Dutchman Study Guide

Dutchman by Amiri Baraka

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Introduction

*Dutchman,*Amiri Baraka's shocking one-act play was first presented at the Cherry Lane Theatre in New York City in March, 1964. It won the Obie Award for best off-Broadway play, putting Baraka, who was actively contributing to five other plays at the time, into the public limelight. He was still mills Bohemian phase but would the following year divorce his white (Jewish) wife, move to Harlem, and change his name from LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka indicating his new Black Nationalist leanings. *Dutchman,* written just before this move, is a transitional piece. It carries elements of the Dadaist poetry of his Bohemian stage, anti-racist sentiments, and the radical black consciousness-raising that would characterize much of his later work.

Dutchman is an emotionally charged and highly symbolic version of the Adam and Eve story, wherein a naive bourgeois black man is murdered by an insane and calculating white seductress, who is coldly preparing for her next victim as the curtain comes down. The emotionally taut, intellectual verbal fencing between Clay (the black Adam) and Lula (a white Eve) spirals irrevocably to the symbolic act of violence that will apparently repeat itself over and over again Baraka's play is one of mythical proportions, a ritual drama that has a sociological purpose: to galvanize his audience into revolutionary action. *Dutchman* initially played to primarily white audiences, until Baraka moved it to a Harlem theater that he founded in order to reach, and to educate, his intended audience of the black bourgeoisie. Ironically, the Harlem audiences labeled it a white-hating play and the play closed in Harlem due to lack of revenue. But Baraka was now fully established as the roaring black literary lion, and he continued his mission of black consciousness raising through a prolific output of drama, poetry, essays, and political activity

Author Biography

Amiri Baraka was born Everett LeRoi Jones on October 7, 1934, to Anna Lois Russ Jones, a social worker, and Coyt Jones, a postal supervisor. Called LeRoi, he grew up in Newark, New Jersey, a gifted student who graduated from high school early and won a scholarship to Rutgers University. He transferred to the predominantly African American Howard University after only one year, however, because he felt too much like an outsider at Rutgers. But he felt equally uneasy at Howard because there, "They teach you how to pretend to be white." From university, Jones went into the Air Force, where he also faced racial oppression. Just as his stint at Howard had taught him about the "Negro sickness" of self-hatred, his experience in the armed forces taught him about the "white sickness" of hating others. Whites infected themselves with mental illness "by having to oppress, by having to make believe that the weird, hopeless fantasy that they had about the world was actually true." For Jones, the only positive aspect of military duty was the opportunity to read widely.

After his discharge, Jones settled in Greenwich Village, New York, becoming a Bohemian intellectual and part of the Beat literary movement that included writers such as Jack Kerouac *(On the Road)* and Allen Ginsberg (the epic poem "Howl "). Jones began coediting an avant-garde literary magazine with his Jewish wife, Hettie Roberta Cohen. But this period of relative literary tameness and cohabitation with white culture would soon end. Jones became increasingly militant in his crusade against white oppression, expressed in violent symbolism in his poetry, essays, and drama. In 1965, Jones gradually divorced himself from his integrated life, left his wife and two daughters, and became a public figurehead of black cultural nationalism. In Harlem, and later ill Newark when his Harlem theater closed, he tried to put on "a playa week" in an effort to revitalize the black American identity or, as he put it, to "blow a million words into the firmament like black prayers to force change."

During the 1967 Newark riots Jones was arrested, beaten, and tried for incitement. His Black militant poem *"Black People!"* and an excerpt from a speech were read as "evidence," and he was sentenced to two and one-half years in prison; he later succeeded ill having the sentence overturned ill a retrial. Like Malcolm X, Jones was attracted to the Islamic religion. In 1967 he changed his name to Imamu (a title meaning "spiritual leader" that he soon dropped) Amiri (prince) Baraka (blessed one) as a mark of his new identity. But the strictures of the Black Muslims proved oppressive, and he shifted his allegiance to Kawaida, a spiritual doctrine based on seven principles of cultural responsibility (it is the doctrine behind the holiday Kwanzaa).

Baraka's collections of essays, *A Black Value System* (1970) and *Kawaida Studies: The New Nationalism* (1972) explain how adopting this system of cultural values would transform Black people and ultimately, America. He eventually broke with Kawaida, too, but remained a political activist for Black Nationalism. In 1974, he took another political turn and embraced communism. Shifts ill the form of his artistic work paralleled these shifts in social consciousness: in theater he moved from the comparatively conventional

form of *Dutchman* (1964) to the African pageantry of *Slave Ship* (1967) to the communist drama of S-1 (1976).

Baraka remarried ill 1966, taking Sylvia Robinson (who changed her name to Bibi Amina Baraka) as his new wife. The couple have five children together (in addition to the two children he had with Cohen). Baraka was elected to the Black Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1970. His other literary honors include: the Obie Award for Best American Off-Broadway Play, 1964, for *Dutchman;* a Guggenheim fellowship, 1965-66; second prize at the International Art Festival, Dakar, 1966, for *The Slave;* a National Endowment for the Arts grant ill 1966; and a Doctorate of Humane Letters from Malcolm X College III Chicago (1972).

Plot Summary

Scene 1

Dutchman takes place "in the flying underbelly of the city:" in a subway train. Throughout the play, the audience is made aware of the setting through the roar of the train and the flashing lights as it speeds and slows and occasionally stops for passengers. Twenty-year-old Clay, a black man, is riding the train. At first only his seat is visible. Before the action of scene gets underway, he exchanges a fleeting smile with an unknown face on the platform and then goes back to reading his magazine.

Lula, a thirty-year-old white woman with long red hair wearing a small, revealing dress, boards the subway, daintily eating an apple. After momentarily awaiting his acknowledgment of her presence, she takes the seat next to Clay. Her manner and mode of conversing with Clay swings from boldly flirtatious to oddly morose and aloof as they share more apples than Clay wants, and fence around the possibility of a sexual encounter. Some of her comments surprise him with their eerily insightful knowledge of his private life ("You tried to make it with your sister when you were ten"). while others seem downright psychotic ("You're a murderer. Clay. and you know it"). Lula claims that she only knows so much about Clay because he is a "well-known type,"_ that type being a socially ambitious black man.

She invites herself to the party to which she correctly guesses he's on his way, and he accepts her company. given that she has been actively seducing him. Despite the fact that her conversation is fraught with hostile racist comments and sudden lapses of attention, he allows this strange seduction and continues. with forced affability. 10 banter with her. She refers to him as "the Black Baudelaire." "My Christ. My Christ," and "a black nigger." At the end of the scene she entreats him to ignore their separate histories and pretend to be "anonymous beauties smashing along through the city's entrails"; then she yells, "GROOVE!" and the scene ends.

Scene 2

In the second scene. more seats are visible and other people are either sitting or boarding and disembarking from the train. Lula and Clay are oblivious of them. As the scene opens, they are discussing how they will act at the party. Lula describes a slow public seduction. which intrigues Clay. Along with the implicit promise of a sexual encounter, Lula also promises that they'll be eating apples along the way to her tenement apartment. As they continue to talk about Clay's "manhood." Clay briefly notices the others on the subway, but soon he is once again submerged in his intense interaction with Lula. ignoring his surroundings.

Traces of morbidity in Lula's description of her home ("like Juliet's tomb") give Clay pause. He asks her if she is an actress because she is so self aggrandizing. She denies

this, but warns him that she lies, Clay demands the whole story from her. She answers elliptically, mysteriously, saying that her life consists of "apples and long walks with deathless intelligent lovers;"_ Lula characterizes his life as "change, change. change," She accuses Clay of being "even too serious to be psychoanalyzed."

A few more people board the subway and again. Clay notices them. Lula claims to know them all, then inexplicably asks if they frighten Clay because he is "an escaped nigger," Struggling to maintain his composure in the face of another hostile jibe. Clay makes light of the comment. turning the conversation to plantations. the source of the blues, Lula launches into a hysterical blues song, during which she shudders rhythmically and bumps into the other passengers, punctuating her act with vicious profanity. In front of the shocked audience of passengers. she invites Clay to . 'do the nasty." Clay is now desperately clinging to his dignity, yet he is still fascinated by her boldness. His conservative side wins, however, and he refuses her invitation to dance. She responds with a string of vicious insults: "You middle class black bastard.

