



Dutchman & The Slave

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Centered squarely on the Negro-white conflict, both *Dutchman* and *The Slave* are literally shocking plays--in ideas, in language, in honest anger. They illuminate as with a flash of lightning a deadly serious problem--and they bring an eloquent and exceptionally powerful voice to the American theatre.

Dutchman opened in New York City on March 24, 1964, to perhaps the most excited acclaim ever accorded an off-Broadway production and shortly thereafter received the *Village Voice's* Obie Award. *The Slave*, which was produced off-Broadway the following fall, continues to be the subject of heated critical controversy.

Dutchman & The Slave Details

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From Reader Review Dutchman & The Slave for online ebook

Rejjia Camphor says

INCLUDES SPOILERS.

When I was finished reading this play, I was angered by it because I hadn't really understood what the author was trying to do with the lesson. It wasn't until I got to class and the teacher discussed it more with us that I began thinking about something specifically relating to Baldwin. It was something Baldwin said when he was on a television show talking about protest and black civil rights. Baldwin discussed the difference between a white man asking for his liberties and rights in society versus a black man asking for his liberties and rights. And the difference included a white man being praised whereas a black man is labeled tyrant and a nigger. This is what this play reminded me of, specifically the scene in Act II where Clay switches places with Lula and he becomes the enemy at the hands of a white woman. A white woman or person can get away with acting out and outrageous and never suffering for it at all. This is even evident in contemporary society with how cases are handled when whites massacre people of color but don't get labeled terrorist or seen badly but people of color do. As soon as Clay speaks out against Lula's outrageous behavior, he is killed and kicked off the train without any thought or consequence to Lula.

Jana says

I meaaaaan i've only read Dutchman, and we're doing it for Camden Fringe so is gonna be awesome af, cuz daaang this play hits me every time

Carolane Vallée says

Baraka's Dutchman first presented itself to me as lacking a purpose. By that I mean that I could not understand the point of Lula and Clay's discussion. Why is Lula such a tease? Why is Clay accepting this discourse and then rejecting it so strongly? However, after reading Malcolm X The Ballot or the Bullet, I could see that there was something I had not understood through my first reading: Dutchman is an allegory re-enacting African-American's history in the United States of America.

Through the relationship of Lula and Clay in her play, Amiri Baraka reveals the social and political relationship of White Americans and African-Americans in the context of the Black Power movements. Lula represents white Americans and Clay, Afro-Americans who know they deserve equal rights. When Lula enters the bus, she sits near him and starts a conversation. Early in their discussion, she mentions that she entered this bus because she saw Clay looking at her in a way that she describes as sexual. Even though Clay says it was not the case, that he looked at her only because she was staring first, Lula still claims that it was the other way around. This moment in the play reminded me of the plantations. White plantation holders were describing African-Americans as sexual beasts who were teasing them when in fact, the white men were the ones taking advantage of the African-Americans. The misrepresentations and racial tensions are embodied by Lula and Clay's conversation in the bus and their relationship.

Moreover, Lula also represents the white political class who teases African-Americans with promises of equality, and with false hope of desegregation. When Lula starts to tease Clay, he believes her attraction is

genuine and falls right into her trap. Unfortunately for him, he was not aware of the rules of the game. He could not have known that the moment he would not follow her rules, she would demonize him and even kill him. Clay, representing African-Americans who believed in the political promises, is disappointed and frustrated to have been played once more. He is angry, like the African-American population is angry. He is louder and Lula does not accept that he takes control of the conversation. Therefore, when Clay threatens her, she kills him. As this is an allegory for the social and political climate of the time, the death of Clay is the death, or incarceration in prison, of all those who stood up to the unjust laws, and attempted to be in control of the conversation as much as any white Americans could be.

