



African American Identity in Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*

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Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) is one of the prominent Black writers who have evolved in the American literary arena in recent years and whose writings are briefed by an impression of moral pressure and a disturbed consciousness caused by over three centuries of brutal treatment and degradation which displays the crux of the Blacks' history in America.

There are several outlooks of racism with various views and for a number of racist notions; racial phenomena are used basically to describe in retrospect the state of failure into which the white race has seemingly collapsed. This sort of racist belief is part of "decadence theory" and belongs with other fairly pessimistic insights. Current issues are regarded as because of the domination of the white races by races of colour. This causality is presented either as an irrevocable faith or as a peril that has already started to happen.

After a period of struggle, the black people in America should incorporate their protests and feelings in psyche, keep their sentiments oppressed and come to terms with the realities of the new world. Though gradually, they have to passively admit the new role in the new atmosphere. This process of reconciliation is nearly achieved by the second and third generations of slaves. Efforts to look after their culture, faith and identity are quite uncommon now. Because now they have lost their African identity distinguished by high moral norms and self-esteem come to terms with the new conditions. The new identity is neither of their African forefathers nor of their white slave masters.

Baraka seems to base black identity basically on shared cultural traits. In this context, a nationalist culture is fabricated to avoid deculturation, historic amnesia, and to bear cultural mummification in an attempt to build a "libratory, non-repressed identity" (62-76) says Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*. Thus, the declaration of black cultural individuality becomes a need imposed by an emergent cultural identity. The cultural turns out to be a designator of the newly born black entity.

Indeed, Baraka determines to adjust this coming black entity following the American model of nation-building. In America, white people have become an identity, a race and a nation. It becomes wholly legal for blacks to lay the first bricks of a black entity with its idiosyncratic identity and culture.

Baraka is a man of many shades. As a productive author of poetry, essays, music criticism, fiction and plays, he has had a powerful effect on American creative authors, specifically black poets and dramatists. In his writing he appears to have moved through phases of black self-consciousness from a basically westernized world-view to hostility against black and white enemies, to a commitment to programmed socio-political growth of black people. "In America, white people have become a nation, an identity, a race" (246) Baraka contends, cited by Anthony B Pinn in *By These Hands: A Documentary History of African American Humanism*. It becomes wholly legal for blacks to lay with its idiosyncratic identity and culture.

The autobiography of Baraka proposes that the reversion of white identity and white-black relationships is basic define certain sorts of black identity and political force. That is, the personal and cultural failure to embody and create a new, actively anti-racist means of being white is a necessary delay in order to strengthen and recreate African-American identity.

The phenomenal drama of Baraka, *Dutchman* (1964) presents the painful dilemma of the American Black as described by the agonizing experience of a twenty-year old middle-class Negro, Clay in resisting the effort of a thirty-year old White woman, Lula to beguile him in a metro using arguments reminiscent of Satan and Eve rolled into one, which ends in his being ritualistically killed by Lula. *Dutchman* is remaining still one of the very outrageous American plays of the post-modern age. It triggers questions here about gender and race. A short one-act, *Dutchman* echoes the factors of gender and race through Lula, a gorgeous and white woman and Clay, a young African American guy.

Baraka writes it while in thrall to black separatism and it remains that the singular cultural symbol of movement. A few months before *Dutchman* is staged, Malcom X has lectured his popular public address "The Chickens Come Home to Roost," in which he ridiculed the duty of civil rights leader and predicted that the white majority would face destructive consequences, poured down from the heavens, if it did not redeem for the sins of slavery. White America is a "She." And so it is in *Dutchman*, which correlates racism and the maladies of the consumerist attitude to a sexually gluttonous lady. The entire scene of the drama play takes place inside a subway car where a conversation between a gaily loose blonde of about thirty, Lula and a quietly dressed young black guy, Clay rises from surreally unrestricted flirtation to violence and tragedy as all of the attempts of Clay towards absorption are fared to be for nothing.

Dutchman is an important drama not only at a specific moment in the twentieth century American culture but also progressively in the politicized life of Baraka. The original run coincided with the intensification of the civil rights movement. The drama's abrupt evolution on the scene aided to show the uncertainty in American race relationships that would quickly explode in angry outbreaks in the cities nationwide, while establishing Baraka, to both good and occasionally harmful and dogmatic impact in African American literature.

