***JAST*, 2019; 51:49-71**

Submitted: 30.09.2018

Accepted: 09.03.2019

ORCID# 0000-0001-7815-389X

A Rereading and Repositioning of Roles in Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*

Sultan Komut Bakınç

Abstract

Amiri Baraka's well-known and both vastly praised and criticized play *Dutchman* is a primary example of Revolutionary Theater, which Baraka conceptualizes as a theater that "forces" its audience to confront the realities of social injustice, and "accuse" and "attack" its practitioners. In this sense, *Dutchman* is a model text of Baraka's compulsion toward destruction through art. This article argues that the prevalent view in the scholarship on this play reduces Clay and Lula as victim and victimizer. This article aims to present these characters in a postmodernist light, as more complex and less stereotyped. Thus, they can be seen as having equally the potential to change and the potential to destroy (themselves and/or the society). In the final analysis, Baraka presents a true piece of Revolutionary Theater in *Dutchman*: powerful, accusatory and destructive.

Keywords

LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, *Dutchman*, Revolutionary Theatre, Myths, Intertextuality, Deconstruction

Amiri Baraka'nın *Dutchman* Oyununda Rollerin Yeniden Okunması ve Konumlandırılması

Öz

Amiri Baraka'nın çok bilinen ve övgüler kadar eleştirilerle de karşı karşıya kalan oyunu *Dutchman*, Devrimci Tiyatronun ilk

örneğidir. Baraka, Devrimci Tiyatroyu, izleyicileri sosyal adaletsizlik gerçeğiyle yüzleşmeye "iten" ve sosyal adaletsizliği yaratanları "suçlayan" ve "hedef alan" bir tiyatro türü olarak tanımlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, *Dutchman*, Baraka'nın sanat aracılığıyla yıkım yaratma dürtüsünü yansıtan bir metindir. Bu makale, eser üzerine yazılmış incelemelerde hakim görüşün Clay ve Lula karakterlerinin mağdur ve zalim olarak indirgendiğini ileri sürmektedir. Makalenin amacı, bu karakterleri postmodernizm ışığında, daha karmaşık ve basmakalıplardan uzak bir şekilde göstermektir. Nitekim, her iki karakter de (kendilerini ve/veya toplumu) eşit oranda değiştirme ve yıkma potansiyeline sahiptir. Baraka son çözümlemesinde, *Dutchman* oyunundaki Devrimci Tiyatronun gerçek bir örneğini gözler önüne sermektedir: güçlü, suçlayıcı ve yıkıcı.

Anahtar Kelimeler

LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, *Dutchman*, Devrimci Tiyatro, Mitler, Metinlerarasılık, Yapısöküm

Art is a
substitute
for murder.

—D. H. Weisgram

Dutchman is a highly controversial play, full of allusions, images and symbols which question black social status within twentieth-century North American society. While on the surface, *Dutchman* has a rather simple plot with only two main characters and one setting, yet as this article will argue, the play offers to take the audience on a challenging quest, laden with multifaceted meanings and powerful political implications. *Dutchman* must be understood as a representative of the Black Arts movement, which in turn was threaded through with the politics of Black Power. As Larry Neal argues:

> Black Art is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept. As such, it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black

> America. In order to perform this task, the Black Arts Movement proposes a radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetic. It proposes a separate symbolism, mythology, critique, and iconology. The Black Arts and the Black Power concepts both relate broadly to the Afro-American's desire for self-determination and nationhood. Both concepts are nationalistic. One is concerned with the relationship between art and politics; the other with the art of politics. (55)

Thus in *Dutchman*, Baraka challenges western cultural codes by rephrasing, redefining, rewriting and, if necessary, destroying them because the Black Arts movement believed that "it [was] impossible to construct anything meaningful within [western culture's] decaying structure" (Neal 55). Baraka's significance to the movement and influence upon it was key, Neal argues, positing him as the "prime mover and chief designer" of the Black Arts concept (60).

The play pivots around a chance interaction between a black subway rider, Clay, and a white older woman, Lula. On the train, their first contact is flirtatious, yet as time passes the woman starts to be offensive, accusatory and seductive. The play's climax is reached when Lula finally stabs the young man to death. Once Clay dies at the hands of Lula, he is thrown out of the subway by the other white passengers. The play ends on a sinister note with Lula preparing to find the next black man to sit next to.

Amiri Baraka won the 1964 Obie Award for *Dutchman.* Before converting to Islam and changing his name to Imamu Amiri Baraka, he was a prolific writer who had been "working, writing, and publishing in Greenwich Village as Le Roi Jones [both] for and from within a white system of power [that] he ultimately attempted to subvert" (Kern 2). His political development saw him become "an aggressive black nationalist and black art aesthetician" (Reid 44) and his acute consciousness of the political purpose of the art he produced led to many accounts of the role of art. Thus his works of art have been understood as aesthetic means to elucidate political ends. Over time Baraka's political views and involvement in Black Politics shifted; by the 1970s he had become a very strong left-wing Marxist (Reid 44). His life and mindset have been a source of inspiration in particular for his community. His famous essay, "The Revolutionary Theatre" was

rejected by *The New York Times* in 1964 because the editors, reported at the time, that they could not understand it. *The Village Voice* also rejected the piece on similar grounds. Finally it was published in *Black Dialogue* ("The Revolutionary Theatre" 1). The article is a key record of his personal beliefs about what art is and how it should act. The arguments set forth in his essay will inform this article.