The relationship between Lula and Clay serves as an allegory for the larger issue of racial discrimination in the United States. Their discussion and the way they treat each other through the play reveals an African-American perspective of the conflict. It depicts the desire to be known as equals, but also the betrayal felt by the African-American population of the United States of America following broken promises. Dutchman may seem violent and rude, but it truly unveils the sad, unjust, undeserved prejudices towards African-Americans.

Bobby Bermea says

When I first read this play in college it hit me like a thunderclap. No other work of art ever has had the effect on me that this play had. It turned everything upside down, or rather right side up. DUTCHMAN came out a good quarter of a century before NWA came out with "Fuck tha Police". Martin Luther King had just or was about to win the Nobel Peace Prize. The idea was in the air (still is) that black people would be happy just to be able to participate. That there might be anger--even rage-- at 400 years of mistreatment underlying Black consciousness was a concept that was anathema to white America and frankly, to a large portion of black America too. And yet, here it was, on stage no less, with all of its symbolic and actual power. What Baraka (then LeRoi Jones) did was scare the pants off everybody. He shook people loose of their complacency. He attempted to take back by sheer force of language what the dominant cultural paradigm had taken from his people. It's a stunning piece of work. Seeing as how race has been and is a central conflict of American society from day one to now and seeing how this play deals with that conflict in as brutal and unflinching terms as has ever been seen or read, I think it makes a strong claim to be one of *the* Great American Plays.

If all this, why only four stars? One, THE SLAVE is not as good by a long shot and becomes more dated by the second. Second, the lofty status I ascribe to DUTCHMAN will be put seriously to the test in the next century. It doesn't mean that what the play asserts is wrong or even misguided but it is a fixed point in an ever changing universe. The world has changed much. The anger was necessary to get to even this point of relative equality but here we are. Everything isn't better but it is different. When this play came out, a black president was science fiction, if not an out and out impossibility. In 2013 a black president, love him or hate him, is serving his second term.

Third, the world grows smaller every day and as ever, the way it changes can not always be anticipated. The sexism in Baraka's work can not, should not and will not be ignored in the days, months and years to come. Any major social or political force ignores or discounts women at its own peril.

In the not too distant future, the battlefields of the various civil rights struggles will not look the same, nor the weapons used. DUTCHMAN is still at a place where it has relevance and may even prove prophetic or

iconic or it may fade away as so many works of art have, not because it wasn't great but because the work it had to do has been done and it is now time to move on.

Eileen Ying says

i read dutchman. it was very good. yt people are scary.

"Don't make the mistake, through some irresponsible surge of Christian charity, of talking too much about the advantages of Western rationalism, or the great intellectual legacy of the white man, or maybe they'll begin to listen. And then, maybe one day, you'll find they actual do understand exactly what you are talking about, all the fantasy people. All these blues people. And on that day, as sure as shit, when you really believe you can 'accept' them into your fold, as half-white trusties late of the subject peoples. With no more blues...all of those ex-coons will be stand-up Western men, with eyes for clean hard useful lives, sober, pious and sane, and they'll murder you. **They'll murder you, and have very rational explanations. Very much like your own.**"

to be clear, this play is highly critical of the liberal, assimilationist perspective but also unfolds through the eyes of a middle-class black man. it's LeRoi Jones on the brink of becoming Amiri Baraka (so the author that Goodreads lists is technically contextually incorrect).

a potent examination of power and how it manifests via the neurosis of the white american psyche. we see racial dynamics in the form of psychological drama. the baiting-and-switching and gas lighting are wild. however, i have a problem w/ the gendering of races + the undertones of homophobia.

Sirius Black says

Dutchman shows the tense relationship between white and black society. White lady, Lula, is very prejudiced and thinks he knows who he is. She tries to seduce him and makes fun of him. Although clay seems to fit in Lula's stereotypical "negro" image, he presents a different attitude in the second stage. It is not certain that Clay was already a furious, full of hatred type man, or Lula forces him to burst into a crisis, but it is obvious that Amiri Baraka shows that racist hatred and prejudiced minds cause violence, which is depicted as an alternative way of raising black voice.

