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Writing identity in the plays of Amiri Baraka and Brian Friel

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WRITING IDENTITY IN THE PLAYS OF AMIRI BARAKA AND BRIAN FRIEL

Thesis

Submitted to

The College of Arts and Sciences of the

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree

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By

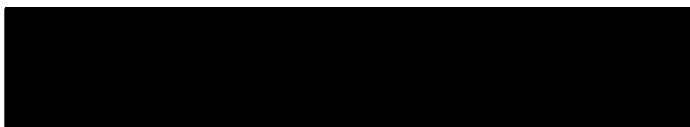
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UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

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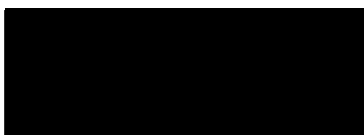
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ABSTRACT

WRITING IDENTITY IN THE PLAYS OF AMIRI BARAKA AND BRIAN FRIEL

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Amiri Baraka and Brian Friel are very different writers. Baraka, who is mainly known as a poet, is one of the most militant writers of the Black Arts Movement. His plays are open calls for the violent overthrow of the white establishment. Friel's historical plays deal with another kind of oppressive establishment—the British occupation of Ireland. But while there is a violent element to Friel's plays, they tend to focus on the problematic attempts at relationships between the Irish and the English rather than presenting them as irreconcilable binary opposites.

In my thesis, I examine the similarities between the two authors' plays with regards to their treatment of both oppressive forces and those who are oppressed. Despite their obvious differences, Baraka and Friel address the same fundamental question in their plays: how do populations establish (or re-establish) a sense of identity—national or cultural—in the face of colonial oppression?

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND	
INTRODUCTION.....	1
THE PLAYS	5
AUTHORIAL INTENTIONS	8
SECTION 2: THE ROLE OF THE OPPRESSOR	13
SECTION 3: THE REACTION OF THE OPPRESSED	24
SECTION 4: LIMINAL CHARACTERS	33
WORKS CITED.....	43
WORKS CONSULTED.....	47

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

One of the most troubling aspects of colonialism is that the colonizer often strips the colonized of agency. The subject population not only lacks political power, but they are often denied the right to define their humanity on their own terms. As Declan Kiberd argues about the English conquest of Ireland, "The English did not invade Ireland—rather, they seized a neighbouring island and invented the idea of Ireland. The notion of 'Ireland' is largely a fiction created by the rulers of England in response to specific needs at a precise moment in British history" (83). Colonizing powers, therefore, define their subjects as inferior in their own minds, which is essential; it would be impossible to conquer a people who were believed to share an equal humanity.

In addition, colonizers impose their ideals of culture upon the oppressed population as well. Therefore, English "civilization" is contrasted with Irish barbarity, Irish literature is judged on the standards of English literature, and black American attractiveness based on how closely the woman can approximate white features. This binary not only allows the colonizing civilization to feel superior to the colonized, but it also creates an abiding inferiority complex in the minds of the oppressed. Since their culture is defined and judged in terms of being *not* civilized, *not* cultured, and *not* beautiful, cultural neurosis is a logical result.

Black Americans were not the victims of the same type of colonial oppression as the Irish; they obviously never had an independent nation that was occupied by the United States. However, the fact that they were brought to America as slaves shows that they were the victims of the same type of dehumanizing colonial mindset as the Irish. In

a way, they still are—"blackness" is often defined as the binary opposite of the majority white culture.

At some point, however, colonized people will strike back at their oppressors. One of the ways by which they do this is by rejecting the cultural narratives placed on them by the colonizing force. In order to accomplish this, oppressed people must look toward the postcolonial future while hearkening back to the pre-colonial past. Laura Chrisman writes that "Nationalism is the product of modern, secular consciousness; it views the emergence of nations as the forward march of history. At the same time, nationalism's imagined community stretches back into antiquity; the nation's identity and credibility depend upon the assertion of unbroken cultural tradition" (186). In other words, in order for people to become autonomous, or to reclaim their autonomy, they need to throw off the shackles of their colonial oppressors and renew their "lost" cultural identity.

It is important that we not overlook the importance of this identity. Tamara Sivanandan points out that while cultural identity alone is not enough to establish political autonomy, it does have the power to unify subjugated people to the extent necessary to fight back against their oppressors (43). In this regard, literature is an extremely useful tool of revolutionary forces. It creates a rallying point for people interested in reclaiming their national identity—writers have the power to reject the identity that has been forced upon them by the colonizing power, which in turn can encourage their readers to do the same. Once the inherently inferior identity has been eliminated, the people can overcome the oppression that the identities engender.

At first glance, it would appear that Amiri Baraka and Brian Friel have little in common as nationalist playwrights. Baraka's plays were mainly written during the Black Arts Movement in the 1960s in the United States, while Friel continues to work in Ireland. Baraka's plays are set in the present (or at least the present at the time of their writing)

or in the near future, and are often written in an abstract manner to dramatize Baraka's vision of a coming race war.¹ The Friel plays that I will examine—Translations and The Home Place—are both concrete and historical: they treat specific moments in the history of the Anglo-Irish conflict.

The authors' subject matter is also dissimilar on the surface. Baraka's plays reflect the increasingly violent struggle for black rights in America. This inevitable conflict had been in the making for almost four hundred years, and pitted the historically oppressed black American *minority* against the overt oppression and the tacit inaction of the white majority. The Anglo-Irish conflict had been going on much longer at the time in which Friel's plays are set. Additionally, although the Irish were unquestionably oppressed by the British, they nonetheless constituted the majority of people in the country.

Reading the two authors in tandem allows for a more complex understanding of both. Baraka and Friel approach their work in different ways, but their goals are similar: to forge a cultural identity free from colonial intrusion. The fact that the writers are almost photo-opposites of one another serves to encourage this type of a reading; Baraka and Friel deal with the same issues, and their characters act in similar ways, but the on-stage treatment of the actions is flipped. Reading his radically violent plays along with Friel's measured reflections helps take some of the edge off of Baraka; his plays become more accessible when read as treatises on cultural identity not unlike Friel's examinations of Irishness. Similarly, reading Friel's plays along with Baraka's allows us to see his radical side—even though Friel's plays are not as overtly violent as Baraka's, they nonetheless deal with many of the same issues of nationalism. Reading Baraka in the light of Friel

¹ Baraka changed his name from LeRoi Jones in the mid-1960s. For purposes of clarity, I will refer to his works as "Baraka's" in the text. In the Works Cited section, however, his works will be cited with his name at the time of publication.

makes him seem somewhat more rational; reading Friel in the light of Baraka shows his radical edge.

In spite of the differences between the two playwrights' works, I will argue that the plays show a number of thematic similarities. In this text, I will draw upon Baraka's Dutchman, Experimental Death Unit #1, Madheart, and The Slave, and Friel's Translations and The Home Place. In the plays, I will examine the role of the outside oppressor, the reaction of oppressed characters, and the treatment of liminal characters (those who are caught in the middle of the conflict). Despite their obvious differences, both Baraka and Friel's plays can easily be placed on the same continuum of Postcolonial protest literature. Both authors' plays illuminate the struggle of subject peoples as they struggle to (re)assert their humanity in the face of prejudice and oppression.

THE PLAYS

Dutchman (1964) tells the story of the doomed black man Clay and his white seductress and murderer, Lula. The play takes place in a subway (presumably under New York City). Clay, a young poet and intellectual, is joined on the train by Lula, an older yet still appealing white woman.

As the play progresses, Lula goes from making small talk with Clay to making explicit references to stereotypes about black sexuality, and mocks him both for his bourgeois conformity and his failure to be more revolutionary. Clay responds by making threats against Lula, and informing her that most black art is actually suppressed violence against whites. His emotions spent, Clay reaches down to retrieve his belongings, only to be stabbed to death by Lula. Clay's body is removed from the train, and Lula welcomes the arrival of her next victim, another young black intellectual.