Dutchman is a passionately charged and extremely symbolic version of the Adam and Eve myth, wherein a native middle-class black man is killed by a crazy and devious white vamp, who is cruelly advancing for her next victim as the play closes. The passionately taught, intellectual verbal fencing between Lula and Clay spirals decisively to the symbolic action of violence that will evidently replay itself over and over again.

Throughout the drama, *Dutchman*, Lula asks that she knows Clay, knows his type, although they have just met. In fact, Lula does know matters about Clay, and this is because until the end of the play, Clay is second-rate middle class portrait of Black America that Baraka so denies. Clay is passive for the whole drama, allowing Lula call him names without protest, and snub him without any reaction. "In college I thought I was Baudelaire. But I've slowed down since I bet you never once thought you were a black nigger" (19). Clay is, at this juncture, everything Baraka stands against. He gets his allotted place in the world and does nothing to fight it. Yet, when Clay stands up for himself in his soliloquy at the closure of the drama, he becomes the paradigm of Baraka: Thus, if he desired to allow his valid cultural tradition should have done it by using the whole gamut of the American understanding from the viewpoint of the emotional history of the black man in America as its victim and its chronicler.

Baraka presents Lula as sexually advancing. She ogles at Clay through the subway ventilator until he sees her. Lula accepts, "I even got into this train, going some other way than mine, walked down the aisle... Searching you out" (7) Lula starts an affirming conversation with Clay about his identity and manhood. She welcomes Clay to her tenement stairway. Baraka puns on the forbidden fruit myth with Lula and her apples: "And with my apple-eating I push open the door and lead you, my tender big eyed prey, into my... god, what can I call it... Into my hove!" (24) The white female historically has been the forbidden fruit and the purported sexual victim of black males; Baraka surprises the stereotype, presenting Clay as the sexual prey and Lula as the opportunist.

Baraka appears to be citing the belief that death is inescapable to a black man that starts sexually engaged with a White woman. Clay starts by liking Lula and then cursing by the closure of the play. The charm the black male senses toward the white female as a seductive but forbidden sex object. For the more rebellious black man, the mindset toward the white woman frequently becomes an uncertain fuse of attraction-repulsion. This could be due to the substance of manhood and real liberation to simply be a man and not a black man is somehow linked to the liberation to be sexually engaged with any woman of his option. In another terms, he is not forbidden to seduce any woman because she is a symbol of the racial hierarchy that has historically banned the black man from being sexually engaged with white woman symbolises.

Lula recounted that she lives in her apartment above a lot of Italians and lying Americans. Baraka gives citation to lies that have been historically found against African American in America carrying incapacitating stereotypes. Lula emphasised Clay "I lie a lot. It helps me control the world" (7). Baraka portrays the notion of white women deceitfully blaming black men of rape, which in turn provoked fatal action by white men against black men. He claims Lula as the hunter, deviating from the myth of black men hunting white women for sex. Giving Clay an apple from her bag, Lula tells, "Eating apples together is always the first step" (11).

It is the first phase of the seduction of Lula of black men. She questions Clay whether he likes to get involved with her calling him "Mister Man," and "Boy" both racial terms. Clay tells he would be an idiot not to get involved with Lula. Sadly time validates in other way as the blunt rendezvous of Clay with Lula concludes tragically. Lula makes it clear to Clay that she has several lovers and welcomes them to her tenement. Lula may very well be backing herself with whoredom which is an accepted lifestyle for some women residing in apartments. If this is real, then Baraka revises the image of the chaste white woman as other authors do.

Baraka damages the pristine image by presenting Lula as sexually aggressive toward Clay and by portraying her as a killer in the end. The untamed White lady is the conversed image of the bizarre blacks the Europeans portrayed. Baraka

intentionally reverses images forged by the white media for particular political ends; likewise, he switches images of loved things into despised ones.

Dutchman crowns in an onstage performance apparently born of racist and misogynist fears deep-rooted in the American cultural imaginary engrossed in a subway, White Lula kills black Clay. On one of the more clear levels within the drama, she is a walking signal, so to speak, of the danger that the very idea of white womanhood in history and myth has stated to the mental, political and physical survival of black men.