Baraka asserts that the Revolutionary Theatre is "... a weapon to help in the slaughter of these dimwitted fat-bellied white guys who somehow believe that the rest of the world is here for them to slobber on" (2). Thus, Baraka's plays, as well as his poems and articles, must be seen in this light, as the means not only to undermine but to actively attack white hegemony both in art and in life itself. As an art aesthetician Baraka proclaims that:

> The Revolutionary Theatre should force change: it should be change. (All their faces turned into the lights and you work on them black nigger magic, and cleanse them at having seen the ugliness. And if the beautiful see themselves, they will love themselves). We are preaching virtue again, but by that to mean NOW, toward what seems the most constructive use of the word. ("The Revolutionary Theatre" 1)

His very first and most important idea about The Revolutionary Theatre is that it should force change because, at the time the essay was written, change was not only desirable but obligatory on account of the fact that black Americans were facing grim discrimination in American society. Racial segregation meant that black citizens were deprived of basic human rights and were structurally disenfranchised, disregarded and despised in the society; in short, they faced physical, systemic and psychic violence in multifaceted aspects of life. These unfortunate and inhuman conditions caused them to have a negative opinion about themselves, most lost their self-esteem and were made to believe that their lives not having value at least not as much as whites'. Frantz Fanon's ideas on Black subjects and their positions in white societies are significant to understand Clay's position as well as other black subjects' positions and behavior. Fanon's popular book *Black Skins, White Masks* investigates the psychology of black subjects and is considered one of the pillars of the issue. In the preface to its 2008 edition, Ziauddin Sardar writes that the book examines "how

colonialism is internalized by the colonized, how an inferiority complex is inculcated, and how, through the mechanism of racism, black people end up emulating their oppressors" (Fanon x). Imitation and mimicry, which in the long run resulted in assimilation, might be argued to be an obligation not a choice because some have felt a strong necessity to transform themselves so as to be accepted in the society. Baraka's art asserts the fallacy of such a position; for Baraka, black imitation of white concepts is a trap that eschews self-determination and undoes political progress; rather, it makes problems worse than ever.

Using his art as a means, as "a weapon," Baraka wrote plays, poems and articles which foregrounded brutal racism and the punitive realities of Black society. Consequently, his works have provoked controversy, which in turn has rendered them both widely read and widely criticized. Some critics have hailed his works as revolutionary, but many have also criticized Baraka harshly for his divisiveness and for encouraging racial tensions. Nita N. Kumar, for instance, describes Baraka's position as an "aggressive and un-yielding anti-white position" and writes that in Baraka's works "[t]he White world is repeatedly described as evil, sick and dying, and the creation of a positive black consciousness is crucially linked to the declaration of white culture as evil and insane" (272). David L. Smith also states that "Baraka's career has been a persistent chronicle of controversies, most of them having been provoked by Baraka's own deliberately incendiary polemics" (235). In his own autobiography, Baraka also addresses criticisms against himself and his play writing that he was called "foul-mouthed," "full of hatred," "furious, angry"; nevertheless, he asserts, "the play had made its mark" (*Autobiography* 276). Within his terms of the ends justifying the means, then, he was able to reach an audience, convey his message and provoke debate, and that, for Baraka, was what was important.

Dutchman is Baraka's most popular and widely known play. In his own terms, *Dutchman* accuses, forces and works to destroy several aspects of white hegemony, impulse which he himself states are the primary goals of Revolutionary Theater. In the play, Baraka uses intertextuality which helps him create a playful language and allows him to suggest that the play operates on multiple layers. In this sense, the play does not privilege one finite, stable or consistent meaning. Julia Kristeva provided one of the earliest elucidations of the implications of using intertextuality within texts by using Bakhtin as a

starting point. Kristeva contends that "what appears as a lack of rigor is in fact an insight first introduced into literary theory by Bakhtin: any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (37).

Thus, Kristeva posits that all literary or non-literary texts are interdependent; they refer to, conclude from, rephrase each other and are always-already interacting with preexisting texts. Consequently, texts cannot ever be said to be truly original because there is nothing that can be said that has not already been said and every text will and does have relations with prior texts, reproducing and transforming them in the acts of reading and writing (Zengin 300). Alfaro expands on the theory further; "the theory of intertextuality insists that a text cannot exist as a self-sufficient whole, and so, that it does not function as a closed system" (268). As Zengin states, "intertextuality's approach to text and its meaning is a poststructuralist and postmodernist one with its emphasis on the interdependence of texts and on the unstable sliding meaning of the text changing through reworking of earlier texts" (317).

The destabilization of concrete meanings implied by the use of postmodernist techniques, such as intertextuality, has been cited by many as evidence of the political impetus of postmodernism towards the dismantling of established hierarchies. If *Dutchman* is an early example of the use of postmodernist techniques, then its themes of racial inequality and violence have also been mainstays of postmodern literature. Read through postmodern lenses, it might easily be argued that the text generates multiple possible readings, because neither the author nor the characters are reliable; indeed, as we can see, their actions, words and manners often work to be deceiving.

