Name

Instructor Name

Subject

Date

*Dutchman*

*The Dutchman* is a one-actplay written by LeRoi Jones in the 1960s and it revolves around the theme of racism in America. Jones incorporates the ideas of double consciousness, racial and social pressures through his plays, essays, and novels. Likewise, he believes that narrative power should be given to African Americans. Owing to this reason, he thinks that the sufferings and social backlash faced by the Black minority group can be best described through the medium of fiction. This play successfully captures the anguish faced by African Americans as a reaction to prolonged racial discriminatory practices carried out by White Americans. It is also influenced by the multiple decade long psychological suffering and political upheaval that the African Americans had to go through. Historically and politically, this play reveals the issues faced by the people of color in the 1960s, during the civil rights movement. At a theatrical level, this play was an attempt at initiating the Black arts movement by Jones, where he started theatrical plays to highlight the plights of his fellowmen. This play's structural analysis further enhances its subject matter, various themes, narrative techniques, plot development, characterization, and style enhance its message and significance.

**Themes**

**Racism:**

The writer has employed rich themes in the play to describe the life experience of African Americans in the mid-19th century. Themes of racism, white supremacy, black identity and sexuality, assimilation, murder, and art, dominate the play. Racism is a significant theme in all the African American narratives because it recollects the experience of being a black minority group in a racial situation prevalent in America. Their classification is solely based on their skin color and they are denied their just rights because of this. In the play, the protagonist, Clay has to face discriminatory behavior because of his color and race. He is introduced as a black Negro, whereas, Lula is introduced as a white woman. They are not introduced as two passengers because of the discriminatory attitude. Moreover, it is she who stares at him first from outside the window but blames him. Similarly, she can be seen questioning and inquiring him, whereas, Clay can be seen as a passive entity, “One of those hopeless colored names creeping out of” (Jones 41). It also points to the social and political hegemony of white on black people because they were always treated as submissive objects because they could never tell their side of the story (Cardullo and Robert 54).

**White Supremacy:**

 White supremacy is evident throughout the play. In the first play, the character of Lula shows the white supremacist attitude. For instance, she can be seen dropping hints from the life of Clay, based on the racial stereotypes and stigmas attached to them and she can be seen taking full authority, “I lie a lot. It helps me control the world” (Jones 5) For the most part in history, they had a slave and master relationship with the White Americans as it is evident through these dialogues, “CLAY. Are you angry about anything? Did I say something wrong? LULA. Everything you say is wrong” (Jones 41).

 It is evident that white Americans control the narrative and the political and social hierarchies, “And you went to a colored college where everybody thought they were Averell Harriman” (Jones 42). They have their reasons for racial violence but when a black man gets armed, they view it as a threat to either their safety or the violation of their boundaries. This attitude further pushes the Black Americans to act on these racial stereotypes and stigmas attached to them.

**Black Identity and Sexuality**

This theme can be extensively seen in both the plays because Jones has built his character, Clay, around this theme. The idea of Blackman identity is highly stereotyped in colonial narratives and the general perception of the white audience. People of color are generally perceived as either criminals or oglers, “I bet you never once thought you were a black nigger” (Jones 43). In the play, Lula accuses Clay of staring at her because she is a White female and she can never be questioned. Jones has revealed the breach between a Black man’s identity and the fight for its recognition in America. He is not violent or criminal by nature, instead his behavior out of societal pressure because there is no such concept of a black gentleman. Both of them love art and carry a good disposition but the society pushes them towards the annihilation of their true identity where they are forced to act badly so that stereotypes can be reaffirmed. Clay is associated with a French poet by Lula nonetheless but still, she keeps his black identity dominant “A black Baudelaire” (Jones 43). Lula specifically tempts Clay for immoral acts and he refuses them knowing that his position does not allow him to fall for this trap (Weisgram and Dianne 117). However, driven by his human instincts, when he finally agrees and advances toward her, she humiliates him and makes racial comments.

