

## White Violence and Black Response: A Study of Amiri Baraka's Dutchman and The Slave

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### □ ABSTRACT □

This paper attempts to examine Baraka's presentation of violence in *Dutchman* and *The Slave*, focusing on the socio-historical and racial roots of violence in the United States, as well as on the interplay between power and knowledge in the representation of violence. In the process, the paper also demonstrates the reciprocal nature of violence, and underlines the point that black violence is not only retaliatory, but is also a just response in the Black struggle for liberation from the White domination.

The reciprocal aspect in Baraka's dramatic presentation of violence is especially evident in *Dutchman* and *The Slave*. Racial violent conflict is prevalent in virtually all Baraka's works, but what is especially significant about *Dutchman* and *The Slave* is that they substantiate the major arguments of this paper, mainly in their presentation of striking reverse parallels in themes and characters as well as in terms of their portrayal of racial violence. *Dutchman* shows white violence, while *The Slave* presents the black response. In *Dutchman*, Lula, a white woman, exploits Clay, a black man, murders him, and prepares for her next black victim, while in *The Slave*, Walker, a black revolutionary, kills his white ex-wife and her white liberal husband in revenge. This is why the two plays can be looked at as one play centring around becoming a black man reflecting assimilationist, nationalist, and revolutionary black tendencies, with Clay in *Dutchman* representing the assimilationist tendencies and Walker in *The Slave* representing the nationalist and revolutionary ones.

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## عنف البيض ورد السود: دراسة لمسرحيتي "الهولندي" و "العبد" لأميري بركه

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### □ الملخص □

يحاول هذا البحث دراسة تصوير أميري بركه ل لعنف في مسرحيتي "الهولندي" و "العبد"، ويركز في ذلك على الجذور التاريخية والاجتماعية والعرقية للعنف في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية، وكذلك على التفاعل بين القوة والمعرفة في هذا التصوير للعنف وتجري في هذا البحث معالجة الطبيعة التبادلية للعنف ايضاً، ويوضح في هذا الخصوص أن العنف الذي يقوم به السود ليس عنفاً انتقامياً فحسب، وإنما هو ايضاً رد فعلي عادل من قبلهم في كفاحهم من أجل تحررهم من سيطرة البيض. إن هذه السمة التبادلية للعنف والصراع العرقي، كما يعرضه بركه، واضحة في أعماله كافة، لكنها تبدو جلية أكثر في مسرحيتي "الهولندي" و "العبد". إذ تجسد هاتان المسرحيتان المقولات الرئيسة لهذا البحث، خاصة في تصويرهما العكسي لموضوعات وشخصيات متشابهة وفي معالجتها لقضية العنف والصراع العرقي. حيث تظهر مسرحية "الهولندي" عنف البيض، أما مسرحية "العبد" فتظهر رد السود على عنف البيض. ففي المسرحية الأولى تقوم المرأة البيضاء، لولا، باستغلال الرجل الأسود، كلي، وتصرعه، ثم تجهز نفسها لاقتناص فريستها السوداء التالية، في حين أن ووكير، وهو الرجل الثوري الأسود في مسرحية "العبد"، ينتقم من البيض بقتله زوجته السابقة البيضاء مع زوجها الأبيض ذي النزعة الليبرالية. ولهذا فإن المسرحيتين غالباً ما يُنظر اليهما على أنهما مسرحيتان تكملان بعضهما بعضاً، أي، تكوّنان مسرحية واحدة تدور حول خلق رجل أسود يجسد صوراً لنزعات اندماجية ووطنية وثورية لدى السود. إذ يمثل كلي في مسرحية "الهولندي" النزعة الإندماجية في حين أن ووكير في مسرحية "العبد" يمثل النزعة الوطنية والتحريرية لدى السود.

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...We want "poems that kill."  
Assassin poems, poems that shoot  
guns. Poems that wrestle cops into alleys  
and take their weapons leaving them dead  
with tongues pulled out and sent to Ireland. Knockoff  
poems for dope selling wops or slick halfwhite  
politicians Airplane poems... (Baraka, "Black Art").<sup>1</sup>

The Revolutionary Theatre should force change; it should be change...The Revolutionary Theatre must teach [white men] their deaths. It must crack their faces open to the mad cries of the poor... The Revolutionary Theatre must Accuse and Attack anything that can be accused and attacked. It must accuse and attack because it is a theatre of Victims. (Baraka, "The Revolutionary Theatre")<sup>2</sup>

This paper attempts to examine Baraka's presentation of violence in *Dutchman* and *The Slave*, focusing on the socio-historical and racial roots of violence, as well as on the interplay between power and knowledge in the representation of violence. In the process, the paper demonstrates the reciprocal nature of violence, and underlines the point that black violence is not only retaliatory, but is also a just response in the Black struggle for liberation from White domination.