The play is littered with literary allusions, symbols and myths. To begin with, the title of the play is of great significance, alluding as it does to the myth of the "Flying Dutchman" in which a cursed captain is trapped on his vessel and cannot reach the shore until doomsday (Nelson 53; Baker 110 and Brown 144). Willard Hallam Bonner writes about the different versions of the "Flying Dutchman" myth and gives a simple outline:

> A Dutch sea captain, Vanderdecken, is condemned by the Devil to beat futilely and forever around the Cape of Good Hope because he once swore a blasphemous

> oath that he would round the Cape if it took him till Doomsday. […] He is allowed to visit the shore once in a long while (though it is every seven years in Wagner's opera of I843), often for the purpose of wooing a bride. He fails and is condemned to return to his ocean wanderings, usually by a spectacular sinking of both ship and captain in the sea. (283)

Following Bonner's outline, it can be assumed that Dutchman figures of the play wander around always failing and the subway train is a symbol for Vanderdecken's ship. Similarly, Hugh Nelson argues that the subway train is a perfect example of "the autonomy of the inanimate which confronts us everywhere in our mechanized society" (54). For Christopher Baker, the mythical allusion contained within the title bears historical implications for the setting (110). Basing his argument on Paul Gilroy's emphasis on Dutch slave ships being major representatives of "the institutions of slavery," the subway in *Dutchman* is reconfigured as "[the] modern, subterranean slave ship of his unredemptive dramatic fable" (qtd. in Baker 110). Baraka himself also refers to the play as myth: "In the flying underbelly of the city Steaming hot, and summer on top, outside. Underground. The subway heaped in modern myth" (Baraka, "Dutchman"). Hugh Nelson explores the myth of the *Flying Dutchman* and claims that there is not just one Dutchman but two; Clay and Lula (56). While he considers the Dutchman figure as trapped on a doomed ship, he sees Clay as the victim of the situation. Nelson asserts "She [Lula] is the figure trapped by a curse from which she seeks release and, finding no release, she is destined simply to pile up victims, to make corpses" (56). The claim that Lula is also trapped in the society is convincing but Clay's positioning as Lula's victim needs to be discussed further. It is true that Lula stabs Clay fatally and she is the one who provokes Clay; however, she can be seen as both the victim of misogyny and at the same time the perpetrator.

Baraka evokes the biblical story of The Fall of Man, using the pieces of apple that Lula offers Clay as a symbol highlighting the temptation her character represents. Also, the name Clay suggests Adam, because several translations of the Bible suggest that he was formed out of clay. As a consequence, Clay's victimization pivots on the allegory of Clay as Adam, while "sexy, flirtatious, playful, and intriguing, yet sinister, devious, insulting, and finally murderous," Lula is Eve (Baker 111). The metaphor expands with the subway being an

ironic Garden of Eden and finally the apple as the forbidden fruit taken from the Tree of Knowledge (Adams 57; Baker 111).

When Lula gets on the subway, she sits next to Clay, eating an apple. She offers some pieces to Clay. The initial interactions between the two characters seem very conventional: a man and woman sit on a subway train and begin flirting. Yet the historical context of the play, written in 1964, renders the situation thwart with dramatic tension. That same year saw the passing of the Civil Rights Act, dismantling Jim Crow segregation in the South and combating racial discrimination across the country. In such a context, inter-racial interaction, especially sexual interaction, was at best subversive and radical, and for others absolutely forbidden. This context swiftly bears down on their interactions as their conversation becomes tenser and they start to question each other's words and behaviors. In this way, this change in dynamic can be understood to illustrate a more accurate example of black and white interaction in 1960s America.

If *Dutchman* partly retells the biblical story of the Fall, then it may be claimed that it is Clay who is offered the forbidden apple and thus falls from grace. In *Dutchman*, heaven or grace is a free and unbiased world where Clay assumes or desires to live and the interaction between Clay and Lula causes Clay to be fallen from by both raising his consciousness and killing him. Nevertheless, this explanation does not help us understand the motivation behind Lula's actions. It is Lula who starts the interaction between the two, by offering Clay the apple and asking him questions, flirting with him. Why does Lula want to interact with Clay? Does she provoke him? Is she an enabler, a consciousness-raiser or victimizer? Who does she actually represent? Is not Lula yet another victim of the society? Who is *in fact* fallen and doomed?

It is true that Baraka deconstructs the story of Adam and Eve, but he does it in such a way that at the same time he destroys the perception of Eve. The deconstructive approach allows the reader to find diverse meanings because, through this lens, signs are not absolute but generate new meanings in different contexts at different times. In the *Margins of Philosophy*, Derrida writes that:

> Deconstruction cannot limit itself or proceed immediately to a neutralization: it must, by means of a double gesture, a double science, a double writing,

> practice an overturning of the classical opposition and a general displacement of the system. It is only on this condition that deconstruction will provide itself the means with which to intervene in the field of oppositions that it criticizes, which is also a field of non-discursive forces. (329)

A similar impulse can be found at work in Baraka's echoes of the Fall. Baraka deconstructs the biblical story by changing, distorting and finally destroying it. It can be claimed that Baraka achieves a double writing and overturns the classical oppositions, and is thus in tune with Derrida's compulsion. Nita N. Kumar, defining Lula as a postmodernist, writes that "in *Dutchman*, Lula is already a Derridean in her interpretation of 'self'" (276). Kumar further asserts that "[s]he is, or rather represents herself as being, an indeterminate creature for whom being is a form of game playing. Soon after confronting Clay, she begins building up his persona through a series of conjectures that have no verifiable source" (276). Through these conjectures, Clay begins to construct his own consciousness. In this way, Lula could be understood as the opposite of a villain who finally kills the hero, but rather a consciousness-raising agent who wakes Clay from his quietism and gives voice to his disenfranchisement. To put it clearly, at the beginning of the play Clay is shown and acknowledged to be a middle-class conformist. He is presented as a conformist who tries to act, dress and behave "white." He does not question the status quo; instead he conforms to it, which makes him the opposite of a hero. On the other hand, as a potential white "enemy," Lula raises his consciousness by means of her actions that are seen as tempting, seductive and evil. This makes Lula the opposite of villain. In his book *Designs of Blackness: Studies in the Literature of African-America,* A. Robert Lee takes a similar position and argues that even though Lula provokes Clay, she has the power to enlighten him first, then "punish for that same enlightenment" (166).