Forget your social-working mother for a few seconds and let's knock stomachs. Clay, you liver lipped white man. You would-be Christian. You ain't no nigger, you're just a dirty white man." Her invectives turn into an insanely poetic entreaty to rebel: "Get up and scream at these people. . . . Red train coughs Jewish underwear for keeps! Expanding smells of silence. Gravy snot whistling like sea birds. Clay. Clay, you got to break out. Don't sit there dying the way they want you to die."

Even though Clay attempts-vainly-to stop Lula's behavior, the momentum of the situation is gathering force hire a runaway train: it must end in violence. He tries to physically force her back into her seat, and she calls him an Uncle Tom. The other passengers laugh, and a drunk gets up and joins in her dance. Finally, Clay's anger rises, and he grabs her, calling her a "dumb bitch." When he still cannot silence her, he slaps her face hard, twice It is his turn to express the anger that he has held in check until now, but Ins anger is more heartfelt than Lula's has been.

In his speech Clay reveals that even in anger he is still holding a much more violent reaction in check. He'd kill them all "wantonly" if he could. But he cannot-it would do no good. Therefore, he demands, "If I'in a middle class fake white man... let me be. And let me be in the way I want." He tells Lula that her sexual offer misses the mark. She knows nothing of the belly rub. Her having slept with black men does not make her an expert on black people. Whites who love jazz fail to recognize that what Bessie Smith and Charlie Parker are really saying to them is "Kiss my ass!" Clay sees murder as the only cure for the black neurosis, for "If Bessie Smith had killed some white people, she wouldn't have needed that music. She could have talked very straight and plain about the world. . . . Just straight two and two are four. Money. Power. Luxury" Murder would make blacks sane, but it's safer to code one's anger. Furthermore, Clay explains, educating blacks is dangerous for whites, for when blacks finally understand the "great intellectual legacy of the white man" they'll be able to rationalize murder just as the whites have done.

Clay's impassioned speech sobers Lula; she tells him she's heard enough and agrees that they will not now enact "that little pageant" she had planned. But she isn't finished with him yet. As he reaches across her to retrieve his books, she plunges a knife into Clay's chest. His mouth works ineffectively as he dies. Now the complicity of the rest of the white world is made apparent as the passengers help Lula throw Clay's dead body from the tram and then get off of the train themselves.

Lula busies herself with "getting everything in order:" straightening her purse, bag, dress. She scribbles quickly into a notebook and drops it in her bag, just in time to be ready for the young black man of about twenty who boards the train. The cycle begins again as Lula gives the young man a long, slow look. An old black conductor performs a brief soft shoe and greets the younger man. Lula stares at him down the aisle, and the conductor tips his hat as he leaves the train car. The curtain drops.

Summary

Dutchman is a one-act play written in the 1960s and set in the same time. The play takes place on a subway car on a hot summer day and involves two main characters. The first character is a twenty-year-old African American man named Clay. The second character is a thirty-year-old Caucasian woman named Lula. As the story begins, Clay sits alone on the subway, reading a magazine. As the train slows to a stop, Clay sees an attractive woman standing in the station and staring at him through the window of the subway car. The woman smiles at Clay, and he smiles back. As the subway train begins to move again, the woman enters the subway car in which Clay is seated. This woman, Lula, is wearing summer clothes and carrying a net bag filled with books, fruit and other items. Lula pushes her sunglasses up onto her forehead as she comes closer to Clay. She is beautiful, tall and slender with long red hair and bright lipstick. She eats an apple as she walks toward Clay. She stops beside Clay's seat, and stands holding the strap above her head to keep her balance as she waits for Clay to notice her before she sits down. Clay looks up from the magazine he is reading and smiles at her.

Lula says hello to Clay and tells him she is going to sit down. She comments that her bag is heavy and Clay replies that it doesn't look heavy. He looks back at his magazine and then out the window. Lula, who is now seated, turns toward him. She asks if he was staring at her through the window. Clay acts as if he doesn't know what she is talking about. He says he saw her but he was not staring, but he thinks she was staring. Lula tells him she got on the train because he smiled at her. The train is going in the opposite direction of where she was heading. She admits that she walked down the aisle of the train looking for him. Clay finds this odd. He tells her he wasn't prepared for "party talk." The two tease each other flirtingly. Lula acts offended and says that he is trying to pick her up, or trying to get her into bed. Clay asks if he looks like the type of person who would do that. Lula says he looks like he has been trying to grow a beard. She continues saying he looks as if he is from New Jersey, lives with his parents, has been reading Chinese poetry, and has been drinking warm, sugarless tea. Lula laughs as she makes this last comment and then says he looks like death eating soda crackers.

Clay is embarrassed. He has no comeback to Lula's strange comments. Still, he is intrigued by her. Lula tells him she made her comments up. She lies a lot because she thinks it helps her control the world around her. Clay tells her she was right about New Jersey and that he is growing a beard. He asks if he knows her, or if she is a friend of his friend, Warren. Lula pretends to know Clay's sister. Clay doesn't follow what she is saying. Once again Lula admits to being a liar and tells him she doesn't know Warren or his sister. Nevertheless she guesses at a description of Warren and is right. She tells Clay that she assumes he would know someone who matched the description because he is dull and predictable. She says that she imagines that Clay must find her exciting.

Lula offers Clay an apple and jokes that eating apples together is always the first step to getting involved. She asks him if he would like to get involved with her. He tells her he would because she is beautiful. Clay wants to know what else she "knows" about him. She says she knows his type. Clay is surprised to hear this. Lula says she has grey hair

for each year and type she has known. Clay asks her why she wants to make herself sound old. Lula wants Clay to ask her to Warren's party. Clay becomes convinced that she knows Warren, otherwise how would she know about the party? Again, the party is just another one of Lula's guesses. Clays ask her what her name is. She tells him it is Lena the Hyena. She says his name is Morris the Hyena. She offers him another apple but he doesn't take it. Lula keeps guessing at Clay's name. He finally tells her and she tells him her real name is Lula. He asks her to Warren's party but she says she doesn't even know him. Clay counters by responding that she knows his type.

Clay notices that Lula sounds irritated. He asks if he said something wrong. She replies that he says everything wrong but that is what makes him attractive to her. She makes fun of his clothes. Clay is dressed formally in a book jacket. She tells him that his clothes come from a tradition that ought to make him feel oppressed. She says his grandfather was a slave and since Clay didn't attend Harvard, why would he wear that kind of jacket? Clay says his grandfather was a night watchman, and that he went to an African American college. Clay said that when he was in college, he thought he was Baudelaire. Lula continues making fun of him. As she becomes more comfortable, her "joking" comments begin to sound offensive and prejudiced. She tells Clay she is an actress, but soon retracts the statement, saying that she lied again. Lula says her mother was a communist. Her mother is the only member of Lula's family that ever amounted to anything. Lula guesses that Clay's mother is a republican and his father votes for the man rather than the party. Clay says this is true. Lula puts on a mock cheer in celebration of America; a country that she says allows the vote of mediocrity.

Lula asks Clay what his middle name is and he responds back with, "Clay". She calls him a ghost of the future. She says he is a murderer. Lula devises a plan. She wants to pretend that people can't see him and that he is free from their history. She says they will pretend they are anonymous beauties. Clay doesn't understand what she is talking about but listens intently.

Other passengers on the train are now visible but Clay and Lula are caught up in their own world and don't notice anyone get on the train. They sit side by side, with Lula clutching Clay's arm. Clay mentions the party again. Lula says she will be mysterious when she arrives with him. He will look casual and when he gets drunk, they will use body language to seduce each other in front of everyone. Clay will talk to young men about his mind and old men about his plans. Lula and Clay will stand together, sipping their drinks, exchanging codes of lust. People will pretend not to know Clay's name, but later will claim a friendship with him. After the party they will walk down the street eating apples and will end up at the steps of Lula's tenement. Inside her place, she will hold his hand. They will sit in her dark living room and talk for hours.

Clay stops her to ask what they will talk about, and Lula says they will talk about everything, especially his manhood, just as they are now. Clay says he didn't know they were talking about that. At once, he notices that other people are on the subway car. He comments that the subway is slow. Clay wants to know what will happen next at Lula's place. She says that they will have sex and that Clay will call her room "as black as a grave" and say it is just like Juliet's tomb. Clay laughs at this comment and says he

might say that. Lula says he has probably said it before. Lula tells him that finally he will whisper that he loves her and will be lying. Clay says he wouldn't lie about something like that. She says it is the only thing he would lie about; especially if he thinks it will keep her alive. Once again, Clay cannot understand her. She says it's her path, one foot in front of the other. Clay calls her morbid. Lula says she has told Clay almost everything she knows about the two of them. Clay asks if there are any funny parts and Lula tells him she thought it was all funny. He tells her he wants the whole story. She says all stories are the whole story but change interrupts them. Lula tells Clay that he is too serious, like a Jewish poet from Yonkers with funny poems that are always about sex. Clay says those poems sound great, like movies. Lula says when a person changes they grow to hate them.