The play's technically uses expressionism and alienation effect. The other passengers in the car are emotionless, the lighting and car going on are designated to illustrate inward thoughts or the streaming consciousness of Clay.

Marc Kohlman says

Boldly radical and fiercely truthful! These two plays are timeless on the subject of race conflict. I read these plays as part of my Rebels and Revolutionaries: Protest Literature class, having read some of LeRoi Jones aka Baraka's poetry which also is direct, aggressive, and opinionated. The subject-manner of these plays are still prevalent in societies today and Jones really critiques what society wants the public to see vs what it really is. "Dutchman" is a very powerful work where Jones makes it clear that the old rules must be forgotten and African Americans are not going to stand discrimination anymore. The protagonist of the play, Clay

Williams, I admired for being a passive character who really wants to be himself. Lula point blank is a bitch! She is controlling, domineering, and has no control over herself whatsoever. The second scene where she wanted Clay to do the Belly Rub with her and began to criticize him, even going as far as to call him a 'would-be Christian" and "a dirty white man" (James 31) was offensive and disgusting on so many levels. She obviously knew nothing about Clay's life or how African American people live and was extremely ignorant in acting the way she did toward him at the party and making such gross racial slurs. I did not blame Clay for speaking aloud against Lula, what her world represents, and its false perceptions and views of African Americans in general. Clay's entire rant from pages 34-37 used a lot of revolutionary words and the tone is honest, strong, and unapologetic. I pictured Jones speaking this as his character of Clay likely would. Clay is a rebel because he refused to be hindered and criticized by a person who had absolutely no idea what she was talking about and was very much right in what he said without sugar coating anything. When Lula killed him, that moment was a shock to me and really made him a martyr in a sense that he died upholding his self-respect and principles. It also showed how much of a marginalized insecure person Lula is. When she did kill Clay, no doubt she knew what he said to her was true, yet she was not going to admit it or let someone of another race leave having criticized her fiercely and openly as Clay did. I felt sorry for the young man she had her sights on next, yet I am sure her character and any person who relates to her would never be able to wash away the powerful and fiery put-down she received due to her insolent and stupid presumptions of a race she knew only rumors about. "Dutchman" is a poignant story how racial presumptions and disregard for the feelings of others leads and results in violence. The second play "The Slave" left me shocked, angry, and broken in a few ways. Walker Vessels character I did not like at all. I could definitely see Jones instilled much of his anger, criticism, and rebellious nature into Vessels character. His homophobic views toward Bradford Easley shows how America in the 20th century had unsavory views concerning not only race but sex. He is learned to a degree and uses vulgar and profane language, which Jones employed in many of his works, to express his opinions. When Grace made mention of Wright's "Native Son", I was amazed. I read that novel prior to Jones plays and could see why she referred to Vessels as 'A second-rate Bigger Thomas" (Jones 57). Compared to Bigger Thomas, Vessels character is a man who has been influenced very hard by his experiences, is consumed with conflicting emotions, and spits on the laws of society. Vessels certainly did not strike me as a good parental figure in any way whatsoever. I was glad to a minimum extent he did not get Elizabeth and Catherine in the end. What life could he have offered them under those circumstances? I can see why Grace left that racist ignorant son-of-a-bitch in the first place. Vessels radical views especially on how African Americans should rise up and rebel against white society really speaks to Jones views that society cripples people and in vessels case very negatively and he is extremely outspoken about it and he does not seem to really care what the costs are. He will go to any lengths to fight and die for his cause. Mr. Easley was a bit of a rebel for not saying the final words Vessels wanted him to say as he died, therefore denying him the self-justification of what he did. Was hoping he would have overcome and killed Vessels. I was also hoping Grace would have had the final say in the end too. The ending was sad and powerful as it opened to the prologue that preceded Act I, where Vessels is an old man with nothing left. The prologue attacks the whole nature of society, of poetry, and how society turns people into killers, liars, and thieves which Vessels very much is. These plays are dramas that still relate to racial perspectives within societies today and the heated tensions that spring from them can have disastrous consequences not only for those who project them but for the people who are the objects of that racism and/or are bystanders in the conflict.