Baraka's decision to gender the white character a woman and the black character a man is also telling. Patriarchal practices shadowed racial discrimination in American society, rendering Lula both powerful and weak, persecutor and persecuted. Indeed, in *Dutchman*, Baraka turns the characters and stereotypes upside down, thus changing, distorting and transforming the binary oppositions of hero/villain. At the end of the play, the position, status, levels of consciousness

and indeed almost everything that the audience might assume about the characters change—the quiet Clay becomes a fierce, conscious man who stands up for himself only to have his very consciousness-raising agent, Lula, kill him in response. In this reading, in contrast to common presumptions about *Dutchman*, the play proves itself to be a slippery postmodern text. Barbara Johnson writes that, for Derrida, reading encloses "other" logics of configurations which might not be in line with conventional "logics of meaning, identity, consciousness, or intention" and for that reason one should take into consideration these logics which will be disregarded by "a standard reading" (46). With a standard reading, Lula would not stand as a positive character in the text, yet with a Derridean perspective, Lula becomes a consciousness-raising agent, a reinforcer for Clay.

Consequently, Baraka deconstructs the myth of Adam and Eve, Eve tempting Adam to eat the forbidden fruit. What Eve does is to encourage Adam to reach for reality instead of being content with a dream and this is precisely the role Lula plays in the character development of Clay. Even the scholars who claim that Lula is a "beautiful seductress" define Clay as "a conformist, buttoned-up behind white conventions" (Weisgramm 219). While Dianne H. Weisgram claims that Clay is manipulated by Lula, we can use the very same quote from the text to argue that by insulting him and denuding his assimilationist impulses, Lula is encouraging Clay to remember his identity and heritage: "Clay, you liver-lipped white man. You would-be Christian. You ain't no nigger, you're just a dirty white man. Get up, Clay. Dance with me, Clay" (Baraka 1905).

Despite the fact that on one level Lula is tempting Clay to engage in sexual intimacy, one might also argue that she is trying to get him to fight with the oppressor, which she paradoxically represents herself. She even goes on to say: "Be cool. Be cool. That's all you know... shaking that wildroot cream-oil on your knotty head, jackets buttoning up to your chin, so full of white man's words. Christ. God. Get up and scream at these people. Like scream meaningless shit in these hopeless faces" (*Dutchman* 1905).

In the biblical version after Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, they are sent out of the Garden of Eden. It is Eve who is tempted by the serpent and who first eats the forbidden fruit and Adam who follows her in temptation. In *Dutchman*, it is Lula who

offers Clay an apple, the symbol of forbidden truth. Many scholars have seen Lula's flamboyance, seductiveness, and flirtatiousness as biblical symbolism. For instance, Weisgram argues that "Jones makes [Clay and Lula] unmistakably clear, emblems of Black and White America" and claims that "[t]he Whites premeditatedly tantalize the Blacks in order to arouse Black aggression and justify White violence" (219). Weisgram claims that Lula is a stereotype of white woman and that "[t]hey are mutual stereotypes merging in conflict" (222). Weisgram's claim is consistent with those who understand Lula to be a provocateur and manipulator, such as Daniel Matlin who describes her as a "vindictive, white, bohemian temptress" (94) and Christopher Baker, as "sociopathically abusive" (110). Nevertheless, by choosing to gender the white character a woman, which allows Baraka to retell the Fall, it is possible to interpret Lula as yet another victim of a society built on racism and patriarchy. In this way, her provocations facilitate Clay's self-awareness, which could be seen as helping him in addition to harming him. Further, the shock that her use of violence and the revelation of her predatory nature provoke at the end of the play ultimately subverts the expectations of the audience, and calls on them to question their own preconceptions. Thus, rather than simply a violent and manipulative white antagonist, it is possible to read Lula as problematizing and deconstructing multiple levels of violence, both race and gender-based. In this reading, Lula in fact reshapes the rules of the patriarchal society; she does everything that a woman was not supposed to do and in fact rehearses a litany of men's actions towards women, including violence and murder.

Jochen Achilles writes that "*Dutchman* leads to a deconstruction of behavioral patterns and the revelation of the underlying atavistic emotions that shape both the gender and race conflicts" (224). Baraka, similarly, deconstructs the fall of man and makes Lula a hero rather than a villain, thus re-assigning Eve to the correct position that she deserves. We can interpret both the Fall of Man and *Dutchman* as narratives foregrounding women's agency in revealing the reality of lived conditions; Adam and Eve are cast out of the Garden of Eden and become mortal, and Clay rids himself of the mask he is forced to wear, and can thus become "black" again, reasserting his real identity. While Clay's murder indeed casts him out of "earth," the only "earth" he has known is one that masks the realities and iniquities of the society he is compelled to live in. Lula's cruelty ironically awakens him to the cruel

realities of assimilating white America, a world which once realized, is impossible to live a true life within.