In Experimental Death Unit #1 (1965), two white men, Duff and Loco, meet an unnamed black prostitute on the street. The two immediately proposition her, Duff using repellent, stereotypical language, and Loco posing as a pseudo-Romantic. The prostitute rejects their advances, belittles their manhood, questions their sexuality, and sets them against one another in a fight for her "affections."

Duff is victorious in his fight with Loco, but before he can claim his "prize" by having relations with the woman, a group of black soldiers arrives on the scene, carrying the head of a recently-killed white man on a staff. They shoot Biff, Loco, and the prostitute, and then behead the two white men.

Madheart (1966) is Baraka's most abstract play. In it, a character known only as Black Man must re-establish his identity, and defend the idea of black masculinity and

femininity. In order to accomplish this, he must first eliminate the white Devil Lady. Even after she is killed and removed from the stage, two female characters, Mother and Sister, bewail the fact that the source of “true beauty”—a white woman—has been taken from them.

The only character who is never under the spell of the Devil Lady is the Black Woman, who rejects the white ideal of beauty from the beginning of the play. At its conclusion, she learns to subjugate herself to the newly re-invigorated Black Man.

The Slave (1964) is set in the middle of a race war. Walker, a black poet-turned-revolutionary, has broken into the home of his white ex-wife Grace and her new husband Easley, who had been Walker’s literature professor in college. The three characters have a heated discussion which centers around Walter’s abandonment of academia, his newfound militancy, and his current “mission”: to take his daughters back from Grace.

In the second act, Walker kills Easley. Soon thereafter, an explosion rocks the house, mortally wounding Grace. Just before she dies, Walker tells her that their daughters are dead—ostensibly Walker killed them before Grace and Easley arrived home at the beginning of the play.

Brian Friel’s plays are both more and less contemporary than Baraka’s; while they are more recent, they are set in the more remote past. The Home Place (2005) is Friel’s latest play. It tells the story of Christopher Gore, an Englishman who lives in Ireland and is torn between his ancestral home (England), for which he does not particularly care, and his estate in Ireland, which he loves—but which is becoming increasingly unsafe. In the recent months, several English landowners have been murdered, and he fears that he might be the next victim.

Complicating matters is the presence of Gore’s brother Richard, a craniometrist (essentially a glorified phrenologist) who conducts “calculations” on the native villagers in order to determine their racial characteristics. This activity draws the attention of local

militants, who convince Richard to leave under the threat of violence. The play ends with Christopher Gore recognizing the futility of his situation: he lives at the pleasure of the locals, he has no desire to return home, and his love for Margaret, his Irish maid, is destined to go unrequited.

Translations (1980), possibly Friel's best-known work, is set in an Irish "hedge school" in 1833. The schoolmaster Hugh, his son and assistant Manus, and the villagers are faced with a stark reminder of their "place" in the English Empire: a British Ordnance Survey whose goal is to re-map Ireland, and, more ominously, to standardize or Anglicanize the names of the towns in the Irish countryside. Friel uses every opportunity available to contrast the civilized, well-educated Irish (who are as conversant in Greek and Latin as they are in Gaelic) with the ignorant British soldiers, who *only* speak English.

As the play progresses, the British Lieutenant Yolland falls in love with the Irish village woman Maire. Although they cannot understand each other's words, the two believe that their affection can bridge the national and linguistic gaps that separate them. Unfortunately, this is not to be: Yolland is abducted and almost certainly murdered by some of the locals, and his superior, Captain Lancey, threatens dire reprisals if Yolland cannot be found. The play ends with the schoolmaster, Hugh, reflecting on the ancient imperial conquests that are recounted in his beloved classics.

AUTHORIAL INTENTIONS

In order to discuss the revolutionary nature of the plays to be considered, it would be helpful to first examine the intentions of the playwrights—or at least to the extent that they can be determined. Timothy Brennan writes that “literary myth [...] has been complicit in the creation of nations [...] Nations [...] are imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role” (49). Baraka and Friel have different opinions with regards to the political importance of their work, and, as we will see, the difference shows itself clearly in their plays.

Amiri Baraka’s plays are highly political, and he makes no attempt to hide that fact. In “The Revolutionary Theatre,” he writes that “The Revolutionary Theatre should force change. It should be change [...] The Revolutionary Theatre must Accuse and Attack anything that can be accused and attacked” (210). With this as his primary goal, Baraka *must* produce politically volatile plays.

Baraka’s guiding principle of the Revolutionary Theatre is not an open-ended hostility toward the world; it has a specific target: “White men will cower before this theatre because it hates them. Because they themselves have been trained to hate. The Revolutionary Theatre must hate them for hating” (210). These words are echoed in Baraka’s introduction to Four Black Revolutionary Plays: “Unless you killing white people, killing the shit they’ve built, dont read this shit, you wont like it, and it sure wont like you” (vii). For Baraka, the Black Revolutionary Theatre necessarily attacks whiteness, because whites are the oppressors.

Matthew Rebhorn sees Baraka's call for black separatism as a matter of necessity: "The dominant issue at the heart of this black cultural nationalism articulated by Baraka was the idea of a socially distinct identity. For Baraka and other cultural nationalists, self-fashioning was the key to defining black power and the creation of a black nation" (799). Philip Effiong puts the matter in even more stark terms: "By the 1960s a very hostile racial climate forced African-American playwrights to search more keenly for a theatre that would prevent Blacks from being destroyed by rage and psychological sterility" (69). Whether or not the situation was as dire as Baraka implies—which will be discussed later—is irrelevant. What is important is that Baraka *felt* that events warranted the stringent anti-white, separationist stance which permeates his theatrical philosophy.

Another important element to consider is Baraka's goal for his plays. The fact that he considered his work to be a part of the "Revolutionary Theatre" is telling. He wants his plays to have a certain effect on the audience:

The force we want is of twenty million spooks storming America with furious cries and unstoppable weapons. We want actual explosions and actual brutality: AN EPIC IS CRUMBLING and we must give it the space and hugeness of its actual demise. The Revolutionary Theatre, which is now peopled with victims, will soon begin to be peopled with new kinds of heroes—not the weak Hamlets debating whether or not they should be ready to die for what's on their minds, but men and women (and minds) digging out from under a thousand years of "high art" and weak-faced dalliance [...] This is a theatre of assault. The play that will split the heavens for us will be called THE DESTRUCTION OF AMERICA. The heroes will be Crazy Horse, Denmark Vesey, Patrice Lumumba, and not history, not memory, not sad sentimental groping for a warmth in our

despair; these will be new men, new heroes, and their enemies most of you who are reading this. (214)

In this context, art is useful only insofar as it inspires oppressed people to revolt against their oppressors.

For Brian Friel, the relationship between art and politics is more complicated. Christopher Murray writes that "Brian Friel is heir to [Irish dramatic] freedom. As artist he has the responsibility to use it in such a way as to explore national identity without giving way to incitement to hatred or the like. His priority has always been to serve art" (75). In fact, some have argued that his plays *reject* the type of nationalism that is so prevalent in Baraka's. Writing about Translations, Claire Gleitman points out that "Rather than writing 'a threnody on the death of the Irish language,' which Friel early on maintained that he wished to avoid, he provides in Translations a gradually emerging critique of what Leonard Pilkington calls the 'quixoticism' in Gaelic culture 'that contributes to *economic* [my emphasis] decline" (236). While economic considerations might well be a part of black nationalist discourse, it is hard to imagine Amiri Baraka rejecting African traditions on the basis of their not being viable in the contemporary marketplace.

This is not to say, of course, that Friel is completely *apolitical*. Michael Mays points out that Friel is acutely aware of the political situation at the time of his plays—and the Irish resistance to British oppression (120). Where Baraka approaches his plays from a fairly straightforward background—that of a black man in America—Friel's personal and political identities are slightly more complicated. Richard Kearney writes that "Friel is not only an *Irish* writer; he is more specifically a *Northern* Irish writer. And this geographical distinction accentuates his sense of cultural, political, and linguistic alienation. Though he repudiates the colonial identity of Britain, he also feels an outsider in the [Irish] Republic" (125). Since Friel's identity is complex, it stands to reason that his writing would be as well; it would be disingenuous for Friel, who has a complicated

notion of national identity, to write as starkly nationalist plays as Baraka, who is absolutely certain of his identity and goals.

