

Learners' Autonomy and Motivation: The Effect of Autonomy Supportive/Controlling Teachers on Students' Motivation

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Abstract. The play The Slave by Amiri Baraka has caused major disturbance since 1964. Baraka's writing seems to get on the nerves of the white people because it boldly presents the real inner and outer struggle of black men with a white system. This paper will analyze Amiri Baraka's play The Slave. The main purpose of this paper is to pin point the significance of allusions/references in Baraka's play. The allusions that have been discussed are three: the reference to Yeats's poem "News For The Delphic Oracle" and the reference of bad poetry to Carl Sandburg. The last reference is to Bigger Thomas the leading character in the novel Native Son.

Keywords. Leroi Jones, Amiri Baraka, The Slave, The Slave, Allusion, References, Drama, Plays, Black literature, BLM (Black Lives Matter), defunding, hostility, injustice, racism

The play The Slave by Amiri Baraka has many angles that we can look at. We can look at it from the similarities in the play with other literary works. For example, the similarity between Heathcliff of Wuthering Heights and Walker in the way that they both loved and hated at the same time. Another angle is the numerous references in the play to well-known literary icons, literary characters, and political views that help in predicting the ending of the play. The idea that the play can be interpreted through many approaches gives it depth of meaning and makes us appreciate Baraka's talent in presenting the black-American struggle through unconventional characters. This paper will investigate The Slave through reviewing the literature about the themes, characters, movements, techniques, messages and trends in the play. Then, it will investigate the significance of the allusions/references made in the play by the characters. Finally, a suggested research on the similarity between the play and the novel Wuthering Heights will be briefly illuminated as a suggestion for future research. Before we go into any details, a brief background on the writer is needed.

His birth name was Everett LeRoi Jones. He was born 1934 in Newark New Jersey where he recently lives. His Father used to work as a lift operator, a job usually filled by minorities and seen as a low status job. Jones joined the air force in 1954 and reached a rank of sergeant but he was dishonorably discharged because of "Communist writings" found in his possession. After that, he moved to Greenwich where he got interested in Jazz music and worked for a music record warehouse. In Greenwich, he married a Jewish Writer, Hettie Cohen,

in 1958. At this period of his life he published and edited some literary magazines such as Yugen and Kulchur. He also got acquainted with some political figures such as Allen Ginsberg and Malcolm X. Being interested in Politics, his writings reflect a black national identity and the racial discrimination that the African-Americans suffered from the white dominance. He distrusts the white American as the civil rights movement was at its peak. In 1965, Malcolm X was assassinated which made Jones announce his conversion to Islam, changing his name to Amiri Baraka, and divorcing his wife. He married a Muslim black woman, Amina Baraka. In the 1970's, his political views has shaped up into those of a communist. More and more, his writings evoked the White's nerves like his most recent poem "somebody Blew Up America" which almost cost him his title as a Poet Laureate. This poem was written after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre ("Amiri Baraka" & Mack Dwayne).

A handful of scholars have commented on the themes and messages Baraka used in his play. For instance, The *Slave* is a play about a revolutionary man that is still mentally controlled by the system he revolted against (Jedrzejko, 341). This is clear when Grace explains Walker's psychological state to him:

There are so many Bulbs and screams shooting off inside you, Walker. So many lies you have to pump full of yourself. You're split so many ways... your feelings are cut up into skinny horrible strips... like umbrella struts... holding up whatever bizarre black cloth you're using this performance as your self's image. I don't even think you know who you are any more (1.61).