The reciprocal aspect in Baraka's presentation of violence accounts for my selection of *Dutchman* and *The Slave* for this study. Racial violent conflict is prevalent in virtually all Baraka's works, but what is especially significant about *Dutchman* and *The Slave* is that they substantiate the major arguments of this paper. The two plays seem to be sequels, although Baraka may not have originally intended them to be so. Their sequentiality is particularly evident not just in their striking "reverse parallels ... in character and theme," as Lindberg explains,<sup>3</sup> but above all, in terms of their portrayal of violence. *Dutchman* shows white violence, while *The Slave* presents the black response. In the former, Lula, a white woman, exploits Clay, a black man, murders him, and prepares for her next black victim, while in *The Slave*, Walker, a black revolutionary, kills his white ex-wife and her white liberal husband in revenge. In fact, "Dutchman and *The Slave* can be looked at as parts of the same play whose plot centers around becoming a man, specially a black man. Furthermore, whereas *Dutchman* is about the difficulty of becoming a black man, *The Slave* is the watershed between the death of an assimilationist and the birth of a black nationalist."<sup>4</sup> The characters are, however, not simple, but complex and mostly split between their personal needs or desires and the loyalties and constraints demanded by their color, a division which further contributes to outbursts of violence, as the paper further seeks to demonstrate.

In a seminal book on racial violence in the United States, from which the title of this paper is partly borrowed, Herbert Shapiro dispels the myth, created by the Whites and their propaganda machines, that associates crime, murder, or violence with the Blacks. Instead, the book substantiates through detailed historical documentation that "the subjection to violence in various forms has been a central ingredient of the African-American experience, that the lives of millions of black people have been and continue to be lived in the shadow of numberless episodes of racist brutality."<sup>5</sup> Lynching has been one of the most horrific and barbaric forms of violence inflicted on the Blacks. The police, the courts, federal agencies, and even the president of the Republic were often indifferent to mob violence against black people, and occasionally actively they themselves participated in the violence.<sup>6</sup> In response, the "blacks have strained to the utmost to protect their lives and to assert their dignity as human beings."<sup>7</sup> The book concludes that black violence has been defensive, responsive, and retaliatory in nature.

Baraka's writings, especially his plays, address similar issues of racial violence and come to conclusions that parallel Shapiro's. In Louis Phillips' words, if not the foremost Afro-American writer, LeRoi Jones, better known as Amiri Baraka, is "the most militant, the most revolutionary, the most explosive, and the most controversial playwright on the American scene."<sup>8</sup> Baraka has earned such a reputation because of his paramount concern with racially-motivated violence. This is why his works, especially his plays, have drawn some very harsh criticism and led some white critics, in particular, to accuse him of advocating racism and bigotry. For example, commenting on Baraka's plays, George Dennison calls Baraka a "demagogue" and sees *The Slave* (December 1964), in particular, "as part of the rot of America, particularly the racist rot that flickers back and forth, north and south, east and west."<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Littlejohn describes *Dutchman* (March 1964) as an example of "race-war literature."<sup>10</sup> Besides, prompted by such a view of Baraka's work, *Dutchman* was banned by California's Superintendent of Instruction from "use in the state's black studies programs;" indeed, the Los Angeles press went further by banning "advertisements of Jones' plays" altogether.<sup>11</sup> A funnier but no less real and relevant episode reinforces this view of Baraka and his work. The Chairman of the English Department at a respected American university "instantly fainted" when Amiri Baraka's name was suggested by "a member of the search committee for an open visiting professorship... When regained consciousness at the college health center an hour and a half later, to the worried looks of faculty and friends, the first thing he said was, 'Che without a jungle—over my dead body!' and promptly faded into momentary oblivion."<sup>12</sup> Presumably, the Chair was worried that Baraka's "gorilla" approach would be too much of a burden in the Department.

Baraka is an uncompromising champion of the Black cause for liberation and self-determination in America and the world over. The quotations above underline two important points of his writing strategy. Firstly, they demonstrate that, like Artuad who believes that the theatre should be "preoccupied with" the destruction of the iniquitous "present social state,"<sup>13</sup> Baraka sees art as a weapon in the struggle for social change and liberation of his fellow-blacks. Secondly, they explicitly voice out Baraka's apparent strong endorsement of violence to realize that liberative goal. In this sense, Baraka is not for violence per se or gratuitous violence, but violence that is defensive in nature and even positive in purpose. As he elsewhere states, for the black people, nonviolence involves tacit acceptance of the status quo and of the continuation of their enslavement through violent means over the centuries:

I advocate a violence, a literal murdering of the American socio-political stance, not only as it directly concerns American Negroes, but in terms of its stranglehold on most of the modern world... The supposed Christian ideal of Nonviolence is aimed at quieting even this most natural of insurrectionary elements. As an actual moral category all rational men are essentially nonviolent, except in defense of their lives. To ask that the black man not even defend himself... is to ask that that black man stay quiet in his chains while the most "liberal" elements in this country saw away at those chains with make-believe saws. The Negro, again, in this instance, is asked to be what the white man makes of him.<sup>14</sup>

This is why Baraka is especially contemptuous of white liberals who, he thinks, merely appear to sympathize with the African-American condition, but do not, in reality, seek a radical change. Baraka is equally critical of the bourgeois or middle-class blacks who try to fit in with the dominant system. He even levels some serious charges at fellow-black writers who do not seem to adopt revolutionary approaches and in whose works he detects compromise or assimilationist tendencies. In other words, Baraka's significant conclusion, here, is that black people are not to blame for

committing acts of violence, because theirs is defensive or retaliatory violence; it is, therefore, a proper response to the all-pervasive violence long perpetrated by white people.

