

Abstract

When Blacks in the United States began to write about themselves they initially tended to follow the stereotypes about themselves that had been established by white writers. The black playwrights who achieved any measure of independence were those who could sneak true images and relevant themes into conventional drama.

The development of a black aesthetic was an attempt to disregard the standard set up by Whites as unsuitable and inimical to black life. It concentrated on reversing traditional myths, archetypes and images which defined blackness as inferior and evil, insisting that to be true to himself, the black playwright must accept responsibility for moulding black consciousness.

Imamu Amiri Baraka was a typical avant-garde poet of the 1950s and 60s who became aware of race issues in the United States and developed into a playwright who wrote specifically for black audiences with the purposes of nurturing black pride and unity. He also added the element of militancy for he believed that this was the only way to eliminate the white enemy.

In his plays, themes of revolution are explored through his characterisation. Interplay between black and white characters analyses the symbiotic relationships between them and provides keen insight into conflicts inherent in black/white relations in the

United States. It exposes the need for the development of a revolutionary black psyche which could carry out the struggle for black liberation.

Baraka also revolutionised the form of black drama to suit its political thrust. He adapted absurdist techniques to suit the black situation, concentrating on creating images and myths which would foster black pride. Structure and action of his plays were adjusted to suit black audiences. He ignored the subtleties of traditional drama and preached revolution on the stage.

Thus Baraka's plays were revolutionary, both in content and in form.