

CONCLUSION

The African Singer-Poet-Historians who carried word from bird, mouth to ear, and who are the root of our own African-American Oral Tradition.

{Baraka Amiri Wise 11ntro}

Baraka's genius is amazing having so many accomplishments as poet, essayist, jazz critic, social critic, dramatist, orator, fiction writer and above all an activist writer. We can conclude that Baraka's poetry represents the evolution of a mind that has gone through radical changes in ideological influences, but even in these changes, there has been a consistent linear development of discovery and rebellion. It is this development that makes Baraka the person, poet and activist that he is. This is what he himself acknowledges when he very correctly says....

My writing reflects my own growth and expansion, and at the same time the society in which I have existed throughout this confrontation. Whether it is politics, music, literature, or the origins of language, there is always a historical and time/place/condition reference that will always try to explain why I was saying both how and for what. (Harris; Baraka Reader. Preface)

Baraka acknowledges the role of imagery in his poetry. The unconventional images that he uses, make his poetry appear complex and obscure. The tone of his poetry is sometimes colloquial and conversational.

But the words he chooses are apparently easy sometimes vague and difficult to understand, but very often beautiful and interesting. He creates a subjective expression of contemporary life in its individual meanings, a vital flow constantly reshaping the realities of the world into human, aesthetic dimensions. Though he is evolving separate patterns in his career of writing and his forms and themes are constantly modified but it is never entirely changed or lost. Its continuity, when it seems to be broken, is but smouldering. As the image of God in the first phase as well as in the Marxian phase.

In the title poem of Preface, Baraka opens by stating he had "become accustomed" to the quotidian: walking the dog, the hearing the song of the wind, counting the same stars in the night sky and even counting their absence. In the last stanza, he focuses on the images of his daughter in prayer "talking to someone" and yet to no one. Through "her own clasped hands" (Baraka, *Preface*, 5) Baraka saw in the daughter's action, the mundane and repetitiveness of human life that no longer holds meaning for him. Though he had heard her "talking to someone" outside her bedroom, when he entered "there was no one there." The world no longer holds meaning for the speaker and without a sense of purpose or meaning, there can be no faith or hope. The contrast between the innocence of childhood imagination and the indifference of adult reality fuses together a future of hopelessness for the apathy of the Western

world. Later in the Marxian phase in the poem "when we'll worship Jesus" he says,

Jesus

aint did nothing for us

But kept us turned toward the

Sky (hem and his boy allah

Too, need to he checked Out!)

Baraka perceives the new Black politicians as a class of exploiters, in black face, collaborators, at best as black militants in residence. In this phase Baraka uses Christianity as only one example of a system of suppressions which misdirect social energies, and Islam is no longer a better alternative.

In the introduction to the poems of *Hard Facts* Baraka demands that "we need a poetry that directly describes the situation of the people and tells us how we can change it,"

As has always been the case throughout Baraka's career, the act of performance remains central to his art. His recent poetry springs to life during oral performance, which underscores its dazzling verbal effects. Nevertheless, at this point of his career Baraka has clearly put politics in command of his art and continues the struggle to merge the realms of art

and life, literature and politics the struggle that has been so central to his work.

Not only the uniqueness of Baraka works, but also his ability to make use of his heritage, is the mark of his originality. We shall find, writes Eliot, 'that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his works may be those in which the dead poets his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously.' (Eliot: *Selected Essays*, Harcourt, Brace and New York, 1950, p 4).

As it has been already mentioned in the earlier chapters,, of this dissertation the allusions to Eliot, are plentiful throughout. One can read Baraka's "Duke Mantee" and Eliot's "Prufrock" paralleley:

<i>the evening</i>	<i>the evening is spread</i>
<i>spread against the windows</i>	<i>out against the sky</i>
<i>("Duke Mantee" P35)</i>	<i>("Prufrock")</i>
<i>Respect the season</i>	<i>But at my back in cold</i>
<i>and dance to the rattle</i>	<i>blast I hear</i>
<i>of its bones</i>	<i>The rattle of the bones</i>
<i>Winter rattles</i>	<i>I do not find</i>
<i>like the throat</i>	<i>The Hanged Man</i>
<i>of the hanged man.</i>	<i>The Hanged Man</i>
<i>("From an Almanac 2" p 43-44)</i>	<i>("Waste Land")</i>

Baraka's life and work resist easy classification or simplistic judgements, yet, beneath the often violent shifts and turns of his artistic and political views, it is possible to view his work in distinct stages as an evolving spiritual autobiography shaped by the imperatives of an intensely self-conscious sensibility. In the various chapters I have made an attempt to show that there is one single pre-occupation which runs through Baraka's work, it is the theme of change itself, the endless quest for appropriate vehicles of expression and action in a world which is in it self constantly changing. Nevertheless, there are significant and sometimes subtle lines of continuity between phases of his career. Baraka's work changes and develops. But his fidelity to some vital concerns, some friendly truths, gives that work continuity, marking it with the seal of an original temper. In Baraka's early, middle as well as in later phase writing the imagery of the self, the different colours used, the sun image, the sound pattern which shows a kind of existentialism which by its emphasis on the individual consciousness, personalized values and subjective ethics can claim to offer modern man a modern form of salvation. This is evinced by its emotively loaded, quasi-religious vocabulary e.g. despair, crisis, dread, choice, commitment, freedom, transcendence, authenticity and so on.