In "The Revolutionary Theater" Baraka also highlights the significance of the positioning of Clay as a victim: "Clay, in *Dutchman,* Ray in *The Toilet,* Walker in *The Slave* are all victims" (Baraka 1). Such decisions are central to Baraka's aesthetic vision, as he believes that Revolutionary Theatre is "a theatre of victims" (1). In *Dutchman*, it is possible to read Clay's final outburst as Baraka's attack on the structures of white supremacy. Having been provoked by Lula's "tactics of verbal entrapment and sexual exploitation" a dramatic return of repressed anger at the insults and levels of disdain he has endured from white society occurs (Baker 117). Clay cannot help himself and starts his attacks and accusations:

> CLAY. […] Shit, you don't have any sense, Lula, nor feelings either. I could murder you now. Such a tiny ugly throat. I could squeeze it flat, and watch you turn blue, on a humble. For dull kicks. And all these weak faced ofays squatting around here, staring over their papers at me. Murder them too. Even if they expected it. That man there… *(Points to a well-dressed man)* I could rip that Times right out of his hand, as skinny and middle-classed as I am, I could rip that paper out of his hand and just easily rip out his throat. It takes no great effort: For what? To kill you soft idiots? You don't understand anything but luxury (*Dutchman* 1906).

Clay's outburst after the long build of tension between the characters has also been interpreted as a "verbal ejaculation" by Saddik Gohar (8). He asserts that Baraka tries to establish a sexual union through the motif of a knife, as well as via Clay's outpour. In addition, the whole relationship between Lula and Clay can also be considered as a cipher for violent sexual union. Gohar proposes that the knife is a phallic symbol and Lula's stabbing Clay at the very end of the play is "a symbolic union between Clay and Lula (that) leads to the victimization and murder of Clay" (8).

The predominantly white passengers' throwing Clay's dead body out of the train signifies the complicity of the society in Clay's

murder. Paradoxically, Lula is both in collusion with the white society in victimizing blacks and also a victim herself at the hands of that same society. Thus she can easily deny moral culpability. The action might be read as evidence that while Lula has tried hard enough to enlighten him and change his perspective for the better, no matter how angry Clay becomes at the end of their dialogue, Clay fails to take the necessary actions. His continued acquiescence can be seen ultimately as provoking Lula to violence. In the atavistic moral universe where racism and patriarchy continue to govern and stymie social relations, Lula represents a bitter truthsayer. Clay's inability to profoundly change his situation even in the face of such provocation, for Lula, renders him a deserving victim. In his review of *Dutchman*, Thaddeus Martin has a similar comment about Clay's position: "[b]ecause Clay fails to see the value inherent in his Blackness and, indeed, in himself, his fate is sealed" (62).

The dramatic impact of the presence of white passengers on the train who are indifferent to blacks' position is also vitally important to Baraka's larger social critique. Passive observers of the action, witnesses of the incident who take sides with neither Clay nor Lula as they trade insults and physical abuse at the hands of one another, the fellow passengers step in only to clear away the evidence of violence. Thus, Baraka presents a scathing critique of the complicity of the wider white society, who stands by and does nothing in the face of social abuse. At the same time, he implies that Lula too is just another victim of the society since the passengers who symbolize white society do not attempt to stop Clay in any way when Clay shouts, harasses, and slaps her.

> CLAY. [*Slaps her as hard as he can, across the mouth. The back of the seat. LULA's head bangs against the back of the seat. When she raises it again, CLAY slaps her again*] Now shut up and let me talk [*He turns toward the other riders, some of whom are sitting on the edge of their seats. The DRUNK is on one knee, rubbing his head, and singing softly the same song. He shuts up too when he sees CLAY watching him. The others go back to newspapers or stare out the windows*]. (*Dutchman* 1906)

They are as voiceless as the seats in the subway, and turn their

heads away. Just as they do not empathize with black Americans, they disregard women in the society; both groups are ignored, disregarded and left alone by the very society they live in. Thus, Baraka shows that conformist white society is both racist and patriarchal, and whatever is said, is ultimately apathetic about the fate of both racial minorities and women in general. It is possible, then, that Baraka's larger social point is that these groups should support each other against the privileged white men of the society, or those that subscribe to their views.

To Baraka, 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" (1). It has been argued that Lula has a bigger role to play than it seems at first. She does not simply seduce or provoke Clay, so to speak, but awakens him to the reality of his lived social conditions. It is Lula who makes Clay feel uncomfortable, who forces Clay to express himself and who encourages him to become himself, which can be read as a forceful embrace of black identity and as reinforcing the right to own one's subjectivity. By means of Lula's actions— indeed, only because of Lula's actions, Clay regains his own identity, finds his voice and is able to both accuse and attack the persecutors around him, just as the creator of the character desires. Prior to his meeting with Lula, Clay has been living in a dream with his "three-button suit and striped tie"; he has deluded himself that in 1960s America a black person shares equality with a white person and that there can be a relationship between them that exists on equal terms. His assimilation has bred attachment to the very system that oppresses him. The folly of doing so is viciously mocked by Lula:

> LULA. I bet you never once thought you were a black nigger. [*Mock serious, then she howls with laughter. CLAY is stunned but after initial reaction, he quickly tries to appreciate the humor. LULA almost shrieks*] A black Baudelaire.
>
> CLAY. That's right. (*Dutchman* 1901)

It is Lula who tries to wake him up from that dream and in a way helps him to enlighten and save him from the risks of subjective annihilation which assimilation poses. As Kumar asserts, for Baraka, Blackness is a value that has to be learned and that "The Black Man must idealize himself as Black. And idealize and aspire to that" (Baraka

