

# **African American Violent Resistance in Ted Shine's *Contribution*<sup>(\*)</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

This paper contends that the African American play, Ted Shine's *Contribution* (1969), was written as a violent reaction to the Civil Rights Movement in the sixties relying on the fact that the African American race is the Master Race as a reaction to, and subversion of the white Master Race ideology. Although Nihilism was firstly introduced by Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* (1862) and employed by Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866) to introduce the concept of the Superman, they stretched their influence to the Revolutionary Theatre which stems from the sixties Black Arts Movement, whose father, Amiri Baraka, incited violence. *Contribution* was not merely a product of this bloody movement as this play, in application, was impacted by Nihilism, the concept of the Superman

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as well as Utilitarianism in an attempt to assert the fact that the African American race is the Master Race.

**Keywords:**

Master Race -Aryan Race – Utilitarianism – Nietzsche – Nihilism – Superman- *Adolf Hitler* - *Amiri Baraka* - *Civil Rights Movement* - *Revolutionary Theatre Black Arts Movement*

**الملخص**

يظهر هذا البحث أن المسرحية التي قام بكتابتها كاتب مسرح من أصول إفريقية، وهي *إسهامات* لتد شاين (١٩٦٩)، قد تمت كتابتها كرد فعل عنيف لحركة الحقوق المدنية في الستينات معتمدة على فكرة أن الجنس الأمريكي من أصول أفريقية هو الجنس الأسمى وذلك كرد فعل وقلب لأيديولوجية الجنس الأسمى الأبيض. على الرغم من أن العدمية قد تم تقديمها لأول مرة من خلال *آباء وأبناء لإيفان تورجينيف* (١٨٦٢) وتم توظيفها في الجريمة *والعقاب* لفيودور دوستوفسكي (١٨٦٦) لتقديم مفهوم البطل الخارق، إلا أن تأثيرهم امتد إلى المسرح الثوري الذي ينبع من حركة الفنون السوداء في الستينات التي قام رائدها، أميرى بركة، بالحث على العنف. إن مفهوم البطل الخارق وكذلك النفعية في محاولة لتأكيد حقيقة أن الجنس الأمريكي الأفريقي هو الجنس الأسمى.

**الكلمات الدالة:**

الجنس الأسمى - الجنس الآري - النفعية - نيتشه - العدمية - البطل الخارق - أدولف هتلر - ميرى بركة - حركة الحقوق المدنية - المسرح الثوري - حركة الفنون السوداء

This paper attempts to prove that Ted Shine's *Contribution* (1969) is a sociopolitical African American play deeply rooted in the philosophy of the Master Race. It attempts to analyze the play in the light of the violent resistance of the African Americans and examine its philosophical justifications which are influenced by the philosophies of Nihilism and Utilitarianism in association with the concept of the Superman.

Shine's *Contribution* is significantly a product of the Black Arts Movement that followed the assassination of Malcolm X on February 21,

1965. It is notable to mention that the year 1964 had witnessed rebellions in Harlem, Rochester, New York, Watts, Detroit, Newark, Cleveland and other cities which went up in flames, exploding African American anger after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. As a consequence, Amiri Baraka's poem "Black Art" (1965) was the poetic manifesto of the movement in which he incited violence, "We want poems that kill" (Andrews et al 71). Being the father of this movement, he explains its objectives in his essay, "The Revolutionary Theatre," edited by Gates and McKay in which he threatens the white race by resorting to violent acts:

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 are 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. We must make an art that will function so as to call down the actual wrath of world spirit. We are witch doctors and assassins, but we will open a place for the true scientists to expand our consciousness. This is a theatre of assault. The play that will split the heavens for us will be called THE DESTRUCTION OF AMERICA. (1902)

Moreover, in his interview with Gottlieb, "They Think You're an Airplane and You're Really a Bird," Baraka admits being a racist and stresses the original superiority, not of the white race, but of the black race, which forms the basis of Shine's *Contribution*:

Q: What do you mean when you say you're racist?