More people enter the train and sit close to Clay and Lula or stand while hanging on to the straps. Clay comments that all the passengers who just got onto the train at the same time must have come from the same place. Lula agrees. She says she knows more about them then she does about him. She asks if he is afraid of them. Clays asks Lula if she is Jewish. Lula starts to loudly sing a mock blues song, making up the lyrics. Her song is racist and Clay is embarrassed. He asks her what was in the apples she offered him, referring to Snow White's poisoned apple. Lula tries to grab Clay's hand but he pulls it away. She tries to get him to dance and is annoyed that he won't. Lula becomes more animated as if to embarrass him even further. He tells her to sit and calm down. Lula mocks him as she continues to dance in the aisle. She starts screaming at the passengers on the train, hollering random nonsense statements. She tells Clay he has to break out instead of sitting there dying.

Clay yells at Lula to sit and tries to restrain her. He curses and her viciousness increases. She calls Clay an Uncle Tom and continues to chant and dance. The passengers on the train laugh at Lula in amusement. A drunken man starts waving his arms wildly. Clay calls Lula a dumb bitch and asks her why she won't stop. He rushes from his seat and grabs her arm. Lula struggles with Clay while yelling at him to let her go. She yells for help as Clay drags her to her seat. Clay throws her on the seat and tells her to shut the hell up. Lula says he is afraid of white people and says his father is an Uncle Tom. Clay slaps her across the mouth. Lula's head bangs against the back of the seat. When she raises her head forward, Clay slaps her again. He tells her she has no sense or feeling. He goes on to add that he could murder her and everyone around him. Clay describes the violence of this possibility. He says that the people around him don't understand anything but luxury, but Lula simply calls him a fool.

Clay responds to Lula, saying that if he is a middle class white man then let him be. His life is none of her business. She doesn't know anything. Her presence is an act, a device, and a lie. She assumes that she is an expert on his life because she has slept with an African American man. Clay refers to black musicians who are popular with white audiences. He explains that they didn't write their music for white people. He says if Bessie Smith had killed someone she wouldn't have needed her music. She could have talked plainly about the world. Clay says he doesn't need to explain his people or defend them. All they need is murder. Clay tells Lula to tell her father to stop preaching rationalism and cold logic to African American people. Instead, let them sing curses in

code and see white people's filth and lack of style. Stop the Christian charity. The African American people may begin to listen to the preaching. One day, they may understand exactly what people like Lula's father are talking about. When they believe, they are accepted and begin to have white trusties, there will be no more blues music. They will become stand-up Western men and they will murder those from this Western culture. They will have rational explanations for it, too.

Lula says she has heard enough. Clays reaches for his books and responds, "I bet you have." Clay is getting off the train. He tells her it looks like they won't be acted out the scene she had described earlier. Lula agrees. Clay leans over her to collect his belongings and says, "Sorry, I don't think we could make it." Lula then stabs Clay twice in the chest. He slumps across her knees. Lula says, "Sorry is right." She turns to the other passengers who have already gotten up form their seats. She screams for them to get Clay off of her. People come to pick up his body. They drag him down the aisle. She tells them to open the door and throw his body out. They throw Clay off the train. Lula straightens up her belongings. She takes a notebook out of her bag, starts making notes, and then drops the book back into her bag. The train stops and Lula tells the other passengers to get off the train. They comply, and Lula is alone on the train.

A young, African American man in his twenties enters the subway car in which Lula is seated. He carries books under his arm as he walks. He sits down a few seats behind Lula. Lula turns and gives the man a long, slow look. An old African American conductor steps into the car. He dances down the aisle and mumbles the words to a song. He looks at the young man, greets him with a smile and the words, "Hey, brother." The young man replies, "Hey," back to the old man. The conductor continues his dance down the aisle. Lula turns to stare at him as he does this. When the conductor passes Lula's seat, he tips his hat to her, then continues to make his way out of the car.

Analysis

Dutchman, by LeRoi Jones, takes place in 1964. Jones tells the story of a chance meeting between and twenty-year-old African American man and a thirty-year-old white woman. The story, which at first seems to describe and amorous encounter between the play's two main characters, Clay and Lula, becomes a surprising tragedy. In this play, Jones expresses the struggle with racist attitudes in America shortly after the Civil Rights movement.

Lula is largely a symbol of these attitudes, a confusing mix of freedom and oppression. At first, Lula's character comes across as liberal. She appears to be quite free-spirited and is even likable as the opening scene unwinds. However, she reveals herself as prejudiced and close-minded. It is implied that Lula is not mentally stable. Her wild behavior and mood swings give the impression that she is crazy. Since by the end of the play she commits murder, and minutes later calmly makes notes in her notebook, it could easily be assumed that Lula is a sociopath. However, Lula's character requires further examination. Her role is filled with greater meaning. She, as a solitary example, symbolizes the whole of white American culture during this period. Her initial attempts to

look beyond race are represented in her attraction to Clay. However, these early impressions quickly give way to intolerance. When Lula recognizes that Clay will not be who she wants him to be, she turns on him, using racist language and offensive mockery as a weapon. This is largely representative of the stifling outdated prejudices throughout America that lurked beneath the surface of politeness and the fazade of tolerance.

Jones uses foreshadowing to reveal Lula's true character. As soon as Lula meets Clay, she assumes she has him pegged, commenting that she knows his "type." Her attraction to the young man also introduces another symbolic aspect to the story; the age difference creates the impression that Clay is Lula's prey. Even before Lula turns on Clay, the idea of Clay being Lula's prey is present, in her reference to seduction.

Clay seems to be just trying to survive. When Lula's attraction turns to intolerance, Clay becomes enraged. The speech he offers implies that this is not the first time he has encountered an experience similar to this. Clay's reaction is also foreshadowed. Early on in the play Lula calls Clay a murderer. His final reaction to Lula is to threaten her with murder. The irony here is that Lula murders Clay. During his speech, Clay says he just wants her to leave him alone. He addresses the American nation, pleading for them to stop filling his people's heads with rationality and cold logic. There is an implication here that they will lose their culture. Clay threatens that turning the African American people into true westerners will be catastrophic. Resentment will still be present. It will lead to violence, but under the tutelage of western culture, the culprits will have cold, logical rationalizations for the bloodshed.

After Lula has murdered Clay and convinced the other passengers on the train to throw his body out of the subway car, another young African American man enters the train. Lula studies his face intently, similarly she watches the elderly African American train conductor as he dances down the aisle. The conductor tips his hat at Lula, a symbolic gesture of mutual acceptance. Little does he know of the horrors she has just committed. This ending ties the overall message of the play together. The unknowing conductor exudes a natural friendliness. His optimistic attitude, represented by his song and dance, can be seen as tragic because he is unaware of the hate that hides within Lula.

Characters

Clay

Clay is a twenty-year-old black man, or, according to Baraka, a Negro man The distinction is that a Negro, according to the playwright' s nominative system, is one who compromises Ins own Identity in order to maintain a peaceful relationship with his white oppressors. Clay is a typical bourgeois black male, so predictably bourgeois that Lula is able to tell his life history by the evidence of Ins dress (a too narrow Suit coat), his demeanor (decorous, tentative), and his style of speech (middle class, intellectual, full of pretensions).

Clay is at first attracted to the sexy, young woman who begins a taunting seduction of him and invites herself along to his friend's party. But her sudden mood swings and unexpectedly violent racist language shock him. Even so, he maddeningly humiliates himself in his attempts to maintain his composure at all costs and to match her violence with intellectual dexterity. For some reason he is intrigued by her, as though she is some kind of social test he desperately wants not to fail. But the sordid truth is that it is Ins very anxiety to prove himself worthy to *her* (white cultural) values that causes him to fail this test. For Clay, who dreamed in college of being a black Baudelaire (a famous French poet), is a member of the black bourgeoisie (upwardly mobile middle class), "just a dirty white man," a white wannabe.