Home 248). Before Lula's intervention, therefore, Clay's positioning himself in white society is symbolic and problematic for Baraka, and he tries to alert the audience to the destructive power such acquiescence poses for the position of black Americans in white America. In Gohar's words, Baraka "criticizes middle class Negroes for having no strategy of socio-political protest against white racism" (7). The playwright claims that "[t]he Revolutionary Theatre must take dreams and give them a reality" (2) and Lula by destroying Clay's dream world of racial equality materializes the playwright's position. One might disagree by simply putting forward that it is also Lula who stabs Clay to death, which is true. Yet this would be to miss Baraka's larger point. Rather, through Lula, Baraka shows readers that without embracing a true black identity, black Americans will continue to be victimized and, in the long run, will ultimately be assimilated and co-opted into a society that is structured against them. As a result, Clay's death is symbolic in that it shows his own victimization at the hands of white society; the redemption that exists by its absence in the play is the message that comes with his death that if black people are conscious of their heritage and history, and hold onto their traditions and true selves, then their chance of survival increases.

It must also be mentioned that Lula does not consider herself as a representative of white society. Indeed, she consistently distances herself from the rest of society by means of using the words "them" and "they," emphasizing her difference. Indeed, her distancing might be interpreted as indicative of her belief that the same society also excludes her, as it does Clay. Lula suggests "May the people accept you as a ghost of the future. And love you, that you might not kill them when you can" (*Dutchman* 1902). This "love" is questionable and must be questioned since it is not real, it just bears fear, contempt and hate. Love cannot be a result of fear. Lula, in contrast to others, might love Clay as he actually is. While she seems to be disgusted by Clay's appearance, it is the *whiteness* of his apparel, which offends her, "a three-button suited, black Baudelaire," nothing but an imitation, an assimilated character. It can be argued that Baraka makes Lula kill Clay precisely because of his current position in the society. Ultimately, Baraka implies, the failure of the relationship between them, the absent redemption present in the play, results in Clay's victimization, which could have been prevented.

Thus it could be that Lula is not as ruthless as she is assumed to

be, rather doomed to live in the very same society which limits, restricts, and labels her, and she is unable to rid herself of the traditional "gender roles" imposed upon her by the patriarchal society. Lula is stereotyped as a woman who sins, seduces, provokes and lures just as much as Clay is stereotyped as a black man who wagers his right to rage and identity in exchange for being shown affection and love by the very society which criminalizes and forces him to be a source of fear. By means of reminding Clay of what people think about him, in reality, Lula helps to rid him of the trappings of polite white society and embrace his rights to anger. In so doing, he turns his back on his desire to be "a ghost" figure, acceptable because unseen by white society, and is awoken to his true circumstances and true emotions.

Lula affirms her otherness as she offers Clay an alternative future with her, where they exist out of their own history and are hidden from the eyes of "the citizens," as she says, "And we'll pretend that people cannot see you. That is, the citizens. And that you are free of your own history. And I am free of my history. We'll pretend that we are both anonymous beauties smashing along through the city's entrails (*She yells as loud as she can*) GROOVE!" (*Dutchman* 1902).

With this statement Lula further distances herself from the society, the ones who are considered to be "the citizens." Yet, who the real citizens are is not stated or even implied by Lula or Baraka. The citizens are most probably white people in the society who seem to love Clay so as to make sure that Clay, as a black man, is not a threat to society. Further Lula might be pointing at black people, who vote for candidates that in the long run would harm black society, who try to blend in the society and be a member of the "melting pot"; in short, those who are ready to forget about their own identity, heritage and are ready to be assimilated. However, it is certain that Lula includes neither herself nor Clay in this group of "citizens." The use of the word "pretend" shows that they are both aware of the fact that they do not belong in this society of discrimination. Acknowledging the fact, Lula goes on to say that they will both pretend to be free from their histories, but of course, this is not possible for either character. Being free from one's history is simply not having a consciousness and losing identity, both of which make a person whole. Hence, Clay is not the only Dutchman of the play—not the only doomed character, but that Lula, too, is circumscribed by society and can escape neither her past,

nor her fate. In this way, then, Nelson's point is proved: there are two Dutchman figures, Clay and Lula aboard the doomed subway train.

Having claimed that Lula is also a "Dutchman," it is difficult to explain the dynamics of the attraction between Lula and Clay. Willene P. Taylor claims Lula to have "a deep desire for love and brotherhood" (129). Taylor further claims that Lula is "the forbidden fruit" for Clay and the reason for his destruction (129). Nelson's comment is that Lula needs to be loved but as a result of not being able to "have his love, she can take, absorb, and use his hate as a vampire uses blood" (57). Nelson considers Lula as a woman who needs human interaction and Clay as a man "who will commit himself to her until death with love and respect, someone whom she can possess and will possess her, someone who will estimate her at her proper price" (57). However atavistic her intentions may seem, Nelson argues, humanity remains; ultimately what Lula wants is to be treated "not as a sexual instrument but as a human being" (57). Nevertheless, it is possible to read Lula far more nihilistically, as a character eschewing any relationship that would threaten her independence.