Friel himself gives some possible reasons for the lack of a strong political message in his plays. In an interview with Lewis Funke (admittedly, the interview was conducted twelve years prior to the opening of Translations), Friel explains that “There are many social things that I am frankly interested in. For example, there was a period in my life where I was a violent Nationalist, an Irish Nationalist. Now this is something that has never appeared in the work I have done” (62). One possible reason for the discrepancy between his personal politics and his plays is the atmosphere in Northern Ireland. In an interview with Ciaran Carty shortly after the opening of Translations, Friel pointed out that British playwrights have more license to work with political topics because of the stability of British culture, “But here we’re continually thrust into a situation of confrontation. Politics are so obtrusive here” (143). Whereas Baraka’s plays need to be political to grab his audience’s attention, Friel’s need to shy away from overt politics because his audience is already inundated with politics.

I would posit another reason for the differences in the political content of the Baraka and Friel’s plays: their goals as playwrights. As mentioned above, Baraka sees himself as the instigator of a race revolution. As such, it is essential for him to write plays which not only shock the audience into paying attention, but motivate them to action. As a result, his plays are far more graphic, aggressive, and profane than Friel’s. Since Friel is more interested in his craft as a playwright than politics—and since he recognizes what politics have done to Ireland in both the colonial and postcolonial eras—it follows that his plays are more introspective and nuanced in their messages than Baraka’s. Of course, while Friel might seek to avoid politics in his plays, it is impossible to ignore the political ramifications of the actions that he describes.

The authors might have different stated goals for their plays, but it is impossible to completely separate politics from art. Seamus Deane writes that "It is possible to write about literature without adverting in any substantial way to history. Equally, it is possible to write history without any serious reference to literature. Yet both literature and history are discourses which are widely recognised to be closely related to one another [...]" ("Heroic Styles" 45). We might say the same about literature and politics, especially when the writers come from and write about environments in which their people have been oppressed.

SECTION 2: THE ROLE OF THE OPPRESSOR

Since both playwrights come from Postcolonial (if not overtly revolutionary) positions, it would be instructive to discuss how the marginalized groups are treated or perceived by their oppressors before discussing how they respond.

For Amiri Baraka, the oppression of blacks is obvious. One of the central notions behind the black man's oppression is white society's preconceptions of black male sexuality. In his essay "American Sexual Reference: Black Male," Baraka writes that "The reason the white woman was supposed to be intrigued by the black man was because he was basic and elemental emotionally [...] therefore 'wilder,' harder, and almost insatiable in his lovemaking" (221). The psychological critic Frantz Fanon puts it even more succinctly: commenting on common conceptions of black masculinity, he writes that "In relation to the Negro, everything takes place on the genital level" (207). The idea of the virile, animalistic black man has been seen as a threat to white men and an enticement to white women for centuries.

The black characters in Baraka's plays are treated by their white counterparts in accordance with these prejudices. Black men must be controlled, lest they ravage the weaker white women. At the same time, in Experimental Death Unit #1 (the only play in my study that contains a white male-black female interaction), the black woman is treated by her male admirers in much the same way: as an exotic temptress who will no doubt show Loco and Duff, her white would-be lovers, a side of sexuality that white women simply cannot provide.

The two men go about their "seduction" in different ways. Loco uses a seemingly romanticized appeal to the prostitute as some kind of sexual Earth Mother. However, his

language betrays his racism, even as he tries to flatter and manipulate the prostitute: "Consider me a ready youth. Made to be used, under and because of you [...] Let me lick you lick you lick you lick you. I'm an icebox. Heat! Silence! No noise between your hams. Lick and lick. Help, hairy lady. Smelly lady. Blackest of all the ladies, help me...us!...all of us! (7). Loco presents a potential conquest of the black woman as some sort of spiritual journey; having relations with her will allow him to replace what is lacking in his soul.

Henry Lacey points out Loco's hypocrisy: "At bottom Loco is only concerned with the uses to which his guilt-ridden psyche can put the black woman. His supplication to her merely serves to bolster the myth of his own moral being" (137). As long as he uses language which *seems* to praise the prostitute, Loco can engage in whatever perverse fantasies he wishes: he simply must couch his desires in romantic language.

By contrast, Duff is repulsively direct in his desires. After Loco claims to be prepared to be "used" by the black woman, Duff expresses his desire to use her: "I differ, unfair lady, only in the sense of my use. I am to be used in all your vacancies. All those holes in your body I want to fill. I got meat and mind to do it with. I mean out there in the street. I'll throw you down...mount you, giddyap! giddyap! big-assed nigger lady!...then I ride you right through the rain...maybe licking your neck" (7). While their language might seem to imply a difference between the two, in point of fact they are very similar. Both want sexual gratification—without any concern for their partner—and they share a belief that a black woman is the best, most exotic source for it.

The source of the two men's obsession with the black woman could be taken directly from Orientalism, in which Edward Said argues that Westerners (in this case the two white men) tend to envision all of their licentious fantasies as being fulfilled by the Eastern "other" (145). In this case, of course, it is another American—albeit one with a different skin tone—that provides the "uncharted territory" that the men yearn to explore.

The fact that they express their desires in (occasionally) flowery language does little to mask the racism behind their request.

The Slave provides a different way in which the white characters look down on their black counterpart. Walker, the black protagonist, had been an aspiring poet and scholar before turning to revolutionary violence. When he goes to his ex-wife's house, ostensibly to take their two daughters, Grace (the ex-wife) and her new husband Easley show the lie of their liberal exteriors.

As he walks into his house at the beginning of Act One, Easley decries the race war that is going on outside—not because of its serious societal implications, but rather because of the annoyance that it causes: “Those black son of a bitches. Why don't they at least stop and have their goddamned dinners? Goddamn son of a bitches. They're probably gonna keep that horseshit up all goddamned night” (101). People are being killed outside, and yet Easley responds as if it were a neighbor playing a stereo so loudly that he cannot sleep.

After Walker confronts him, Easley asks what Walker wants. When Walker replies that there is nothing of Easley's that he wants, Easley replies: “Is *that* why you and your noble black brothers are killing what's left of this city? I should say...what's left of this country...or world” (103). While it might be understandable, given the situation, that Easley might be upset, the fact that he accuses the blacks of destroying “*what's left*” of the city, country, and world implies that he thinks that they have already started the process of demolition; the riot is simply finishing the job.

Even Grace, the “progressive” ex-wife, shows a racist streak when confronted with Walker's newfound radical identity. When he slaps Easley, Grace screams that Walker is a “nigger murderer” and asks him, “Why don't you leave before you kill somebody? Before you kill another white person?” (106). Putting the melodrama of the line aside for a moment (which is hard to do, considering the fact that the line is so

heavy-handed), we see in this moment of crisis Grace's true feelings. Under normal circumstances, she might be able to hide her bigotry under a veneer of polite liberalism, but when she is faced with a situation that is completely out of her control (her husband has been assaulted, her children might well be kidnapped), she reverts to racist language.

Henry Lacey argues that the representation of Easley and Grace is a weakness in the play. He writes:

Grace, the ex-wife, and Easley, ex-teacher of Walker and now-husband of Grace, are very nearly reduced to personified abstractions. They too statically represent the *thought* of the detested liberals and apolitical esthetes. This is especially the case of Easley [...] whose name suggests the non-involved 'luxury' so despised by the enraged Clay [in Dutchman] as well as the superficiality and comfortable status of the professor and poet, who takes it for granted that Walker is dead as an artist because of his activist posture. (86)

In an abstract play such as Madheart (which is subtitled "A Morality Play"), abstract caricatures might be more acceptable. In a more "realistic" play, the two-dimensionality of the white characters takes away from the play's effectiveness.

Brian Friel's plays rely less on caricatured portrayals, which makes them more dramatically effective. He *does* write some "stock" characters in the form of oppressive English characters, but he is careful to balance them with others who are more tolerable.