Clay recognizes the compromises he has made, yet shirks from committing the murder of whites that would absolve him of compromise. He takes refuge in the fortress of his words. He warns Lula, however, that the cultural conditioning of blacks could backfire. since they soon may he able to rationalize their murders as whites do. Lula' s symbolic murder of him serves to quiet him, but it is also merely an extreme version of the social murder he submits to in prostituting his manhood by conforming to white values.

Conductor

The old conductor is the stereotypical "Jim Crow" or "Uncle Tom" black character (characters who would often dance and sing to delight whites) who seems content with his lowly station in relation to whites. His quick soft shoe shuffle before exiting the rail car is symbolic of the way blacks expressed their suppressed freedom through artistic forms such as dance, music, and song. Clay, like Baraka, found this sublimation of rage both impotent and self-delusional. But the reality is that. at the play's close. the conductor is alive while Clay is dead.

Lula

The Caucasian Lula is a thirty-year-old femme fatale who alternately seduces and insults Clay. She is a mythical apple-offering Eve to his clumsy and naive Adam. Lula is

the embodiment of western civilization. seductive and ferociously greedy., relentless., but also psychotic. lonely. trapped by her own cultural identity. There is never a sense. as there is with Clay. that a real beating heart lies behind her cultural armor. Instead, she is the mythical all-devouring female, mindlessly dispatching with Clay's manhood (and later his dead body) so that she can attend to her next victim. She is programmed to destroy, she simply follows the path. placing her feet "one in front of the other:'

This process of oppression bores Lula, and she occasionally lapses into a daze and makes morbid comments on her fantasized seduction ("You' II call my rooms black as a grave. You'll say, 'This place is like Juliet's tomb'"). She lets loose strings of racist insults when Clay fails to succumb to her seduction and "rub bellies" with her in a crazy erotic dance. She cannot abide the brutal honesty of Clay's final speech. in which he is finally truthful about his fate and his reluctance to change it. But her irritation only reminds her of her duty, to dispatch with this victim and move on to the next.

Young Negro

Ostensibly Lula's subsequent victim. The young black man of about twenty boards right after Lula and the other passengers throw Clay' s dead body off of the train. Like Clay. he carries some books, indicative of his intellectual ambitions. Like Clay.

Themes

Race and Racism

Racial oppression and racial hatred lie at the heart of *Dutchman* Yet this play is not a simplistic denunciation of racism but rather one long invective against one (in Baraka's view ineffective) solution to racism: assimilation. Clay is a representative of the form of assimilation practiced by many of the black middle class, a pursuit of white values and culture through "white" education. Clay carries a stack of books, and he wears the garb of the well educated Lula seems to hate Clay on sight, explaining that he is a "type" she has seen often. She infers that he has a black friend with a "phony English accent" Clay, she tells him, looks like he is trying to grow a beard and has "been reading Chinese poetry and drinking lukewarm sugarless tea." These are the trappings of the Bohemian intellectual, such as Baraka was himself at the tune he wrote this play.

Lula hates Clay not just because he is black, but because of his obvious attempts to discard his racial heritage. She berates him for ills meek acceptance of assimilation as a desirable goal, saying, "Boy, those narrow-shoulder clothes come from a tradition you ought to feel oppressed by." When she taunts him that his grandfather was a slave who did not go to Harvard, he responds lamely that his grandfather was a night watchman In other words, he tries desperately to distance himself from his slave heritage, even at the cost of remembering that he is black. As he states, he was the one student at a "colored college" whose role model was not Averell Harriman (a white American statesman) but Charles Pierre Baudelaire, a white (French) poet. Clay wants to distinguish himself, but he limits himself to a superficial shift, choosing art over politics.

Clay also falls to recognize the irony that he is as deluded as the other students at the black college, who aspire not to be black leaders but white ones. It is left to Lula to clarify that he would have to be the *black* Baudelaire, and she chides him "I'll bet you never once thought you were a black nigger." Clay's pretension is not about becoming an educated black; he actually seems to aspire to be white or at least to so steep himself in white intellectualism that his color will not matter. Lula reminds him that he is black, and, when she calls him a murderer, it is apparent that it is his black self that he murders.

Violence and Cruelty

Clay steadfastly seeks to maintain his composure in the face of Lula's violent language and cruel reminders of his lowly status in society. The question becomes, how much cruelty will Clay tolerate before he stands up for himself, for the manhood Lula questions? The dramatic irony and symbolic tragedy of the play occurs in its final violence, when Lula stabs a knife into Clay as he reaches for his books to leave her. It is dramatic irony in the sense that he has finally made a stance and shown his manhood, but he falls to recognize that Lula intended all along to destroy him utterly His tragic

ending is symbolic of the violence of white oppression, which regularly murders blacks in both a figurative as well as literal sense. The play's increasing dramatic tension leads to the final act of violence against Clay. In Baraka's value system, Clay deserves this violence for not using a more direct, and violent, means of bettering his life and silencing the likes of Lula.

Passivity

Intersecting the theme of violence and cruelty is the theme of passivity. Clay passively accepts a second-class role in society, a role that by its very definition can never produce excellence because it is a weak copy of the original, white culture. Black assimilation consists of adopting the values and norms of the oppressing society. This passive act of accepting the culture of the dominant power engenders a race of followers, not leaders A black Baudelaire can never surpass Baudelaire's artistry because by adopting both the genre and the criteria for judging it, invention is stymied. The very impetus to invent is destroyed. No leader, political, artistic, or social, can emerge in a copycat society - nothing grows in a stagnant pond. The stagnation of black society in a sterile, white pond can only lead to a downward spiral in imagination, performance, and self-image.

At another level, Clay's passivity exists ill resorting to words instead of action. He responds to Lula's taunts with sophisticated-sounding rebuttals. When he finally erupts in rage, it is apparent that his nonchalance had been a mask.

Sexism

Lula is a mythical, evil Eve, enticing Clay (Adam, who was made of clay) with sexual wiles and murderous intent. Like Eve, she eats and offers apples. In fact, she offers Clay so much of the fruit that he Cannot eat any more. She is the Gorgon/Siren/ fury, the archetypal devouring female. She figuratively emasculates Clay, repeatedly challenging his "manhood" with verbal Jibes; she then physically destroys him and throws his body off of the train. She is a sterile goddess, with hands as "dry as ashes," luring him to her room as "black as a grave," a dwelling that she promises will remind Clay of "Juliet's tomb." She tempts Clay with sexual promise, murders him dispassionately with a quick stab, and then prepares herself for her next victim. She is actually bored by the endless cycle of her role; she has "a gray hair for each year and type" of man she's gone through. Lula belongs to the sisterhood of "Crow Jane," or "Mama Death," Baraka's idea of the siren muse who lures black artists to pervert their black artistry to fit the hollow, sterile criteria of white art.

Style

Allegory

Dutchman's stage directions suggest that the subway is "heaped in modern myth." This phrase alerts the reader to the presence of allegorical meaning. Allegory presents an abstract Idea in the guise of a concrete image and symbolic elements in the work point to the allegorical meaning. Thus the story of Clay and Lula holds more significance than the chance encounter of two individuals on a subway. Clues to the structure of the allegory, which is a kind of extended metaphor that organizes the story, exist in the symbols of the play: the apple, the subway, and the name, "Clay," which seems to refer to Adam, who was made of clay; in this context, Clay is the black everyman.

In *Dutchman,* the key to the allegorical meaning of the relationship between Clay and Lula lies in the relationship between Adam and Eve. Eve (innocently or not, depending upon one's view), seduced Adam (with an apple, a symbolic element of that story) into partaking of forbidden knowledge. Lula seduces Clay sexually, partakes of apples with him, and then forces him to face the knowledge that his cloak of white, bourgeois values masks his social impotence; the knowledge is forbidden to Clay in the sense that it will shatter his illusions. In Baraka' s allegory Lula personifies both white dominance and (Baraka's) disgust for black assimilation, while Clay personifies passive acceptance of low social status by blacks and their blind refuge-taking in the culture of their oppressor.

Symbolism

Symbolic images and names evoke associations that contribute to the meaning of a literary work. In *Dutchman,* the image of the apple, Eve's prop, threads throughout the play. Lula first walks onto the set daintily eating an apple. She offers one to Clay, and then offers more and more of them to him until he refuses another. Her bounty of apples suggests that their evil poison is so pervasive that Clay will never be able to avoid contaminating himself.

The name of the play is also symbolic, referring to the legendary ghost ship the *Flying Dutchman,* doomed to endlessly sail the seas leaving only death in its wake; the title also suggests a connotation to the Dutch slave ships that transported blacks to enslavement. In addition, Clay's name connotes a black Adam, one who is molded by white society, like clay. The accumulation of related symbols and the structure of the relationship between Clay and Lula confirms the significance of this reading.