Destruction can be understood as the key word in unlocking the whole play. By retelling the biblical fall and mythical allusions to the Flying Dutchman, Baraka destroys the façade of racial relations in the US while also destroying the position of "the integrationist Civil Rights Movement of the preceding decades" (Baker 272). For him, the pacifist Civil Rights Movement was no solution to America's racial divisions. Instead, he adopted a more radical position that defined his art and life. Thus LeRoi Jones became Amiri Baraka and a spokesperson for the Black Nationalist movement, and he went on in his creative life to create works which contradict the premises upon which the Civil Rights Movement's non-violent resistance tactics were based. *Dutchman* is, in its message that violence might indeed be the legitimate means of resistence, an example of this rejection of non-violent strategy.

As this reading shows, it would be misleading to suggest that Baraka holds only the white community responsible for racial inequality in the U.S. As Kumar argues, for Baraka, "[t]he enemy is not only the white person, who is easily identifiable, but the whiteness hidden in shades of blackness, where it can be more difficult to detect" (273). Baraka believes that blacks can inflict harm upon themselves just as much as whites can, because "the enemy" is more dangerous

when it is difficult to identify. In the play, Clay is not only a victim but a culprit, as the assimilationist positions he practices are detrimental not only for himself but also for the whole black community. Without a concrete identity consciousness, he places others in danger of being the next targets of "the enemy" (Kumar 273). Thus, when Lula plunges the knife into Clay's chest, no solace is offered—neither to Clay nor to the bystanders:

> LULA. Sorry is right. [*Turning to the others in the car who have already gotten up from their seats*] Sorry is the rightest thing you've said. Get this man off me! Hurry, now! [*The others come and drag CLAY's body down the aisle*] Open the door and throw his body out. [*They throw him off*] And all you get off at the next stop. (*Dutchman* 1907)

In Clay's death, Baraka suggests his own culpability. By tying his fate to the oppressor, Clay threatens others and reinforces the same structures of oppression. This results in the vicious circle, which makes Clay the other Dutchman in the play.

Poet Don L. Lee states that:

> We must destroy Faulkner, dick, jane, and other perpetuators of evil. It's time for DuBois, Nat Turner, and Kwame Nkrumah. As Frantz Fanon points out: destroy the culture and you destroy the people. This must not happen. Black artists are culture stabilizers; bringing back old values and introducing new ones. Black Art will talk to the people and with the will of the people stop impending "protective custody." (qtd. in Neal 55)

This call to cultural arms is vital in understanding what is meant here by destroying language. It is not the language itself that must to be destroyed; rather it is the system of meanings which underpin it—of what language represents for the Black community, because language and culture are historically crucial in oppression. Don L. Lee calls for cultural reparation and repopulation with black voices signifying more truthful meanings. Lee also emphasizes the importance of the language and signifying systems used by black artists inasmuch as new generations can be better educated and can reclaim their own histories

via more truthful, meaningful accounts. Given that, it might be claimed that Lula's position as a provocateur urges Clay towards a search for true meaning. She accuses Clay of forgetting his ancestry and trying to fit into society by wearing white men's clothes and, instead, makes him remember his past saying that "Your grandfather was a slave, he didn't go to Harvard" (*Dutchman* 1901).

The final scene of the play is deliberately portentous, and pregnant with the threat of new violence as the stage directions indicate:

> [*Very soon a young Negro of about twenty comes into the coach, with a couple of books under his arm. He sits a few seats in back of LULA. When he is seated, she turns and gives him a long slow look. He looks up from his book and drops the book on his lap. Then an old Negro conductor comes into the car, doing a sort of restrained soft shoe, and half mumbling the words of some song. He looks at the young man, briefly, with a quick greeting*].
>
> CONDUCTOR. Hey, brother!
>
> YOUNG MAN. Hey. [*The conductor continues down the aisle with his little dance and the mumbled song. LULA turns to stare at him and follows his movements down the aisle. The conductor tips his hat when he reaches her seat, and continues out the car*]. (*Dutchman* 1908).

The entrance of this new young man, who the audience knows by now to be highly vulnerable, shows that, in the absence of a change of tactics, racial victimization is a vicious circle, doomed to repeat itself just as the captain of the Flying Dutchman is doomed never to make port. Overtly sinister, Baraka's dramatic implication is that if assimilation is not rejected and if only the tactics of non-violent resistance are utilized, then the fate of America's race relations is bleak and the position of the black community will remain highly vulnerable. Baraka places the emphasis on individual responsibility: in this fight, every individual matters because, as a result of their actions, the fate of others might change. Action is necessary, assimilation must be rejected and compliance must be punished. Sollors argues that "[t]his murderous cycle remains the play's last statement on interracial

relations" (qtd. in Achilles 226). In the end, another young black man is offered up to be the new target of white society. The symbolism of the elderly black conductor greeting Lula with respect, drives home the message that, in this backdrop, complicity kills. Without taking proper aim at the system itself, the structure of racism will continue to harvest its victims.