As Grace Puts is, Walker is controlled by the system that he is trying to revolt against. It caused him to scream from the inside and have "split" feelings regarding the white race and his ex-wife. He feels love for his white wife and hatred to the race she is from. He also loves his innocent daughters while he killed his best friends. Grace is trying to say that Walker lost his identity that he designed the revolution for. He is wearing black clothes to hide the contradiction inside him. This makes the audience/readers of the play disrespect his character. According to Davidson, *The Slave* is a ridicule of the revolutionary figure Walker. He is satirical in the matter that he shows up in the house of liberal white folks drunk and in the middle of the war (403). This shows that he is carrying the contradiction that Grace explained and trying to hide through drinking. Baraka is using reverse psychology on his audience here by showing the most ridiculous and hypocritical side of Walker to indirectly say 'be real and stand up for your beliefs.' Baraka's Message as Barrios states, is showing the audience through *The Slave* that they need to go deep inside themselves and get rid of the "Hell" they carry inside (47). Walker has this kind of hell inside; it is the contradictory ideology whither acting against the oppression or maintaining the stereotype of a slave. It is an internal war between the inner slave and the outer slavery. Walker admitted his struggle when he said: "*I have always found it hard to be neutral when face with such ugliness. Especially an ugliness that has worked all my life to twist me.*" (1. 75). Walker has been trying to be "neutral" and not act against the "ugliness" of oppression but he was filled with resentment to the white that his mind became twisted. Politics did enhance Baraka's themes, as Watts indicates, that he took advantage of the racial protests that were happening to strengthen his own political views allowing the black man to "rise as" a man (327). Thus, Baraka is enforcing the theme of racial discrimination on the audience as well as the critics, whither white or black, saying that no matter how the white critics try to cover his writing with layers of literary paradigms his revolutionary ideals will emerge, as it did in *The Slave* when Walker reported to Grace: "... *right is in the act! And the act itself has some place in the world... it makes some place for itself.*" (1.75). Walker believes that the only way that he

can force the white to listen to him is by acting and promoting for war so the black could have their position in America.

The characters in the play received different views from different critics. It cannot be helped to notice that this play is somehow a reference to Baraka's huge transformation and struggle in an all-white community. Walker is a sample of the angry black men who are fed up with being followers of the white men and wanted to be on top for a change. Walker being abandoned by his white ex-wife, wanted revenge. This revenge is not only on her but on the entire white race that used its authority to enslave the black man. Grace figured out Walker's intentions when he killed Easley: "... *Is that the point, Walker? Me being alone... as you have been now for so long? I'll bet that's the point... kill Brad, take the kids and leave me alone... to suffocate in the stink of my memories. Just like I did to you.*" (2. 83-84). She figured that he was feeling abandoned when she left him because of his cause. So his cause is no longer a cause of all black men, it is personal to him. Davidson agrees that Walker made everything that Grace adores as his target to destruct (403). Walker in the prologue commented on the phase Baraka was in when he stated that "*we live our lives seeking nothing but ourselves*" (43). Davidson clarifies that Baraka was still LeRoi Jones trying to comprehend the struggle he was in whether it is worth it to be revolutionary or not (403). However, when we deeply investigate the prologue, it is significant because it attacks the white for forbidding black men to live normally, stopping "their pulses publically," and condemning them to death whenever they try to have a voice. Therefore, the black will act and "*will push and sting, and what the crust of our stance has become will ring in our ears and shatter that piece of our eyes that is never closed.*" (1. 43). Moving to Grace, she represents the sound of Walker's conscious as she brings the bitter truth about Walker's inner struggle. She scorned him because he killed many of his white friends in the name of his cause:

Grace: No, you never even found out who you were until you sold the last of your loves and emotions down the river... until you killed your last old friend... and found out what you were. My God, it must be hard being you, Walker Vessels. It must be a sick task keeping so many lying separate ugliness together... and pretending they're something you've made and understand. (1.63).

She is the voice inside him that tries to wake him up from his struggle as she was screaming "Walker! Walker!" when he shot Easley. In such situation, a person screams out the name of the person being hurt not the attacker, but Grace here proves that she is actually used by Baraka to personify the conscious of every black man. Walker goes back at certain times of the play to being that oppressed slave in a plantation who dances away the pain and sadness of his life: "[*he starts dancing around and whooping like an 'indian'*] *More! Bwana, me want more fire water!*" (1.56) and another time when he speaks pidgin. This shows Walker going back to the time when all the slaves in the plantation would gather around and drink and dance to chase away the pain of captivity and slavery. Davidson refers to his state as being the effect of liquor (403). Easley is the white liberal that opposed the black revolution claiming that it causes more damage than good: "*cruel political synapse you're taken with, ... any individual, any person who thinks of life as a purely anarchic relationship between man and God.... Any conscious like that is destroyed...*" (1. 75). Easley considers what Walker is doing as harsh politics that only leads the killing of innocent lives. He represents not only himself but the white mass that do not understand that black men are victimized by the system and stereotype that the white had created for them. In addition, he is the part of Walker that questioned the revolution and doubted the cause. Finally, Baraka predicts the outcome of the revolution as Walker killed Easley. The killing says that there is a defeat of Easley whereas Walker is still in his struggle

with himself and with Grace. At the end of the play we still do not see Walker's either winning or losing: [*he leaves, stumbling unsteadily through the door. He is now the old man in the beginning of the play. There are more explosions.*] (2.88). Being the same old man at the beginning of the play that was preaching for a revolution proves that he gained nothing from the revolution and the sound of the explosions tells that he is still in his dilemma.