The setting of *Dutchman* also carries symbolic weight. Baraka drew attention to the importance of the train's symbolism in the stage directions, where he characterizes the subway as "heaped in modern myth." This is a play about the modern myth of black assimilation: limiting oneself to existence on the low-status paths of the "flying underbelly of the city." The entire play takes place in a subterranean universe, a subway

car hurtling towards its destination. The train slows down, stops to let passengers on and off, and then regains speed. There is a sense of movement and progress, but the train is actually repeating the same route over and over. Clay is merely following the "track" of white culture, sensing forward motion but in reality restricted to the underbelly, or lower class, of the thriving city above. Subway trains ferry people back and forth across the city, traveling the same short distances over and over again, following a repetitious daily schedule-the path is cyclical. Likewise, Lula's process of seducing and killing her victims is cyclical. She indicates that she has done this for years and has a "gray hair for each year and type."

Autobiographical Elements

At the time that Baraka wrote *Dutchman,* he was part of the Bohemian literary culture of Greenwich Village (the Beats) and was married to a white woman, with whom he coedited a literary magazine. Like Clay, he grew up in New Jersey and had aspirations as a poet. Baraka's real life was a successful version of Clay's, however; he awoke from his dream of assimilation in time to save himself from his protagonist's fate.

In the play, Clay screams at Lula, "If I'in a middle-class fake white man . . . let me be. And let me be in the way 1 want." Only a year later Baraka would reject his entire white world-wife, children, and all-to start anew, black life in Harlem. To a certain extent, the play can be read as a trial of Baraka's assimilated period, in which he condemns himself through Lula's words and actions. The playwright symbolically kills off his passive, "white" self through this fictional account and is reborn in real life as the hero that Clay refuses (or is unable) to become

Historical Context

Civil Rights in the 1960s

The year of *Dutchman's* debut, 1964, was a tense year in the United States-especially for Civil rights issues. Both violent and nonviolent protests occurred daily in contention of these issues. Although it had been nearly a decade since Rosa Parks, by refusing to vacate her bus seat to a white patron, sparked a series of bus boycotts that led to a wholesale Civil Rights Movement, legalized equal rights for blacks were still denied in practice Sit-ins and other forms of nonviolent resistance took place to protest the reluctance of some businesses, schools, and communities to support the civil rights that had been made law by the Civil Rights Act.

The 1964 Civil Rights Act made provisions for fair voting, use of public facilities, education, and employment practices, essentially abolishing segregation; and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was appointed to ensure that all races had the same opportunities in securing employment. Yet these laws were frequently ignored-especially in southern states such as Alabama and Mississippi. Often, emotions reached such a pitch that riots ensued in major cities (notably Harlem and Philadelphia) where the demographics had shifted to a black majority for the first time in history. These "race riots," in which blacks and whites hurled abuses both verbal and physical, would expand and persist virtually unabated for the next four years.

The summer before *Dutchman* debuted, Martin Luther King made his "I Have a Dream" speech at a civil rights rally in Washington, D.C. Then-president John F. Kennedy attempted to cancel the rally due to the threat of violence. King's protest was peaceful, however, and its success contributed to the enactment of the Civil Rights Acts in 1964. Of particular interest was equity in voting rights. To this end poll taxes, designed to discourage blacks who couldn't afford to vote, were outlawed. Northern civil rights workers often traveled to southern states to monitor elections and ensure that blacks were safe at the voting booths. Three such men traveled to Mississippi in 1964. On their way home, they were ruthlessly beaten and murdered by white supremacists, who were not brought to justice until the 1990s.

Baraka, being apolitical activist as well as a playwright, consciously used art as a means to achieve social justice. He was personally involved in race riots and on one occasion was arrested for the possession of firearms and incitement, although he denied the charge and was later acquitted. His play *Dutchman* participated in the discourse of hatred and violence of the times, taking a strong stand against one segment of the black population: those who attempted to assimilate with white culture at a time when many, Baraka included, felt the need for militant opposition to white oppression.

Black Arts Movement

In the course of defining a new, self-determined black population, blacks eschewed the terms "negro" and "colored" that were associated With racism and oppression and demanded to be called "black" or Afro-American (and later, African American). Both terms affirmed positive aspects over negative ones: intensifying color to the extreme-black-and underscoring the African heritage of former slaves. These two trains of thought merged in the search for a new "black" identity. Styles, language, and values from African cultures were adopted and sometimes freely adapted to formulate the style of the "Afro-American." The phrase "black is beautiful" both acknowledged the aesthetic beauty of the black body and affirmed the value of black culture as the new black aesthetic as well.

Along with this dramatic shift in cultural identity came a shift in the assessment of black art. Although jazz had long been a black musical expression, it was considered more of a craft or practice than an acknowledged art form. Jazz became an art form in its own right, stepping out from the foster parentage of the (white) Bohemian culture. African artifacts became collector's items as art objects rather than as anthropological oddities.

Baraka was at the forefront of the re-evaluation of black and African art forms. He wrote jazz criticism for avant-garde magazines and consciously promoted black artists in music, art, theater, religion, and cultural values by finding avenues to move them into the public forum. He established a community center called *Spirit House* in Newark to disseminate new ideas about black culture. He was the driving force behind what became known as the Black Arts Movement, which celebrated black and African culture, the black body and facial features, and urban and rural black dialects. The Black Arts Movement included the didactic purpose of raising consciousness about black art and culture It was the American counterpart to Negritude, the Caribbean movement to honor the art, music, and language of black culture in that part of the world.

Baraka's own poetry was quite explicit about the reculturizing, political agenda of the Black Arts Movement. In a poem entitled "Black Art" from his 1966 collection *Black Arts* the final lines read, "Let the world be a Black *Poem/* And Let All Black People Speak This Poem/Silently/or LOUD" Baraka was considered the "high priest" of the Black Arts Movement, who, through theater, poetry, essays, and actions carried his message beyond the intellectual elite.

Critical Overview

When *Dutchman* opened in 1964, white audiences hailed Baraka as the new black voice of the American theater. He had suddenly caught the public eye. *Playboy* magazine called him "the most discussed and admired-Negro writer Since James Baldwin." It was ironic that in calling whites to task for their racism, Baraka earned their admiration. Stephen Schneck explained in *Ramparts* that "The blasé New York culture scene was titillated by his maledictions. . . The more he attacked white society, the more white society patronized him. . . . The masochistic vein was a source of hitherto untapped appeal, big box office stuff, and LeRoi Jones was one of the very first to exploit It."

Baraka's fame landed him teaching positions at the State University of New York, Buffalo and Columbia University. Isabel Eberstadt, writing in the *New York Herald Tribune,* called him a "critic, a celebrity. . . a king of the lower East Side.. a Rabid racist, who Hates whites, Hates Negroes. . . Hates intellectuals, Hates liberals" Eberstadt's was a positive review, like many of the early appraisals of the play Others, however, were disturbed by the work's outspokenness. As Baraka continued to work the vein of anti-racist sentiment, the negative appraisal of his work was catalogued into the works that set the standard for literature in America.

Allan Lewis's 1965 book, *American Plays and Playwrights of the Contemporary Theatre,* called *Dutchman* a flawed dramatic structure, an "apostrophe to hate." *Native Sons: A Critical Study of Twentieth Century Negro American Authors,* Edward Margolies's 1968 work assessing twentieth century black literature, called Baraka's rage "monomaniacal obsessions. . ideas tossed together in a whirlpool of hysteria." Many of his critics weighed the play in terms of its dramatic content, measuring against white dramatists who portrayed in-depth characters deep in conflict. Baraka's play was not about individuals but was a parable about society as a whole. John Ferguson, in a 1971 article in *Modem Drama,* expressed concern that "Lula is a symbol, but Clay is a person." Ferguson did recognize the playas a ritual drama, but he assessed It against the norms of classical Greek theater, which is not the genre that Baraka evokes.

