



Marxist Approach and Baraka's *Dutchman*

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Abstract

The black literature as one of the most dominant literary movements, genres, and features of Modern American literature worth the better and deeper study. Since the black literature, here especially American Black Drama, based on the social and racial concepts which show a kind of protesting and fighting with oppressions and discrimination which are dominant in the modern American society and according to the Marxist view and Blacks' ideal utopia that they wish in their writing, making and building this kind of ideal and utopian society needs facing with different challenges. Baraka's *Dutchman* tries to portray, symbolically and allegorically, the bitter reality which is in the American society. The writer of this paper tries to present a new analysis according to the African-American writers' prevailing and leading views which has been blended with Marxist literary criticism for any kind of objection and protection against the whites' social norms which are based on sexual(gender), racial and social discrimination.

Keywords: Black literature, American literature, Marxist approach, Baraka, *Dutchman*

INTRODUCTION

In 1966, Baraka (as Jones) published his manifesto on 'The Revolutionary Theatre', which presented an aggressive and, both intellectually and socially, violent proposition for an emerging African-American theatre, a 'theatre of assault'.¹ He declared: 'The Revolutionary Theatre should force change; it should be change . . . The Revolutionary Theatre must EXPOSE! Show up the insides of these humans, look into black skulls. White men will cower before this theatre because it hates them.'² Baraka wanted a theatre that would be honest about African-American anger and frustration, one that would 'Accuse and Attack anything that can be accused and attacked. It must Accuse and Attack because it is a theatre of Victims. (Saddik, 74).

Because of its tangible closeness and focusing of signs and images, the modern American black drama remains a influential position for the codification and de-codification of modern and postmodern American social concepts and meanings that try to object and

cause some changes in the dominant social norms that whites have created them according to the superior imagination that they have and based on Foucault's idea of power (that can be considered a kind of Marxist theory in the field of sociology) which says anybody has power is right.

When black scholars hear the call to equal opportunity in darkness, they must remember that they do not belong in the darkness of an American culture that refuses to move toward the light. They are not meant to be pliant captives and agents of institutions that deny light all over the world. They must speak the truth to themselves and to the community and to all who invite them into the new darkness. They must affirm the light, the light movement of their past, the light movement of their people. They must affirm their capacities to move forward toward new alternatives for light in America. (Robinson, 3)

Indeed, the modern American black theatre has existed as a source and reinforcement of both racial and gender stereotypes; however, by the same token, it functions to reject unwanted images and create new ones. (Ajayi, 6)

Modern American Black writers use their knowledges, and cultural norms as in literature and as the essence of critical tool that are a kind of protesting to social norms which have been inspired somehow from the Marxist ideology. In the rouse of freedom attempts to close colonial domination and racial and social discrimination, new images of the perfect black identity have developed. The position of blacks' race in Marxist study highlights the high position of white artists, writers and poets in the worldwide organization of humanity, for, not having encountered bitter and real colonization and the racial cruelty, discrimination and oppression does not found role of their involvement in the new globalized world.

MARXIST CRITICISM AND AMERICAN BLACK LITERATURE

Although Marx and Engels detailed theories of Socialism in the nineteenth century, it was not until the 1920s that Marxist Literary Theory was systematized. The greatest impetus for this standardization came after the Revolution of 1917. The event instigated a change in belief around socialist ideals in society and socialist realism was accepted as the highest form of literature – a theory based on an art movement that represented and worshiped the proletariat's challenge towards societal development. Marxist literary criticism is a loose term describing literary criticism based on socialist and dialectic theories. Marxist criticism views literary works as reflections of the social institutions from which they originate. According to Marxists, even literature itself is a social institution and has a specific ideological function, based on the background and ideology of the author. (Eagleton, 18)

The English literary critic and cultural theorist, Terry Eagleton, defines Marxist criticism this way:

Marxist criticism is not merely a 'sociology of literature', concerned with how novels get published and whether they mention the working class. Its aim is to explain the literary work more fully; and this means a sensitive attention to its forms, styles and, meanings. But it also means

grasping those forms, styles and meanings as the product of a particular history. (21)