In the American culture imaginary a white woman in tangible or intangible closeness to a black man implies that some death, figurative or literal is impending. But the behaviour of Lula is inhuman not solely because it is killing but because she is totally absent. The killing is a bizarre one for this made by someone who does not remain: in the first scene of *Dutchman*, Lula tells Clay that, "I'm nothing, honey and don't you ever forget it" (19). This comment is, possibly, in the own words of Lula, "The rarest thing" that she states in the drama's often stichomythic exchange of contradiction and negations.

Asserting of the consciousness of Baraka of the commodified fetishization that is the approved position of white womanhood within the American optical economy the drama comprehends representations through her theatrical presence as Baraka observed that the white woman is accustomed exhibit just about everything in America: atomic bombs, detergents, furniture - you name it. This profusion admits the white Lula to be read together as both Eve and Lilith, a drug-adult waif, a Beat poet, an angel come to redeem Clay from himself, the brutally methodical executor of black (male) genocide, and a black nationalist who murders a middle-class black man who functionally, is nothing more than as Lula states a filthy white man.

In brief, Baraka's Lula symbolises mostly everything excluding herself, her white woman's visible presence serving as the open field upon which the dramatist imprints the complications of this specific phase in his own political creative advancement.

Dutchman's initial stage direction seeks a production that immediately emphasizes the visible nothingness of the woman who will be Lula. In an interview with Charlie Reilly, Baraka reveals that his model for Lula is a "whacked out white woman whom I met during my early village days" (257). This white woman, he reminds, is something who has been in and out of psychiatric hospitals in and out of the communist party, and she would always be murmuring bizarre things about bosses and fascists and whatever within *Dutchman*, this white woman kind of being at once "in" and "out" of ideas and places, literally neither "here" nor "there" starts with that starting conversation of looks through the subway ventilator.

As the madness of Lula intensifies, Clay increasingly becomes "embarrassed," Baraka's term for the persistent discord that the actions of Lula now push Clay to encounter intensely. From the opening, *Dutchman* has proposed that Clay possesses but does not yet manifest an accurately native racial self-awareness. The factor that the initial stage directions of Baraka define the smile of Clay as lacking of self-awareness proposes not that the man has 'no' self but rather that what Baraka views as his real black male consciousness is darkened by the explanation of a kind of fake consciousness that drives him to act, as Lula found later, "dirty white man" longing after a white woman.

At the opening and closure of his last speech, Clay apparently concurs to his middle-class absorbent ambitions, ambitions that are illustrated first as an ambition to be left alone by Lula and all she signifies and last as an outcome of exhaustion. But within the middle - the part of process, the part recited madly through clenched teeth Clay becomes and works what Baraka regards the true black heart. It is here that the theatrically unseen figure and theory of the black woman evolves as guide to both disconnecting from the malady of white society and creating a black nationalism, a notion empowered by another racial misogyny that is all about establishing and enduring, to lend Baraka's own phrase "a race, a culture, a nation" (34).

Lula sees Clay's eye through the subway train ventilator and then meets him. At the outset Clay reacts to the sexuality of her remarks. The attitude of Lula becomes even more aggravating, exhibiting her racial suppression and gender outlooks, with all commuters, both white and black. Lula starts to snub him and claims that he assert himself unable to take anymore, Clay beats her and pushes her down into the seat. It is what the black man does in order to avoid killing whitey Lula's reaction is to stab Clay to death. The white and black commuters, at Lula's direction, flip him off the train and alight at the next station. It is alluring that Baraka takes a boyhood incident in which a white person is a victim and, keeping the crucial action indeed reverses the races of victim and suppressor in the drama.

Within the structure of *Dutchman*, Baraka intertwines an allegory of the challenge between liberal blacks and whites in American society. He advances the belief of the hopelessness of true, positive human relationship between individuals of the two races and the disappointment emerging from the human commitment on both sides to make such interracial rapport. The villain is American society, which forms impervious hurdles to the fulfilment of this commitment. It is the racism which reveals a real integration between individuals of the two races.

Baraka had moved even further back in time to the history of Africans capturing and selling Africans to the white traders his theme would be reinforced. Such a detail would present whole tribes enslaving and selling other tribes. Baraka primarily interested in established the guild in these individual blacks who conspired with the white enemy.

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