, yet, not articulate enough. They do not speak standard English. They are endowed with African America Vernacular English (AAVE) also known as Black English or Negro Non-standard English (A. A. Filmer, 2003, p.254). This unconventional language denotes sociocultural, and intellectual deficiencies. A. A. Filmer (2003, p.258) observes that "[W]ithin mainstream American society in conservative and liberal sectors a prevailing belief holds that speakers of African American Vernacular English are somehow deficient intellectually, culturally, and socially as evidenced by their use of language". This means that inarticulateness is a tangible datum of cultural lowness. A close scrutiny of the protagonists' linguistic shortage, from a psychoanalytic angle, reveals a mental disequilibrium, like schizophrenia. Freud emphasizes that in schizophrenia the words are also subject to the primary process and to the actions of displacement and condensation such as the images in dreams. The replacement is defined by the uniformity of words employed and the things expressed (C. B. de Andrade, 2016, p.285). Schizophrenia occurs when there is dissimilarity between words formed and things referred to. In this respect, E. O'Neill's new hero is a schizophrenic patient who uses butchered, disorganized and poorly articulated words:

JONES: Sho' did. Heah she be. [*He takes out his revolver, breaks it, and takes the silver bullet out of one chamber.*] Five lead an' dis silver baby at de last. Don't she shine pretty? [*He holds it in his hand, looking at it admiringly, as if strangely fascinated.*]

SMITHERS: Let me see. [*Reaches out his hand for it*]

JONES: No, 'tain't dat. I knows you'se scared to steal from me. On'y I ain't 'lowin' nary body to touch dis baby. She's my rabbit's foot (E. O'Neill, 2001a, p.4-5).

That quotation illustrates Jones's non-standard linguistic competence. His schizophrenic pathology resides in his inability to connect words to things he tries to name. While referring to the silver bullet, he naively considers it his shield, the "rabbit's foot". For Paul Eugen Bleuler, the most important sign of schizophrenia is the splitting of different psychological functions, resulting in a loss of unity of the personality including the presence of "abnormal thoughts and behaviors, such as: delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech, poverty of speech (C. Lee, 2013, p.1). The protagonist's incoherent speeches and behaviors highlight his personality disorders that stems from pipe dreams. In Jones's poor speech, there is a disconnection between the silver bullet and the rabbit foot, yet he mistakenly links them together. In the same perspective, Yank, in *The Hairy Ape*, compares himself to a machine: "I'm de ting in coal dat makes it boin; I'm steam and oil for de engines; I'm de ting in noise dat makes yuh hear it; I'm smoke and express trains and steamers and factory whistles" (E. O'Neill, 2001b, p.7). In a very expressive, but butchered and disorganized discourse, Yank identifies himself with smoke, steam, engine, oil in the factory. This incoherent juxtaposition is a symptom of mental disorders.

Consequently, in quest of a new form of modern American tragedy that suitably articulate American reality, O'Neill distances himself from the classical Greek form to adopt African American blackface legacy. He subverts the racist coon and invents a hero to caricature the modern American man who suffers from psychic disorders and whose rise is illusory.

2.The Rise of the New Hero

The hero's success in E. O'Neill's tragedy is triggered by deceptive knowledge of himself. It is a negative stereotype of blackness embodied by a coon character who puts on airs. He over esteems himself and pretends to be brainy and superior to others. He is also superstitious and gives the impression that he has control over the situation. Illusion is a key dramatic device that upholds E. O'Neill's tragedy. It is the pipe dreams that fuel the protagonist's life. He believes: "The lie of a pipe

Yao Katamatou KOUMA : Deconstructing Blackface Tradition in O'Neill's...

dream is what gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of us, drunk or sober” (E. O'Neill, 1988, p.1). The belief in fairy tales about one's genius, strength, wealth, beauty and faith, is the madness that helps endure life. It helps think of oneself as “a hero fighting the dragons of evil” (H. Bloom, 2007, p.130). The hero becomes the ““exuberant hero” who does not see those calamities and who only acknowledges life as real when it is disguised as beauty and appearance” (R. Geuss and R. Speirs, 2007, p.152). A pretentious coon dwells in a fallacious successful world that blindly leads him to the brink of a precipice.

