

Program Note
Final Draft

“We will scream and cry, murder, run through the streets in agony, if it means some soul will be moved, moved to actual life understanding of what the world is, and what it ought to be.”

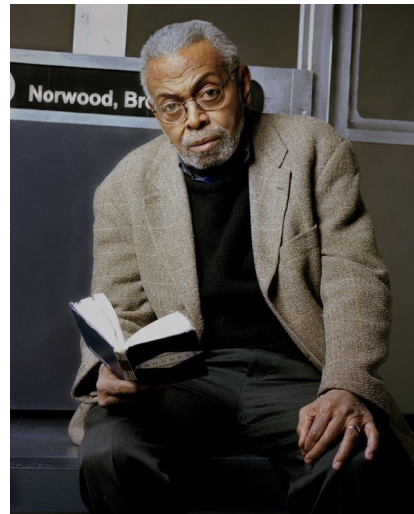
- Amiri Baraka

LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka

Everett LeRoi Jones (now Amiri Baraka) was born in Newark, New Jersey on October 7, 1934.

This means he and Lula were born the same year as she is 30 years old in 1964, the year in which our play takes place. Similar to Clay, Baraka was a poet and a college student - first at Rutgers, then transferring and earning a B. A. in English from Howard University, a Historically Black College & University (HBCU). In 1954, ten years before our play takes place and the same year of his graduation, Baraka joined the military and served three years in the Air Force as a gunner most likely in Vietnam. He lived in Greenwich Village and was a part of the Beat Movement with other poets such as Allen Ginsberg (who is subtly referenced several times throughout the play).

After visiting Cuba in 1960, Baraka broke away from the apolitical Beat movement to address radical politics. When *Dutchman* first premiered in March 1964, Baraka was still known as LeRoi Jones. After Malcolm X was assassinated on February 21, 1965, Amiri Baraka separated himself from the white world changing his name to Amiri Baraka, moving to Harlem and focusing his efforts on the black community. He founded the [Black Arts Repertory Theatre and School](#) in Harlem. After FBI tampering



and a lack of economic means, the school was shut down in less than a year, so Baraka founded Spirit House, a theatre space in Newark, where young African American playwrights' works were performed by the African Revolutionary Movers repertory theatre company.

Amiri Baraka was a poet, playwright, author and educator. In addition to plays, he has published more than two dozen books, including poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. He is known as the founder of the Black Arts Movement with *Dutchman* being looked at as a critical piece of Black Revolutionary Theatre.



What is Revolutionary Theatre?

Dutchman is often referred to as a piece of Revolutionary Theatre, the beginning of a movement called for by Amiri Baraka, but how is Revolutionary Theatre defined?

According to Amiri Baraka, the Revolutionary Theatre should force change, expose, accuse and attack, be political, be of and for victims and help others see how they themselves are also victims. Not for victims to wallow in self pity but to see “strength in their minds and their bodies” (Baraka 1965). Above all, the Revolutionary Theatre is intentionally *not* meant to be another delightful light hearted easy-to-digest play ending in marriage and poetic justice. Instead, “it must be food for all these who need food, and

daring propaganda for the beauty of the Human Mind . . . The Revolutionary Theatre is shaped by the world, and moves to reshape the world” (Baraka 1965). In his essay on the Revolutionary Theatre, Baraka famously states: “We will scream and cry, murder, run through the streets in agony, if it means some soul will be moved, moved to actual life understanding of what the world is, and what it ought to be.”



(The Flying) Dutchman

The Flying Dutchman is a legendary ghost ship cursed to sail the ocean forever. It is known as one of the worst omens of the sea and feared by all sailors. The myth likely originated in the 17th-century golden age of the Dutch East India Company. Amiri Baraka titles the play *Dutchman* and sets it “in the flying underbelly of the city. . . The subway heaped in modern myth” (3). Baraka uses the subway train as a modern vehicle for retelling the Flying Dutchman myth. Additionally, he is also making a reference to the first ship to bring slaves into what is now the United States of America.

References

Baraka, Amiri. "The Revolutionary Theatre." *Liberator*, July 1965.