A: I'm racist in the sense that I believe certain qualities that are readily observable on this planet have to do with racial types and archetypes. The identities of peoples are based on their race and culture ...

Q: Do you believe there's a genetic or generic superiority of the black race over the white?

A: Well yes. The black man was here on this planet first, and he will be here long after the white man is gone.

Q: Could the white race possibly reverse this trend, by an act of will or decision, or by social and political changes?

A: It could be, if you had evolved to that state. The next point of evolution for white people seems to me to be dust and ashes. (Baraka 32-33)

Accordingly, Baraka was influenced by Nietzschean and Hitler's notions as well. To explain Baraka's concept of the superiority of the black race, it is noteworthy to refer to the characteristics of the Master Race, as perceived by Nietzsche. Lamont explains:

Friedrich Nietzsche followed Schopenhauer in regarding Will as the activating principle at the heart of the cosmos. Bracing himself with crude interpretations of the Darwinian theory of evolution, he defined this Will as a brutal, assertive and amoral Will to Power. In the human race this Will to Power manifests itself, according to Nietzsche, in the survival and superiority of the strongest, the most ruthless, the most masterful... His ideal man was the tough and aristocratic hero recklessly engaging in strife, danger and adventure and boldly setting himself above all current views of good and bad. (117)

Lamont develops his argument further to point out the influence of the concept of the Master Race on Adolf Hitler:

This fierce philosophy, paradoxically enough produced by a constitutional invalid, later became a stimulus and inspiration for the German Nazis under Adolf Hitler. The Nietzschean Will to Power was equated with the Will to Dominate the World; the Nietzschean stress on biological

superiority and eugenics with the right of the master race to rule mankind. (117)

In spite of the fact that Hitler “had nothing but disdain for black Africans, whom he considered far below the level of Aryans. He admitted that blacks are humans, but still he considered them essentially different from and inferior to Europeans” (Weikart 69). Baraka, like Hitler, believes that he belongs to the Master Race. Being an extraordinary race, the black race has the right to resort to violence due to its superiority over the rest of humanity. Baraka's words echo Hitler's:

What we must fight for is to safeguard the existence and reproduction of our race and our people, the sustenance of our children and the purity of our blood, the freedom and independence of the fatherland, so that our people may mature for the fulfillment of the mission allotted it by the creator of the universe. (214)

In an analogous way, Baraka stresses the superiority of the black race in “An Interview with LeRoi Jones” with Clarke:

Clarke: Would there be any break in logic for you to conclude that the black race is superior?

Jones: Well, the way I feel about it is this: we are all – we are all – under the will of Allah. We are all moved by the spirit, by one spirit; one spirit moves every one of us. Now, if we embrace our natural selves, then we will be naturally closer to Allah because we are the first people – the original man – and I think our creations will be superior to materialistic creations. I think the European is given to materialistic creation, artificial materialistic creation, and I think ours is a natural strength. But the point is, if we do not embrace this, then we are inferior. We must first become what we are. Then we will be closer to Allah, closer to ourselves. Do you see what I mean? (Baraka 43)

This paper contends that Shine, like Baraka and Hitler, is influenced by the philosophies of Nihilism, Utilitarianism and the concept of the Superman. These western influenced theories were rampant in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, but their influence never ceased to inspire people more than a century after their emergence.

Notably, Nietzsche explains “What does nihilism mean? That the highest values devalue themselves. The aim is lacking; “why?” finds no answer” (9). Also, he reaches the conclusion that “the faith in the categories of reason is the cause of nihilism. We have measured the value of the world according to categories that refer to a purely fictitious world” (13).

Silone explains the concept of Nihilism, as perceived by Nietzsche, in his essay, “The Choice of Comrades”:

Nihilism, as Nietzsche conceived it is the identification of goodness, justice, and truth with self-interest. Nihilism is the conviction that beliefs and ideas are, ultimately, a mere façade with nothing real behind them, and that consequently only one thing really matters, really counts: success. It is nihilistic to sacrifice oneself for a cause in which one does not believe, while pretending to believe in it. It is nihilistic to exalt courage and heroism independently of the cause they serve, thus equating the martyr with the hired assassin. And so on. (236)

Silone expected the universal spread of Nihilism “from the upper classes over the entire surface of the social fabric: the epidemic has not spared the working-class districts. Today the nihilist call of force and success is universal” (243).

