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VIOLENT BLACK MAN AND THE MYTH OF BLACK MACHO IN EUGENE O'NEILL'S *THE DREAMY KID*

The aim of this article is the investigation of the extent to which Eugene O'Neill, in his drama The Dreamy Kid*, (re)constructs, or employs, the black macho myth, which negatively images black men as marginalized and violent. This undertaking questions O'Neill's self-proclaimed progressive racial attitudes and stated focus on the universal nature of human existence, which he professed to express through drama. Moreover, the article challenges the mainstream view of* The Dreamy Kid *as progressive. Although the play focalizes the experience of a marginalized black man, which could be interpreted as the playwright's concern with the unjust racial and class stratification of American society, O'Neill's production, unfortunately, contains a number of pervasive stereotypes relative to black people's alleged moral degeneracy, primitiveness, and violent behavior, which threatens the white dominated constructed order. In terms of gendered racial politics, in the article attention is given to O'Neill's presentation of black male negotiations with the white patriarchal power structure, embodied by the police forces, and with black matriarchy, represented by O'Neill's stereotypical character portrayal of a dominant elderly black woman. Lastly, an overall analysis is performed in light of the call for an autonomous black art, which emerged among black artists in opposition to the demeaning, unrealistic, stereotypical portrayals of black victims of oppression by white American writers.*

KEY WORDS: myth of black macho, racial stereotype, violence, black matriarchy, black art.

The Dreamy Kid, like a number of other Eugene O'Neill's plays, portrays a black character whose look and behavior is at variance from the "minstrel image of the singing, dancing, carefree darky" (Scott 1985: 21), which was viewed by whites as entertaining and comic. This primitive image permeated theatrical stages during O'Neill's lifetime. Moreover, *The Dreamy Kid* is believed to have been "one of the first plays to be cast with Black actors in serious roles by a 'white' producing company" (Shaughnessy 1984: 87). The two factors may account for the primary reasons why the dramatist's art is thought to be racially progressive. As far as racial consciousness is concerned, Eugene O'Neill himself, at certain point, expressed universalism and deracialized approach to theatrical portrayals of human life and nature, reasoning "What is the theater for if not to show man's struggle, whether he is black, green, orange or white, to conquer life; his effort to give it meaning? Doesn't that struggle, that endless effort to conquer life, show that man loves life" (Kantor 1990: 47).

Contrary to minstrel shows, *The Dreamy Kid* represents a certain dramatic breakthrough in racial terms, but, nevertheless, it incorporates the long-evolving racial mythic image of violent black men on the margins of white society. In general, "O'Neill viewed himself and his writing as progressive on matters of race" (Pfister 1995: 121), when he stated that, "spiritually speaking, there is no superiority between races, any race. We're just a little ahead mentally as a race, though not as individuals" (Kantor 1990: 46). However, *The Dreamy Kid* makes an ambiguous, if not contradictory, statement relative to alleged white intellectual superiority and black inferiority. In his overall portrayal of the main protagonist, the playwright appears to have relied on the racial myth of "the black man as primitive" (Gillett 1975: 45). When O'Neill adds violence upon primitivism, the black man becomes the embodiment of an even more poignant, derogatory myth, the brutish black macho.

The myth of the black brute has complex origins. Varied fields were involved out of which certain conceptions of white regarding black masculinity, resulting in particularly derogatory images of black men emerged. The most decisive context in the rise of the myth of the black brute was the socio-political one. During slavery, black men were dehumanized by the slavocracy to facilitate their ascription as human chattel. After slavery's demise, white supremacists continued to rely on notions of black male inferiority in order to inhibit manumitted black male social advancement.