Conclusion

Reading *Dutchman* through postmodern lenses renders its racial politics starkly powerful. By means of understanding the intertextual references in the play and using Derrida's idea of "play of differences," we might reread, analyze and find unexpected points of views for the apparently simple plot. Baraka, as a political artist, believes that art should force its audience, and in *Dutchman* he forces his audience to confront their own positions and complicities regarding race and gender. The impending doom of a new character that is offered by the ending burdens the audience with dramatic responsibility. No character in the play, nor the audience, escapes the moral implications of an America built on racial violence and gendered oppression. Baraka wishes to provoke change in people through his art—to raise awareness and incite consciousness. In many ways, this aligns his position with Lula. While many critics have seen Lula as a one-dimensional character who rehearses various traditional stereotypes of femininity, this article claims that Lula's function is more complex. Rather than simply a temptress, seducer, provocateur, she is rather another victim of a society built of patriarchy as well as on racism. As a result, Lula and Clay turn out to be both Dutchman figures; both are victimized and, without the intervention of others, it is almost impossible for them to rid themselves of this vicious circle. Finally, Lula's ultimate act which results in Clay's death might in fact be almost perversely natural, given the social restrictions placed upon the characters. Lula, from the very beginning, goads Clay into standing up to the bullying that society inflicts upon him, but he does not defend himself. The consciousness that Lula tries to raise, desires and hopes for is not fulfilled, which becomes a failure also for Lula. Baraka, through Lula, tries to construct this identity. However, Lula's failure clarifies for her that Clay's existence means nothing to himself, to her, or to his race. Her failure and his are locked together, and thus his fate is sealed.

Works Cited

Achilles, Jochen. "Allegory and Iconography in African American Drama of the Sixties: Imamu Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman* and Alice Childress's *Wine in the Wilderness*." *Amerikastudien/ American Studies*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2000, pp. 219–238. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41157564.

Adams, George R. "My Christ in Dutchman." *College Language Association Journal*, vol. 15, 1971, pp. 54-58.

Alfaro, María Jesús Martínez. "Intertextuality: Origins and Development of the Concept." *Atlantis*, vol. 18, no. 1/2, 1996, pp. 268-285. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41054827.

Baker, Christopher. "A Trip with the Strange Woman: Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman* and the Book of Proverbs." *South Atlantic Review*, vol. 78, no. 3/4, 2013, pp. 110-128. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/43739218.

Baraka, Amiri. *Dutchman*. *Anthology of American Literature*. Vol II: Realism to the Present, edited by George McMichael, et. al., MacMillan Publishing, 1980, pp. 1896-1908.

---. *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones.* Lawrence Hill Books, 1997.

---. "The Revolutionary Theater" *Liberator*, July 1965 National Humanities Center Resource Toolbox: The Making of African American Identity: Vol. III, 1917-1968, pp.1-3.

Bonner, Willard Hallam. "The Flying Dutchman of the Western World." *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 59, no. 233, 1946, pp. 282-288. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/536251.

Brown, Lloyd W. *Amiri Baraka.* G.B. Hall and Co., 1964.

Derrida, Jacques. *Margins of Philosophy*. Translated by Alan Bass, U of Chicago P, 1982.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skins, White Masks*. Pluto Books, 2008.

Gohar, Saddik. "The Complicated Interfaces of Symbolism and Myth in *Dutchman*" *International Journal of English Literature and Culture*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2018, pp. 7-12.

Johnson, Barbara. "Writing." *Critical Terms for Literary Study,* edited by Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, U of Chicago P, 1990, pp. 39-49.

Kern, Douglas. *Killing in the Name of Struggle: Amiri Baraka's Revolutionary Theatre.* The University of York. PhD dissertation, 2014.http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/6365/1/Final%20Submission%20PhD.pdf

Kristeva, Julia. *The Kristeva Reader*. Edited by Toril Moi. Columbia UP, 1986.

Kumar, Nita N. "The Logic of Retribution: Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*." *African American Review*, vol. 37, no. 2/3, 2003, pp. 271-279. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1512313.

Lee, A. Robert. *Designs of Blackness: Studies in the Literature of African-America*, Pluto Press, 1998. *ProQuest Ebook Central*,http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/halictr/detail.action?docID=3386112.

Martin, Thaddeus. "*Dutchman* Reconsidered." *Black American Literature Forum*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1977, p. 62. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3041574.

Matlin, Daniel. "'Lift up Yr Self!" Reinterpreting Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), Black Power, and the Uplift Tradition." *Journal of American History*, vol. 93, no. 1, 2006, pp. 91-116. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/4486061.

Neal, Larry. "The Black Arts Movement." *A Sourcebook on African-American Performance: Plays, People, Movements,* edited by Annemarie Bean, Routledge, 1999. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/halictr/detail.action?docID=166118.

Nelson, Hugh. "LeRoi Jones' *Dutchman*: A Brief Ride on a Doomed Ship." *Educational Theatre Journal*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1968, pp. 53-59, *JSTOR,* www.jstor.org/stable/3204875.

Nuyen, A. T. "Derrida's Deconstruction: Wholeness and Différance." *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1989, pp. 26-38, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25669901.

Taylor, Willene P. "The Fall of Man Theme in Imamu Amiri Baraka's [Le Roi Jones'] *Dutchman*." *Negro American Literature Forum*, vol. 7, no. 4, 1973, pp. 127-131, *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3041441.

Reid, Calvin. "Amiri Baraka: Fierce Fictions, Radical Truths" *Publishers Weekly,* May 1, 2000. 247, 18; ABI/INFORM Collection p. 44.

Smith, David L. "Amiri Baraka and the Black Arts of Black Art." *Boundary 2*, vol. 15, no. 1/2, 1986, pp. 235-254. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/303432.

Weisgram, Dianne H. "LeRoi Jones' *Dutchman*: Inter-Racial Ritual of Sexual Violence." *American Imago*, vol. 29, no. 3, 1972, pp. 215-232. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26302722.

Zengin, Mevlüde "An Introduction to Intertextuality as a Literary Theory: Definitions, Axioms and the Originators" *Pamukkale Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi,* vol. 25, no.1, 2016, pp. 299-326.