Saxon says

Baraka (formerly le roi jones) sharply addresses black-white relations in this country through a semi-surreal encounter between a sultry white woman and pseudo-intellectual, black poet on a hot new york subway ride.

For being such a short play, Baraka touches on many race-related issues and chooses to express feelings of paranoia, distrust, guilt and alienation through emotional reactions of the characters instead of hyper-intellectualized examinations of race within our culture. I appreciate this approach which seems to allow the play to be all that much more disturbing, uneasy and overall powerful.

Baraka has gotten some flack over the past few years as being a polarizing, inflammatory figure amongst black american writers and intellectuals. However, Dutchman is an important play that I feel still holds up today as an important piece of american racial discourse being explored through an artistic medium.

highly suggested...it will take you less than 30 minutes to read i promise.

note: anyone have/heard or read his book of poetry called

"Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note"? Seems to be out of print and I would like to get my hands on a copy...

amy-you live in oakland...there has gotta be a copy lying around some used book store or being sold at the oakland swamp meet...

Debs says

Read for my Race & Theatre course. Reminded me of the Michael Che bit about white women being able to get away with anything.

Lawrence says

In Dutchman and The Slave, both plays published in 1964, Amiri Baraka (he was still LeRoi Jones at the time) presents two plays that explore a search for Black identity and consciousness and a question of sanity. Striking parallels and reversals reaffirm the sense that these two plays are meant to go hand in hand.

In Dutchman, Baraka presents to the theater audience a piece that is simple in structure—it features two characters and two scenes in a subway car—yet saturated with complexity and haunting implications. Lula, a thirty-year-old white woman, starts a flirtatious conversation with Clay, a young, middle-class Black man (presumably a businessman), that sours quickly and ultimately ends with Clay's murder at the hands of Lula. In the closing scene, Lula—by now it's clear that she's an agent of the white power structure—proceeds to seek out her next victim.

In The Slave, Baraka reincarnates Lula and Clay but reverses their roles. No longer is Clay the hapless victim of white oppression; Clay is now Walker Vessels, a leader of an armed Black liberation movement that is waging direct war against white society. Walker, unable to completely sever his ties with his past, finds himself in the home of his white ex-wife, Grace, and her new white husband, Brad Easley. He defends himself against the latter two's accusations of racism and murder in the name of Black liberation, but their ideologies are beyond reconciliation. Brad and Grace's deaths seem to be inevitable, but the final excision of Walker's past comes with his children.

J says

While these plays are explosive today, just howling off the page, it's impossible (if you weren't there) to imagine their effect at the time. While Baraka's writing in both plays is clearly didactic, it never comes off as preachy. Rather it's in the same historical theater tradition of pitting opposing views, opposing lives, on the stage and fighting the ideas, back and forth.

Gitte Hørning says

Hvis man satte sig for at ville lave en nykritisk læsning af LeRoi Jones' drama fra 1964, 'Dutchman', ville man ikke få meget ud af teksten. Nykritikken var den tilgang til litteratur, hvor man betragtede teksten som autonom – uafhængig af forfatter og samtid. Hvis man derimod researcher lidt på forfatteren, hans samtid og hans øvrige produktion, begynder den rá dialog og de voldsomme psykologiske svingninger i det kontroversielle stykke at give mening.

LeRoi Jones var en af de mest indflydelsesrige 'African-American' skribenter i sin tid. Han var universitetsuddannet og selv underviser, samtidig med at han gennem 50 år opretholdt en forfatterkarriere. Jones var produktiv inden for mange genrer, og hans tilgang til stoffet var politisk og agiterende, hvilket næsten giver sig selv, når kernetemaerne var 'black liberation' og 'white racism'. Efter mordet på Malcolm X i 1965 forkastede han sit døbenavn – også kaldet sit slavenavn – og omdøbte sig selv: Amiri Baraka. Han grundlagde samtidig 'The National Black Political Assembly'.