One of the most disparaging allegations concerning black men and their supposed violent nature was black male primitivism, which was given credence by pseudo-scientific theorizing. The black man was an uncivilized violent brute who was a threat to the white social order. Such perspectives not only envisioned black men as underdeveloped human beings, but also fortified belief in black male savagery and bestiality. In post-Civil War discourses deprecating black men, some white writers and intellectuals employed "pseudoscientific or Darwinian language" (Leiter 2010: 42). They referred to the black man as "social monstrosity" (Van Evrie 1968 cited in Leiter 2010: 42) or "an ape" (Carroll 1900 cited in Leiter 2010: 42), which resulted in the myth of the primitive black brute.

To a large extent, Eugene O'Neill's portrayal of the black man in *The Dreamy Kid* reflects racialized discourse that demeans the humanity of black men. First of all, at the outset, the introductory information about the character projects Dreamy as a violent black man on the run from the police. A black prostitute and Dreamy's girlfriend, Irene, enters his apartment and informs another black woman, Ceely, caretaker of Dreamy's grandmother, about his antisocial behavior. She states, "Trouble? Good Lawd, it's worser'n dat! […] Ain't you heard what de Dreamy done last night, Ceely? […] Bad? Worser'n bad, what he done!" (O'Neill 1951: 18). Later on, Dreamy enters the scene and reveals that the police are looking for him because he killed a white man. In his reconstruction of the black man's account of the killing, O'Neill utilizes stage directions that project Dreamy's utterances and movements as beastly. The character speaks of his dispatch of the white man "with an attempt at a careless bravado […] boastfully […] With cruel satisfaction" (Ibid.: 21). As the action develops and the fear of police apprehension increases, Dreamy's brutishness intensifies. He responds to Ceely's remarks "savagely" (Ibid.: 21) and "scornfully […]

Clenching his fist threateningly" (Ibid.: 22). Discerning that the police are approaching the barracked apartment, "He stares at the door, his face hardening savagely, and listens carefully" (Ibid.: 25). The overall context seems to evidence a white Darwinian conceptualization of black inferiority, expressed in the depiction of a so-called savage black man who threatens the white, allegedly civilized, order by committing homicidal act upon a white man and seeking to escape the white power structure. His fear of apprehension is construed as an indicator of brutish, animalistic-like survival instincts.

The overall representation of a violent black man in O'Neill's *The Dreamy Kid* corresponds to the mainstream approach to black male violence, demeaned by criminologists and sociologists as an aftereffect of black male assumption of 'compulsive masculinity,' which "refers to a pattern of masculine behavior characterized by overt emphasis on norms of toughness, sexual conquest, manipulation, and thrill-seeking" (Oliver 1994: 11). Black men projecting themselves as tough are engaging in performative procedures. "Thus, demeanor, style of walking and physical posturing, and 'tough talk" are major strategies that lower-class black males employ to symbolically communicate their adherence to the toughness norm" (Ibid.: 24). Indeed, O'Neill's character assumes a posture of a tough violent man by utilizing several strategies. First, Dreamy considers homicide to be a laudable response to the white male's affront to his autonomy. Since the white man "was de one looking' for trouble" (O'Neill 1951: 21), the black man "got him right" (Ibid.: 21). Secondly, Dreamy uses insult and vulgarity as means to express self-confidence. He orders panicked and concerned Ceely to "Shut yo' loud mouth, damn yo'!" (Ibid.: 21). He also reproaches her for putting his life in jeopardy when she compelled him to come home while his grandmother was on her deathbed. He rebukes, "I gutter mind ter smash yo' face for playin' de damn fool and makin' me de goat" (Ibid.: 22). Not only does O'Neill denigrate black speech but also focuses on Dreamy's appearance as reflective masculine compulsion. Dreamy "is a well-built, good looking young negro, light in color. His eyes are shifty and hard, their expression one of tough, scornful defiance. His mouth is cruel and perpetually drawn back at the corner into a snarl. He is dressed in well-fitting clothes of a flashy pattern. A light cap is pulled down on the side of his bead" (Ibid.: 20–21). Therefore, his posture is emblematic of masculine physical strength. His glance expresses continual wariness and readiness to discern and confront possible threat. The outfit he wears shows self-confidence. Finally, albeit implicitly, the playwright alludes to the black man's sexual excessive fixation. Instead of pursuing settled family life, Dreamy chooses to have an affair with Irene, a "highly rouged and powdered, dressed in gaudy, cheap finery" (Ibid.: 17) black prostitute. His insensitivity towards Irene implies that his only interest is prurient. When she expresses commitment to their relationship, and states her willingness to stay with and support him against the police, "he opens the door and grabs her two arms from behind […] pushes her into the hallway and holds her there at arm's length" (O'Neill 1951: 30). Playing a role of a tough guy, he rejects feminine compassion and succor.