Jones has stressed on the point that in American society, White women place Black men at the position of alpha males who are driven by their lust. Quite on the contrary, white women lust after them because they perceive the latter as exotic or mysterious beings. They also face the issues of “toxic masculinity” and “double consciousness”, firstly because they are men and secondly, because they are black men. Therefore, they can never really defend themselves in society when they are attacked by sexual violence. Clay's aggression shows his identity conflict and he slap Lula and then utters this dialogue, “Let me be who I feel like being… You don't know anything except what\s there for you to see” (Jones 47). Moreover, the bold nature of Lula suggests that her bold talk and confidence is due to her race and social standing as part of a White majority group. Owing to this reason, Clay cannot pose any serious threat to her “where we will sit and talk endlessly… about your manhood” (Jones 46). He acts rather dumb around her while she keeps on dominating him but when his mutability ends, he gets violent with her.

**Cultural Assimilation:**

 *Dutchman* is dominant from instances that refer to the theme of cultural assimilation. Cultural assimilation comes with the status of being a minority group where the major dominant culture is considered superior. Likewise, in the play, this phenomenon has been showcased through the characters of Lula and Clay. Lula, now and then in the play, tries to critique the Black culture and history. When she enters the bus, she carries a bag filled with books. These books symbolize the White colonial justification of civilizing the Africans and it also depicts the lies and control that they have developed over the repressed minority group. Likewise, the world can only read the colonial accounts of African colonization. She carries a dismissive opinion about their unique sense of identity and thinks that her culture is superior. In an instance, when Clay refuses to surrender himself to the American models of intellect and cultural superiority, he protests in the following lines, “Don't make the mistake … of talking too much about the advantages of Western rationalism, or the great intellectual legacy of the white man” (Jones 48). Likewise, the play's title Dutchman is suggestive of the “Flying Dutchman” myth which was an isolated ship and it was cursed to always sail in the sea. From a historical perspective, Dutchman was a ship that sailed African slaves into the American colonies. Clay faces this issue of double consciousness where he cannot disconnect from his roots and at the same time, he cannot be accepted in the majority culture because of his race. The “black subject” manifests a sense of cultural inferiority where they have to share the hierarchy as colonized ones because of their split identity. When he dresses in a suit, Lula questions his choice and mocks his cultural values "why're you wearing a jacket and tie like that? Did your people ever burn witches or start revolutions over the price of tea? … Boy, those narrow-shoulder clothes come from a tradition you ought to feel oppressed by" (Jones 4). He cannot defend his origin and native culture in front of the culture of his homeland as he faces rejection from there too, “And who did you think you were? Who do you think you are now?” (Jones 4). Clay’s reception in an American society establishes itself as anti-assimilated because he does not have a fixed identity, his identity is borrowed and he will be continued to call as a nigger because of his past and origin.

 His final outburst symbolizes his need for assimilation on one hand so that he can have a unified sense of identity within the sphere of his home country. He is under a lot of psychological strain because he cannot adopt violent behavior because he does not want to reaffirm the racial stereotypes. “And I sit here in a buttoned-up suit to keep myself from cutting all your throats” (Jones 9). As a resolve, he resorts to getting assimilated and adopt the behavior of the dominant group to feel a sense of belonging. However, if he tries to adopt the ways of White Americans, Lula addresses him as a Niger whereas on the contrary, if he tries to live by through his African ties, his culture will be mocked because of her racial and political dominance (Weisgram and Dianne 118).

**Murder:**

Through theme of murder, Jones has critiqued the irony of White supremacist thought. They associate every act of murder and vice to the Black Americans whereas, in the play, it is Lula who mercilessly stabs Clay. “You're a murderer, Clay, and you know it” (Jones 5). White Americans can subjugate the rights and liberties of the minority groups because at that time, even the legislative process chooses to ignore mass murder of the blacks. The playwright has exposed the social and psychological discernment of White masses and their treatment of black identity. Lula kills Clay in a state of frenzy and schizophrenia: this shows her irrational psychological state being a representative of the American state and disorder, “And we’ll pretend that people cannot see you” (Jones 5). In the train, people throwing his body on a deserted road symbolizes the historical significance of slavery and the treatment of Black people at the hands of the colonizers. The witnesses follow the directions of Lula, which draws hint toward the colonial, unicentric view of African Americans and their lives. Clay fails to defend himself because he is deliberately killed. It shows the defenselessness of African Americans and how they are not given any chance to tell their side of the story. After murdering Clay, Lula sits calmly and with a sigh of relief on her face because she knows that she is protected by both the law and her sense of dominance. Her “dry” and “cold” hand points to her cruel nature and her stainless character because she belongs to the dominant group and she cannot be blamed in any given situation.