Selv om 'Dutchman' på overfladen kun fortæller om to personers tilfældige møde i undergrundstoget i New York, så er teksten ved nærmere analyse en allegori om de sortes historie fra slaveri til ligestillede borgere. Men efter som den 20-årige sorte Clay overhovedet befinner sig i samme togvogn som den 30-årige hvide Lula, er vi langt hinsides slaveri i bogstavelig forstand. Vi er nærmere bestemt i den fase, hvor en ung mand med ambitioner er villig til at fornægte sin sorte identitet til fordel for at gøre sig selv til en slags slave, version 2.0, idet han annammer den hvide kulturs ydre fremtrædelsesform: jakkesæt & slips, kultiverede manerer og ditto sprog. At Lula er 1½ gange Clays alder er nærmest en underdrivelse i forhold til, hvor fremskreden hendes udvikling er i forhold til hans. Hun kan læse Clay som en åben bog, hvilket forvirrer ham meget, idet han ikke er sig bevidst blot at være en prototype: den unge sorte, der som blødt ler (= 'clay') velvilligt former sig selv efter de givne hvide normer.

Hvor ler alluderer til Adam, så alluderer Lulas kontinuerlige spisen æbler til Eva og Syndafaldet. Hun ønsker tilsyneladende at forføre Clay, men akten tager gradvis form af tortur: den hvide kvinde spiller et sadistisk spil med den sorte mands psyke. Den psykiske terror eskalerer imellem dem, og Clay provokeres ud af sin pæne forklædning som en 'wannabe-white'. I et raseriudbrud afslører han sig som en potentiel farlig rebel. Men skønt Lula hele vejen igennem tager prisen som den mest utåleligt larmende af de to, så er det dog hende, de øvrige passagerer hjælper i den sidste ende.

Ordet 'dutchman' indskriver sig i mange diskurser. I én myte betegner det en dræber, hvis pligt inkluderer at slippe af med liget, og set i dét lys agerer medpassagererne som en slags kollektiv 'dutchman'. Med dette bragt til en side skribler Lula et eller andet i sin notesbog, idet en anden sort mand entrer togvognen. Cyklist komposition, altså.

Hvis man ikke ud fra teksten alene kan visualisere sig Lulas farlighed, kan man på YouTube se en engelsk

1966-filmatisering af stykket med Shirley Knight som en forrygende Lula. Rollen sikrede hende en pris i Cannes.

Adira says

Review of The Slave

Once more, I feel as if this play would be very powerful if I saw it performed live, but just reading it leaves a lot to be desired. Furthermore, I believe that the whole idea of a militant black war lord hellbent on starting a race war against whites was done much better in Sam Greenlee's book, *The Spook Who Sat By the Door*.

After reading both *Dutchman* & *The Slave*, I have to say that Amiri Baraka's work makes me feel like I'm being dropped into the middle of his writing and getting surrounded by chaos without knowing how the conflicts started. I only fully understand and "get" the plots *AFTER* I've researched the plays' historical impact. I think I'd prefer to study Baraka's work as a part of a curriculum so that I can be sort of safeguarded through it.

Joe says

Maybe you know *Dutchman*? So *The Slave* is a science fiction play that takes place in the middle of the race war everyone in the 70s was afraid would happen. Given the damage of the war (everyone), this is the, oddly, more optimistic of the plays in that it's a cautionary tale. It takes place in the future. There's still time. And it makes sense that *Dutchman* is paired with this. In fact, it almost seems necessary to read them together. In one Hettie Jones (basically) kills LeRoi Jones in a present day public space. In another Amiri Baraka kills Hettie Jones and her academic husband in a domestic space in the future. In one the white passengers in the train are complicit in the murder. In the other, it is Baraka's black army. In *Dutchman* it's Lula/Hettie who is drunk on the power of wielding definitions. In *The Slave*, it is Walker/Baraka. Who is also literally drunk. Etc etc etc. If you want to figure out what Baraka is saying, you've got to take the narrow road defined by these two. Boy I sure wish I knew what he was saying.