The latter manifestation of compulsive masculinity—the refusal to acknowledge the concern of a black woman with his fate—illustrates misogynist stance of the mythic black

macho. Misogyny of O'Neill's character is multidimensional as his contempt for black women's attitudinal and emotional involvement in the lives of black men is exhibited. As referred to earlier, Dreamy violently rejects Irene's willingness to assist and support him. Coupled with this, the affection bestowed upon him by his grandmother and Ceely infuriates him. When he finds out that his grandmother wants to see him once again because she senses her approaching death, he scornfully and unfeelingly tells Ceely that his grandmother is just an old woman and that death is an everyday occurrence. When Ceely tries to evoke his compassion, informing him that his grandmother has been calling and praying for him all day, Dreamy rebukes her, "Aw, she don' need none o' me. What good kin I do watchin' her do a kip?" (Ibid.: 22). When his grandmother awakens, instead of expressing due regard for her condition, his concerns are focused upon overcoming her authoritarian, matriarchal bearing and absconding from the apartment to avoid arrest.

To sum up, O'Neill's black male character is actually a representation of the black macho. Dreamy is depicted as a savage, brutal, homicidal, self-confident, and misogynist black man, who threatens a white world order, resulting in his assumption of compulsive masculine norms as survival strategies.

The Dreamy Kid propagates certain conceptions that refer to sociological tenets that undergird black macho myth. One of the sociological and criminological explanations attempting to account for black male violence is based upon "the poverty-social disorganization theory," (Oliver 1994: 8), which maintains that black men at the lower socio-economic level are more prone to develop violent postures as an aggressive response to financial depravity and its delimiting circumstances, which, in turn, engender social disorganization characterized by "chronic unemployment, teen pregnancy, female-headed families, academic failure, welfare dependency, inadequate socialization, and substance abuse" (Ibid.: 8). In O'Neill's drama, Dreamy's social background reflects this sociological milieu. A black man of the lower socio-economic level is submerged by social disorder and dysfunction. First, his vulgar, colloquial, non-standard American English speech shows a lack of proper schooling. Although many linguists recognize Black English as a formal variety of English, Eugene O'Neill, according to the conventions of his times, does not consider Black English to be a unique cultural expression with its own specific cadence, codes and idioms, but as evidence of social, intellectual, and moral inferiority. Secondly, the black community in the drama is beset with chronic unemployment. Although the characters do not explicitly mention their joblessness, their overall characterization reveals a lack of dignified employment. Irene is a woman working in a "bad house" (O'Neill 1951: 17). Dreamy is a "boos er de gang" (Ibid.: 19). It is also uncertain whether Ceely assists his grandmother voluntarily or she is an employee of a homecare institution. Moreover, a black female-headed household is portrayed as a factor of social disorganization. Other men in the drama are absent. The only relative that Dreamy interacts with on stage is his matriarchal grandmother. Therefore, it relates to the fact that he has not been brought up in a familial context that would have offered him an appropriate model of a male role of a reliable father as family provider and protector. The reason for his father's absence is atypical. The stereotypical representation of a dissolute family abandoned by a man who

is more concerned with womanizing and partying than taking care of his family does not apply here. Dreamy is an orphan because his parents were killed in an accident. Nevertheless, the absence of a male figure as a role model at home implies familial distortion, whereby, in line with sociological tenets—"poverty and social disorganization diminish the ability of the black community to encourage its youth to adopt conventional values and behavior" (Oliver 1994: 8).