The first rise is a military apparent success. In *The Emperor Jones*, the five silver bullets, on which Jones builds his political hegemony, embody his imaginary intellect, supernatural power, high social position, and unshakable protection of his kingdom and life. He says: “Ise got five lead bullets in dis gun good enuff fo' common bush niggers—and after dat I got de silver bullet left to cheat 'em out o' gittin' me” (E. O'Neill, 2001a, p.8). Jones thinks he is the only person who possesses such a weapon. It marks his military success and power in the empire. In the same perspective, the silver bullet is compared to Yank's muscle in *The Hairy Ape*. He “seems broader, fiercer, more truculent, more powerful, sure of himself than the rest. They respect his superior strength... Then, too, he represents to them a self-expression, the very last word in what they are, their most highly developed individual” (E. O'Neill, 2001b, p.2). Yank's physical power is considered the threatening military force he wields to establish his authority: “[*Fiercely contemptuous, he extends his right arm, swelling out the great muscles.*] I coulda took her wit dat, wit' just my little finger even, and broke her in two. [*Again bewilderedly*]” (E. O'Neill, 2001b, p.16). Yank's military success resides in his muscle whereas Jones's is the silver bullet. Owing to that, they violently threat their fellows creating a stressing environment.

Moreover, the bullet grants Jones the highest social position where he absolutely has the right to abuse the citizens of the empire. He proudly exults that: “Ain't I de Emperor? De laws don't go for him” (E. O'Neill, 2001a, p.4). Jones assumes that an emperor does not abide by the social laws. He substitutes himself for the Almighty God Who is not concerned with human established laws. His strong love for power and fame distances him from the mass. He becomes an eccentric character who best represents O'Neill's perception of tragedy. Because of his imaginative self-elevation to the highest social position, he appears as

a buffoon who “performs the role of life in a “solitary cell” and to “empty benches” (H. Bloom, 2007, p.130). The playwright explains:

[I]f there were an audience to applaud, the actor could finish his performance. Instead, actors perform for themselves and watch their show in a mirror. Their solo efforts try to convince themselves that they are who they pretend to be. In the absence of anyone watching them, they must convince themselves of the authenticity of their performance by making “brave faces into a mirror... (H. Bloom, 2007, p.13-131).

Jones’s one-man-show performance convinces him that he is the Supreme and unchallengeable emperor. Like an actor before a mirror, he puts on airs convincing himself that he is socially superior to others. However, through a psychoanalytic lens, his strange behavior can be understood as a mental disorder symptom. It is the result of unaccomplished desires, affections and protections when he has been arrested and imprisoned for homicide. His experience in jail is a weakness that creates within him a hole which he tries to fill up. He is naively isolated from the commonsense life by pretending to be the supreme citizen. Childishly and boastfully, he seems to be a privileged super powerful emperor in the monarchy. Likewise, Yank, in *The Hairy Ape*, wears the same blackface mask that tells him lies when he considered himself the Almighty God and the alloy steel:

I'm at de bottom, get me! Dere ain't nothin' foither. I'm de end! I'm de start! I start somep'n and de woild moves! It dat's me! de new dat's moiderin' de old! I'm de ting in coal dat makes it boin; I'm steam and oil for de engines; I'm de ting in noise dat makes yuh hear it; I'm smoke and express trains and steamers and factory whistles; I'm de ting in gold dat makes it money! And I'm what makes iron into steel! Steel, dat stands for de whole ting! And I'm steel steel steel! I'm de muscles in steel, de punch behind it! [As he says this he pounds with his fist against the steel bunks. All the men, roused to a pitch of frenzied self-glorification by his speech, do likewise. There is a deafening metallic roar, through which Yank's voice can be heard bellowing] (E. O'Neill, 2001b, p.7)

Yank, proudly identifies himself as a ‘steel’ metal. He is as strong as the alloy steel which resists cold, corrosion and any other threats. Owing to his high-strength, he substitutes himself for God. He asserts: “I'm de end! I'm de start!”, which means the *Alpha* and *Omega*, the beginning and the end. His big ego lifts him up to a so high position above his fellows that he thinks all things result from him.