Another factor that might contribute to Friel's plays being more nuanced is their length: his plays are generally almost two hours long, while most of Baraka's are one-act plays which take only around thirty minutes. Friel's longer plays allow him to develop his characters more, and to engage in a more complicated discussion of the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. Baraka's plays are not long enough for such

complications; they act as quick declarations against white oppression. Again, it is worth noting the differences in the playwrights' goals: Friel attempts to work his way through a complex historical problem in his plays, while Baraka seeks to shock his audience into revolutionary action in his. As such, it is little surprise that Friel's plays are meditative where Baraka's are didactic.

In Friel's plays, the Irish are subjugated to the British in three main ways: they are subjects who are to obey the British authority at all times, they are subjects of experimentation, and they are subjects of British affections.

The identity of the Irish as unwilling British subjects is most obvious in Translations. Captain Lancey takes his role as the commanding officer in the British survey team—and therefore the commanding officer of all the local citizens—quite seriously. Whenever he is in the schoolhouse, he immediately assumes command, cutting off whoever else might be speaking when he pleases. The irony is that the native Gaelic speakers who attend the school cannot understand a word that he says. When he makes his first appearance, we read that before his Irish assistant Owen intercedes, Lancey attempts to address the gathering by “speak[ing] as if he were addressing children—a shade too loudly and enunciating excessively,” as if *that* would bridge the communications gap (405).

In his only other appearance in the play, Lancey is far less buffoonish. After Yolland's disappearance, Lancey can deduce what has probably happened to him. When Owen tells him that the hedge-school class has been canceled for the evening (therefore only a few students are present), Lancey cuts him off: “This will suffice. I will address them and it will be their responsibility to pass on what I have said to every family in this section [...] Lieutenant Yolland is missing. We are searching for him. If we don't find him, or if we receive no information as to where he is to be found, I will pursue the

following course of action" (439). What follows is a terrifying litany of threats: local livestock will be shot, villagers will be evicted, and their homes will be leveled.

Richard Kearney points out the irony of the situation: "Lancey's threat to destroy the very locality which his own Ordnance Survey was proposing to civilize and advance, renders the whole 'translation' process null and void. Nominal eviction [accomplished by changing the Irish place names] has been replaced by its literal equivalent" (140). In order to punish the "unruly" Irish, Lancey is willing to destroy his own "work."

The historian Sean Connolly argues that Friel takes too many liberties with his presentation of the Ordnance Survey: they were generally well-received in Ireland, specifically because they treated the local Irish populations with respect. The Survey was not staffed with functionaries from the British army, but rather by dedicated cartographers and Irish scholars. In general, the relationships between the members of the Ordnance Survey and the locals bore little resemblance to the open hostility between Lancey and the villagers (152). In this respect, then, Friel can be accused taking the same license as Baraka, although his British characters still achieve a greater level of nuance.

At the same time, even if the Survey was handled in the most diplomatic way possible, the result—the loss of the original Irish place names—was the same. Seamus Deane writes that "It is not the case that translation as such is impossible. Equivalence can be achieved; but it can never be identity. That is the problem of translation. It is, in effect, an interpretation. What haunts it is the belief that there is in the original name or text something which will not carry over, something that is untranslatable precisely because it is original" ("The Name of the Game" 107). At the root of the problem, then, is the question of who gets to define the "other"? In the case of Baraka's plays, white "outsiders" (that is, whites from outside the black community) are empowered (or empower themselves) to control black identity. In the case of Friel's plays, the English

outsiders (literally an invading and occupying force) dictate to the Irish where they live by re-naming the towns.

We see authority being wielded in a slightly different way in The Home Place. Dr. Richard Gore has *intellectual* power over the local villagers (he has no official power, as he is neither a landowner nor a representative of the British government). While it should be noted that his experiments to determine the “racial characteristics” of the Irish people would not have been dismissed as pseudoscience at the time of the play’s setting (1878), Richard treats his research as if it were somehow directed from on high:

Isn’t it just possible that the combination of black hair and strong chin and clear complexion is much more than the haphazard confluence of physical accidents? That they constitute an ethnic code we can’t yet decipher? That they are signposts to an enormous vault of genetic information that is just beyond our understanding? Are they saying to us—these physical features—if only we could hear them—are they whispering to us; crack our code and we will reveal to you how a man thinks, what his character traits are, his loyalties, his vices, his entire intellectual architecture [...] If we could break into that vault [...] we wouldn’t control just an empire. We would rule the entire universe. (33)

Richard’s faith in science—and particularly the *kind* of science he practices—is not simply overexuberant, it is terrifying.

As a result of his faith in science, Richard treats his “subjects” abysmally, pushing and prodding small children, and coldly telling their desperate mother, who agreed to take part in the experiment so that she could get money for her starving family, “You’ll get a photograph [a copy of the picture taken as part of the experiment] like everyone else,” before completely ignoring her as he tells what he thinks is an amusing

anecdote about an Indian woman immolating herself on her husband's funeral pyre (51). His faith in science has turned him into a monster by destroying his humanity.

As he does with the virtue of his scientific endeavors, Richard takes his privileged status as a British citizen for granted. Con Doherty, who represents the more militant citizens of the village, comes to instruct Christopher Gore to end his brother's experiments and send him on his way. Apparently either ignorant or uncaring of the situation—several English landlords have been murdered recently specifically as a result of their abusive treatment of the locals—Richard demands that Con obey him: "I have no idea who you are or what your purpose is. But I know an insolent pup when I see one. And if you don't leave immediately I'll have you flung in prison" (56). When Christopher pragmatically agrees to shut down his brother's experiment, Richard calls him a traitor for failing to assert his authority over the Irish (60).

In both cases, we see British characters who abuse the Irish *because they can*. In one respect, it could be argued that they treat the Irish badly "for their own good," since they see the Irish as inferiors who need to be looked after or who can be exploited with impunity. Said describes the way a westerner views the Orient: "No better instance exists today than what Anwar Abdel Malek calls 'the hegemonism of possessing minorities' and anthropocentrism allied with Eurocentrism: a white middle-class Westerner believes it his human prerogative not only to manage the nonwhite world but also to own it, just because by definition 'it' is not quite as human as 'we' are" (108). The fact that the British characters oppress the Irish in Friel's plays is bad enough; the fact that they do so out of a sense of *entitlement* is all the more galling.

Friel's British characters exhibit a fascination with Irish women that is slightly similar to Baraka's whites. However, Friel's men do not become caricatures in their desire. This is not to say that their desires are entirely savory. As an example, the otherwise decent Christopher Gore is obsessed with his Irish maid, Margaret. After his

humiliating capitulation to Con Doherty, Christopher makes a flailing attempt to convince Margaret (who is at least twenty years his junior) to marry and join him in his flight from Ireland:

Christopher: You know what I want.

Margaret: Please, Christopher.

Christopher: (*suddenly, rapidly*) Let's go away. Leave all this behind.

Make a life somewhere else—Africa, South America, India—anywhere where roles aren't imposed on us—we'll be free of history and heritage and the awful burden of this (*house*).

Margaret: Christopher—

Christopher: You know how I feel about you. I've never made a secret of it. I want to marry you, Margaret.

[...]

Christopher: Will you marry me?

Margaret: There can be no question of marriage—no question at all. (67)

We can read Christopher's constant requests as either a touching, albeit quixotic, attempt by an aging man to reach out to someone else, or the horribly misguided longing of an oppressor who has spent so long with his "subjects" that he no longer recognizes their subjugation—even though the subjects are never allowed to forget where *they* stand.

Christopher Gore's "love" for Margaret is based not only on physical attraction, but also on the idea that love can conquer all. Such illusions might be allowable for an aging aristocrat, but his servants must live in the unromantic present. Amiri Baraka has nothing but disdain for the passions of white men (we might also read "British men" in this context): "The white man is in love with the past, with dead things and soon he will become one. He is in love with the past because it is in the past that he really exists. He

understands that he cannot possibly exist in the future, or even in the present" ("American Sexual Reference" 232). White men cling to anachronistic ideals of love because they are anachronisms themselves. Christopher Gore—one of a shrinking number of British landlords who have not yet been killed by the locals—must recognize that the noose of time is tightening around him and his kind.