Another theory seeking to account for black male violence is "the racial oppression-displaced aggression theory" (Ibid.: 8), according to which angry and frustrated black men who are unable to affirm masculinity in sync with the mainstream society's standards redirect their violent negative emotions upon others. More often than not, this rage is displaced upon other black people because of feeling of powerlessness coupled with a perceived inability to confront the oppressive white power structure. Bearing this scenario out, O'Neill creates a black male character who has not attained the American mainstream success goals of "academic achievement, occupational and social prestige, upward mobility, financial success and material acquisition" (Ibid.: 8–9). Dreamy assumes violent posture normative within the black street gang criminogenic realm, projecting masculine virility by killing a white man. After the fact, however, recognition of his powerlessness and hopelessness returns as he attempts to avoid apprehension by white law enforcement. The fusion of fear and rage within him evokes enmity towards black women: Irene, Ceely, and his grandmother. Such a turn of events reflects reasons why black men are believed to reject black women's solidarity in the struggle against oppressive forces.

He refused her because he could not do anything else. He refused her because the assertion of his manhood required something quite different of him. He refused her because it was too late to carbon-copy the traditional white male/female relationships. And he refused her because he felt justified in anger. He claimed that she had betrayed him (Wallace 1978: 14).

The two criminological reasons for black male aggression overlap for they both posit the dispossessed male's thwarted access to means that would promote social advancement, an attainment of the "Dreamy" American Dream. Thus, the character's name is symbolic. It connotes blasted hopes. A critic Joel Pfister (1995: 124) pointedly observes,

In *The Dreamy Kid*, Dreamy's "mammy" reminisces that he was given his nickname while still a babe in the South because of his dreamy look—read as symbolic of the dreams they hoped would come true for them in the North. But years in the North have hardened this dreamy boy into a defiant urban gang leader […] the doomed Dreamy is O'Neill's embodiment of the black dream of freedom in the North turned into a nightmare.

The misogynous element of the black macho myth is worth of further elaboration. Dreamy's resentful attitude towards black women has roots in the black matriarchal myth, whereby black women are considered to be the primary factor inhibiting social advancement and masculine affirmation of black male. Sociologically and historically, reversal of traditional patriarchal gender roles within the black families has been documented. In the period from the Emancipation Proclamation up on to the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, black women frequently performed the role of a family provider due to the high unemployment rate among black men. Even though black women had access mostly to lower-paid

jobs, professionally and financially they were in an advantageous position relative to black men. This situation resulted in inter-gender, intra-racial conflicts between black men and women. The literary critic Aoi Mori (1999: 8) points out that "a black man, denied his maleness and unable to fulfill the conventional 'male' role of supporting and protecting his family, was frequently pressured to leave home, feeling uncomfortable with staying with his family; while a woman […] was left with the responsibility of being head of the family". This circumstance eventually led to the emergence of the myth of "the 'bad' Black mother" (Collins, 1990 cited in Mori, 1999: 8), who was marked as an obstacle to black masculine assertion. Even in the early 1960s, the female-headed household was viewed as a negative phenomenon stirring a great deal of sociological and political debate on the status of the black family, with the most notoriety given to a report by Daniel P. Moynihan, which blamed the structure of the black family for dysfunction within the black community. Bell Hooks (2003: 123) criticizes the fallaciousness of the Moynihan report, writing that "by targeting the black family he made it seem as though the economic system was conductive to black progress and the failure lay with dominating black females in the home, whom he called matriarchs". The aforementioned racialized gender conceptions compelled a number of black men to flaunt their masculine prowess in opposition to assertive black women, which, more frequently than not, led to intra-racial antagonisms.