It is also important to explain the concept of Utilitarianism as Russell clarifies:

It maintained that happiness is the good, and that we ought to act so as to maximize the balance of happiness over unhappiness in the world. I should not myself regard

happiness as an adequate definition of the good, but I should agree that conduct ought to be judged by its consequences. I do not mean, of course, that in every practical exigency of daily life we should attempt to think out the results of this or that line of conduct, because, if we did, the opportunity for action would often be past before our calculations were finished. But I do mean that the received moral code, in so far as it is taught in education and embodied in public opinion or the criminal law, should be carefully examined in each generation, to see whether it still serves to achieve desirable ends, and, if not, in what respects it needs to be amended. The moral code, in short, like the legal code, should adapt itself to changing circumstances, keeping the public good always as its motive. If so, we have to consider in what the public good consists. (237-238)

Aiken, on the other hand, presents another definition of Utilitarianism:

Mill, like Bentham, holds that actions are to be judged by their consequences; but science cannot dictate what consequences are to be preferred. Moreover, the principle of utility, which prescribes that actions are right only in so far as they promote the general happiness, or greatest happiness of the greatest number, is a principle of conduct, and not a definition in which the logical function of the word "right" is explicated. In short, utilitarianism is, for Mill as it was for Bentham, a way of life, not a theory of moral discourse. And it was so construed in the nineteenth century by most of its enemies as well as by its friends. (146)

The present writer favours Russell's definition for it adapts the concept of Utilitarianism according to the changing circumstances targeting happiness as the sole desirable goal. Indeed, Mill affirms that "those who

know anything about the matter are aware that every writer, from Epicurus to Bentham, who maintained the theory of utility, meant by it, not something to be contradistinguished from pleasure, but pleasure itself, together with exemption from pain” (Mill 8). It was imperative to give an informative definition of the terms Nihilism and Utilitarianism for the purpose of proving the hypothesis of their influence on Shine’s *Contribution*. Some critical views will be mentioned to show the total departure of the present paper from their approach. Criticized from a general perspective, it has been disparaged by the critics, neglecting the fact that Shine was one of the leading literary figures in the Black Arts Movement. Kerr, for example, praised Shine for his "low-key sauciness" and his "uncanny knack for being warm-hearted and blood-curdling at once" (qtd. in LeBlanc 33). In the same strain, another *Times* critic, Barnes, is critical of *Contribution*:

Ted Shine is a new black playwright with a great eye for a funny situation. His actual writing as yet is not nearly so smooth as his sense of the ridiculous is acute. He is an interesting newcomer who writes from the heart with a brush and bitter humor. (qtd. In Le Blanc,39)

The present researcher attempts to prove that many critics failed to analyse the positive implications of violence in a play produced by the Revolutionary Theatre. Moreover, although the play manifests the influence of philosophies that gripped Europe a century earlier, they contribute to the objectives of the Black Arts Movement that assert the superiority of the black race as Baraka declared.

As for Robinson’s critique of *Contribution*, its significance lies in his pointing to the crucial role Shine plays in the history of African American literature and focusing on his being neglected by scholarly studies, the only point I agree with. He says that

it is fair to say that Shine has been overlooked by the scholarly community. Although he has written more than

thirty plays, partnered with Hatch to produce what remains an important anthology of African American plays, and had plays performed in New York, Shine and his works have not been the subject of very many scholarly studies. This neglect is unfortunate, as this important playwright was a pioneer in the black arts movement of the 1960s. (415)

To the present researcher's belief, *Contribution* is a sociopolitical African American play of the Black Arts Movement that expresses and justifies the black revolutionary spirit and violent response to the criminal and murderous violations against the African Americans during the sixties. Fueled by the violent objectives of the Revolutionary Theatre, it embodies the African American strong belief that they are the Master Race, which comes as a reaction to and subversion of the philosophy of the white Master Race.