An even more complicated case of love between the power strata is seen in Translations. The doomed Lieutenant Yolland falls in love with the beautiful villager Maire. Yolland is a "special" case for two reasons. First, as a *Lieutenant* with the Ordnance Survey, Yolland necessarily occupies a secondary power role—he is simply in Baile Beag to follow the orders of Captain Lancey. Second, Friel goes out of his way to indicate that Yolland is not the average British soldier: at his entrance, he is described as "a soldier by accident" (404). When he is given the opportunity to address the pupils at the hedge school, he is unable to speak: "I—I—I've nothing to say—really—" (407). His inability to speak mirrors that of the villager Sarah, a mute who is barely able to say her own name. In both cases, their silence indicates their powerlessness.

F.C. McGrath notes that Yolland's dilemma is tied very closely to his British identity: "Lieutenant Yolland's desire to assimilate into Irish culture and society raises another issue illuminated by both [George] Steiner and Bhabha—the problem of incommensurability in translating between cultures" (186). Although he is strongly drawn to Ireland—and to Maire—Yolland realizes that he can never be at home in Baile Beag. He expresses his misgivings to Owen, the Survey's Irish translator:

Yolland: [...] Even if I did speak Irish I'd always be an outsider here, wouldn't I? I may learn the password but the language of the tribe will always elude me, won't it? The private code will always be...hermetic, won't it?

Owen: You can learn to decode us. (416)

But, of course, Owen is only humoring Yolland; he has no more chance of being assimilated into the Irish culture than the Ordnance Survey itself. Although he is sincere, he will always be an agent of the British colonial oppressor, and therefore will always be suspect.

Both Friel and Baraka show oppressive characters who deny the humanity of their subjects in one way or another—although in Friel's plays, the denial is seemingly more benign. The difference in their treatments might well be attributable to the immediacy of the moment: Baraka sets his plays in the present or the immediate future; as such, his characters are much more direct. Friel sets *his* plays in a more remote time, which allows for a more contemplative—and therefore measured—treatment of even antagonistic characters.

The white and English characters enable their oppressive actions against the black and Irish characters by defining the oppressed characters' humanity as inherently different than (and inferior to) their own. This external definition is necessary, because otherwise the characters would not be as likely to feel that they had the liberty to use their counterparts as avenues for sexual gratification (as is the case with Duff and Loco) or that they had the right to invade another country and force its inhabitants to change their entire way of living to suit the colonists' sensibilities.

In the case of both playwrights, however, the exigency of the plays is the imposition of power on subject peoples from outside sources. In the next section, we will see how those affected strike back at the ones who wield the power.

SECTION 3: THE REACTION OF THE OPPRESSED

There is little sense of détente or debate in Baraka's plays. When it is necessary to deal with oppressors, they are to be fought and eliminated using force. This aggression fits in well with Baraka's stated goals for the Revolutionary Theatre.

The fact that The Slave is set during a race riot is telling. Walker Vessels, the black protagonist, has abandoned his academic and poetic ambitions in order to assume a leadership role in the black nationalist uprising. Like Baraka himself, Walker has undergone a radical transformation: "I was preaching hate the white man...get the white man off our backs...if necessary, kill the white man for our rights" (117). The quest for black power requires that Walker reject the artistic values that he learned from his classical poetic training: "What does it matter if there's more love or beauty? Who the fuck cares? Is that what the Western ofay thought while he was ruling...that his rule somehow brought more love and beauty into the world?" (119). Walker has come to recognize that the aesthetic values of the white man simply mask the unpleasant truths of racist oppression.

Walker breaks into the Easley's house in order to take his two daughters by Grace, his white ex-wife. He explains that even if they witness his death in the riot, that would "still [be] better than being freakish mulattoes in a world where [their] father is some evil black thing [they] can't remember" (116). Part of his mission is to "save" his daughters from having a purely white identity, even though that would entail their having no identity at all—at the end of the play, as Grace lies dying under a fallen beam, Walker informs her that the children are in fact dead. Since he does not leave to check on them during the explosions of the riots, it would appear that he killed them himself (129).

Philip Effiong suggests that Grace and her children are necessary sacrifices for Walker: "By sacrificing his former wife and children, Walker is caught between his identity as an individual and his identity as a revolutionary. His plight centers on the fate of his innocent 'freakish mulattoes' [...] who are caught up and destroyed in this Black-White clash. In The Slave and, perhaps, all of Baraka's 1960s plays, these children emerge as the most tragic scapegoats. Their death is a tremendous price to pay for freedom [...]" (103). However, the "sacrifice" of his children is a necessary step for Walker: he has already abandoned his career and wife for the revolutionary cause; the deaths of his children makes his disengagement from white society complete.

Another way that Walker defines himself as a man is by using the academic Easley as an example of what he is *not*. Walker taunts Grace as he holds a gun on her new husband: "'My country, 'tis of thee, Sweet land of liber-ty.' We'll, let's say liberty and ignorant vomiting faggot professors. Right, lady? Isn't that right? I mean you ought to know, 'cause you went out of your way to marry one. Huh? Huh? And then fed the thing my children" (106). Vessels is clearly under a good deal of emotional stress at this moment. He has been drinking, and he is in the middle of a domestic crisis which takes places in the middle of a larger race riot. However, we should not dismiss his words as having no basis in Amiri Baraka's sense of reality. Baraka opens his essay "American Sexual Reference: Black Male" by saying that "Most American white men are trained to be fags" (216). Through Walker Vessels, Baraka shows that the black man, on the other hand, is active, virile, and willing to act.

In Madheart, the actions taken by the black characters to free themselves from the influence of white people are even more explicit. The play opens with Black Man killing the white-masked Devil Lady. What is especially significant is the *manner* in which this is accomplished. The stage directions call for the lights to go down, and when they come back up, "the Devil Lady lies in the middle of the stage with a spear, or many

arrows, stuck in her stomach and [presumably vaginal] hole." Black Man then delivers the *coup de grace*:

Black Man: You will always and forever be dead, and be dead, and always you will be the spirit of deadness, or the cold stones of its promise. *(He takes up a huge wooden stake and drives it suddenly into her heart, with a loud thud as it penetrates the body, and crashes deep in the floor.)* Beautiful. (71)

Like Walker Vessels, Black Man accomplishes his separation from white society through violence.

Black Man's action is significant for another reason. Robyn Weigman describes one of the more unsavory aspects of certain elements of black nationalism:

For Black Power, in particular, the mythology of the black man as a rapist and the repeated sexual negation which accompanied the rape charge was central, offering a context in which black nationalist demands were simultaneously articulated and refined. Eldridge Cleaver's Soul on Ice, for instance, emphasized the reclamation of black masculinity as the usurpation of white supremacy by crafting the rape of a white woman as the prototypical insurrectionary act. (107)

The sexual nature of the Devil Lady's death is obvious. Not only is she killed by being penetrated by Black Man's spear and stake, but Baraka even has her being pierced vaginally. Black Man penetrates Devil Lady (in an act rich in rape imagery) in order to establish his dominion over her. He uses sexualized violence in order to reclaim his manhood.

Black Man's actions are not limited to re-establishing his own identity. The Devil Lady has a hypnotic hold on two black female characters, Mother and Sister, who are obsessed with following the Devil Lady's example of femininity and beauty. The Devil

Lady must be eliminated for *their* benefit as well. Philip Effiong explains the importance of her destruction for the female characters: "The Black Man destroys Devil Lady and vows the decimation of her culture [...] [he] sprays and cleanses the Mother and Sister with a fire hose, a gesture that translates to a purification rite" (119). Henry Lacey describes the play as a "collective exorcism," in which blacks are freed from white cultural tyranny (143). Significantly, this exorcism is performed by Black Man, as if the black female characters are incapable of saving themselves.