A number of critics have provided some valid criticism of *Dutchman*, both in terms of Baraka's use of significant mythical symbols and in the light of Freud's psychoanalysis, which foreground the psychological factors contributing to much of the violence in the play.<sup>15</sup> While Baraka does not underestimate the validity of such interpretations of his play, he underlines the real-life reference of the imagery used. Lula is modeled after "an utterly whacked white woman" whom he met during his early Village days and whom he calls "Dolly" in his Autobiography: "In fact, the real 'Dolly' nearly always had a bag of apples with her and she was always offering them to people. It was an image that stuck in my mind."<sup>16</sup> Even the introduction of Lula's "notebook" at the end of the play, which Baraka, at the time, thought to be innovative, turned out to be based on a real-life figure.<sup>17</sup> "Dutchman," Baraka confirms, is meant to be "a portrait of America."<sup>18</sup> In other words, for him the real, the present, or the socio-historical is more important than the mythical. In this sense, Lula can be said to represent "White America," while Clay symbolizes "Black America," both past and present. The stage directions at the beginning of the play underline the value of contemporary mythical symbols: "The subway [is] heaped in modern myth."<sup>19</sup> Thus, it is possible to suggest that Baraka's use of mythical and contemporary symbols is probably primarily intended to contemporize America's past and historicize its present, with all the accompanying racial hatred, conflict, and violence.

Pushed to the edge by the ever-aggressive Lula, Clay delivers a very emotionally-charged speech in which he lays his heart open, verbally assaults Lula, and threatens her with physical violence:

I'll rip your lousy breasts off! Let me be who I feel like being. Uncle Tom. Thomas. Whoever. It's none of your business. You don't know anything except what's there for you to see. An act. Lies. Device. Not the pure heart, the pumping black heart. You don't ever know that. And I sit here, in this buttoned-up suit, to keep myself from cutting all your throats. I mean wantonly. You great liberated whore! You fuck some black man, and right away you're an expert on black people. What a lotta shit that is... And I'm the great would-be poet. Yes. That's right! Poet. Some kind of bastard literature... all it needs is a simple knife thrust. Just let me bleed you, you loud whore, and one poem vanished. A whole people of neurotics, struggling to keep from being sane. And the only thing that would cure the neurosis would be your murder. Simple as that. I mean if I murdered you, then other white people would begin to understand me... All of them. Crazy niggers turning their backs on sanity. When all it needs is that simple act. Murder. Just murder! Would make us all sane (pp. 34-35).

Lula's overtly seductive remark expressed earlier- "Eating apples is always the first step" (p. 11), accounts for the tendency to read *Dutchman* in terms of the mythical reference to Adam and Eve. Similarly, Clay's description of himself and his fellow-blacks as neurotics whose remedy involves murder of whites, in part, explains the other tendency to read the play along Freudian lines. Clay's statement might even seem to suggest that Baraka is unintentionally acknowledging that his black characters are somewhat innately violent. However, the linkage between black neurosis and murder of white people appears intended to highlight the socio-historical, cultural, and racial context of violence. As Nilgun Anadolu-Okur states, the speech is like "a long soliloquy in which he discloses his long delayed anguish against white society's oppression, humiliation and stereotypical allusions."<sup>20</sup> Clay, or for that matter, Baraka himself is alluding to the centuries of accumulated suppression of the freedom and basic needs and aspirations of the black population by white people.

Therefore, murdering Whites does not only restore the Blacks to sanity, but it is also a means through which the Blacks seek to fulfill their aspirations, assert their dignity, and gain freedom. In other words, their violence does not reflect a serious psychological disorder, but it is culturally mediated, defensive, responsive, or retaliatory in nature.

Nevertheless, Clay's neurosis also appears to be partly self-inflicted. Accordingly, Clay is not just a victim of white aggression, but he is also a victim of his own class affiliation within the black community itself as well as of his apparent personal desire to fit in with and be part of the white value-system. Clay's appearance, his suit and necktie, together with his educational background, a university graduate and a poet, suggests that Baraka means him to be an example of a middle-class black figure who naively thinks that his improved black status would ensure him safe passage into the parallel community of whites. "Acquisition of a white woman" is, for him, as a black man, "a way of participating more directly in white society;" and his "integration... is merely whitening to fit the white soul's image."<sup>21</sup> Put differently, Clay is attracted to Lula, because he seems to believe he "has transcended his social history, and entered a world of pure light."<sup>22</sup> Lula cunningly plays upon Clay's open-secret desire to be free of history. In fact, her final words in Scene One, which describe their "would-be" love journey, clearly taps into that desire, although she also calls upon herself to do likewise: "And you are free of your own history. And I am free of my history. We'll pretend we are both anonymous beauties smashing along through the city's entrails" (p. 21).