The Bourgeois, in Baraka's *Dutchman*, Lula (who represents the sadistic temptress), and whites (Dominant class who control and own the means of production) and Proletariat, Clay (a twenty-year-old black man who believes he can live as an individual in American society and avoid the trappings of history and the politics of race relations.) and other blacks in the modern American society and symbolically and Allegorically present them as Marx says inferior class (Subordinate class: Don't own and control the means of production) were the only two classes who engaged in hostile interaction to achieve class consciousness. Marx believed that all past history is a struggle between hostile and competing economic classes in state of change and Baraka presents this challenge in his masterpiece *Dutchman* which is a real show of internal social racial, ideological challenges that the reader of this text can feel in the modern American society.

BARAKA AND DUTCHMAN

In a study by *Negro Digest* in 1968 among thirty-eight African American writers, Baraka (1934-2014), born Everett LeRoi Jones, was named "the most promising black writer", "the most important living black poet" and "the most important black playwright" in America. According to drama scholar Hugh Nelson in *Educational Theatre Journal*, Baraka's work may contain flaws, but it "has the vital ability to suggest a multiplicity of concepts in a simple and direct action." This African-American playwright, Amiri Baraka, is a model of the self-made African-American national, poet and propagandist. (Bloom, 36)

The *Dutchman* can be labeled as a political allegory and symbolism which is full of allusion to social, political, and historical events which portraying black and white relationships during the time Baraka wrote it and it became a real mirror for bitter truth which is dominant in modern American society, among different races and social classes. In *Dutchman*, the protagonist, Clay (considering symbolic and allegorical name which is associated with the creation of Adam), represents the black revolutionary spirit that Baraka possessed when he wrote the play. Like Baraka, Clay was a young, educated and flexible black man living in the big city, where it is full of social, economic, political, religious (as the play says they against Jewish, blacks and educated people and never inferior classes of society are tolerated).

PLOT

The play focuses on Lula, the meaning of her name is symbolically interesting it means in a general term for very attractive, yet intelligent woman. In other words, a 'sex bomb' and in another term used to describe women gifted in the culinary arts (<http://www.urbandictionary.com>), she is a white woman, tall, slender, and has long red hair. She is described in the play as

LULA is a tall, slender, beautiful woman with long red hair hanging straight down her back, wearing only loud lipstick in some body's good taste. She is eating an apple, very daintily. Coming down the car toward CLAY. She stops beside CLAY'S seat and hangs languidly from the strap,

still managing to eat the apple. It is apparent that she is going to sit in the seat next to CLAY, and that she is only waiting for him to notice her before she sits. (p. 1)

Like Clay, Lula is symbolic; she symbolizes "White America". Throughout the play, Lula continues to seduce ('sex bomb') and taunt Clay; Lula is a mythical, evil Eve, enticing Clay (Adam, who was made of clay) with sexual wiles and murderous intent. Like Eve, she eats and offers apples. In fact, she offers Clay so much of the fruit that he cannot eat any more. She is the Gorgon/siren/fury, the archetypal devouring female. She figuratively emasculates Clay, repeatedly challenging his "manhood" with verbal jibes; she then physically destroys him and throws his body off of the train. She is a sterile goddess, with hands as "dry as ashes," luring him to her room as "black as a grave," a dwelling that she promises will remind Clay of "Juliet's tomb." She tempts Clay with sexual promise, murders him dispassionately with a quick stab, and then prepares herself for her next victim. She is actually bored by the endless cycle of her role; she has "a gray hair for each year and type" of man she's gone through. Lula belongs to the sisterhood of "Crow Jane," or "Mama Death," Baraka's idea of the siren muse who lures black artists to pervert their black artistry to fit the hollow, sterile criteria of white art, and Clay (is a twenty-year-old, middle-class black man. He is college educated, well dressed, extremely calm and well-mannered, although he finally reaches his breaking point by the end of the play), a black man, who both ride the subway in New York City. Clay's name is symbolic of the flexibility of blacks' society identity. It is symbolic of integrationist and assimilationist ideologies within the contemporary Civil Rights. Lula boards the train eating an apple, an allusion to the Biblical Eve. She accuses him ogling.