Yao Katamatou KOUMA : Deconstructing Blackface Tradition in O'Neill's...

Through the two protagonists, O'Neill alludes to the American realities and re-interrogates its identity. He exposes his disapproval against American rise to military power, fame and materialism from racist, capitalist and imperialistic politics. M. Gupta, quoted by R. Mahmud (2020, p.62), observes that through the protagonists, O'Neill blames the capitalist-imperialist American society and condemns the notion of American success, mainly success in money-making, associated with riches, position and power predomination. O'Neill complains that:

I feel, in that sense, that America is the greatest failure in history. It was given everything, more than any other country in history, but we squandered our soul by trying to possess something outside it, and we'll end up as that game usually does, by losing our soul and the thing outside it too. But why go on-the Bible said it much better: "For what shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (J. P. Diggins, 2007, p.xiii).

The playwright prophesizes the fall of America. He expresses his opposition to American selfish belligerent ideals based on fake knowledge of itself. He challenges its greatness which contradicts with its oppressive deeds.

Therefore, the rise of the hero, in O'Neill's tragedy, is an illusionary growth to military forces, high social rank and spiritual power. Concealed behind a mask he unfortunately fails to see the coming misfortunes.

3. The New Hero's Misfortunes

O'Neill's tragedy occurs when the hero haplessly collapses into his own precipice. Blinded by fake self-praise, fame, materialism and power, he cannot accomplish his dreams, and he cannot fathom his flaws either. He is caught into an endless loop of illusions. R. Williams (1964, p.91) notes that O'Neill's tragedy is "a kind of tragedy which ends with man bare and unaccommodated, exposed to the storm he has himself raised". Contrary to the classical Greek tragedy, the hero's opponent is not the supernatural power that controls over his destiny. Rather, it is his own pretentious of high social, intellectual, military, spiritual and economic powers that resurface to challenge his ego. His excessive pride, according to O'Neill, is "the real dragon, a grave worm born within the individual" (H. Bloom, 2007, p.131). This means that the hero's buffoonish attitudes resurge as stumbling stones on his path. He is

arrogant, pretending to have control over any situations, whereas he is weaker and less intelligent than he can image.

The first misfortune is economic chaos. Through Jones's poor banking system, in *The Emperor Jones*, and, the destruction of the Nazareth Steel mill in *The Hairy Ape*, the playwright blames American capitalism. When interviewed, O'Neill complains that there are no values to live by today, because the country was moving toward a life of endless material abundance, which he saw almost as a biblical curse (J. P. Diggins, 2007, p.xiii). That curse is allegorized in *The Emperor Jones*:

I ain't no fool. I knows dis Emperor's time is sho't. Dat why I make hay when de sun shine. [...] What good is gittin' money if you stays back in dis raggedy country? I 'wants action when I spends [...] I'se got all de money in sight, I resigns on de spot and beats it quick [...] I travels light when I wants to move fast. And I got tinned grub buried on de edge o' de forest. [*Boastfully.*] Now say dat I don't look ahead an' use my brains! [*With a wide, liberal gesture.*] I will all dat's left in de palace to you- and you better grab all you kin sneak away wid befo' dey gits here (E. O'Neill, 2001a, p.6-10).