Other critics saw the expression of Baraka's artistic anger as genius. In a survey conducted by *Negro Digest* in 1968 among thirty-eight African American writers, Baraka was named "the most promising black writer," "the most Important living black poet," and "the most Important black playwright" in America. According to drama scholar Hugh Nelson in *Educational Theatre Journal,* Baraka's work may contain flaws, but It "has the vital ability to suggest a multiplicity of meanings in a simple and direct action." In 1969, Darwin Turner recognized Baraka's social agenda and its success, writing in *Black American Literature: Poetry,* "Since 1964, Jones has concentrated on the use of literature-poetry and drama especially-as the force of revolution. To this end, he has revised his poetic style to make It more meaningful for community residents who have found little relevance in the traditional formal language of American poetry. His success is evidenced in the extreme popularity of his frequent public readings in community assemblies"

Certainly, Baraka had a profound effect on the black intellectuals of his day. Black playwright Ed Bullins, in an interview in *Negro Digest,* stated that "I didn't really find myself until I saw *Dutchman* That was the great influence on my life. . . . [LeRoi] has changed theater in this country by creating or influencing or whatever he has done to black theater, which will have a great effect on the overall theater of this country." Writer Toni Cade (now Toni Cade Bambara) said that Baraka's plays of 1962-1964 *were* black theater. Poet/playwright Ntozake Shange also acknowledged her debt to Baraka, as did poet Sonia Sonchez and many others. The public acknowledged his artistic leadership in 1970, by electing him to the Black Academy of Arts and Sciences. He enacted, according to Theodore Hudson in *From LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka: The Literary Works,* "a gradual change from a subjective, tentative lyricist to an activist priest-poet" but continually "satirical, inventive in imagery, expressive, consummately in command of language, occasionally lyrical, partial to only a few symbol images (his own), 'profane,' and disdainful of conventions of form and mechanics."

The seventies marked a turning point in critical work on Baraka's output, seeing a handful of serious scholarly works published about him, notably Hudson's work and Werner Sollors' *s Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones: The Quest for a "Populist Modernism* "Lloyd Brown's 1980 volume on Baraka in the Twayne author series describes him as worthwhile not for his artistic merit, which he considers burdened with a certain amount of "intellectual flabbiness," but for his politically involved art. "He is a political weather vane." Supporters still steadfastly honored his contribution as an artist. C. W. E. Bigsby, writing in *The Second Black Renaissance: Essays in Black Literature,* called him "the most Important black writer of the 1960s."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Hamilton is an English teacher at Cary Academy, an innovative private school in Cary, North Carolina. In this essay she discusses Baraka' s concept of the "Revolutionary Theatre" as it applies to his early play, Dutchman.

A 1969 television interview WIth Baraka conducted by David Frost (on the syndicated program *The David Frost Show)* became heated and confrontational; Baraka clearly represented a threat (Frost introduced him as a "provocative gentleman") to white society and his message of self-determination for blacks was misunderstood as white hatred. From the beginning of the interview, when Frost asked Baraka if his play *Slave Ship* is a "Get Whitey" play, Frost seemed to expect a battle from Baraka. He got one, and in the process missed Baraka's key point: that the playwright's quarrel was not with white individuals, but with a white culture that does not recognize blacks. At the close of the interview, Frost got in the last word but failed to realize that Baraka had achieved his goal: to reach the black audience, not to convince the white interviewer. The final words of their verbal boxing match follow. Frost had just accused Baraka of being too extreme, of offending white people, and he compared Baraka to others interviewed on his program:

Frost: I have had people on this stage the Jesse Jackson and Billy Taylor, people who have made a great deal of sense making the points you have made, and doing so without . . .
Baraka: Let that be defined by your ability to understand what the world is about You do not know, finally, what we are talking about We are trying to use fins media as a way to get to our own people. What you impose is in opposition to the truth. You don't understand. .. What is important to me is the ability to talk to black people, not the ability to make you understand Do you understand that? [Applause.]

Frost: Yes, absolutely But, on the other hand, what I was trying to say involved two things . .
Baraka: You're trying to grade my paper. You're trying to tell me I wasn't as good as Jesse Jackson or Billy Taylor.
Frost: Right.
Baraka: Yeah, but *who* wants to hear that?
[Laughter. Applause.]
Frost: I'll take that, yes. Seven out of ten for LeRoi Jones

Besides the apparent animosity in the interview, Frost misunderstood Baraka's aim to discuss the need for a self-determined black population. In fact, instead of listening to and hearing Baraka, Frost treated him like a child, like one who should be admonished for behaving inappropriately. His demeanor towards Baraka simply reinforced Baraka' s point: that white Americans feel privileges to judge and to condemn blacks according to a value system to which they alone hold the key. To Frost, Baraka was a madman, someone who simply made no sense. Baraka often faced this kind of assessment of his

speech and writings, not because he was actually mad or incoherent, but because his mode of discussion did not fit into the prevailing and accepted (white) discourse, or way of communicating.

French philosopher Michel Foucault considered the control over discourse to be one of the key functions that protect the power (usually dictatorial in nature) of a society. Each society has rules and conventions that exclude the kind of discourse that would threaten its hold on power. Society will often define as mad those whose speech and actions do not conform to the standards and conventions of acceptable messages and modes of behavior. Defining nonconformists as mad makes it easier to ignore them, even to lock them up or have them "cured" by psychologists. "Madness" can run the gamut from complete incoherence to actions or speech that are merely unconventional (and therefore often threatening to "normal" society).

Baraka was often characterized as "out of step" with the rest of society-full of unprovoked, illogical anger. Why did he not follow the pacifist road of Martin Luther King, or, as one interviewer asked him, stick to his poetry and leave politics alone? The anger and hatred expressed in his plays, which became more virulent after *Dutchman,* disturbed audiences white and black. Critics accused him of moving away from "legitimate" theater into radical politics. Oddly enough, societies also tend to attribute strange prophetic powers to the "mad," assuming that if one can separate the mere "noise" of the mad person from the "truth," then the lunatic may carry a legitimate message. Baraka was the madman, whose "strange" anger seems less strange after three decades. His perspective and his mode of discourse have been absorbed into the culture, and some of the changes for which he called, though by no means all, have been instilled in the culture as well.

Culture consists of the norms and ideals of society-its way of behaving, speaking, and expressing spiritual concepts. The youth of society are trained (both in and out of school) and indoctrinated into the society's mode of behaving, into being able to participate in the discourse of society, so that the person can function effectively, without being considered "mad." Cultural anthropologist Edward Said pointed out that controlling how its members act is one of the key functions of a society. It does so by encouraging some kinds of behavior and discourse and discouraging others. Said explained that one of the "possessions" of culture is the power to define and endorse certain practices. There are ranks and levels in society, and the way that one demonstrates one's rank or status is to practice the discourse of the rank in which one belongs. . . or wants to belong.

In *Dutchman,* Clay has sought his education in the discourse of white society: he has been "molded" by it, like clay. He displays his newly learned skill when he banters politely With Lula, Since polite banter is one of the earmarks of the fully sophisticated member of intellectual American society. He tres to ignore her hostile remarks, because hostile remarks are not acceptable in sophisticated society, and because Lula is attractive to him and he wants to impress her. One could say that he has been "trained" to find her attractive and to think that "winning" someone like her would increase his social status. Clay is a tragic figure because his passive acceptance of her verbal abuse

leads inevitably to his murder. and it is his cultural training that has made him a tragic "type."'

As Baraka explained in an interview quoted in *Conversations with* Amiri *Baraka,* Clay's tragic flaw is his passivity; "He should be resisting that type of murder."' Clay commits the crime that Baraka (in his 1962 essay. "The Myth of a 'Negro Literature',") condemned black artists *for* committing: being content "to cultivate *any* mediocrity, as long as that mediocrity was guaranteed to prove to America. .. that they were not really who they were. i. e.. Negroes."

Baraka fought such an urge to mediocrity on many fronts-with his poetry, essays. and drama as well as through his political activities in black communities. Of these agendas, he considered the theater the most effective means, because it addressed the widest audience. including culturally ignorant blacks. In an essay called "The Revolutionary Theatre." he says that "what we show them must cause the blood to rush. . . cause their deepest souls to move." Furthermore, "The Revolutionary Theatre, which is now peopled with victims, will soon be peopled with new k1nds of heroes-not weak Hamlets debating whether or not they are ready to die for what's on their minds, but men and women (and minds) digging out from under a thousand years of 'high art' and weak-faced dalliance."