This attempt to be free of history is a central argument of the liberals and integrationists on both sides of the racial divide. However, immediate actions prove that neither can be free of history and accumulation of racial tension, enmity, and violence. In Clay's case, as Patsalidis argues in his informative study of *Dutchman*, "history, society, and the conventions of white art weigh Clay down."<sup>23</sup> Thus, ironically, despite the fact that Clay is the one who threatens Lula with murder, it is the latter who, upon Clay's completion of his threatening speech, takes out a knife, coolly plunges it into his chest, and orders her fictional subway spectators to throw the body at the next stop. The attitude adopted here follows a general pattern of racial violence in the United States throughout the centuries: "The Whites premeditatedly tantalize the Blacks in order to arouse Black aggression and justify White violence."<sup>24</sup> Clay's murder does not only show him to be a victim of white violence as well as of his own false aspirations, but it more importantly signals Baraka's rejection of the assimilationist tendency among black middle-class people. Moreover, the murder exposes the shame of white liberal thinking about racial integration. Middle-class blacks can be admitted into white society by the white liberals on white terms, which entail that Blacks must still feel satisfied with a lower status or else face retribution. This is why when Clay appears to be attempting to cross the lines, even though at the rhetorical level, he is ruthlessly physically eliminated by the representative of the liberal whites. Thus, Clay's murder also embodies Baraka's outright dismissal of the integrationist policies of white liberals. In other words, for Baraka, integration, whether advocated by Blacks or Whites, is not a viable means for the desired social change<sup>25</sup>.

Clay's physical elimination brings to a logical deadly conclusion a power game with Lula that he is shown from the outset to be destined to lose. The fact that a woman is the perpetrator of white violence is also important for its historical significance as far as racial violence is concerned. Historically, women have always been at the center of white aggression in the United States, whether by way of being occasionally active participants in the violence against blacks or in being the prime pretext and justification for it. Lynching blacks by hysterical mobs of white people had always been provoked by supposed attacks on white women by black men:<sup>26</sup> "The specifics of each lynching might vary, but the general pattern of this racial barbarism was clear. Whites would be roused to hysteria by accounts of some purported black offense... The cry of rape, appealing to the most extreme fears and hatreds, drawing upon racist myths concerning black male sexuality and a hypocritical view of white womanhood, became a summons to the mob and also was used to justify the lynching to the national public opinion."<sup>27</sup> Part of the ritual of lynching black "sexual offenders" often involved cutting the sexual organs of the individual concerned to be displayed in public with the organs in his mouth or pockets.<sup>28</sup> In *Dutchman*, Baraka appears to be alluding to that past

mechanism of lynching through Lula's design for Clay. Throughout the play, Lula uses her seductive skills and powers, linguistic and even physical, to entice and stimulate Clay. At one point, Lula "graps [Clay's] thigh, up near the croth," thereby provoking him to warn her: "Watch it now, you're gonna excite me for real" (p. 17). Clay's reaction to Lula's act shows that her carefully planned strategy is working. Lula successfully tries to place Clay in a position whereby his next step would make him look overreactive and even aggressive in his response to Lula's overtures, so that her ensuing acts would seem justifiable and rational. Her overall aim, as Baraka probably means it to be, is to subjugate, emasculate, and even lynch Clay. However, in historicizing Lula's act, Baraka does not apparently mean to show that the severing of sexual organs, frequently conducted in past and historical lynchings, is currently in practice, but that it has given way to the "more subtle way of public deballing" in the present.<sup>29</sup>

The presence of a fictional subway audience is crucial for the act of public deballing: "Lynching, ... as it always functioned, was a mechanism for general instilling of fear within the black population."<sup>30</sup> In Foucauldian terms, this exercise of brutal force secures sadistic pleasure for the aggressors and their peers among the audience, but more importantly, it creates "docile bodies" of the victims and their peers among the spectators. This shows how "discipline produces subjected and practised bodies."<sup>31</sup> However, Lula's immediate hold on Clay is guaranteed from the start not because of her physical powers or of Clay's inhibitions and fears, but rather because of her wide knowledge of Clay as a cultural, historical, and racial product. Again, as Foucault argues, a very intimate two-way connection always exists between production of knowledge and power effects: "The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power."<sup>32</sup> In this sense, "the subjects that know and the subjects or objects to be known are all integral elements of power-knowledge strategies and are determined by the historical evolution of these networks."<sup>33</sup> With a long history of power and knowledge on her side, Lula is naturally more assured of success in her struggle with Clay. The latter, the object of knowledge, is evidently mesmerized by how much Lula seems to know about him, although she is a self-confessed liar.

Lula's knowledge enables her to invent a story, a drama within drama, in which she assumes the roles of both an actress and a director. She interprets the story and more importantly is able to cast Clay in a subordinate role in it.<sup>34</sup> Drawing upon her wealth of white stereotypes about the Blacks, especially about middle-class black men, and judging by Clay's looks and attitude, Lula soon concludes that Clay is going to a party. For his part, Clay is so surprised by the apparent accuracy of some of the information Lula provides that he gets carried away and even volunteers to give Lula more helpful pieces of information. He even thinks that Lula knows him or is probably an acquaintance of some of his friends and the party organizers, although she tells him: "I told you I didn't know anything about you ... you're a well-known type" (p. 12). Nevertheless, ensnared Clay soon accepts Lula's request to be at the party with him, only if he himself makes the offer. The invitation turns out to be a very funny dramatic moment in which Lula demonstrates her directorial skills and establishes a firmer hold on Clay:

LULA. [Starts laughing again]. Now you say to me, "Lula, Lula, why don't you go to this party with me tonight?" It's your turn, and let those be your lines.