**Art:**

Clay shows his liking for art as a medium of expression and Jones, has used this idea to make Clay his mouthpiece to represent his views about art. He thinks that art is a strong medium and powerful emotions can be expressed through the avenues of literature, singing, and painting. Likewise, Clay, in his monologue says, “Charlie Parker. All the hip white boys scream for Bird…. Bird would’ve played not a note of music if he killed the first ten white people he saw” (Jones 9). African Americans have left a legacy in art and performing arts in the past and they are continuing to do so. Only in this way can they express themselves better and share their sufferings and plights with the rest of the world. Racial discrimination and loss of heritage served as a motivation for

all the great literature produced, “No metaphors. No grunts. No wiggles in the dark of her soul” (Jones 9). It also refers to Jones as a founder of the Black arts movement because he extensively worked to preserve the right of Black narrative voice (Piggford and George).

 This play has rich themes and every theme extensively draws upon the idea of racism, discrimination, and Black identity politics. Besides, these very themes refer to the social and political upheaval caused in America under segregation law and other biased practices against the Black Americans. Additionally, the concept of art as a medium of expression refers to Jones's initiative of the Black Arts Movement (Piggford and George).

**Narrative/ Plot development:**

Jones has written the play, *Dutchman*, from the perspective of a Blackman because earlier, White people dominated their narrative. The story and events are told by a third person, omniscient narrator. According to critics, this play is revolutionary because it sends a message against the White hegemony and their illicit control (Weisgram and Dianne 215). The narrative voice depicts the deliberately silenced Black ideology, the ideas of Black male ideology, and the psychological and social threats posed towards them. This play also embodies the vision of Jones regarding the racial practices; he views equal revenge as a solution to these racial practices.

 Exposition occurs at the start of the plot and unfolds in the form of a casual conversation taking place between two passengers, Clay and Lula, on a train. The setting takes place in New York City at night time. Playwright starts building tension between both the characters when Lula flirts with Clay because this is very unusual. At first, the reader feels that Lula is not a representative of her White social values but after a while, she starts the racial discourse. This rising action turns into climax when Lula degrades Clay and he gives his monologue speech, whereas, the plot winds itself at the end of the play with a falling action. Falling action can be considered her calm disposition while sitting on the train after stabbing Clay to death. In the stage of resolution, jones has shown white supremacy over the black Americans and how insignificant they are for the white Americans.

**Character Relationships:**

 There are two characters in the play, Lula who is a thirty-year-old white American and a Black American named Clay who is twenty years old. Lula represents the white supremacist America and its ideas of rationality, sophistication and cultural superiority over the African Americans. On the other hand, Clay represents the African Americans, their double consciousness, bifurcated identity and the need for assimilation with the White Americans. Their names are also significant, for instance, Clay’s name has been taken from Genesis. The word Clay shows a human portrayal, besides, the word Lula suggests lustful behavior (Cardullo and Robert 52). The relationship between these two characters starts from a casual conversation and then Lula’s racial attitude towards Clay and his culture becomes suggestive of the colonial discourse. The air of racial tension and White superiority is dominated throughout the play until the play ends at the murder of Clay.

**Style:**

This is a one-act play and it is divided into two scenes. Similarly, the writer has incorporated many references from African mythology and history. It is written in prose and formal diction has been used by the writer and no colloquial style has been used. For instance, in most of the works that are based on the subject matter of Black or colored people, Colloquial diction is generally used to define the ethnicity and origin of African Americans. However, in this play, Clay can be seen talking in a sophisticated manner and making good word choices. To intensify the rage and tension between these two characters, in the second and final scene, such diction is used which depicts the seriousness of the matter. For instance words like "kiss my black ass”, “feeble minded”, “Tallulah Bankhead” point to the outrage taking place between the two characters. These words also symbolize the rage and anguish depicted by Jones who is a Black American writer and he is expressing his emotions through this play.