LULA Weren't you staring at me through the window?

CLAY [*Wheeling around and very much stiffened*] What?

LULA Weren't you staring at me through the window? At the last stop?

CLAY Staring at you? What do you mean?

LULA Don't you know what staring means?

CLAY I saw you through the window ... if that's what it means. I don't know if I was staring. Seems to me you were staring through the window at me.

LULA I was. But only after I'd turned around and saw you staring through that window down in the vicinity of my ass and legs. (p. 2)

This kind of baseless charging and accusing one to be a corrupted man comes from the power that society gives to her as a superior member of the society (because she is a white lady from a superstructure of modern American society) and Clay is shocked by her apparent knowledge of his past (it can be an ironical allusion to Orwell's 1984 that big brothers knows everything about his citizens and here Baraka accuses the modern American society for doing same against his own citizens) . Clay accuses Lula of knowing nothing but "luxury." Clay launches into a monologue. Clay suggests that whites let black people dance "black" dances and make "black" music. He explains that these segregatory actions satisfy black Americans' anger towards whites and disturbs them from accessing the "white man's intellectual legacy." Clay states that if black people stopped trying to

heal their pain through dance, music, civic participation, religion, or focusing on moving upwards in American society, and became coldly rational like white people, black people would just kill all the whites and be done with racism in America. Clay protests to Lula's insulting (as a symbolic member of modern American society) to the blacks' identity:

You telling me what I ought to do. [*Sudden scream frightening the whole coach*] Well, don't! Don't you tell me anything! If I'm a middle-class fake white man ... let me be. And let me be in the way I want. [*Through his teeth*] 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. (p. 9)

MARXIST APPROACH AND *DUTCHMAN*

Marxist critics believe that Drama is not just a collection of literary texts; it is a capitalist business which employs certain men (authors, directors, actors, stagehands) to produce a commodity to be consumed by an audience at a profit. 'A writer', Marx comments in *Theories of Surplus Value*, 'is a worker not in so far as he produces ideas, but in so far as he enriches the publisher, in so far as he is working for a wage.' (Eagleton, 28)

The name of the play is also symbolic, referring to the legendary ghost ship the *Flying Dutchman*, doomed to endlessly sail the seas leaving only death in its wake, as the protagonist of the play, Clay, was doomed to endless journey in underground (subway) up to the time of slaying and murdering by the whites who are superior class of the modern American society; the title refers to a connotation to the Dutch slave ships that transported blacks to enslavement. Clay's name suggests a black Adam, as Marxist critics believe, one who is molded by white society, like clay which God for the first time modeled as He wished and created Adam (although Adam was the first rebellion) and now the whites and rich people in the modern American society are modern gods for modeling inferiors of the society any play with them as their modern puppets. As Marxist critics state Clay believes that he has nothing in the modern American white society, so he must accept the whites' social, political, economic and religious norms without any kind of objection, although he is accused to murdering he accepts the norms:

Clay: You telling me what I ought to do. [*Sudden scream frightening the whole coach*] Well, don't! Don't you tell me anything! If I'm a middle-class fake white man ... let me be. And let me be in the way I want. [*Through his teeth*] I'll rip your lousy breasts off! 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. The only thing you know is that you come if he bangs you hard enough. (9)

Subway trains ferry people back and forth across the city, traveling the same short distances over and over again, following a repetitious daily schedule—the path is cyclical, exactly like the legendary ghost ship the *Flying Dutchman* which was doomed to endless journey. Likewise, Lula's process of seducing and killing her victims is cyclical. She indicates that she has done this for years and has a "gray hair for each year and type."

CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

According to Marxist literary criticism and Marxist social view there is a dominant challenge between superior and inferior classes in the society. The Baraka's anti-discrimination view is in the same line with Marxist's ideology which expresses the "permanent and everlasting challenges of social paradoxes" or as Bakhtin says they are "binary oppositions" which make powerful social forces always challenge with each other and ironically we can say that these social challenges make society alive.