If Madheart is about the triumph of black beauty and culture over white domination, the conclusion of Experimental Death Unit #1 is decidedly more mixed. The black revolutionary militants are victorious at the end of the play, but in order to accomplish their goals, they must kill the play's only female character, the black prostitute who has been cavorting with Duff and Loco. As she and Duff face their impromptu firing squad, the prostitute fails to recognize the fact that she is about to die. She asks the stone-faced Leader, "O.K., what...what's happening, man...why you bein' so cool? (*Other soldiers raise their guns, begin shooting at the two*) Hey...who are you, huh? What you think you in to...(*Falls, terribly surprised, ignorant*) Who are you...huh...why you bein' so cool...?" (15). In the context of Baraka's play, she is just as corrupt—and, therefore, as worthy of death—as her two white "defilers."

As the play progresses, the prostitute continually mocks and dismisses Duff and Loco as being "queers" and "fools," and tells the pair that "I'll go mystical when I goddam please...even while...and if...you get your big pimple face pushed up hard between my legs. I'll be off somewhere then, thinking about something that would make you mad. What I care about you? (9). Even though she dismisses the two white men, she does not do so to a sufficient degree. Philip Effiong argues that "While the Woman is not totally devoid of ethnic pride and the spirituality of folk values, as depraved whore and mammy she lacks the type of spiritual merit that Baraka advocates. For this reason she ends up

as sacrificial victim too, not spiritual guide" (94). Interestingly, Effiong describes the incident using similar terminology as the spraying of Mother and Sister in Madheart, calling the killing a "cleansing rite" (93).

For Baraka, the appropriate way to respond to oppression is through violent uprising. Violence serves a number of different purposes. Not only does it (obviously) allow for a degree of resistance to white hegemony, but it also allows black characters to assert themselves symbolically. Even when the violence does not have its intended effect—for instance, Walker Vessels acknowledges that it is entirely possible that his revolution will not succeed (116)—taking action against whites sends the message that blacks will no longer tolerate being abused. The fact that Baraka's plays are often graphically, shockingly violent should not come as a surprise, as his stated goal for the Revolutionary Theatre was to foment an actual black nationalist revolution.

In Brian Friel's plays, the violent response to oppressors is more treated more subtly, even when it is similar: we do not find nearly the same degree of graphic violence in Translations or The Home Place. This is not to say that violence is not a part of his plays; characters are killed, but the killing takes place off-stage, and is usually referred to in a roundabout manner.

As an example, the most violent characters in Translations are never seen onstage. When Manus, the schoolmaster's son and assistant, calls the role at the start of a lesson at the beginning of the play, it initiates a cryptic and disturbing conversation:

Manus: What about the Donnelly twins? (*To Doalty*) Are the Donnelly twins not coming anymore? (*Doalty shrugs and turns away.*) Did you ask them?

Doalty: Haven't seen them. Not about these days. (*Doalty begins whistling through his teeth. Suddenly the atmosphere is silent and alert.*)

Manus: Aren't they at home?

Doalty: No.

Manus: Where are they then?

Doalty: How should I know?

Bridget: Our Seamus says two of the soldiers' horses were found last night at the foot of the cliffs of Machaire Buidhe and... [...] (393).

Michael Mays writes that "Though the sentence remains unfinished, the implication is clear: the Donnelly twins have 'spoken.' In a play about the failure of language [...] it is ironic, perhaps, but hardly surprising that the Donnelly twins speak loudest and most forcibly without ever uttering a word" (135). Like Black Man in Madheart and the revolutionary soldiers in Experimental Death Unit #1, the Donnelly twins act decisively rather than attempting to negotiate with their enemies.

Although the twins are never seen onstage, their presence is undoubtedly felt: when Lieutenant Yolland goes missing at the end of the play, the hedge school students all realize that they must have been involved in his disappearance (436).

At the beginning of The Home Place, Christopher Gore returns home from the funeral of a fellow English landowner who was brutally murdered—apparently in retaliation for his habit of evicting his Irish tenants (11). Since Christopher does not evict *his* tenants, he has no reason to worry about reprisals until his brother Richard begins performing his scientific "measurements" on local villagers. When this happens, Con Doherty appears, asks that Richard cease his experiment, and then begins delivering thinly-veiled threats:

Con: There are three men down at the foot of the avenue, Mr. Gore. They wanted to come up here with me, but I persuaded them to wait down there.

Richard: Chris, don't remonstrate any more with—

Con: They'll wait there to make sure your guests leave. If they don't see your guests leave, those three men will come up here.

[...]

Con: You don't know the mean down at the gates, Mr. Gore. Temperate men in normal times; but they find this measuring business offensive—as I do myself.

[...]

Con: One of the men you might know of: he has suddenly acquired some little fame—notoriety maybe—around here. And all because a fistful of hair was pulled out of his head—from just here—exactly four weeks ago today. (58)

The significance of the man missing hair is that the murdered landlord mentioned at the outset of the play was found with a handful of his attacker's hair clutched in his fist. Again, we see Friel's pattern. The most violent actions—and the characters who commit them—are left to the audience's imagination.

The characters who appear onstage in Friel's plays are much tamer than their unseen counterparts. When we first see Doalty in Translations, he is carrying a stolen British survey pole and regaling his classmates with stories of moving the Ordnance Survey's equipment in the middle of the night so as to disrupt their work and throw off their measurements (390). Tamara Sivanandan refers to these types of actions as "'everyday' forms of resistance to colonialism [...] whose intensity was too low for them to be considered 'rebellious' or 'insurrectionary,' [...] which [...] tell the story of a continuous low-level resistance to domination" (44). Doalty might wisely avoid the sorts of activities that make the Donnelly twins and Con Doherty and his friends both feared and hated, but that does not mean that he simply accepts British domination. He asserts his agency by doing what he can to serve as an annoyance to the British.

The schoolmaster Hugh offers an even *more* passive form of resistance: rather than fighting the British, he simply belittles them. He recounts his first meeting with Captain Lancey to his students in terms by describing the Englishman's linguistic ignorance: "[Lancey] then explained that he does not speak Irish. Latin? I asked. None. Greek? Not a syllable He speaks—on his own admission—only English [...] he voiced some surprise that we did not speak his language. I explained that a few of us did, on occasion—outside the parish of course—and then usually for the purposes of commerce, a use to which his tongue seemed particularly suited [...]" (398). Later, when discussing poetry with Lieutenant Yolland, Hugh explains that the Irish prefer the Classics to English literature, since "We feel closer to the warm Mediterranean. We tend to overlook your island" (417). Of course, Hugh is far too educated to sincerely believe that the British can be "overlooked" as a colonizing force.

Sean Connelly finds Hugh's dismissive attitude toward the British—and his cleverness in expressing it—perplexing. As quoted in Gleitman above, Friel claims to have written Translations, not as a dirge for Gaelic culture, but instead as a reflection on the fact that Gaelic culture (and especially the Gaelic language) had ossified to the point that they were no longer viable. If that is the case, Connelly asks, why does Friel allow the sharp-witted Hugh to continually get the better of the English soldiers (156)?

One possible reading of the situation might be that like Doalty, Hugh realizes that full-scale resistance against the British is probably futile, especially for an older man with mobility and drinking problems. Mocking English poets could well be Hugh's answer to stealing survey poles.

Another possible reason for Hugh's dismissive attitude toward the British is that unlike the Donnelly twins and possibly Doalty, he realizes that the Irish cannot win the battle of languages. He tells Yolland to "remember that words are signals, counters. They are not immortal. And it can happen—to use an image you'll understand—it can

happen that a civilization can be imprisoned in a linguistic contour which no longer matches the landscape of...fact" (419). As a student of not only language, but history, Hugh must recognize that the violent resistance practiced by some Irish is not only ineffective, but potentially disastrous. Making fun of the English would therefore be a defense mechanism against his own impotence.

The reaction of oppressed characters in Friel's plays is more complicated than that of Baraka's. While some of Friel's characters rush to take up arms—an impulse common to most of Baraka's characters (even the passive Clay in Dutchman recognizes the *possibility* of violence), others simply accept their situation and adapt to it.