The thematic continuity between *Preface To A Twenty Volume Suicide Note* and *The Dead Lecturer* (1964) is suggested by the titles themselves, hinting that the narrator still has not resolved his fundamental predicament. He still has not formulated the new identity he seeks.

Nevertheless, a significant development has occurred. *The Dead Lecturer* lacks the playfulness and spontaneous humor of *Preface*; the tone of the poem is sharper, more urgent, and the narrator/poet is less - preoccupied, more prepared to explore the outside world than the narrator of the *Preface*. While the poems of *Preface* moved toward a mood of new life. At one level, this struggle is expressed in terms of the narrator's attempt to free himself of language and poetic forms which no longer have any use for him, as in "Rhythm and Blues."

*I am deaf and blind and lost and will not again
sing your quiet
verse. I have lost
even the act of poetry.....*

on the other hand, his struggle for rebirth is revealed in terms of a life-and-death battle raging within the narrator's consciousness, a struggle between two sharply defined and opposing selves, as in "An Agony. As Now."

*I am Inside someone
who hates me. i look
out from his eyes. Smelt
what fouled tunes come in
to his breath. Love his
wretched women.*

Following Malcolm X's assassination in 1965, Baraka moved uptown to Harlem where he became a Black Nationalist committed to the black community and political reform. Having left the "White world" of Greenwich Village which included family and friends, Baraka organized and directed the Black Arts Reparatory Theater in Harlem and published the autobiographical novel *The System of Dante's Hell*. The following two years resulted in the overturn of that conviction and the publication of his definitively Black Nationalist book of poetry *Black Magic* in 1969.

In the poem "Western Front" (from *Black Magic*), Baraka metaphorically kills his poetic father and trusted friend, Allen Ginsberg:

Poems are made by fools like Allen Ginsberg

One of the remarkable things that Baraka accomplished in *Black Magic* was the inversion of negative symbols and stereotypes of African-Americans so that they could no longer be used against them as a subordinate class. During the 1960s, African-Americans were fighting for their civil rights and being bombarded by stereotypes and negative symbols as well as bullets and bri-a-brac in the process. By defusing these internal weapons, Baraka helped to unify and strengthen the black community. In doing this, Baraka was also redefining the African-American past that was being denied to them by the whitewash of American society:

*we are beautiful people/with African imaginations
full of masks and dance and swelling chants
with African eyes, and noses, and arms.....
we need magic/now we need the spells, to raise up
return, destroy, and create ("Ka'Ba," Baraka Reader, p 222)*

In 1974, Baraka dropped the title Imamu, signaling another shift in his cultural and political views. Abandoning his emphasis on black cultural nationalism and Pan-Africanism, Baraka proclaimed himself an adherent of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist thought.

Third World Marxism gave Baraka the ideology to reestablish the ties he had severed as a young adult without the guilt that he would be betraying his art or heritage in doing so.

*I see art as a weapon, and a weapon of revolution.
It's just now that I define revolution in Marxist
terms. . . . as a result of having struggled as a
nationalist and found certain dead ends theoretically
and ideologically (Baraka Reader, p 224).*

Baraka published *Hard Facts* in 1975, his first Marxist collection of poetry. The poems in this collection was different not merely for their redefined Marxist ideology, but for their diction and form. Some poems

have lines skirting across the page with random indention and certain lines are the representation of sounds, not words.

In the poem "When We'll Worship Jesus" (from *Hard Facts*), Baraka attacks capitalist America's tradition of Christianity. The religion with which the "beasts" of Africa had been domesticated into slaves who would endure their suffering as a race (using the suffering of Jesus as a model) for the existential good of their souls, Baraka takes the proverbial quote by Karl Marx that "Religion... is the opium of the people." And puts it in historical context for African-Americans:

*we aint gonna worship jesus cause jesus don't exist
except in song and story except in ritual and dance, except in slum
stained
tears or trillion dollar opulence stretching bacli in history...
stop moanin about jesus, stop sweating and crying and stompin
and dyin for Jesus (Baraka Reader, p 253-254).*

Baraka published the epic poem-in-progress "Why's /Wise" in 1990. It is an ongoing poem in several parts following the history of African-Americans and written in the tradition of the Griots:

*Griots were the African Singer-poet-Historians who
Carried word from bird, mouth to ear, and who are
The root of our own African-American oral tradition
(Baraka Reader, p 493).*

As African-Americans rediscover their history and develop a faith in themselves, credit should go to those who fought in the struggle. Credit should go to those who are still fighting - and writing for themselves and their people. Among those, Amiri Baraka,

A study of a living author cannot, properly speaking, have an ending. The process remains ongoing, the "same" keeps "changing." An understanding of Baraka is also part of this process of continuous change.