**Historical context:**

 This play was written and performed in 1964. Through this play, Jones presented his point of view regarding Black identity (Ceynowa and Andrzej). Likewise, he opposed the idea of cultural assimilation by including many mythical references from the African culture. Africans associate their literary works with their mythological history and spirituality. For instance, the title “Dutchman” is a mythological reference of a Flying Dutchman that was bound to sail in the sea forever. Moreover, in the opening scene, the directions of the play also drop a hint towards the segregation under the Jim Crow laws. For instance, “Opening scene is a man sitting in a subway seat ... looking vacantly …Dim lights and darkness ….. The man is sitting alone” (Jones 1). Besides, White supremacist ideas are also dominant in the dialogues of Lula. For instance, she can be seen directing hate at Clay, “I bet you never once thought you were a black nigger. *[Mock serious, then she howls with laughter*” (Jones 5). Jones has successfully crafted the play in the backdrop of racial politics prevalent in 1960s America.

**Cultural context:**

This play highlights the racial tension between White Americans and African Americans. Racism has plagued American culture and in the 1960s, specifically dealt with this issue because Africans were suffering the loss of their cultural values (Piggford and George). They refused to assimilate in the dominant majority group and struggled for getting their civil rights back “Cause you’re an escaped nigger” (Jones 8). Besides, they were viewed as a threat, in the first scene Lula mocks Clay’s heritage and says, “The people accept you as a ghost of the future” (Jones 5).

**Social Context:**

Jones has described a racist American society where people of color have no rights and they are looked down upon because of their skin color. They are not called by their names, instead, they are addressed as “niggers” (Cardullo and Robert 51). Besides, within the social spheres, they are secluded by the White Americans because they consider them as inferior and a threat. In an instance in the play, Lula narrates a made-up poem and signifies that the White majority group has taken over the avenues of education and entertainment to spread hate about the Africans, “Ten little niggers sitting on a limb, but none of them ever looked like him. *[Points to* CLAY” (Jones 8).

**Theatrical Context:**

The historical, cultural and social context forms the theatrical context. The play *Dutchman* is set in 1960s America and it takes place in New York. The characters Lula and Clay represent their cultures and political believes. Lula manifests the White supremacist and so-called liberal ideology whereas, Jones has used Clay as his mouthpiece. He has directed his anger and psychological disturbance in the character of Clay, who keeps a calm disposition, but when he is provoked, he acts violently. This play was first performed on 24th March 1964 in Cherry Lane Theatre, New York, and this play established itself as a revolutionary play because it contained unusual rage and frustration against racism. Dutchman was adapted into a film in 1967, both the play and the movie captured the racial stereotypes and critics view this play as a political allegory, concerning the White and Black identity politics (Ceynowa and Andrzej).

 Furthermore, structural elements of the play such as context, characterization, and style all create a unified thought pattern which is then used by LeRoi Jones in the play *Dutchman*. He has extensively covered the ills of racism, white supremacy and black man’s identity and sexuality ideals based on his ethnicity (Weisgram and Dianne 116). Besides, the theme of Art signifies the importance of literature or any other form of art as a medium of expression. The mythological and pop culture references represent the social and political condition of America during the era of the Civil Rights movement which was initiated in the response of segregation policy (Piggford and George). This play is a one-act play and the characters of Lula and Clay are wisely incorporated by the writer and their thoughts stem from social stigmas of the dominant and the repressed culture respectively.

 In my opinion, after reading other plays, this play can only be compared to the play *For colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* by Ntozake Shange. This play has the same subject matter as that of the *Dutchman* because both the plays discuss racism and the African American fragmented identity. The issues of cultural assimilation and white supremacy are dominant in both these plays. Besides, the writers belong to the African American community and they have full control of their narrative power and they can tell their side of the story to the universal audience. For instance, these lines reveal their racial treatment in the hands of the White majority group, “The slaves who were ourselves had known terror intimately, confused sunrise with pain, & accepted indifference as kindness” (Shange 20). Furthermore, another line resonates with Clay’s idea of Blackman sexuality racism as it discusses the idea of a colored woman and her identity in a racist atmosphere, “Being alive and being a woman is all I got but being colored is a metaphysical dilemma I haven't conquered yet” (Shange 20).

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