Literary movements of the post-war period are said to effect Baraka's theatre. At first we can say that he is experimental, same as writers of the era, where he brought a new trend. This trend is the revolutionary African-American theatre that Baraka preached for in his essay "The Revolutionary Theatre." The revolutionary theatre, as Baraka put it, should reveal the hidden part of the black man and "look into the black skulls. White men will cower before this theatre because it hates them" (Baraka, 4). Baraka's strong statement here resembles the strong statements that Walker utters in the play:

Walker: In spite of all the people that I've killed. No, better, in spite of the fact that I, Walker Vessels, single-handedly, and with no other adviser except my own ego, promoted a bloody situation where white and black people are killing each other; despite the fact that I know that this at best a war that will only change, ha, the complexion of tyranny... (1. 66)

Walker is implying that the revolution will change how the white people see black men. Walker expresses his hatred towards the white people, As Baraka intended him to do, as he was explaining to Grace his reasons for revolting against the system: "*I was preaching hate the white man... get the white man off out backs... if necessary, kill the white man for our rights...*" (1.71). And, previously in the prologue where he suggested a "meta-language" for black men away from the oppressor's language of obedient. Sanders claims that the meta-language here refers to "action" which lays in the brutality of Walker's revolution (qtd. In Barrios, 52). Walker also asserted the idea of Action when he mentions "right is in the act." Artaud's theatre of cruelty effect is crystal clear in this play. Artaud's theatre of cruelty attempts to present to the audience the reality that they do not desire to face ("Theatre of Cruelty"). Therefore, the audience would be in shock-if not in anger- if they were white, watching a play that predicts a racial war against them. The cruelty in *The Slave* lies in Walker's criticism to Easley and Grace: "*I knew that you had moved too far away from the actual meanings of life... into some lifeless cocoon of pretended intellectual and emotional achievement, to really be able to see the world again.*" (1.76). Walker is criticizing their attitude towards his revolution, as they claim that they are liberals but they are against the liberation of the black nation. They shot themselves from reality of their contradicting attitude and locked themselves inside their titles of being college professors. Barrios agrees that Artaud's movement did affect Baraka's drama (50). Baraka himself was an admirer of Artaud as he stated in his essay "The Revolutionary Theatre," "Even as Artaud designed the conquest of Mexico, so we must design the conquest of White Eye..." (5). Baraka did succeed in driving the white intellectual's attention to his cause which is asking for equal rights for the black nation in America. He brought to our attention that the black man is carrying anger in his mind and he is about to act upon that anger if the white man kept ignoring the fact that they pity the black slave for thinking that he could pursue his rights and the white would obey him. Walker and Grace criticized each other's attitude towards the cause, when Grace said: "*... your cause, remember. And thousands of people following you, hoping that shit you preached was right. I pitied you.*" (2.84). She thinks that his cause occupied his mind and made people falsely think that he is right. Walker replied to her: "*... you were so secure in the knowledge that you were good, and compassionate... and right, that most of all... you were certain... that you were right, until the only idea you had about me was to pity me.*" (2.85) They

pity each other because they both think of the other as delusional and each one of them thinks that what he believes is right. The truth that the both sides don't want to see is that Walker's revolution is the result of the white's ignorance about his inner struggle as a slave.

Baraka used Techniques that would enhance the theme. The first technique is the symbol that the title represents. It makes the audience think that the play is about the suffering of a slave in a plantation, but we are shocked by the fact that it is about a man who is mentally enslaved by his own revolution. It represents the modern black man being enslaved mentally by the very revolution that he established to free himself. Another symbol is Walker's clothes in the prologue: [*Coming out dressed as an old field slave,*] (43). This indicates that despite the revolution, he still thinks of himself as a slave and people still see him as a slave. Then, we see him in the play trying to get rid of this image and revolt against it:

*I was crying out against three hundred years of oppression; not against individuals.”
Then he continues: “it was individuals who were doing the oppressing. It was individuals who were being oppressed. The horror is that oppression is not a concept that can be specifically transferable. From the oppressed, down on the oppressor (1.72).*