To clearly portray Jones's economic crisis, O'Neill reproduces the biblical teachings on "Treasures in Heaven" and "Parable of the Rich Fool"². Jones is the rich fool who blindly stores up his treasures on earth thinking that it is the wisest choice. In the quotation above, he "got tinned grub buried". This allegory sheds light on his short mindedness and misleading love for materials. Saving his money and other goods in a forest without realizing the risk exemplifies Jones's misfortune. In the same perspective, Mildred, in *The Hairy Ape*, complains about the destruction of their steel mill by fire. "[A]ll that was burnt out in our stock...Grandfather's blast furnaces, flaming to the sky, melting steel, making millions then father keeping those home fires burning [...] I am sired by gold and darned by it..." (E. O'Neill, 2001b, p.8-9). The loss of the materials challenges the characters' ego. It is the failure of their economic system. Though they over praise their intellect and wisdom, Nietzsche explains that human intellect is deceptive. It is a fog, a blackface mask over the eyes and senses of human beings (R. Geuss and R. Speirs, 1999, p.142). The hero's misfortune stems from his misjudgment of his intellectual competences and capitalist system,

² www.biblegateway.com

Yao Katamatou KOUMA : Deconstructing Blackface Tradition in O'Neill's...
because he cannot fathom that his visceral love for riches is something flattering.

Moreover, the hero has experienced a striking sociopolitical failure that demystifies his oppressive military powers and social rank. In *The Emperor Jones*, when Brutus Jones decided to go to war against Lem's crew in the forest, he was convinced to win, because he is brainy, rich and powerful. He is also well equipped with the silver bullets. However, at the forest edge, he is crippled with fear:

While his back is turned, the LITTLE FORMLESS FEARS creep out from the deeper blackness of the forest. They are black, shapeless, only their glittering little eyes can be seen... He fires. There is a flash, a loud report, then silence broken only by the far-off, quickened throb of the tom-tom. The formless creatures have scurried back into the forest. JONES remains fixed in his position, listening intently. The sound of the shot, the reassuring feel of the revolver in his hand, have somewhat restored his shaken nerve... (E. O'Neill, 2001a, p.11).

Jones purposelessly fires into emptiness to kill the little formless fears which ironically reside within himself. At the first sight, Jones fears his enemy peers. He stresses: "I've got five lead bullets in dis gun good enuff fo' common bush niggers—and after dat I got de silver bullet left to cheat 'em out o' gittin' me" (E. O'Neill, 2001a, p. 8). The common bush niggers refer to the revolutionary citizens of the empire he has oppressed and made foes. Fighting them is exposing himself to "the storm he has himself raised". His enemies are the products of his tyrannic ruling system. Thus, the depth and the blackness of the forest embody the complexity of human beings including himself. By bringing Jones to the edge of that forest, O'Neill sheds light on human complexity stressing on their weaknesses. This denotes the labyrinth of Jones's tormenting pipe dreams that prevent him from realizing the fearful sound "tom-tom" in his own heart. The playwright explains that the quickened throb of the tom-tom exactly equals to the rate of the normal 72 heartbeats per minute (E. O'Neill, 2001a, p. 8). This means that the haunting rebellion and the darkness of the forest which terrorize him is not outside, but inside himself. And because of the black veil, he fails to see it right. Thus, he is driven tragically into a vicious circle of self-destruction like a snake biting its own tail. Nietzsche wonder, [W]hat do human beings really know about themselves? Are they even capable of perceiving themselves in their entirety just once? [...] (R. Geuss and R. Speirs, 1999, p.142). O'Neill's perception of the tragic

hero appears like ouroboros, the symbol of the snake biting its own tail. Nietzsche explains that ouroboros represents “the eternally self-creating and destroying” (K. P. Stewart, 2018, p.206) of someone who “suffers, he suffers more severely; indeed, he suffers more frequently because he does not know how to learn from experience and keeps on falling into the very same trap time after time” (R. Geuss and R. Speirs, 1999, p.153). Jones’s tragedy is the consequence of self-misunderstanding. The ignorance of his gloomy history constitutes the threatening fear that torments him. He roars and fires aimlessly into the forest without knowing that the growing terrorizing beast is within himself.

