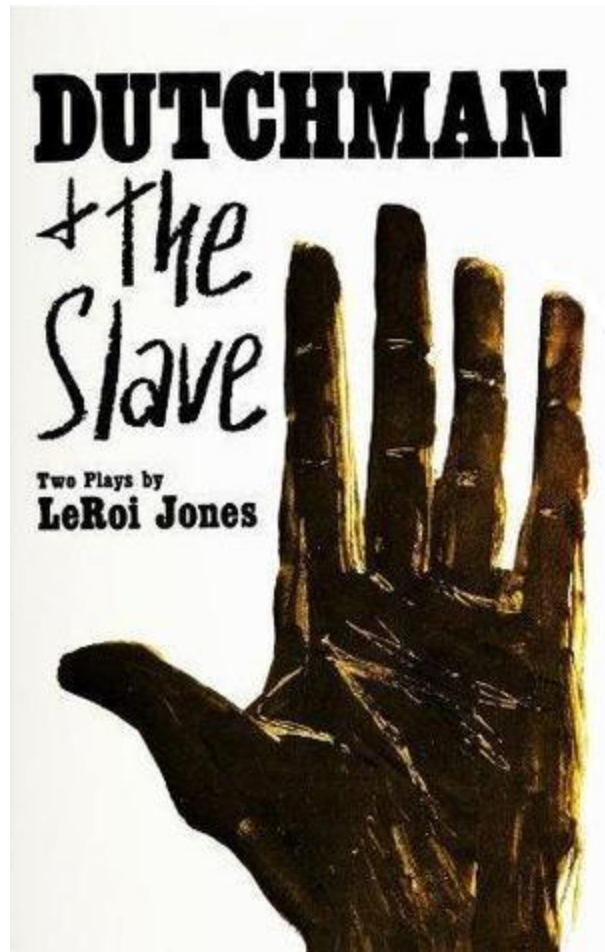


Racial Tensions in Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*

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Abstract

African American literature focuses on the role of African American within the larger American society and what it means to be an American. It explores the issues of freedom and equality long denied to blacks in the United States, along with further themes such as African American culture, racism, religion, slavery and diaspora. The survival of the Blackman in America, is predicated upon his ability to keep his thoughts and his true identity hidden. Many African- American writers have explored this metaphor of double-consciousness. This paper

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focuses on racial tensions depicted in Amiri Baraka's novel *Dutchman*. The Metaphor of Double Consciousness and Amiri Baraka are discussed.

Key words: Racial tension, Black Man, Amiri Baraka, *Dutchman*, the Metaphor of Double Consciousness and Amiri Baraka.

Amiri Baraka (LeRoy Jones)

Amiri Baraka (LeRoy Jones), a contemporary playwright, poet, essayist, novelist and critic has explored it extensively. He uses his writings to explore the experience and anger of the African American people against racism and advocates socialism to reverse the political power structure that ends the age-old suffering of his community- the black people. Double consciousness in his work emerges as a kind of masochism, for his attraction to both black and white culture is laced with pain. The life of African American had always been relentlessly unreal and their problems remain unsolved. This concept is reflected in his plays. He also reflects violence and social tensions of race relations in contemporary America through his plays.

Dutchman

Although Baraka wrote a number of plays during this period, *Dutchman* (1964) is widely considered as his masterpiece. The play spoke lucidly to black Americans of the savage destruction of their cultural identity, should they continue to imitate or to flirt with an alien, though dominant, white lifestyle. The play illustrates the persistence of racial violence in the United States that prevailed in the 1960s and represented an emerging militant attitude on the part of American blacks, and on the part of black American playwrights.

Tendency of Assimilation

This article aims at tracing the assimilation tendency of Clay, the protagonist and at the same time the revelation of his black self or black identity. At the literary level, *Dutchman* is concerned with two people, a Negro male, Clay, and a white female, Lula, who strike up a chance acquaintance on a subway train. To Clay, Lula is a white liberal, a bohemian type, a bit flirty; to Lula, Clay is a typical middle-class, intellectual young Negro anxious to achieve

success in white America, the type who should feel honored or pleased and so she offers him company.

Clay and Lula

The two engage themselves in flirtatious small talk. Then Lula teases Clay about compromising himself in order to get along with the white society. Clay becomes resentful. Lula criticizes him for avoiding his identity as a black man. Pursued to the point where he loses his composure, he angrily rebuffs Lula, declaring that it is his right to be whatever he is or wants to be regardless of whether she approves of it or not. Indeed his manner of living is a way of controlling his violence. He continues to talk until Lula, enraged, rather reflexively stabs Clay to death while other subway riders look on passively. She orders them to throw Clay's body off the train, and they do so, silently. Then when a similar young Negro boards the subway train at the next stop, Lula begins what apparently is going to be a similar temptation routine.

Sexual, Racial, and Economic Implication of Black-White Relation

The play is concerned with the sexual, racial, and economic implication of black-white relation. Racial oppression and violence lie at the heart of *Dutchman*. The play is a sharply focused indictment of those African Americans who desire to assimilate into mainstream American society. The life of African American even after the proclamation of emancipation is characterized by racial discrimination, segregation in social life and widespread insecurity. The search for identity and the realization of black nationalism soon found an explicit outlet in the rejection of everything of the white civilizations and an enthusiastic acceptance of everything black. Thus they soon rejected the white way of life and the white history of the black men.

Common Goal

Baraka strives at a common goal – establishing self-awareness and self-confidence in blacks. Although, our society on a superficial level puts great emphasis on diversity inclusion and equal rights but it is not embedded in the fabrics of society. Minorities are still viewed with hatred and contempt. By exposing the horror of race relations in America, Baraka diagnoses the problem of white dominance in American society and prescribes his cure – race revolution and murder.

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The article thus analyses Amir Baraka's concerns such as cultural alienation, racial tension and conflict, and the necessity for social change through revolutionary means. He used drama to teach people, opening their eyes to reality as he saw it. He illuminated the plight of all human beings in the confrontation between dream and reality, light and darkness, injured psyche and adopted personae. It contained profound treatment of abiding human values which demand synthesis and not analysis of different races. He advocated socialism as a viable solution to the problems in America resulting in goodwill and harmony.

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