CLAY. Lula, why don't you go to this party with me tonight, Huh?

LULA. Say my name twice before you ask, and no huh's.

CLAY. Lula, Lula, why don't you go to this party with me tonight?

LULA. I'd like to go, Clay, but how can you ask me to go when you barely know me?

CLAY. That is strange, isn't it?

LULA. What kind of reaction is that? You're supposed to say, "Aw, come on, we'll get to know each other better at the party."

CLAY. That's pretty corny (p. 16).

The dialogue is obviously humorous and even silly. However, the humor soon grows darker and even deadly, with Lula getting more aggressive.

Meanwhile, the interplay between power and knowledge is much in evidence. Lula takes Clay on an imaginative sexual journey that is supposed to follow the would-be party. All along that journey, Lula mocks Clay, questions, and strongly attacks his race and middle-class aspirations:

LULA. Every thing you say is wrong. [Mock smile] That's what makes you attractive. Ha. In that funnybook jacket with all the buttons. [More animate, taking hold of his jacket] What've you got that jacket and tie on in all this heat for? And why're you wearing a jacket and tie like that? Did your people ever burn witches or start revolutions over the price of tea? Boy, those narrow-shoulder clothes come from a tradition you ought to feel oppressed by. A three-button suit. What right do you have to be wearing a three-button suit and striped tie? Your grandfather was a slave, he didn't go Harvard.

CLAY. My grandfather was a night watchman (p. 18).

Clearly, Clay seems to swallow his pride by appearing unoffended by Lula's very arrogant attitude and condescending remarks. Perhaps, he judges that that is a price he may have to pay in order to fulfill his class aspirations. More importantly, he seems to accept such insults and subservient position, because he probably thinks that they are still the only passengers in the subway carriage. This is, perhaps, why he seems to feel embarrassed and even puzzled to see people around. However, Clay's embarrassment at Lula's increasing unruly and offensive behavior, coupled with his realization of a growing and more attentive audience, has a somewhat transforming effect.

Clay's apparent transformation is also part of the interplay between power and knowledge set in the play: "For, as Foucault claims, power needs resistance as one of its fundamental conditions of operation. It is through this articulation of points of resistance that power spreads through the social field and makes its presence/potency felt."<sup>35</sup> In other words, rather than having a positive or liberative effect, Clay's transformation or rebellion reinforces Lula's power. Significantly, in his rebellious outburst, Clay seeks to deconstruct Lula's, and for that matter the Whites' cultural stereotypes about the Blacks in general, and black musicians in particular. As the quotation above shows, the black musicians like Bessy Smith and Thomas Parker are in reality full of contempt and hatred for the Whites. The racial tinge of Clay's violent response is confirmed when white members of his subway audience also become targets for his pent-up anger and even physical abuse. But his outrage is primarily directed at Lula; he even attempts to subdue her physically. For her part, she displays the reserve of a person in full control of the situation at hand. She coolly waits for the proper moment to counter-attack. The moment soon comes when Clay's rage considerably subsides. She takes out a knife from her bag and coolly stabs him to death.

The film version of the play shows Clay falling on top of her body, thus, perhaps embodying Baraka's intention of historicizing the experience. Clay's murder would, thus, be justified, because it would be claimed to be the penalty for an attempted rape. This is partly why none of the passengers raises a finger. More importantly, the passengers/audience are passive, because they are disciplined or terrorized into submission by Lula's savage display of power. They obediently remove Clay's body and get off the train, leaving Lula to analyze her violent racial experience and to plan for a new and perhaps more cruel encounter. Thus, Baraka's innovative introduction of the notebook at the very end seems to fit in well with Lula's image as an-all domineering director. Lula is shown writing comments, which one may be inclined to assume to include ways of avoiding the difficulties she has encountered with Clay. The last-minute introduction of a young black man



provides her with the desired opportunity. The play ends with her exchanging seductive looks with him, suggesting that he, too, will be easily entrapped.

Although Clay, as has just been explained, has disastrously attempted to respond violently to Lula's aggression and violence, Baraka's presentation of the black response to white violence is dramatized in his other play, *The Slave*. The latter "is in essence an extension of the conflict of *Dutchman* to what Jones clearly sees as its logical conclusion...[which] is racial warfare."<sup>36</sup> Clay's assimilationist aspirations as well as his revolutionary potential are realized by Walker Vessels in *The Slave*. However, in *The Slave* "the figure of white culture is split into Easley and Grace."<sup>37</sup> Together, the two characters embody Lula's cultural and personal self. While "Easley symbolizes the intellectual and cultural aspects of white society, Grace symbolizes what lies beneath intellectual and cultural constructs- the emotional, experiential aspects of life."<sup>38</sup>