In the *Dreamy Kid*, Eugene O'Neill reconstructs the stereotypical black matriarch who dominates the thoughts and decisions of Dreamy, a dispossessed black man. In this drama, Dreamy's grandmother, Mammy Sounders, is presented as "an old, white-haired Negress about ninety with a weazened face furrowed by wrinkles and withered by old age and sickness" (O'Neill 1951: 16). The tension between Mammy and Dreamy is not readily visible at first, because O'Neill introduces her as an elderly black woman on her deathbed who wants to see her beloved grandson once again before her transition. However, when he arrives, instead of expressing compassion, he becomes enraged because he does not perceive his grandmother's condition as serious enough to warrant his visit. He is more concerned with the risk of arrest that his visit presents. Interestingly, though, he is unable to direct his anger at his grandmother, in whose presence he feels dutifully compelled to maintain respectful composure, so he represses his rage. When he observes Mammy closely, he "shudders in spite of himself as he realizes for the first time how far gone the old woman is – forcing a tone of joking reassurance" (Ibid.: 23). When she speaks of approaching death, he rejoins, "You live ter plant de flowers on my grave, see if you don'" (Ibid.: 23). He is under pressure and his retort does not arise from humor but is a means by which he represses inner fear and rage. When Mammy becomes talkative, he insists that she stop talking. Simultaneously, the tension between the two characters increases, as Dreamy threats about the police. Almost every utterance that Mammy makes is met with an attempt by Dreamy to silence her. He commands, "Don' you talk, Mammy. […] Don' you talk so much, Mammy. […] Ssshh, Mammy! Don' shout so loud. […] For God's sake, don't speak for a minute" (Ibid.: 24–25). Until now, Dreamy's attitude towards Mammy has a certain ambiguity. On the one hand, he wants to stay by her side out of compassion and grief over her approaching death. On the other hand, he wants to leave the place in resistance against her matriarchal domination and avoid police apprehension. The latter

reason appears to be more solid. Further on, the most critical evidence of the elderly black woman's dominance over the frustrated grandson is a threatening forewarning. When Dreamy decides to leave, promising to return, Mammy fills him with trepidation, saying "Yo' ole Mammy won't bodder yo' long. Yo' know w'at yo' promise me, Dreamy! Yo' promise yo' sacred word yo' stay wid me till de en.' […] If yo' leave me now, yo' ain't gwine git no bit er luck s'long's yo' live, I tells yo' dat!" (O'Neill 1951: 29). Dreamy, a supposedly tough black man, who leads a street gang, surprisingly takes the irrational forewarning to heart. From that moment on, an uncontrollable inner struggle arises between his two identities of a daring macho in resistance to his other half of an obedient grandson. In the final scene, "Dreamy gives [Mammy] his left hand. The revolver is in his right. He stares nervously at the door" (Ibid.: 32). After a while, he does not manifest the behavior of a bossy gangster. Beforehand, he had asked the prostitute Irene to tell his fellow gang members about his dire situation, hoping for their support. Now, he stares nervously at the door gripped by fear of the police. He also becomes increasingly distraught due to his grandmother's curse and fear of overwhelming police power. His sense of confinement multiplies feelings of powerlessness. He speaks "[w]ith gloomy fatalism" (Ibid.: 30), he acts "absent-mindedly" (Ibid.: 31). Under tremendous stress, he expresses, "aloud to himself with an air of grim determination as if he were making a pledge" (Ibid.: 32), his unceasing resolve to hold on to the receding hope of remaining free from incarceration.

