Assignment: *Dutchman Review*

**Summary:**

In this assignment you will write a critical review of Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones’s play *Dutchman*, which is playing at the Castillo Theatre (castillotheatre.org), 543 W 42nd St in Manhattan (212-941-5800) through March 8th. Show times are Thursdays-Sundays and it costs $20 with a student discount (bring your Lehman ID).

**Objectives:**

- Refine summary writing skills
- Refine skills in analysis and description
- Practice writing essays
- Practice using specific details and examples to develop a point
- Practice with MLA citation format

**Assignment:**

Write a critical review of the *Dutchman* play. Your review should be about 4-5 pages in length (about 1,200-1,500 words) with an additional Works Cited page at the end. The goal here is not simply whether or not you liked the piece, but to engage in a deeper discussion of the play’s significance, focusing a few key themes or contexts and what the play says about them.

For contrast, you should look up *at least* 3 reviews for previous productions of the play. One should be from the original 1964 run; the other two should be from post-2010 productions. You should summarize what the reviewers said and use this as a beginning to form your own opinions about the play that you will see and a possible model for writing your review. The *New York Times* is one good source of old reviews.

You should then focus on key themes in the play and explain how it relates to the larger world. This will be your thesis, that is, the main point of your review essay.

**Essay format:**

- Introductory paragraph(s) should tell the reader what it is you’re reviewing and give a brief (1-2 paragraph at the most) summary of the plot and action.
- Next, summarize and comment on what other reviewers have said about *Dutchman*. This should be possible to do in 1-2 paragraphs. You should use these as reference points for how well the current production works.
- Following paragraphs should explain how specific scenes, characters, plot points, or design details of the play. Use one paragraph for each major point. Show readers in detail exactly how the specific examples you chose illustrate your thesis.
• Use examples from specific scenes to give evidence for what you say. For instance, if you think the acting is good/bad, use a specific scene that shows this and explain to the reader why.
• The conclusion should answer any unresolved questions and state whether or not you like the performance and why.

You should also talk about the performance critically. A few examples of questions you might want to raise are: What are the major themes? What are the strong or weak points? Who are the main characters? Where is the play set? What is the time period? How does the plot progress? Are there serious flaws or weaknesses in the story, and what are they? Similarly, are there particularly good.awful performances?

**One point of attention: DO NOT simply** re-tell the entire story! If you do this, you will fail. Use only as much summary as necessary to explain your points and focus on analysis – what’s interesting, noteworthy, or important about the performance from your point of view in your own words.

**Tips for preparing for your trip and watching the play:**

• Do some basic research on the play and its author. Reading the background info on the Castillo site and website for the New Federal Theater (the group actually producing the play) will give you a sense of what to expect.
• Read reviews of previous productions of *Dutchman* before you go.
• Take a small notebook with you and make note of key scenes
• Get a copy of the play’s program with actor’s bios and background info
• Write up your notes from the performance when you get home or the next day while it’s still fresh in your mind. *This is important!* The longer you wait, the less you’ll remember.

**Format:**

• Papers should be between 1,200-1,500 words in length (about 4-5 pages, plus an additional Works Cited page),
• Typed double space, 12 point Times font (this is 12-point Times) and 1” margins.
• **Papers should be submitted via e-mail (ONLY) as a Microsoft Word file attachment.** Please pay close attention to format, punctuation, and style.

**Sources and citations**

Citations from outside sources should be done using the Modern Language Association (MLA) format, which is standard for the humanities. At a minimum, you’ll have 4 sources: the 3 reviews you are looking up (and citing) and the play that you’re watching and taking notes on. All sources should be listed on the Works Cited page at the end of the paper.
See the Lehman College Library and/or the Academic Center for Excellence in 205 of the Old Gym building for more in-depth assistance on the MLA citation format. Also see Purdue University’s OWL (Online Writing Lab) for detailed instructions.

You are expected to use sources appropriate for college-level research. In summary, mainstream news/magazine articles, books, and scholarly journals (including ones retrieved through internet databases) are fine. Not acceptable are Wikipedia, random websites/blogs, Facebook entries, self-published books and zines, etc. If in doubt, ask me. Papers with improperly cited sources will be penalized.

**Deadline and Submission:** E-mailed copies are due **Monday, March 9th by midnight Eastern Standard Time** at my Lehman e-mail: hank.williams@lehman.cuny.edu. I will respond that I have received it within 24 hours: the return email I send you is your proof of submission. Late papers will be penalized 1/4 letter grade per day late: I go by the time stamp on your email.

**How to do well on this assignment:** Take good notes on the play. Think about what you’re seeing and try to describe it accurately. Start early and plan to write multiple drafts of your work. Proofread carefully to eliminate spelling and punctuation errors and consider visiting Lehman’s writing center for assistance. Carefully review the MLA format and be sure that you use the required number of sources (minimum of 4), cite accurately, and that the format of your Works Cited page is excellent.

**Grading:** Will be on the scale of A-F and based on the following:

- Clarity of thesis and how well it is presented/defended
- Thoroughness of explanation and use of examples
- Clarity and style of writing: paragraph structure and transitions
- Mechanics (punctuation, spelling, correct word choice)
- Proper amount, quality, and use of sources (including citations).

Questions? E-mail me at: hank.williams@lehman.cuny.edu or see me during my office hours (5-6 PM after class Thursday in Carman 398 or by appointment)