Thus, an inner split of the black protagonist in *The Slave* parallels this splitting of the white character in *Dutchman* into two in *The Slave*. Nevertheless, the relationship Walker establishes with both Easley and Grace represents one aspect of his divided self. Grace and Easley should not be viewed "simply as representatives of the white world around Walker but also as embodiments of his white Western perspectives, those perspectives that inhibit his racial pride by encouraging self-hatred."<sup>39</sup> Thus, Easley, with whom Walker shares similar literary tasks and intellectuality, is an object of Walker's hatred because he, at once, represents the external white enemy and the symbol of "whiteness within him." Similarly, Grace is "the image of that white femininity that has attracted a certain kind of self-hating black male."<sup>40</sup> In this regard, Walker's repeated reference to Shakespeare's *Othello* is highly significant. In a performance of *Othello*, which Walker recalls, he assumed the role of Othello; Grace, Desdemona; and significantly, Easley, Iago. Thus, with his marriage to Grace, Easley carries Iago's intentions in *Othello* to their logical practical conclusion. Hence, as a changed man, Walker, unlike Othello, initiates action. For, unlike Clay who is cast in Lula's drama, Walker himself acts as a director who casts new roles for both Easley and Grace. Walker shows them as defeated liberal whites. On the other hand, the other aspect of Walker's divided self is related to his blackness, which, too, has two manifestations, those of a past slave and those of a present rebel. Thus, Walker's present violent acts are at once symptoms of conflicting forces within the self as well as part of his struggle against white racial oppression. This is why most of Walker's obsessive comments on white racist culture are directed at Easley. By contrast, he shows some feelings and humane attitude towards Grace, although she, too, is tainted by white prejudice.

As an educated liberal middle-class black man, Walker was attracted by white female sexuality, and he mistakenly believed that his marriage of a white woman would secure him a comfortable place in white-dominated society. However, the liberal environment could accommodate him only at a very high price. He had to suffer humiliation and racial discrimination. This is why his marriage intensified his sense of alienation. Recriminatory, expository dialogues between Walker and Grace reveal that they were married, but they were not able to strike a balance between their personal emotions or aspirations and the public commitments determined by their race. As a result, their marriage disintegrated:

GRACE. Walker. You were preaching the murder of white people.  
Walker, I was, am white. What do you think was going through my mind every time you were at some rally or meeting whose sole purpose was to bring about the destruction of the white race? (p. 72)

On the other hand, "Walker has rejected Grace, his white ex-wife, because she cannot reconcile his personal love for her with his political action to kill white people."<sup>41</sup> One may parenthetically mention that Baraka may be alluding to the relationship that existed between him and his white wife, Hittie, although at the time of the writing and production of the play, the couple seemed to have been on good marital terms. Nevertheless, Hittie "was just so horrified when [her husband]

wrote it\_ and then, you know, of course, we just called it Roi's Bad Dream for a year".<sup>42</sup> More importantly, Walker's politics seems to echo Baraka's, especially in his rationale for revolution and its attendant violence: "I was crying out against three hundred years of oppression; not against individual" (p. 72). In other words, like Baraka, Walker has been responding to century of exploitation of the Black by white people.

Present action dramatizes black violent response, both verbal and physical. The play is punctuated by off-stage-explosions that accompany an advancing revolutionary black army. This background violence is very significant dramatically, because it contextualizes the racial conflict that occurs within the Easleys' house. Walker, the leader of the army violently enters the house brandishing his gun. No wonder that Easley is both surprised and terrified. He "freezes staring at Walker's face and then at the gun and then at Walker's face" (p. 47). Ironically, Easley has just been lavishing abuse at the black people in general, who, he thinks, are intent upon destruction of the city. The pretext for Walker's visit is to get back his two daughters. But Walker's verbal response reinforces the first impression of him as a violent person, who intends to avenge himself and his race:

Oh, fuck you (Hotly) Fuck you...Just fuck you, that's all! (Keeps voice stiffly contained, but then it rises sharply) I mean really, just fuck you. Don't tell me about any goddamn killing of anything. It that's happening, I mean it this shelling town is being flattened, let it ... It needs it. (p. 49)

Obviously, Walker's vulgar language is also meant to assert his strong sense of power and his control of the situation.

Walker's definite conclusion about the necessity of violence further confirms the recurrent theme in Baraka's oeuvre; that violence is a precondition of social change, that it is a weapon to counter white aggression. However, perhaps out of desperation or of his belief that white authority is still intact, Easley retains an aggressive posture. He adopts a tactic similar to Lula's in *Dutchman*, exploiting his liberal, white knowledge of an educated liberal person. He ridicules Walker's past and current heroic claims, and addresses him contemptuously, calling him "filth," "nigger murderer," etc. He also threatens to call the police and even attempts to eliminate Walker physically, taking advantage of Walker's current drunkenness. But unlike Clay, Walker is not intimidated:

WALKER looks at GRACE slightly, and EASELY throws himself on him. The chain falls backward and the two men roll on the floor. EASELY trying to choke WALKER. WALKER trying to get the gun out of his pocket...Suddenly, WALKER shaves one hand in EASELYS face, shooting him without taking the gun from his pocket. EASELY slumps backwards, his face twisted, his mouth open and working. WALKER rolls back off EASELY, pulling the gun from his pocket. He props himself against the chair, staring at the man's face (p. 80).