Moreover, the dread that his grandmother's words, which he considered a curse, inflicted within him can be interpreted as "the residue of primitive superstition in civilized man" (Gillett 1975: 54), which corresponds to the aforementioned mainstream racial myth which projects black man as primitive. This scene signifies that Dreamy's adoption of compulsive masculinity has faded owing to the onslaught of dual oppressive factors – societal and domestic, constituted by the white establishment and by black matriarchy respectively. This portrayal of a victimized, marginalized black man relates to the image of the mythical black macho who violently responds to white society's confinement and black matriarchy. The point of view emerging from the drama complies with the black macho's misogyny, which results from some black men's response to their double oppression.

In summary, O'Neill's portrayal of the black violent man in *The Dreamy Kid* does not comport with his alleged deracialized approach to dramatic works. Not only the character of Dreamy is explicitly racially defined, but derogatory stereotypical features are ascribed to him. O'Neill's portrayal of a black man is somewhat progressive in his theatrical production, particularly when one juxtaposes the play with the defamatory and humiliating minstrel shows of his day. To some extent, O'Neill highlights racial oppression as a predominant factor in Dreamy's tragic life. Nevertheless, the playwright ascribes certain cultural, discursive, and social prejudicial bases to Dreamy in his character conception. In an early scene, O'Neill negatively portrays Dreamy as a violent, frustrated, savage black man, who, throughout the play, does not evidence qualities of a self-assertive human being, who is able to transform his oppressive circumstance into positive, empowering experiences.

Following the publication of *The Dreamy Kid* (1918), a number of black American literary critics and theoreticians called for the definition and enactment of black theater. They advocated resistance to stereotypical and derogatory black character representations. Black literary figures and activists began to promote images of empowered characters, who had courage to resist and transcend their oppressive circumstance. Such warrior characters challenged infamous image of powerless, impotent victims. The black sociologist, philosopher, and activist, W. E. B. Du Bois (1926 cited in Harrison, 1997: 569–570) proclaimed that black theater's raison d'être should be the establishment of the space whereby black playwrights could assert their agency and connect with black masses.

The plays of a real Negro theatre must be: 1. *About us*.... they must have lots which reveal Negro life as it is. 2. *By us*.... they must be written by Negro authors who understand from birth and continual association just what it means to be a Negro today. 3. *For us*... the theatre must cater primarily to Negro audiences and be supported and sustained by their entertainment and approval. 4. *Near us*. The theatre must be in a Negro neighborhood near the mass of ordinary Negro people.

In succeeding years, the import of black theater, and black art in general, was elaborated upon by a group of black theoreticians and artists, which, after four decades, were progenitors of the 1960s Black Arts Movement. Larry Neal (1968 cited in Harrison, 1997: 572–573; Matthews, 1998: 72), prominent within the Movement, put forth the aesthetic transformation characteristic of black art. He asserted,

The Black Arts Movement is radically opposed to any concept of the artist that alienates him from his community. Black Art is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept. As such, it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America. In order to perform this task, the Black Arts Movement proposes a radical reordering of the Western cultural aesthetic. It proposes a separate symbolism, mythology, critique, and iconography. The Black Arts and the Black Power concepts both relate broadly to the Afro-American's desire for self-determination and nationhood. Both concepts are nationalistic. One is concerned with the relationship between art and politics; the other with the art of politics.

In conclusion, black artists, in resistance to white created powerless, grotesque characters like Dreamy in O'Neill's drama, called for the imagining and creation of characters who seek empowerment in order to liberate themselves from oppression, characters with the ability to move from the margins to the center. Authentic black art should express the beauty and power of black warriors committed to their own and the black community's uplift, in contrast to white mainstream racial cultural representations of black men, as "thugs, pariahs, bearers of chaos, purse-snatchers, athletes, rappers, or criminals" (Jones 2005: 7).