Walker is explaining that the revolution is against the oppression but he is saying that he could not oppress the oppressor without oppressing himself. So, the struggle never stops. Another technique is the sound of explosions throughout the play. At the very beginning of the first act [*A light from an explosion lights the room dimly for a second and the outline of a figure is seen...*] (1.46) which informs the audience that it is the middle of a war. Baraka uses the explosions to intensify the seriousness of the revolution. There is another explosion that occurs when he was confident about his war: “we'll be here en masse in about a week.” He thinks that he is going to win the war. However, a third explosion shows his conflict when he agrees with Easley's remark on his cause: “the politics of self pity.” (1.77). the explosions are correspondent with Walker's state of mind as he first thinks that his cause is righteous but after seeing the loneliness and damage it has done he rethinks his revolution. The sound of a child crying is very significant:

He leaves, stumbling unsteadily through the door. He is now the old man at the beginning of the play. There are more explosions. Another one very close to the house. A sudden aggravated silence, and then there is a child heard crying and screaming as loud as it can. (1.88)

The child crying out is a symbol of all the victims that died in the name of his cause. Walker himself is a victim of his own thoughts as he declared in the prologue: “...Ideas. Where they form. Or whose they finally seem to be. Yours?... No, no more. Not mine. I served my slow apprenticeship... and maybe came up lacking.” Walker's friends and family are victims of the revolution as well. His wife Grace left him when she realizes that he got caught up in the cause that he forgets his wife is white, as she comments: “what do you think was going through my mind every time you were at some rally or meeting whose sole purpose was to bring about the destruction of white people?” (1.72). she feels the racial discrimination that Walker inflects on the white people which makes her leave him.

There are many allusions/references of literary characters and important literary icons. The first reference is to Carl Sandburg, a famous poet of the renaissance era in U.S. Sandburg is known for his biography on Abraham Lincoln's biography (Abraham Lincoln: the war years) which he won a Pulitzer Prize for (“Carl Sandburg”). He supported the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) and the civil rights movement (“Carl Sandburg”). Sandburg joined the socialist party in America and was a supporter for the IWW (industrial workers of the world) (Villarreal, 5). As a result, we understand why Walker refers

“once a bad poet is always a bad poet” to Sandburg “as some kind of confession” (1. 50) because he inflected his own political views boldly in his writing. According to Villarreal, Sandburg received bad criticism on his political poetry since it focused on politics and ethics more than diction, technique and other devices that the 1940’s and 50’s favor (8). Walker did the same thing with his poetry, where he recite in front of his troops to support his cause. Easley commented on his poetry saying it is “a flashy doggerel for inducing all those unfortunate troops of yours to spill their blood in your behalf” (1. 55). The idea of bad poetry places Sandburg, Walker, and maybe Baraka in the same side. They all support the civil rights of African-Americans and oppose oppression which makes their poetry bad for the white. This reference gives us the idea that Baraka is making his print on his work since he is well known as poet. Another side of this reference is that Walker is knowledgeable black man. It gives an idea that he is educated and that he read a lot of poetry. He might also admires Sandburg for his work on Abraham Lincoln who is known for freeing the slaves. Baraka is trying to make his own comments on poetry.

Another poetic reference is when Walker quoted a couple of lines from "News for the Delphic Oracle" by W.B. Yeats. Yeats was an Irish nationalist who dreamt of an independent Ireland (“W. B. Yeats”). The main theme of the poem is an imaginary heaven where all the Gods, prophets, and monsters of Irish mythology are Equal with classical philosophers, which makes it a poem on the Irish dying culture (Stewart, 179). This poem along with others has a second theme besides the main theme, which is Ireland. The poem represented his aspiration or political views on Ireland’s future. He wanted the Irish people to maintain their own identity and their own ancient Gaelic culture, not the history of England. He refuses the domination of the fake democracy of the English mob (Deane, 139). Vendler comments on the poem, that "Yeats rejects Balance in favor of Disorder, hierarchy in favor of equality..." (139). The equality here is among characters in the poem: kings, Greek gods and monsters, where they all equal to the extent that “Nymphs and Satyrs copulate in the foam (59). That gives Baraka a reason to mention the poem in the play. When Easley mocked Walker’s opinion on the renaissance age in America “as an evil time,” Walker used a couple of lines from the poem and made them his own:

Walker: oh, God, yes. You want to hear the first lines of my newest work?