This violent end to Easley's life at Walker's hands, like Walker's slapping of Easley earlier, is meant to be a response to Easley's threats throughout. No wonder that Walker orders him to "shut up": "I don't want to hear anything else from you. You just die quietly. No more talk" (p. 80).

A person's physical end obviously involves his linguistic silence. Nevertheless, Walker's comment suggests that Easley's language has been too much of a burden. This is not just because he has had to contend with Easley's, and for that matter, Grace's verbal assaults and white racist remarks, but more importantly, because it also signals a sense of freedom on his part, a kind of regenerative knowledge. Walker's verbal exchanges with both Easley and Grace force him to re-live and question his past experience with them. He especially appears to reject his past liberal integrationist attitude. Throughout the play, like his creator, Walker is intent upon showing the

failure of liberal values and the hypocrisy of the liberal whites. This idea particularly recurs in Walker's angry exchanges with Easley, as this one at the end of Act One shows:

WALKER.(Nodding) Well, what do you think? You never did anything concrete to avoid what's going on now. Your sick liberal lip service to whatever was the least filth. Your high Aesthetic disapproval of the political. Telling the sick ghosts of the thirties strange whatever chance we had

EASLEY. What are you talking about? (p. 74).

Walker's own role-playing and frequent reference to "ritual drama" further demonstrate the affinity between his past and present, and how his present acquires a violently liberative direction marking his change into a black revolutionary.

Throughout the play, Walker preoccupies himself with impersonation and role-playing, which both Easley and Grace tragically misjudge, despite the fact that his impersonation is accompanied by acts of physical violence, involving slapping Easley and pressing the gun against his stomach. In the process, Walker recites poetry from Yeats and mimics accents of Negro and Japanese gangsters. Grace herself accuses him of "playing the mad scene from *Native Son*... a second-rate Bigger Thomas" (p. 57). His fictional audience meets with derision and irony Walker's role-playing, together with his past poetic interest:

EASLEY: (Moving to comfort her) Oh, don't get worried, Grace... you know he just likes to hear himself talk... more than anything ... he just wants to hear himself talk, so he can find out what he's supposed to have on his mind (p.63).

Easley further derogatively repeatedly declares that Walker's revolutionary attitude is all part of what he calls "ritual drama" (p. 56), which particularly marked the liberal conduct during the time when Walker was a university student.

Easley's destruction at Walker's own hands and the death of Grace's "as a result of the history Walker set in motion"<sup>43</sup> appear to underline the success of Walker's violent response to representing a revolutionary change. Apparently, that change does not seem to be clearly defined or emancipatory. The slave of the title does not only refer to the hero, being a black slave, but it also appears to predict Walker's tragic condition, his enslavement. This means that his victory does not guarantee him freedom. This is perhaps why Walker is shown heavily drunk throughout. Thus, drunkenness seems to serve two purposes. It first makes Walker more susceptible to violence. It secondly, probably, signifies the ambiguity surrounding the result of violence. However, as he clearly states in the following dialogue, this is not exactly worrying:

WALKER. ... The point is that you had your chance, darling, now those other folks have theirs. (Quietly). Now they have theirs.

EASLEY. God. What an ugly idea.

WALKER. (Head on hands). I knew. I knew (pp. 73-4).

Thus, Walker's comment rephrases the thesis of this paper and reiterates Baraka's argument that the violence of black people is essentially responsive and retaliatory in nature. Violence is cyclic, a matter of turn taking.

Nevertheless, "Walker is not denigrating revolution by this comment but he is acknowledging that a better world may not result."<sup>44</sup> As Walker further explains, creating a better world would be "up to individuals on that side, just as it was supposed to be up to individuals on this side" (p. 74). "What is problematic from an Afrocentric perspective is that Walker does not provide any solutions for the aftermath of the uprising; he leaves the stage stumbling as unsteadily

as the old man at the beginning of play.”<sup>45</sup> Walker does not any longer have “a capacity for love and confusion; he had gone from dissatisfaction to specific rage against a social order undifferentiated hate for white people.”<sup>46</sup> Walker’s violent confrontation epitomizes Baraka’s “conception of cause and effect of racial situation, for it is the failure of Easley’s liberation which has transformed the field slave into a rebel.”<sup>47</sup> This creation of a rebellious black figure, who turns very violent, is a legitimate and logical response to a social order kept by white domination and violence.