"You don't know anything except what's there for you to see" (Clay)

Jhoel Centeno says

4.5/5*

Really interesting plays!

I liked *The slave* a lot more. It had a plot I understood and development of characters though the little pages of the play. The *Dutchman* was hard understand at times and was a visual play that needs to be seen and not read . Really great plays !

Amy says

This play is a time capsule of the early sixties. It's a discussion of the black male experience in the 1960's. This play is told in symbols. The characters are abstract representations of themselves. the perspective is told from Baraka's perspective. This play is a really interesting time capsule of a theatre style and a political environment. It's not as shocking in 2018 and it's no as progressive and envelope pushing, but it's central themes remain important.

It's treatment of the main female character can feel stilted and one dimensional at times. She is a tool and a symbol, but so is the main male character, with whom we take our emotional journey.

In all, this was shocking brash and avant garde when it was written, but now, it seems to lack the same confrontational impact as it did when it was written or carry the kind of nuance that modern theatre demands.

Amy says

The Dutchman and the Slave are two plays by Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka) from 1964. Both plays deal with black/white relations, specifically slave heritage and oppressor heritage respectively. Also, both make the point that sexual relations across racial lines does not increase understanding, nor should it contribute to any sense of authority about the life of the other.

In the Dutchman, we witness a subway ride with Clay, a early-20s middle class black man, and Lula, a closer to 30, provocative white woman. Throughout the play Lula teases Clay, hints towards the prospect of sex, claims to know about his "type", then later moves towards insults and "Uncle Tom" derisions, escalating the scene significantly. Basically, at its core, Clay is representative of black assimilationists, and Lula could be any white liberal who claims to know how black people are and how they should be, and Amiri Baraka ultimately seems to have no patience for either one of them.

If the Dutchman is full of hatred, the Slave takes that theme to a whole different level. In this play, we have 3 characters Grace and Easley, a white liberal couple; and Walker a black man that we are first introduced to as drunk with a gun, but later find out that he is the ex-husband of Grace. In the background explosions indicate a present or future war between blacks and whites. Walker is the leader of a violent radical black liberation movement whose ultimate goal seems to be to kill all white people. We learn that Grace had left Walker years before for the very simple reason that if his goal was to kill all white people, and she happened to be white, then she couldn't consider herself safe. Even though Walker is a murderer, he is still clearly a victim in this play, since the need for violent racial war could only arise out of decades of oppression without relief. The vitriol builds in this play in such a way that there is only one inevitable conclusion.

These are shocking, angry plays, but especially for the time, gestures such as these were probably the only things that could wake up some people.

William says

Great stuff but pretty elusive. The pay off is worth it though. You just don't know what's going on and most of what the play is about is what you can imagine and infer. I like that but it makes a difficult read. Otherwise grrreat!

Julie says

I've been looking for plays to pair with a study of Othello and I thought Baraka seemed a perfect fit. Dutchman is a little too difficult for my 10th graders to navigate and hard to dramatize but I am definitely advocating for The Slave to be on our reading list for the fall. For a shorter play it is really intense and there will be a lot for students to work through. As well, the overt nod to Othello in the play is a great starting point for comparison. While the play is violent and disturbing, the content is an excellent source for discussion about race and gender.

Alexa says

The ONLY reason I read this was for a class. And the only reason it received as much as 2 stars is because it was mildly interesting.

This play is nothing but a poor description of racism and murder. Not only does it have a schizophrenic feel, but it left me (and I'm sure others as well) at a loss. What exactly happened and what was he point?