*Uh, now’s it go...? Oh, “Straddling each dolphin’s back/ And steadied by a fin,
/Those innocents relive their death, / Their wounds open again.” (1. 50).*

The black people, same as the Irish, need to have their own identity and voice, which Walker wished for as a result of his cause. Baraka here is giving us implied information about Walker, that he is educated and knowledgeable poet. He is not a bad poet in the sense that his poetry is meaningless, on the contrary; his poetry is bad to those who are against his cause. It is the same cause that made Yeats, Sandburg, and Baraka revolutionary poets who wish for equality, the same as Walker.

A third reference is Grace's reference to the *Native son* by Richard wright. In this novel, bigger Thomas is a black man who committed crimes and is sentenced to death by the U.S. court. His struggle in White society is enhanced in the novel and he is presented in a pitiful state where the oppression is the major cause for his misfortune (“Native Son”). As Walker was commanding Easley to fix him a drink dancing around, Grace makes a “cynical composure:” “I’ll get it Brad. Mr. Vessels is playing the mad scene from Native Son. A second-rate Bigger Thomas.” (1.57) She is comparing the two men in the way that they are mentally disturbed and that Walker might face the same fate as Bigger Thomas. It show how Baraka wants Walker to

be seen by the audience. Chen justifies why Wright's novel is different from other works about black men:

It boldly shows us a black man ... it vividly pictures the miserable life of American black men living in a slum and the leading character Bigger Thomas and the changing of his mind. After the novel is published, American society is drastically shocked. It is because the novel strongly blows the white American and forces them to realize their oppression to the black men. Meanwhile, it also awakens American black men by forcing them to realize the heavy cost for obeying and bearing the ruling of the white men for so long (1858).

Baraka Used the same impression that the novel suggested to enhance the struggle that Walker suffered. Baraka wanted to remind the audience of the struggle and he is implying that years of oppression and racism created many victims like Bigger and Walker. Someday, those victims will act the same as Walker and a revolution will sink its teeth into the flesh of a racist society.

The final reference this paper is discussing is of Shakespeare's play Othello. It shows how Walker sees himself and how he sees Grace and Iago. Walker thinks that he is a hero that been envied by his friends. Othello in the original play is a black man. This makes Walker even more similar to him in the fact that he is deceived by his friend, as he is delusional. He literally accused Easley as being evil as Iago and Grace as pure as Desdemona. This shows us that he does think of Grace as the love of his life. He comments "*I was Othello... Grace there was Desdemona... and you were Iago...*" (1. 57). Baraka's reference here is to show the evilness of the white to destroy everything that they are afraid of. Iago is afraid of Othello as he was a victorious leader and so he targeted the most important thing that he thought will destroy him, which is his wife. In the same sense, Walker is doing the same thing to Grace as he was attacking anything that she loved. Walker and Grace are ex-lovers and they are still lovers in the sense that they still argue and Walker thinks of her as pure as Desdemona. Easley is Iago in Walker's eyes because he is simply a white liberal professor who married his ex-wife. The downfall that Walker spoke of is the downfall that Othello had but it has a different angle: "*the key to my downfall. I knew you were Iago between classes, when I saw you, but I never knew who you were during classes. Ah ah, that's the basis of an incredibly profound social axiom...*" (1.57). the questions here are rhetorical and they are addressed not only to the characters by the characters, they are also addressed to the audience. He is mocking the white audience that act friendly as Iago did in front of black people and are filled with hatred and jealousy when they are not around.

looking at the hero of the play, Walker, he possesses some features of other characters in another literary work that is worth investigating. For instance, Heathcliff in the novel *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte has the same twisted romantic relationship with Catherine as the one Walker has with Grace. Walker is in love with his ex-wife Grace who he has two daughters with. Grace left him for his political views against the white and married Easley, white man, and took her daughters with her. Walker felt that she betrayed him for leaving him alone and so he set his mind to think of a way to revenge. The same feeling is accompanied with Heathcliff's character. He attempted to revenge his loneliness on Catherine because she denied his love to marry another man of higher class. Catherine's reason for leaving Heathcliff is because he is not of the same status as her. The similarity in the two ladies is that they both think low of their former lovers despite the love they had for each other. The romantic relationship between the lovers in both literary works is based on revenge and punishment. Heathcliff's punishment of Catherine lays in marrying another woman (Jeffares, xv). Similarly,

Walker punishes Grace for leaving him through killing Easley and threatening her to take the children. This provides an idea that revenge only leads to destruction upon the avenger when Walker implied at the end of the play that he might have killed the children saying to Grace "they are dead" (2. 88). Having said that, this approach needs a thorough investigation of the novel and all the possible criticism it received alongside with the play which would be a seed for further research.

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