Besides, the hallucinating tom-tom is also compared to Jeff’s ghost, the nigger Jones has murdered:

[*Stopping suddenly, bewilderedly.*] But how you come to be heah, nigger? [...*JONES' eyes begin to roll wildly. He stutters.*] Ain't you gwine—look up—can't you speak to me? Is you—is you—a ha'nt? [*He jerks out his revolver in a frenzy of terrified rage.*] Nigger, I kills you dead once. Has I got to kill you again? You take it den. [*He fires. When the smoke clears away JEFF has disappeared. JONES stands trembling* (E. O'Neill, 2001a, p.12).

Jones deeply suffers from mental disequilibrium. His repelled crime in the subconscious, strongly reappears in his conscious causing psychic instability. He continues firing Jeff’s ghost, whereas the spectrum, he assumes to see in the forest, dwells in his dream. The fear of losing his pride drives him out of his kingdom to wander in the forest. And his nudity symbolizes his poverty and lowness as a whole. In the same vein, Yank’s misfortunes, in *The Hairy Ape*, result from his incapability to acknowledge his real identity. He trusts the lies that mislead him, and makes him to struggle against himself. In scene1, he proudly identifies himself as the alloy steel. Later in scene 6, when he is arrested and jailed, he realizes that he is imprisoned in a cell made of steel metals. Furiously, he bends the steel bars to free himself. He says: [*Then with sudden rage, rattling his cell bars.*] I'm a hairy ape, get me? And I'll bust youse all in de jaw if yuh don't lay off kiddin' me... [*A silence. Then a furious rattling of bars from down the corridor*] (E. O'Neill, 2001b, p.21). The steel bars that maintain him in detention epitomize his fear, ignorance, exactions and misbehaviors. His attempt to remove them symbolizes self-destruction. The rattled bars in the corridor illustrate Yank’s agony in a materialistic and oppressive

Yao Katamatou KOUMA : Deconstructing Blackface Tradition in O'Neill's...

society he has constructed himself. Additionally, Yank's most humiliating fall occurs when he is marginalized in his own society to the point that he has to cut himself off to a zoo. He identifies himself with a hairy ape. The playwright outlines:

The monkey house at the Zoo. One spot of clear gray light falls on the front of one cage so that the interior can be seen. The other cages are vague, shrouded in shadow from which chattering pitched in a conversational tone can be heard. On the one cage a sign from which the word "gorilla" stands out. The gigantic animal himself is seen squatting on his haunches on a bench in much the same attitude as Rodin's "Thinker." YANK enters from the left (E. O'Neill, 2001b, p.28).

Yank, in a great despair, enters the zoo to start a new life with apes, his new peers. Despite his superintelligence, power, fame, and wealth, he fails to integrate the human highly industrialized community. This humiliating episode shows how Yank, who early considers himself the Almighty God, the *alpha* and *omega*, collapses from his illusory high social position. Like an ape, he returns to the zoo. At this very point, Yank's repetitive "attitude as Rodin's 'Thinker'" and Jones's stay at the forest edge are a representation of "Rodin's gates of Hell" (K. Fugelso, 2013, p.115). The hell stands for the modern American society, whereas Yank and Jones embody the marginalized social class. It stigmatizes, kills and oppresses the lower-class citizens like African Americans, whereas they constitute the springboard of American growth.

Conclusion

The objective of this paper has been to examine how O'Neill manipulates the racist blackface tradition as a tool to shape his perception of tragedy that expresses his vision of modern America. In light of psychoanalytic theory, the investigation reveals that the hero, in O'Neill's drama, is a caricature of a coon character. He is a subhuman who puts on airs. Crowned with illusory successes, he collapses into his own precipice. His hopes always end in despair. Thus, the African American blackface that emerged in southern plantations becomes fully integrated in American culture. It becomes a tool used in a new form of tragedy that clearly maps O'Neill's critical views of America. For him, his country is masked by ephemeral rise to materialism, military power, fame, and pride, that endlessly maintains it in a vicious spiral of self-creation and self-destruction.

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