Some of the major themes of the play are morality, immorality, corruption and sexual abuse, honesty which according to Marxist view these try to distinguish whites' cruelty against the blacks' innocence and high knowledge (symbolically both black characters of this play have books and newspapers and educated but the white ones don't have and Lula has knife in her bag which is a tool of superiority for whites). Another interesting point the Baraka wants to show and by it he attacks social corruption which is rooted even in the American feminist movement which tries to separate itself from other centers of corruption in the American society.

When at the end of the play Lula (the female character of the play) two times stabs the clay's heart it symbolically and allegorically approves Marxist social views about the domination of social, sexual, economical and racial discrimination in the American society and it violates the American values which want to be representative (such as American dream and American Adam) in the globalized world and reject it by the leaders (white women who are head of feminism movement) of liberty, freedom and equality in a capitalist society. *Dutchman's* stage directions suggest that the subway is "heaped in modern myth." This subway is symbolically and allegorically represents hollowness of modern life which does not have any real myth in it (since most of the white American people are immigrant and refugee, without a real ancestral background they don't have myth and tradition). His sentences warn the audiences of the play to the presence of allegorical and symbolical concepts about racial and social discriminations that are present in the modern American society. Clay's and Lula's encountering in the subway (symbolically and allegorically Hades' territory, an unreturnable land) deals with real conflict that we can observe in the modern American society in which superficially everything is beautiful and attractive but in reality they have a very bitter truth and full of danger:

LULA is a tall, slender, beautiful woman with long red hair hanging straight down her back, wearing only loud lipstick in some body's good taste. (p. 1)

The subway symbolically is Hades' palace, God of underground, the subway itself is dead's' land which in this play according to Marxist criticism it can be a *Waste Land* that represents the bitter reality of absurdity in American society and the violation of the rights in that society. Lula seduces Clay sexually (as Marxists believe the power that in modern American society has been considered the best tool for performing the social intentions that powerful authorities want from their employees to do), partakes of apples with him, and then forces him to face the knowledge that his cloak of white, bourgeois

values masks his social impotence; the knowledge is forbidden to Clay in the sense that it will shatter his illusions. In Baraka's allegory Lula personifies both white dominance and (Baraka's) disgust for black assimilation, while Clay personifies passive acceptance of low social status by blacks and their blind refuge-taking in the culture of their oppressor. (<http://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/dutchman>)

If Karl Marx and Frederick Engels are better known for their political and economic rather than literary writings, this is not in the least because they regarded literature as insignificant. It is true, as Leon Trotsky remarked in *Literature and Revolution* (1924), that 'there are many people in this world who think as revolutionists and feel as philistines'; but Marx and Engels were not of this number. Karl Marx wrote a sizeable unpublished manuscript on art and religion, and planned a journal of dramatic criticism, a full-length study of Balzac and a treatise on aesthetics. Art and literature were part of the very air Marx breathed, as a formidably cultured German intellectual in the great classical tradition of his society.

Marxist criticism is not merely a 'sociology of literature', concerned with how novels get published and whether they mention the working class. Its aim is to *explain* the literary work more fully; and this means a sensitive attention to its forms, styles and meanings.[4] But it also means grasping those forms, styles and meanings as the products of a particular history. Marxist criticism has much to say on this issue, but the 'historical' analysis of literature did not of course begin with Marxism. Many thinkers before Marx had tried to account for literary works in terms of the history which produced them; The originality of Marxist criticism, then, lies not in its historical approach to literature, but in its revolutionary understanding of history itself. (Eagleton, 63)

It is believed that this play is a very good adaptation of Marxist theory and approach on the modern American literature and especially the modern American drama. Here it worth to mention Marx's *Capital* states that says:

The mode of production of material life determines altogether the social, political, and intellectual life process. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary their social being that determines their consciousness.' Put simply, the social situation of the author determines the types of characters that will develop, the political ideas displayed and the economical statements developed in the text.