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Santrauka

ŠĖLSTANTIS JUODASIS IR JUODOJO MAČO MITAS EUGENE'O O'NEILLO DRAMOJE *VAIKIŠČIAS DRYMIS*

Šiuo straipsniu siekiama išnagrinėti, kiek išsamiai Eugene'as O'Neillas savo dramoje *Vaikiščias Drymis* (re)konstruoja ar taiko juodojo mačo mitą, pagal kurį juodieji vyrai yra vaizduojami neigiamai – kaip įtūžę ir visuomenės atstumti. Analizuojamos O'Neillo asmeninės pažangios rasinės pažiūros, jo nuostatos dėl universalios žmogiškosios egzistencijos, tai vertinama kaip tvirtas dramos pagrindas. Į minėtoje dramoje vyraujančios krypties pažiūras žvelgiama kaip į progresyvias. Nors dramos centre yra visuomenės užribyje atsidūręs juodasis, o tai gali būti laikoma dramaturgo išreiškiamu susirūpinimu neteisinga Amerikos visuomenės rasine ir klasių stratifikacija, vis dėlto O'Neillo kūryboje gausu plačiai paplitusių stereotipų, susijusių su tariamu moraliniu juodųjų nuosmukiu, jų primityvumu ir agresyviu elgesiu, kurie kelia grėsmę vyraujančiai baltųjų sukurtai tvarkai. Kalbant apie rasinius lyčių įsitikinimus, straipsnyje dėmesys skiriamas tam, kaip O'Neillas vaizduoja juodųjų vyrų derybas su baltųjų patriarchalinėmis galios struktūromis. Jas rašytojas perteikia stereotipišku dominuojančios pagyvenusios juodaodės moters paveikslu. Taip pat gilinamasi į nepriklausomą juodaodžių meną, kurtą jų menininkų kaip priešpriešą baltųjų amerikiečių rašytojų skelbiamiems žeminantiems, stereotipiniams priespaudą kenčiančių juodaodžių aprašymams.

REIKŠMINIAI ŽODŽIAI: juodojo mačo mitas, rasinis stereotipas, agresija, juodaodžių matriarchatas, juodaodžių menas.

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PORYWCZY CZARNOSKÓRY A MIT CZARNOSKÓREGO MACHO W SZTUCE EUGENE'A O'NEILLA *THE DREAMY KID*

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest ukazanie, w jakim stopniu Eugene O'Neill w swojej sztuce pt. *The Dreamy Kid* (re)konstruuje mit czarnoskórego macho, ukazujący go w negatywnym świetle jako osobę porywczą i zepchniętą na margines społeczny. Takie przedsięwzięcie pociąga za sobą kwestionowanie stwierdzenia O'Neilla, w którym dramatopisarz wyraził przekonanie o własnej postępowej postawie w kwestiach rasy oraz o skupieniu się na przedstawianiu w swoich utworach uniwersalności ludzkiego istnienia. Mimo iż sztuka skupia się na losach staczającego się na dno czarnoskórego mężczyzny, co można zinterpretować jako dowód zainteresowania O'Neilla niesprawiedliwością podziału rasowego i klasowego społeczeństwa amerykańskiego, artykuł stawia pod znakiem zapytania powszechną klasyfikację *The Dreamy Kid* jako sztuki postępowej, eksponując aspekty odpowiadające stereotypowaniu czarnoskórych jako istot niemoralnych, prymitywnych i pełnych przemocy, które stanowią zagrożenie dla porządku białych. Jeśli chodzi o politykę rasy i płci, artykuł zwraca uwagę na przedstawienie negocjacji czarnoskórego mężczyzny z patriarchalnym, rasistowskim światem, który w dramacie O'Neilla uosabiają policjanci, oraz z czarnym matriarchatem, reprezentowanym przez stereotypową, dominującą bohaterkę. Analizę przeprowadzono w świetle pierwszych wezwań do tworzenia osobnej sztuki czarnoskórych, co było odpowiedzią czarnoskórych artystów na poniżające, stereotypowe postaci czarnoskórych bohaterów, dominujące w literackich utworach białych.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: mit czarnoskórego macho, stereotypy rasowe, przemoc, czarny matriarchat, sztuka czarnoskórych.

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