Again, we see the difference in the playwrights' intentions. Amiri Baraka's characters are not as introspective and reflective as Brian Friel's because in Baraka's world, there is no time for reflection; there is a revolution to plan and instigate. Friel's plays take place in a world in which the conflict has already taken place; we therefore see characters going through the same identity crises as Baraka's, only at a later point in the process.

Nevertheless, both playwrights explore ways in which characters strike back against their oppressors. In some cases, this is done violently; those who act against the oppressed characters, or who act as agents for the oppressors, are dispatched by any means necessary. In other cases, such as Translations' Hugh and, to an extent, Walker Vessels, this is accomplished by rejecting the cultural hegemony of the dominant society. Of course, Walker exemplifies *both* of these means of protest—first he rejects white culture, and then he takes violent action in order to oppose it.

In any conflict, there are those on the extremes of both sides, and there are many more who are trapped somewhere in the middle of the warring factions. In the next section I will examine how both playwrights deal with the characters who are caught in the crossfire.

SECTION 4: LIMINAL CHARACTERS

In Amiri Baraka's plays, the liminal space in the middle of a conflict is a very dangerous place to be, as there are often quite literally shots being fired in one or both directions. Baraka's worldview at the time was quite stark, and he has little use for characters who waver in their revolutionary zeal.

The most conflicted of Baraka's liminal characters is Dutchman's Clay. Early on in his conversation with the murderous Lula, we find out about Clay's background and aspirations:

Clay: My grandfather was a night watchman.

Lula: And you went to a colored college where everybody thought that they were Averell Harriman.

Clay: All except me.

Lula: And who did you think you were? Who do you think you are now?

Clay: *(Laughs as if to make light of the whole trend of the conversation)*

Well, in college I thought I was Baudelaire. But I've slowed down since.

(82)

Like Walker Vessels, and Baraka himself, Clay started with the intention of becoming a black intellectual poet, more at home in the academy than in his black neighborhood. Unlike his counterparts, however, Clay has not yet reached the point of rejecting white people and culture.

This is not to say that Clay is ignorant of the conflict between blacks and whites. He is very well aware of the militant leanings of some artists, as well as the way in which some black artists can be "read" by militant audiences. Near the end of the play, he

finally explodes at Lula's constant provocations and explains to her the "true" meaning of black art: "Charlie Parker? Charlie Parker. All the hip white boys scream for Bird. And Bird saying 'Up your ass, feeble-minded ofay! Up your ass.' And they sit there talking about the tortured genius of Charlie Parker. Bird would've played not a note if he just walked up to East Sixty-seventh Street and killed the first ten white people he saw. Not a note!" (94). Unfortunately for Clay, he cannot maintain his anger, and Lula kills him as he gathers his things to leave (95).

As with other characters, Clay is stuck between identities. He recognizes that the "right" thing for him to do is to adopt the life of a black revolutionary. He sees the vacuity of his intellectual and poetic endeavors, and yet he cannot turn the corner as a character. He cannot abandon the white aesthetic ideal that he has been taught to revere.

George Piggford argues that Clay's dual identity rises to the level of mental illness: "Clay's insanity, according to his newly discovered understanding of it, is a by-product of the neurotic, *white* culture which insists that he hide his inner feelings while it goads him into revealing them" (77). The dominant artistic paradigm values expression, but only of one sort: as long as art expresses white values and artistic ideals, it is valuable. When a black man expresses emotions that white people either fail to understand or find threatening, he must be silenced. Clay's main problem is that as long as he allows himself to be shaped and defined by a culture that is not his own, he will never be able to find himself as a poet or as a man.

Clay's inability to reject white values leads to his death; it is significant that Lula kills Clay only *after* his rage subsides. Lotta Löfgren suggests that the *femme fatale* is a stand-in: "Lula actually represents Baraka himself, wearing the mask of a white woman, the better to test Clay's mettle. The ultimate goal is not to seduce Clay sexually or anger him to the point that it seems legitimate for a white woman to kill him in self-defense but

inspire in him a liberating, violent rage that will deliver him from the entrapments of double consciousness and social and political subjugation" (438). If Clay *had* been able to assault, rape, or kill Lula, he would have shown his worthiness as a black revolutionary. Unfortunately, he is unable to assert himself when he has the chance.

Löfgren points out the significance of his inaction: "Clay is a murderer, not the potential yet failed murder we see at the end of the play, but a murderer now because his passive, assimilationist lifestyle ensures the destruction of his fellow blacks" (440). The fact that he is unable to choose revolution makes it necessary for Clay to be eliminated. He is a failed version of The Slave's Walker, who managed to cast off his white-imposed identity.

Both characters must deal with the fact that they are hybrid individuals: they are black men in America—an identity which carries any number of cultural assumptions from both white Americans as well as other blacks—and yet they are well-educated in the white aesthetic tradition (Clay recalls wanting to be like Baudelaire, and Walker quotes Yeats from memory). For Baraka's purposes, they must find a way to manage these competing identities and emerge as revolutionary black men. Since Clay cannot do this, he is purged from the scene. Walker is able to embrace the black side of his identity, thus proving his utility to the revolution, and is therefore allowed to emerge from his liminal state and live.

The fact that both characters struggle with their links to white literature is important; neither can be completely revolutionary while still clinging to white aesthetic values. Like Black Man killing the Devil Lady in Madheart, they must eliminate the white influence from their lives as men and writers in order to assume their rightful place in black society; to fail to do so would make them traitorous double-agents.

Walker's role as the leader of the black revolution is somewhat ironic, given his background. Tamara Sivanandan writes that in many postcolonial African countries, one

of the main sources of political corruption is the fact that the newly-minted "native" leaders have been so steeped in white culture—including going to the finest *Western* colleges for their education—that when they take leadership roles in their home countries, they are often just as corrupt and abusive as their European predecessors (57). Walker seems to accept this possibility without much question, telling Easley that "I know that this is at best a war that will only change, ha, the complexion of tyranny" (114). His leadership might be just as corrupt as the outgoing white man's but at least it will be *his*.

Homi Bhabha writes that the threat that culturally "hybrid" oppressed people pose is that they will be able to imitate their oppressors too well: "The paranoid threat from the hybrid is finally uncontainable because it breaks down the symmetry and duality of self/other, inside/outside" (116). In other words, hybrids frighten the dominant classes because they have learned to imitate the dominant classes so well as to blur and erase the lines that separate them. When Easley complains that the revolution is killing innocent people, Walker tells him that "The horror is that oppression is not a concept that can be specifically transferable. From the oppressed, down on the oppressor [...] I mean really, if the Western white man has proved one thing...it's the futility of modern society. So the have-not peoples become the haves" (118). The fact that Walker wants to stand up for black America is not what is frightening; it is the fact that he approaches the task with a nihilistic lust for power that is reminiscent of the white powers-that-be is what is unsettling to Easley.

While Walker's newfound revolutionary spirit might upset his white fellow characters, his assertion of his own identity is what separates him from Clay. Walker shares an educational background with Clay, and the two characters once had similar goals. But Walker was willing to re-invent himself in order to better serve the cause of black nationalism, which is why he was allowed to live.

Madheart's Mother and Sister are also liminal characters, but they differ from Walker and Clay because unabashedly occupy the middle ground in the race war. In fact, they occupy the middle ground because the color of their skin prevents them from being fully assimilated into white society. Both women wear wigs (Mother's is red, Sister's is blonde), and neither has much use for black culture or people. Put quite simply, they long to be white.

The fact that they want to be white is underscored by their choice of sexual partners. In an exchange that echoes Baraka's homophobic view of white men, Mother and Sister respond to Black Man's call for them to gather around:

Black Woman: Get up, you other women, and listen to your man. This is no fattening insurance nigger graying around the temples. This is the soulforce of our day-to-day happening universe. A man.

Sister: A man. Dammit. Dance. (*Change*) Men. What do they do? Hang out. If I have to have a niggerman, give me a faggot anyway.