In *Contribution*, Mrs. Grace Love, a black woman in her seventies, plays the role of the "Superman." She is above suspicion for she kills white people by poisoning them, claiming that this is her "contribution" in an attempt to assert the superiority of her race. The significance of the title lies in the fact that it does not mean that this contribution is an act of revenge, as seen from a surface level by many critics, whose critical views will be counter argued in this paper. Instead, the title stretches its perspective to embrace a philosophical case to include Mrs. Love's concept of blacks as the Master Race. Since Mrs. Love believes that she belongs to an elite "Superman" status, she has the right to transgress the law to establish the truth of her race's superiority over the whites. She confesses to her grandson, Eugene, at the end of the play, "I worked for nigger haters – made 'em love me, and I put my boy through school – and then I sent them to eternity with flying colors. I got no regrets, boy, just peace of mind and satisfaction" (*Contribution*, 431). Her motivations for killing whites are rather based on nihilistic beliefs due to her rejection of familial, societal, emotional and aesthetic bonds that could exist between the white race and

the black race living in one society. Wimberly supports the above point of view stating:

Traditional African American communal values such as strong family-oriented ties, reverence for elders, caring for children, a deep sense of spirituality, and a conviction that life is sacred have eroded; and a prevailing sense of nihilism or loss of a sense of meaning and purpose prevail. The end result is the lessening of the ability to negotiate successfully life-cycle tasks and transitions. There is a loss of relational skills that are essential to maintain close and intimate relationships and to build on previous stages of the life cycle. (49)

Mrs. Love's motivations are also utilitarian; by killing whites, she achieves the greatest happiness for the largest number of black people since she will pave the way for her race to dominate and thus live up to what they have envisioned for their race. She tells Eugene at the end of the play "Cheer up! I done what I did for all yawl" (*Contribution*, 431) The utilitarian theory, based on Mill and Bentham's words, is clarified by Michalowski:

The principle of utility could be summarized as a principle of striving for the greatest happiness for the greatest number. This means that utilitarian theory to some extent favors the public good over that of the individual. It claims to be objective, in that the determination of whether or not an act or a rule is good or bad depends on a calculation of the pain and pleasure thereby caused. (8)

To the writer's belief, it is only due to nihilistic and utilitarian motivations that Mrs. Love kills the white doctor, Doctor Fulton. Although she has been working for his family, he left her husband die without treatment because he hates blacks. In spite of the fact that she admits that the doctor's family "grew to love me like one of the family" (*Contribution*,

428), she poisons them all. She applies the identical murderous plan when she poisons Sheriff Morrison, one of her white victims. She victoriously describes to Katy, her thirty-year-old neighbor, the common symptoms of poison on her common victim, the white man:

Mrs. Love: Oh, I've seen it before. Child! I've seen it! First Dr. Fulton a medical man who didn't know his liver from his kidney. He sat and watched his entire family die out one by one – then let hisself die because he was dumb!

(*Contribution*, 429)

Here, Mrs. Love is also subverting the stereotyping of black people as “dumb” and stupid by fixing these same descriptions to the white man. Responding to Baraka’s violent call in his “The Revolutionary Theatre,” Mrs. Love, like an assassin who wholeheartedly believes in her mission, commits these crimes in cold blood because she believes she is a part of a class of “Supermen” that is above the law and the moral rules that govern the rest of humanity. She affirms to Eugene that she is “justified – justified in whatever I do” (*Contribution*, 428). She is actually performing what she believes a praiseworthy subversion of power relations between blacks and whites. She kills these white people only to remove them from society to pave the way for the blacks to dominate and prove their superiority over the whites. Also, Mrs. Love regards the whites inferior to blacks professionally and mentally, an evaluation that supports the concept of the Master Race and fortifies her motivations of committing crimes for the benefit of her race. She secretly kills in pursuit of this concept. When her twenty-one year old grandson, Eugene, joins a civil-rights sit-in, but sees that Sheriff Morrison is “the one who’s raisin’ all the hell” (426), she decides to take his life. Her argumentative dialogue with Eugene is highly satirical and ironical:

Mrs. Love: Look at you – a nervous wreck at twenty one – just because you’ve got to walk through a bunch of poor white trash and sit at a lunch counter in a musty old drug store!