Tins weak-faced dalliance is what the black bourgeoisie mistakenly adopted as they sought a way into cultured (white) society. Clay represents that form of foolishness, with his bookish pretensions and "narrow-shouldered" coat, a coat that does not fit Ins body. Clay wants to hide behind a mask of culture and to fit his body and mind into the image that white culture dictates. When Lula's taunts finally break through his controlled resistance, he shocks her, and himself, with Ins own hostility, yet it has been lurking there beneath the mask. He blurts out, "Just murder would make us sane." But his own hostility surprises him, he has been trained to abhor hostility, and he recants, saying that no, he would rather not 10.11 but be "safe with my words, and no deaths." His retreat is his tragic flaw. He fails to struggle as Baraka intends to struggle.

During an interview (reprinted in *Conversations)* following the debut of *Dutchman,* Baraka was asked why not just stick to poetry? Citing the immediacy and potential reach of drama, he answered, "You have to be involved, whether you say you are or not. I'in black. I have to be involved. When I walk down the street, a man doesn't say,

'There goes a cultured nigger.' He says, 'There's Just another nigger.'" By this statement Baraka reveals the plight of the black in America, who is doomed no matter how much he absorbs of white culture. Furthermore, not realizing the futility of this mode of being, blacks attempting to assimilate must continually strive to accomplish what can never be achieved-to be completely accepted into white culture.

Against tins bleak future, the Black Arts Movement proposed a startling alternative: to raise black culture up, to transform the perception of blacks to one in which black language, body Image, and culture were beautiful. This "black is beautiful" movement in and of itself posed no real threat to white America. But Baraka had insight into the ways

that culture changes, he knew that no real change occurs without revolution. To those who suggested nonviolent change, Baraka reminded them that changing themselves would not change the American system. The American culture allowed people to exist in social castes; its businesses took advantage of the masses of working poor.

In Ins essay, "The Last Days of the American Empire," Baraka explains that to change themselves without affecting white society would simply not do; It would feed into the oppressive, white program He felt that what liberal whites wanted was for the "black man somehow to be 'elevated' Martin Luther King style so that he might be able to enter this society . . . and Join the white man in a truly democratic defense of this cancer, which would make the black man equally culpable for the evil done to the rest of the world." Baraka objected to this easy way out because it supported an unacceptable status quo a society that takes advantage of its people must be destroyed. His plays were vehicles to convince black audiences that only a total destruction of the white American way would change their status. *Dutchman* served tins end, and the plays that followed it made his point with more and more clarity and vehemence.

With an agenda of destroying white culture, why, then, does the play *Dutchman* end with Clay's murder instead of with Clay murdering Lula? Why not illustrate the revolution in success instead of chronicling one more failure to affect change? The answer lies in Baraka's purpose for Revolutionary Theatre. His drama, like his poetry, is designed to "raise up/return, destroy, and create" (in the words of his poem, "Ka'Ba.") He wanted to "make an art that [would] call down the actual wrath of the world Spirit." It was angry theater, designed to move his black audiences to action.

Baraka's was an effective, cleansing theater. Not only did it inspire his audiences to pursue political and social change, it also irretrievably changed the heart and purpose of American theater. At least as far as race goes. Ironically, latter-day productions of *Dutchman* were suppressed for a (superficially) different reason: some complained that the play has too many "dirty" words in it. As Baraka said in a 1991 interview, "When you think about it, they are really throwing *Dutchman* off the train, aren't they?"

Source: Carole Hamilton for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 1998

Critical Essay #2

In this article, Ralph offers another meaning for the title of Jones's play, one that has a meaning more directly rooted in the vocabulary of theatre and one that bears considerable significance to the events that transpire between Lula and Clay.

The relation of LeRoi Jones's careening subway car in *Dutchman* to two "Dutchman" ocean vessels - the legendary ghost ship *Flying Dutchman* and a slave ship of the Dutch East India Company-has been amply explicated. It is likely, however, that a further, purely theatrical reference may be intended. In stage practice the "Dutchman" is a narrow band of muslin glued vertically onto two adjoining flats to give the appearance of a solid wall. In point of fact, little effort is required to pull the flats apart, breaking the "wall" and dispelling the illusion of solidarity.

Jones's set description indicates that an obviously flimsy theatricality is appropriate in the design of the subway car itself. "Or paste the lights, as admitted props, right on the subway windows," etc. Further, as metaphor, "Dutchman" in its stagecraft function Images the meretricious facade of civility and potential symbiosis in Clay and Lula' s relationship. Both parties contribute to sustaining the false commonality. In its initial design, this commonality is the construct of white society: Lula. Sherley Anne Williams describes Lula's mastery of the situation in terms of ". . . her insistence that Clay conform to her view of him which brings about the outburst which leads to his death." But complicity in the form of employing the racial pseudo-accord as a disguise is the product of black culture: Clay. That is, ". . . the survival of the Black man in America . . . is predicated upon his ability to keep his thoughts and his true identity hidden."

The rending of the veneer, the Dutchman, to reveal the irreparable breach is the climactic point of the drama. Goaded finally into abandoning his middle-class white-society guise, Clay exclaims that Lula cannot possibly know or identify With his experience, his being, his blackness. He proceeds to unburden himself in a vitriolic and impassioned diatribe against Lula and her kind But she holds the knife. And, as she has established the terms of maintaining the deceptive Dutchman, so it is she who calls for its laceration. She responds to Clay's verbal violence With "I've heard enough," and stabs him in the chest. She completes the gesture of rupture in her command to the other subway passengers: "Get this man off me !"

Jones's view of American social history suggests that such a "Dutchman" has been imposed by whites, in that". . . even the most liberal white man in America does not want to see the existing system really *changed."* As in *Dutchman's* subway, so in real-life America: the insubstantial, sham "Dutchman" must be ripped apart. The only question is what side determines the time, method, and outcome. Jones has specified-in an essay written shortly after *Dutchman's* premiere performance that the "revolutionary theatre" is to facilitate the tearing of this artificial social fabric His play's "Dutchman" metaphor, then, can be seen as adumbrating both the task of a socially conscious theater and the future of American racist society.

Source: George Ralph, "Jones's *Dutchman"* ill the *Explicator,* Volume 43, no 2, Winter, 1985, p 58.

Critical Essay #3

In this excerpt, Nelson compares Jones's play to the legend of the flying Dutchman. He also explains how the playwright employs facets of the legend to create both modern myth and contemporary truth.

Leroi Jones describes the setting for his short play, *Dutchman,* with a significant metaphor: "In the flying underbelly of the city. Steaming hot, and summer on top, outside. Underground. The subway heaped in modem myth." The play's title supplemented by these provocative hints and allusions would lead one to believe that the action might be illuminated by examining It in terms of the various renderings of the legend of "the Flying Dutchman." It is my feeling that Jones has made complex use of the "Dutchman" theme in converting it into modem myth. The two major figures, Clay and Lula, are not the colorless characters of allegory; their symbolic relationship as revealed by the "Flying Dutchman" legend is as powerfully ambiguous as their dramatic relationship in a human context.

The legend first appears in literature in Sir Walter Scott's *Rokeby* where the source of the curse which dooms ship and crew to endless voyage is given as a horrible murder committed on board.

Scott provides a plausible explanation for the ship's wanderings in the form of a plague which breaks out among the crew following the murder, making the vessel unwelcome in any port of call. Captain Marryat's novel, *The Phantom Ship* (1839), adds a son seeking his father, the doomed captain Richard Wagner's *Der Fliegende Hollander* (1843) makes some rather more significant additions and alterations The curse in this case has been imposed by an angry Deity as a result of the Captain's presumption in swearing an oath to round the Cape even If It should take him an eternity to do so. The curse can be lifted only if the Captain finds a wife who is willing to sacrifice everything in his behalf through the purity of her love for him. In order to provide for this possibility, he is granted several days every seven years to search for such a maiden on dry land.

Wagner's libretto centers around the Captain's discovery of such a maiden, his joy in her pledge of devotion to him, and his mistaken belief that she has been false to him. The curse is finally lifted when Senta, the maiden, leaps into the sea from a cliff in order to display her faithfulness; the ship sinks immediately and Senta and the Dutchman are seen flying up from the sea together to an appropriately epiphanic accompaniment in the orchestra.

It is clear that Jones' subway car bears more than a superficial resemblance to "the Flying Dutchman" and its doomed crew He has set the first half of his play in a subway car empty but for the two central figures; during the second scene, other passengers file in gradually until, at the play's climax, the car is full. The empty car and the full car are both necessary to the play. The private drama becomes a public ritual. Without the drama, the ritual would be meaningless while the ritual adds a new and important dimension to the drama.