Mother: (*Laughing high voice and sweeping her hand*) Oh, chil', I know just what you mean. Uhh, so sweet. I tell you. But...a white boy's better, daughter. Don't you forget it. (76)

The two women have no interest in Black Man's strongly masculine black identity, or Black Woman's embracing of black beauty. Henry Lacey writes that "Mother and Sister [...] manifest both ignorance and self-loathing," and suggests that they both embrace and contribute to their own degradation as black women (141). By taking their cues for beauty and sexuality from whites, Mother and Sister betray their blackness, and, therefore, must be rescued by Black Man when he vanquishes the Devil Lady.

Mother and Sister are "saved," where their liminal counterparts Clay and the prostitute in Experimental Death Unit #1 are killed, because Black Man must first assert his masculinity in order to eliminate the influence of the Devil Lady. Even though he is

never in the thrall of the Devil Lady, Baraka implies that Black Man must stand up for himself in order to save his women. He accomplishes this by first disposing of the Devil Lady (thus freeing Mother and Sister), and then assuming his "rightful" place as the sexual superior of Black Woman. When Black Woman points out that he has previously done nothing to protect black women from the influence of whites, Black Man responds violently:

Black Woman: You permitted it...you could...do nothing.

Black Man: But now I can. (*He slaps her, drags her to him, kissing her deeply on the lips.*) That shit is ended, woman, you with me, and the world is mine.

Black Woman: I...oh, love, please stay with me...

Black Man: Submit, for love.

Black Woman: I...I submit. (*She goes down, weeping.*). (82)

Sandra Richards is troubled by the passage, as it implies that for Baraka, the subjugation of women is an important facet of black nationalist identity (240). As with his treatment of homosexuals, Baraka treats women as a stepping-stone toward black cultural identity: they must be brought under the control of black men in order for black men to inhabit their rightful place in the world.

Translations features three main liminal characters: Lieutenant Yolland, the Irish translator Owen, and Maire, who inadvertently lures Yolland to his death. All three characters try to exchange part of their national identity for something else, with calamitous results for all.

Owen (the schoolmaster Hugh's "prodigal son") is torn between his Irish heritage and his pragmatic association with the English. When his brother Manus asks him if he has joined the British military—which would, of course, be outright treason against his countrymen—Owen responds "Me a soldier? I'm employed as a part-time, underpaid,

civilian interpreter. My job is to translate the quaint, archaic tongue you people persist in speaking into the King's good English" (404). He is being somewhat facetious, but not entirely: he recognizes that if he wants to be successful in a career that does not involve hedge schools or farming, he needs to ally himself with the British. However, as W.B. Worthen points out, "Language is never neutral, least so when it translates" (147). He might not acknowledge it, but by helping the Ordnance Survey, Owen is participating in a process that necessarily destabilizes his own people.

Like Dutchman's Clay and the pre-revolutionary Walker Vessels, Owen is simply too close to the colonial power. McGrath argues that Owen's problem is not rampant pragmatism, but rather unchecked innocence. He does not realize the consequence of his actions until it is too late (184). Oddly enough, the Englishman Yolland is more hesitant about their project than the Irishman Owen:

Yolland: [...] I'm concerned about my part in it. It's an eviction of sorts.

Owen: We're making a six-inch map of the country. Is there something sinister in that?

Yolland: Not in—

Owen: And we're taking place-names that are riddled with confusion and—

Yolland: Who's confused? Are the people confused?

Owen: —and we're standardizing those names as accurately and as sensitively as we can.

Yolland: Something is being eroded. (419)

For whatever reason, Owen simply cannot see the deleterious effects of his work. In this, he is not unlike Mother and Sister in Madheart, whose obsession blinds them to the fact to they are denying their black identity. Owen is not obsessed with the British, but his pragmatism blinds him to the negative aspects of the British expedition.

Lieutenant Yolland is a doubly liminal character. As the play progresses, he moves away from his British colonial identity, but with the exception of Maire, the Irish locals do not move to accept him—and they never will. Although he recognizes that he can never be Irish, he still believes that he can connect with Maire. Like Owen's naïveté with regards to his work, Yolland's naïveté with regards to love for Maire has disastrous consequences.

Maire's situation within the Irish community is similar to that of black women in Baraka's plays: she is seen as the property of the community instead of a member of it. Even though Yolland's intentions are seemingly innocent, Lauren Onkey points out the symbolic problems caused by his pursuit of Maire: "Maire cannot act freely on her desires because she functions as property and symbol of Baile Beag. If Maire stands for Ireland, then Yolland's emotional or sexual possession of her is equated with possession of the country" (166). Like Baraka's black male characters, the men of Baile Beag need to assert their control over Maire in order to establish their national identity; her interests and desires are secondary to the "greater good" of the village—which is ruthlessly pursued by the Donnelly twins.

Throughout the play, Maire betrays a mild antipathy toward the Irish language—and Ireland. She is determined to have Hugh teach her English, and uses Daniel O'Connell to support her cause: "[...] what he said was this: 'The old language is a barrier to modern progress.' He said that last month. And he's right. [...] I want to be able to speak English because I'm going to America as soon as the harvest's all saved" (400). Unlike Owen, who is seemingly ignorant of the consequences of his actions, Maire knows exactly what the result of her education will be; it will make it easier for her to leave Ireland.

Maire is intelligent enough to know that her actions—both learning English and her planned emigration—will weaken the Irish national identity. Furthermore, she must

be aware that if consummated, her relationship with Yolland will contribute to the decline of the Irish *ethnic* identity. This raises not only the specter of miscegenation, but also a symbolic castration of Irish men: by becoming involved with an Englishman, she both announces that the Irish men are deficient in some way and demonstrates their impotence by their inability to control her.

Maire's affections toward Yolland lead directly to his demise. After they are discovered spending time alone with one another, Yolland disappears. It is almost certain that he has been abducted and assassinated by the Donnelly twins. As the play ends, Jimmy—an older villager with a penchant for classical references—asks Maire, "Do you know the Greek word *endogamein*? It means to marry within the tribe. And the word *exogamein* means to marry outside the tribe. And you don't cross those borders casually—both sides get very angry" (446). He is speaking of his own drunken plan to marry the goddess Athena, but the connection to Maire's situation is obvious. Both she and Yolland betray their "tribes," and are subsequently punished—Yolland with death, and Maire with the loss of her lover.

Darcy Zabel's interpretation of nationalist themes in Baraka's Dutchman could easily have been written about Maire and Yolland's brief, doomed affair: "Sex does not heal, [and] love between the races is not the answer [...]" (22). The fact that they thought that a connection was possible without upsetting the local balance speaks volumes about either their love or their naïveté. Like Baraka's protagonists, in order for the characters to survive, they must move to more stark nationalist identities. Owen, Yolland, and Maire move closer to the middle, blur their identities, and disaster ensues.

Both Friel and Baraka recognize the need for the establishment of a nationalist identity in their plays. For Baraka, this is accomplished by purging assimilationist thinking (and thinkers) from the black community. For Friel, it is accomplished by showing the disastrous effects that occur when characters forget their "place" in society and think that

they have more mobility than they actually do; just because characters *want* to forget their identity does not mean that they can without reaping the consequences.

Brian Friel and Amiri Baraka are clearly very different writers. They come from different countries, have different backgrounds, and use widely different techniques in their plays. The differences between the two outnumber their similarities.

At the same time, both writers ask the same fundamental question—how do oppressed people build a national identity for themselves in the face (or aftermath) of colonial oppression? In the cases of both Ireland and black America, the oppressive forces have spent centuries denying the oppressed agency, and at times humanity.

Simon During offers one solution to colonialist oppression. He writes that “nationalism has often seemed a mode of freedom. Its most powerful form—cultural nationalism—was in fact developed *against* imperialism” (138). Despite the fact that the two playwrights approach the idea of cultural nationalism in different ways—Friel’s characters come to an understanding of what is lost, and what the implications are for the inhabitants of the land, while Baraka’s rise up to fight their oppressors—the manner in which the characters establish their identity is similar.

For both playwrights, the characters must take control of their own identities. Sometimes this leads to triumph, and other times it leads to tragedy, but the important thing is that the characters are finally able to define themselves and their people on their own terms.

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