Baraka in *Dutchman* believes that the modern American white society is stopping him from loving himself as an independent and complete man. His spiritual suffering can be prevented if there is any salvation and savior in the modern American white society. His burning need to discover an answer to the white discriminations made him support the thoughts of applying drama devices as a so effective tool against these social, racial, religious and economic discriminations and fierceness as a means of explaining the racial challenging.

Dutchman, winner of the 1964 Obie Award for best Off-Broadway production, is a fascinating dramatization of psychosexual, interracial conflicts. The title conveys mythical inferences, which indicate a subway setting (symbolically, mythically and allegorically represents Hades territory) filled with modern American myth. Lula, as the

white modern American social representative, will inhabit the subway, preying upon her black victims, freeing him and both races through her murder. She can be an allegorical allusion to Orwell's 1984 in which all of the characters under exact and deep control of government and Big Brother who know everything about their citizens; here Lula also as a white lady who is representative of the modern American society knows everything about Clay:

LULA You look like you been trying to grow a beard. That's exactly what you look like. You look like you live in New Jersey with your parents and are trying to grow a beard. That's what. You look like you've been reading Chinese poetry and drinking lukewarm sugarless tea. [Laughs, uncrossing and re-crossing her legs] You look like death eating a soda cracker. **p.2**

LULA You tried to make it with your sister when you were ten. **p.3**

CLAY I thought you knew everything about me? What happened?

CLAY You said you know my type. **p.4**

The last pages of the play is a Marxist based blacks' preaching and social manifestation for defending themselves as a Man and not as "dirty white" which Lula calls him "You middle-class black bastard. Forget your social-working mother" or "You ain't no nigger, you're just a dirty white man", and when she asks him to dance and rub his belly to her she says that she is in doubt about his manhood because he is a negro, "Clay. Let's rub bellies on the train. The nasty. The nasty." (P. 7, 8)

In Baraka's *Dutchman* Clay, the hero, is a good example of the two-ness or in-betweenness. He finds difficulty choosing between the ethnocentric white culture and the black culture. He allows himself to be shaped into the image of the white middle-class society. Baraka's protagonist is situated in between two worlds and is made to suffer the ramifications of a culturally estranged identity. (Rebhorn, 2003)

Paradoxically Clay as a representative of African-American society (inferior class of society) is an educated, flexible, a rather well-spoken and reserved Negro but Lula as a representative of modern white American society (superior class of society), a disreputable white girl. It is obvious that racism and the plight of the Negro are the points or symbolic and social themes of Baraka's play, based on Marxist social and economic view that he tries to portray. Baraka's feelings on social, racial, sexual and economic challenges are evident in his tone of range and anger which clearly are inspired from conflicts that are in modern American society, which is ironically the leader of liberty, freedom and social right equality in globalized world and Baraka's *Dutchman* mocks it when a white, gentle, beautiful and sexy lady wildly stabs an educated black man.

Come on Clay, let's do the thing...You middle-class black bastard. Forget your social-working mother for a few seconds and let's knock stomachs. Clay you liver-lipped white man. You would be Christian. You ain't no nigger, you're just a dirty white man...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.

Result and conclusion

In his seminal 1968 essay, 'The Black Arts Movement', Larry Neal aligned Black Arts with Black Power, the 1960s movement that broke with the passive tactics of Civil Rights and demanded political and artistic freedom by 'any means necessary', embracing black leader Malcolm X and advocating armed resistance and racial separatism. Baraka makes use of *The Flying Dutchman* as a metaphor for a cycle that is repeated endlessly throughout history, and *Dutchman* is an allegory of race relations in America. It signifies the cycle of history to which we are all, in some sense, doomed. (Saddik, 75)

It is believed that this play is the Baraka's revenge from the superior white class that is dominant in modern American society. Baraka's masterpiece is a great and artistic mixture of modern literary elements, Bakhtin's binary opposition with Marxist's view about identity, social and racial conflicts, reality and truth of the life in under-skin of American society (that symbolically here presented in the subway, Hades' territory). Baraka wisely, ironically and cleverly uses a white lady, who is supposed to be as a leader of feminism and social changes in the modern American society, for slaying, genociding and slaughtering of the blacks in American society. Reborn states that:

Lula's characterization allows her to embody white femininity, and through a form of "blackface" minstrelsy, to mimic the same black masculinity Baraka was after in Clay's final, angry monologue. By tracing how race and gender categories circulate in Lula's minstrel performance, however, the defining trait of Baraka's new Dutchman of the 1960s emerges--namely, his endless desire for punishment, his unyielding self-"flying." By putting pressure on the scope of Lula's complex performance, this article also reveals how Lula's own masochistic white femininity forecloses the same sexual liberty and agency she achieved when she metaphorically "blackened up." In this way, Baraka's ironic treatment of Lula and Clay's intricate, interrelated power plays in the end not only illustrates the self-destructive tragedy of black nationalist masculinity, but also underscores the way white femininity's trafficking in this currency of blackness as a method of empowerment is doomed, like the Dutchman Lula emulates, to suffer endlessly the scene of her own debilitation. (797)

The term "double consciousness" describes an individual whose identity is divided into several facets. These facets bring about the existential tension between black man and the ideals of the whites which appears when the black man comes into contact with the values of his surrounding American environment. Clay as Lula describes is this kind of black man who has "double consciousness" and whose identity is divided into several facets:

Lula: That's what makes you so attractive. Ha. In that funny book 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? ... 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 to Harvard. (4-5)

Lula hates Clay not just because he is black, but because of his obvious attempts to discard his racial heritage. When she mocking him that his grandfather was a slave who did not go to Harvard, he responds lamely that his grandfather was a night watchman. In other words, he tries dreadfully to distance himself from his slave heritage, even at the cost of remembering that he is black. Saddik believes that:

In terms of identity, Clay, as a black man, is not allowed to be an individual. Lulu constantly refers to him as a 'type', claiming that she 'knows' him. At first, Clay playfully participates in her game, as when Lulu asks him what his surname is and he responds with: 'Take your pick. Jackson, Johnson, or Williams' (p. 4). Clay's response, not only highlights an awareness of his lack of individuality as a black man in America, it dismisses the 'slave names' imposed on African-Americans who were forced to take on the surname of their owners, names that have been stamped on them throughout history, as insignificant. Lulu, representing society's relentless persecution and the forces of history, does not allow that. She baits Clay both sexually and intellectually, pointing out that his identity as an American is 'wrong', that he has no right 'to be wearing a three-button suit and striped tie' since his 'grandfather was a slave, he didn't go to Harvard' (p. 5). From a feminist point of view, Lulu as a character symbolizing the white seductress, apple and all, who baits and then coldly destroys the innocent Clay, is obviously problematic. *Dutchman* is Baraka's vision of the fate of African-Americans in white America, and was intended to provoke a collective response and consequent political action within the black community. (73-5)

In *Dutchman*, Clay has sought his education in the discourse of white society: he has been "molded" by it, like clay. Clay, as a member of an inferior and low class society and the most important because he is a black man, is a tragic figure because his passive acceptance of her verbal abuse leads inevitably to his murder, and it is his cultural training that has made him a tragic "type." As Baraka explained in an interview quoted in *Conversations with Amiri Baraka*,

Clay's tragic flaw is his passivity; "He should be resisting that type of murder." Clay commits the crime that Baraka (in his 1962 essay, "The Myth of a 'Negro Literature',") condemned black artists for committing: being content "to cultivate *any* mediocrity, as long as that mediocrity was guaranteed to prove to America . . . that they were not really who they were, i. e., Negroes." (Saddik, 74)

Jones's view of American social history suggests that such a "*Dutchman*" has been imposed by whites, in that" . . . even the most liberal white man in America does not want to see the existing system really *changed*." It is dramatic irony in the sense that he has finally made a stance and shown his manhood, but he fails to recognize that Lula intended all along to destroy him utterly. His tragic ending is symbolic of the violence of white oppression.

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