## Notes:

1. The LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader, edited by William J. Harris (Thunder’s Mouth Press, New York, 1991), p. 219.
2. LeRoi Jones, *Home: Social Essays* (William Morrow & Co., Inc., New York, 1966), pp. 210-11.
3. John Lendberg, “Dutchman and The Slave: Companions in Revolution,” in *Imamu Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones): A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Kimberly W. Benston (Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, 1978), 141-7 (p. 141).
4. Nilgun Anadolu-Okur, *Contemporary African American Theater* (Garland Publishing, Inc., New York, 1997), p. 107.
5. Herbert Shapiro, *White Violence and Black Response: From Reconstruction to Montgomery* (The University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1988), p. xii.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 85, 94, 95, 106, ect.
7. *Ibid.*, p. xv.
8. “LeRoi Jones and Contemporary Black Drama,” in *The Black American Writer, Volume II: Poetry and Drama*, edited by C.W.E. Bigsby (Everette/Edwards, inc., Deland, 1969) 203-217 (p. 206).
9. “Demagogy of LeRoi Jones,” *Commentary*, 39 (February 1969), p. 68.
10. David Littlejohn, *Black on White: A Critical Survey of Writing by American Negroes* (Viking Press, Durham, 1973), p. 153.
11. Theodore R. Hudson, *From LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka: The Literary Works* (Duke University Press, Durham, 1973), p. 153.
12. Tejumola Olaniyan, *Scars of Conquest/Masks of Resistance: The Invention of Identities in African, African American, and Caribbean Drama* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1995), p. 67.
13. Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, translated by Caroline Richards (Grove press, New York, 1958), p. 42.
14. LeRoi Jones, *Home: Social Essays*, p. 151.
15. See for example John Gassner and Bernard F. Dukore, eds., *A Treasury of the Theatre from Henrik Ibsen to Robert Lowell*, Fourth Edition (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1970), p. 1247; George R. Adams, “Black Literature: Black Militant Drama,” *American Imago*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Summer 1971), pp. 107-128; Dianne H. Weisgram, “LeRoi Jones’ Dutchman: Inter-racial Ritual of Sexual Violence,” *American Imago*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Fall 1972), pp. 215-32; Theodore R. Hudson, *From LeRoi Jones To Ameri Baraka*, pp. 148-153; George Piggford, “Looking into Black Skulls: Amiri Baraka’s Dutchman and the Psychology of Race,” *Modern Drama*, Vol. XI, no. 1 (Spring 1997), pp. 74-85.
16. Amiri Baraka, in an interview with Charlie Reilly, in *Conversations with Amiri Baraka* (University Press of Mississippi, Jackson, 1994), pp. 255-6. See also Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* (Lawrence Hill Books, Chicago, 1987), p. 277.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 256.
18. Amiri Baraka, in *Conversations with Amiri Baraka*, p. 256.
19. LeRoi Jones, *Dutchman and The Slave* (William Morrow and Company, New York, 1964), p. 3. Further reference to both plays by page number in the text is to this edition.
20. Nilgun Anadolu-Okur, *Contemporary African American Theater*, p. 110.
21. LeRoi Jones, *Home: Social Essays*, 223.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 226.
23. Savas Patsalidis, “Discipline and Punish: The Case of Baraka’s Dutchman,” *The North Dakota Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (1992), 101-113 (p. 103). The present paper builds on many of the issues raised by Patsalidis.

24. Dianne H. Weisgram, "LeRoi Jones' Dutchman: Interracial Ritual of Sexual Violence," p. 219.
25. See Amiri Baraka, "The Descent of Charlie Fuller into Pulitzerland and the Need for African-American Institutions," *Black American Literature Forum*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Summer 1983), pp. 51-54.
26. In his *White Violence and Black Response*, Herber Shapiro gives numerous examples of such cases. See, for instance, pages 49, 59, 97, 104, 106.
27. Herbert Shapiro, *White Violence and Black Response*, p. 30.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 219-20,
29. LeRoi Jones, *Home: Social Essays*, p. 230.
30. Herbert Shapiro, *White Violence and Black Response*, p. 222.
31. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (Allen Lane, London, 1977), p. 138.
32. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, edited with an afterword by Colin Gordon, translated by Colin Gordon and others (Pantheon, New York, 1980), p. 52.
33. Karlis Racevskis, *Michel Foucault and the Subversion of Intellect* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1983), pp. 97-98.
34. See Dianne H. Weisgram, "LeRoi Jones' Dutchman: Inter-racial Ritual of Sexual Violence," p. 218; and Savas Patsalidis, "Discipline and Punish: The Case of Baraka's Dutchman," p. 104.
35. Savas Patsalidis, "Discipline and Punish: The Case of Baraka's Dutchman," p. 108.
36. C.W.E. Bigsby, *Confrontations and Commitment: A Study of Contemporary American Drama 1959-66* (University of Missouri Press, 1968), p. 148.
37. Leslie Cathrine Sanders, *The Development of Black Theatre in America: From Shadows to Slaves* (Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1988), pp. 151-2.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 152.
39. Lloyd W. Brown, Amiri Baraka, p. 147.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
41. Jhon Lindberg, "Dutchman and The Slave: Companions in Revolution," p. 144.
42. C.W.E. Bigsby, *Confrontation and Commitment*, p. 157.
43. Leslie Cathrine Sanders, *The Development of Black Theatre in America*, p. 153.
44. Leslie Catherine Sanders, *The Development of Black Theater in America: From Shadows to Selves* (Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 1988), p. 149.
45. Nilgun Anadolu-Okur, *Contemporary African American Theater*, p. 119.
46. Hudson, p. 156.
47. C.W.E. Bigsby, *Confrontation and Commitment*, p. 14.

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