As a setting for a ritual murder, the New York subway needs no symbolic reinforcement, as recent subway violence clearly indicates. As the "underbelly" of the City, It is a place of darkness and potential danger, lonely, beyond recourse, crowded with humanity but massively impersonal. As an underground, it has almost automatic associations with the mysterious depths of body, mind, and society: with the physiological world of digestive and excretory processes, WIth the psychological world of suppressed wishes always threatening to erupt, and with the sociological "melting-pot" (in Jones' vision more a cauldron of discrete substances which will not mix) from which the subway draws its hot cargo and into which it throws it back again.

The "Dutchman" image, however, if we take it seriously, draws attention to certain specific qualities of the subway. Like the doomed ship, it seems to operate either senselessly or according to some diabolical plan. It goes nowhere, never emerges from its darkness; reaching one terminus, it reverses Itself and speeds back towards the other with brief pauses at identical stations rescued from anonymity only by a slightly different arrangement of defaced posters, bodies, and turnstiles. The doors open and shut mechanically. Anonymous men behind barred windows push identical tokens towards equally anonymous travelers. The subway is in fact a marvelous sample of the autonomy of the inanimate which confronts us everywhere in our mechanized society. Just as primitive man created myth to explain satisfactorily the apparent irrationality of nature, so his modem-day counter-part, the City dweller, begins to feel again the need for myth to explain his own demonic and seemingly equally irrational inventions and artifacts. Thus, the subway in Jones' metaphor becomes a doomed ship under the control of an irremediable curse

The same mechanism makes it possible to consider the passengers as the crew of this ship The fact that they are not present in the opening scene and, more Important, the fact that even when present they do not speak, makes them seem as unreal as the ghosts who walked the Flying Dutchman's decks. As a crew, they have no tasks, for their craft maneuvers through its tunnels without any need of their assistance. Though wraithlike, they do however exhibit intention through their hostility towards Clay and their role as Lula's accomplices. That they are or at least become accomplices is clear, and this leads to the next stage of the comparison If the passengers are a species of crew then It is Lula and not Clay who is their captain. This relates her rather than Clay to the figure of the Dutchman.

This is a surprising discovery. If the "Dutchman" metaphor does in fact filter down to the level of character, then it is Clay, the Negro, whom we would expect to fill the symbolic role of the Captain. As a Negro, he lives under an automatic curse in a white society which, in Jones' view, promises to lift the curse only if he sacrifices his identity and converts his values to those of a materialistic and rationalistic culture. Working from the Wagnerian version of the legend, Lula would be the maiden through whom and in whom he can find release if she will love him and give herself to him totally. Jones' conclusion would then display the failure of any such redeeming love, and the inevitability of racial hatred and vengeance culminating in the murder of a victim. Clay is released from his curse only through death, and the cycle begins to repeat itself as Lula confronts her next victim in the play's final moments. . . .

Source: Hugh Nelson, "LeRoi Jones' *Dutchman:* A Brief Ride on a Doomed Ship," in *Educational Theatre Journal,* Volume XX, no. I, March, 1968, pp. 53-59.

Adaptations

Anthony Harvey directed a film version of *Dutchman* in 1967 that received little attention and played lightly at small theaters for a brief period. Al Freeman, Jr. played Clay and Shirley Knight portrayed Lula. Produced by Kaitlin Productions, Ltd. in association with the Dutchman Film Company. Available from San Francisco, California Newsreels.

Topics for Further Study

Ironically, when Baraka moved *Dutchman* to a Harlem theater in order to reach a black audience, the play was quickly rejected by the audiences because they saw it as promoting hatred of whites. Is this a racist, white-hating play?

Clay's reaction to Lula is infuriating because he desperately tries to maintain his composure, his "mask" of bourgeois pretensions, in the face of her ever-more vitriolic racist jibes. Why doesn't he simply ignore her, move to another seat, or ask her to leave him alone? What is the significance of his "fatal attraction" to her?

When Clay finally reacts in outrage. his outburst proves cathartic to the audience as well as to himself. Aristotle in his *Poetics* suggested that catharsis is the objective of all tragedy that feelings of pity and fear raised in the audience would be purged by the resolution of the tragedy. Over time, critics have debated what Aristotle meant by catharsis. Is it that the audience learns vicariously to avoid the problems that led to the downfall of the tragic hero? Is it that the balance of the audience's own emotions of pity and fear is restored through Vicariously watching them resolved in the tragic hero? Or is it that the tragic hero serves as a scapegoat for feelings too strong for the audience to admit? Which of these readings seems to fit the cathartic experience of Baraka's emotionally demanding play?

In *Dutchman,* Baraka suggests that Clay's pursuit of assimilation with American bourgeois culture, in the form of his intellectual pretensions, is a path of self-destruction Baraka suggests an alternative: to develop a separate black value system and a new black aesthetic. He purposely built theaters and community centers to promote the cultural ideas of the Black Arts Movement. From a modem perspective, in what ways has this cultural and aesthetic movement of the 1960s succeeded? In what ways has it failed?

Compare and Contrast

1964: Tension over racism is at a peak, with numerous protests occurring in major urban centers. The 1964 Civil Rights Act is flagrantly ignored by many southern businesses, schools, and local governments. Although blacks now hold the same voting, working, and educational privileges as white Americans, they are sometimes actively (and illegally) barred from accessing these rights. The summer of 1964 is named "Freedom Summer" for the number of staged protest demonstrations that take place across the country in support of Civil Rights.

Today: Minorities are assured their legal rights as United States citizens. Schools, voting places, and businesses are vigilant in upholding civil rights laws.

1964: The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is first established in 1964 to serve as a "watchdog" to assure that employers do not discriminate in hiring practices because of race, age, or gender. In 1965 President Johnson extends the reach of Equal Opportunity with an executive order for Affirmative Action requiring the active recruitment of minorities in employment and education.

Today: Some Americans want to do away with Affirmative Action, suggesting that it encourages reverse discrimination and that the advances made in equal opportunity over the past thirty years render Affirmative Action unnecessary. Opponents to California Proposition 209 insist that Affirmative Action should remain in place to combat the "glass ceiling" of unequal pay and status that still afflicts minorities and women in the job market.

1964: Race riots are widespread, with armed groups of whites and blacks openly fighting in the streets of urban areas such as Philadelphia and Harlem. On several occasions, the National Guard is called in to restore the peace. Race riots will occur in major cities such as Watts and Detroit over the next few years as the United States comes to terms with the implementation of the Civil Rights Acts.

Today: While race riots are now rare, in 1992, three days of violent rioting ensued in Los Angeles after the acquittal of four policeman who were videotaped beating a black man, Rodney King, during a routine traffic arrest. Once again, the National Guard had to be called in to restore peace, and property damage mounted to millions of dollars. This incident awakened Americans to the fact that discrimination in police forces and other bureaucratic agencies continues to plague minority Americans. In 1997, a poll reported that over two-thirds of Los Angeles's residents still consider race relations problematic

What Do I Read Next?

The Baraka play published with *Dutchman* is called *The Slave.* It is a fable loosely based on Baraka's former marriage to a white woman that exposes the latent racism of liberal whites. HIS 1969 play *Slave Ship* moves away from the traditional American dramatic structure to the pageantry of African drama. It portrays the total "sense" experience of coming to America on a slave ship.

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* explores the emptiness of the assimilationist dream. The novel's protagonist discovers not only that his black skin makes him an invisible member of American society but that black leaders and educators actually encourage him to deny his heritage and make himself even more invisible.

Black feminist playwright Ntozake Shange expressed her debt to Baraka's innovations in language and social revolution in the new black theater. Her 1975 play, *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf,* portrays the plight of black women, doubly oppressed by whites and by black males, in a dramatic production that combines dance, music, poetry, and improvisation fused together into a new genre she calls the "chore poem."

Randall Dudley's 1969 poem "Booker T. and W. E. B." describes the schism between assimilations thought, represented by Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois, and more ambitious efforts to improve the status of blacks in America.

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Harris, William J *The Poetry and Poetics of Amiri Baraka The Jazz Aesthetic,* University of Missouri Press, 1985 Finds traces of Jazz elements in Baraka's poetic output.

Lacey, Henry C *To Raise, Destroy, and Create: The Poetry, Drama, and Fiction of Imamu Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones),* Whitson, 1981.

An explication of many of Baraka' s works as they fit into an assessment of his development as an artist

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Explains the dynamics of the form of domination that occurs within the culture of societies, the form of domination that Baraka sought to rectify.

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Introduction

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The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

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The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

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- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
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- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
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□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

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When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

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Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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