Eugene: I may be a little tense – it's only natural – you'd be too!

Mrs. Love: I do my bit, baby, and it don't affect me in the least! I've seen the blazing cross and the hooded faces in my day. I've smelled black flesh burning with tar, and necks stretched like taffy.

Eugene: Seeing those things was your contribution, I guess?

Mrs. Love: You'd be surprised at my contribution!

Eugene: Nothing that you did would surprise me at all! You're a hard headed old woman!

Mrs. Love: And I'm justified – justified in whatever I do. Life ain't been pretty for me, son. Oh, I suppose had some happiness like when I married your granddaddy or when I gave birth to your daddy, but as I watched him grow up I got meaner and meaner. (*Contribution*, 428)

This dialogue exposes the real motivations of Mrs. Love's crimes as a representative of the black Master Race. Her description of Doctor Fulton is also ironic when she describes his death at her hands. She tells Kathy that he called her to his deathbed and asked her to hold his hand, "I ain't got nobody else to turn to now, Auntie." After she asked him, "You related to me in some way?" he laughed and the pain hit him like axe (*Contribution*, 429). Indeed, Mrs. Love's question implies negation of any kind of relationship. Feeling victorious and enjoying Doctor Fulton's torture at her hands satisfy her desire to take revenge. She admits to Eugene:

Mrs. Love: The Bible says love and I does. I turns the other cheek and I loves 'til I can't love no more – (*Eugene nods*) Well ... I reckon I ain't perfect – I ain't like Jesus was. I can only bear a cross so long. I guess I've "had it" as you young folks say. Done been spit on, insulted, but I grinned and bore my cross for a while – then there was peace – satisfaction – sweet satisfaction. (428)

Mrs. Love suffers from an inner conflict as she is trying to justify the reasons for being a serial killer. She relies on the fact that the Bible could not support her and hence had to find other means to assert the superiority of her race. Her motivations for crime were not profoundly analysed as Miller expresses the view that *Contribution* focuses on an elderly Black woman who, while masquerading as a docile servant for her white employers whom she inwardly detests, aids the young Black integrationists in the South. She fights for freedom in her own fashion. (85)

To the researcher's belief, although Mrs. Love's killing Doctor Fulton's family as an act of revenge has justifiable reasons for ending their lives, this is not the real motivation for her crimes. Killing a whole family is a symbolic act of killing the whole white race. Doctor Fulton could have been her only victim. Also, she has made him see his entire family die in front of his eyes one by one. She has not meant to torture him as much as she has done this to fulfill her mission of getting rid of as many white people as she could. Yet, she has worked in sincerity; she says that she "held them white folks' hand when they was sick. Nursed the babies – and I sat back and watched 'em all die out year after year. Old Dr. Fulton was the last to go. He had worked around death all his life and death frightened him" (*Contribution*, 428).

Significantly, a different analysis of the play is offered. Morgan sees *Contribution* from another perspective. He says that it

brings the trickster tradition to the 1960s Civil Rights Era; the one-act play encapsulates and reflects many of the same elements of trickster humor familiar from antebellum tales embedded in slave narratives and traditional African American oral culture

In reality, she is someone who might be labeled a psychopath; she is certainly a mass murderer. She insists, of course, that she does not hate anyone. Grace Love's doubleness as a sweet old lady and vengeful angel of death marks her as a trickster. (26)

Morgan's view is partly true only when he refers to Mrs. Love doubleness that marks her as a trickster, while the rest of his analysis that labels her as a psychopath is faulty because she does not conform with views proposed by Carr who presents the definition of the African American trickster:

It would be best to view trickster tales as narratives representing varying gradations of power relationships and possibilities for social change. In the African American context, the trickster has been filtered through the particular conditions African Americans have had to endure to reflect a material existence that is at once similar to that found in sub-Saharan Africa and yet altered considerably for the social situations found under slavery and other oppressive conditions. For this reason, the trickster may range from the selfish/self-centered to the altruistic, but she or he consistently reifies the potential for the witty and idealistic to effect an alteration of material conditions. (35)

As previously explained, Mrs. Love murders because she conforms to her philosophy that asserts that blacks, not whites, represent the Master Race. That makes her "justified in whatever I do" (*Contribution*, 428), "have great peace of mind" (429) and "got a long way to go and much more to do before I go to meet my maker" (427). The present researcher contends that Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866), not African American trickster tales, has the direct impact on Shine's *Contribution*. To explain, commonly sharing the utilitarian and nihilist justifications for crime, Raskolnikov, the protagonist of the novel, kills Alyona, the pawnbroker. He kills her for utilitarian reasons because she is a "louse" that must not exist in society, and this would thereby increase "the greatest happiness or greatest felicity principle" as Utilitarianists call it. Raskolnikov also justifies the murders on nihilist grounds; the philosophy of Nihilism which raged through St. Petersburg in the 1860's. He believes he is a "Superman" who is above the law and has the right to violate moral codes. In *Crime and Punishment*,

Raskolnikov's article on crime explains the philosophies of Nihilism, Utilitarianism and the concept of the Superman. He begins by explaining the concept of the Superman:

An extraordinary man has the right ... that is not an official right, but an inner right to decide in his conscience to overstep ... certain obstacles and only in case it is essential for the practical fulfillment of his idea (sometimes, perhaps of benefit to the whole of humanity) (260)

To support his argument, he refers to real "Supermen" who had a great influence on humanity:

... I maintain that if the discoveries of Kepler and Newton could not have been made known except by scarifying the lives of one, a dozen, a hundred, or more men, Newton would have had the right, would indeed have been in duty bound .. to eliminate the dozen or the hundred men for the sake of making his discoveries known to the whole of humanity. But it does not follow from that that Newton had a right to murder people right and left and to steal every day in the market. (260)

He affirms that "Supermen" must be criminals by nature:

In short, I maintain that all great men or even men a little out of the common, that is to say capable of giving some new word, must from their very nature be criminals – more or less, of course. Otherwise it's hard for them to get out of the common rut; and to remain in the common rut is what they can't submit to, from their very nature again, and to my mind they ought not, indeed, to submit to it.

(260-261)

Notably, Gray points to the concept of the Master Race in *Crime and Punishment*, represented in Raskolnikov, which could be "applied to different people over different periods of time," such as in *Contribution*:

Raskolnikov believes he is part of a "Master Race" that makes him able to commit crimes without guilt. The same can be applied to different people over different periods of time. Hitler and Stalin both had these ideas, and the fact that Dostoevsky wrote about these ideas years before is a notable accomplishment.<sup>1</sup>

The same is applicable to Mrs. Love who commits crimes "without guilt." Therefore, Raskolnikov and Mrs. Love vividly depict the influence of the concept of the Master Race in different times and spaces.

It is important to mention that the concept of the Superman is represented through the African American "militant." Mrs. Love calls the members of her race "militants" because, according to her perspective, they have a racial mission to fight for. Recalling Baraka's words, they are "new kinds of heroes" who "are ready to die for what's on their minds." She tells Eugene:

Mrs. Love: You young folks ain't the only militant ones, you know!

Eugene: You work for the meanest paddy in town – and to hear you tell it, he adores the ground you walk on! Now you're a big militant!

Mrs. Love: I try to get along with folks, son. (*Contribution*, 427)

Ironically, Eugene is blind to the fact that his grandmother plays the role of a militant from her point of view. In a different attempt to assert the superiority of the African American race, he sees that his grandmother could easily live a better life if she stops working for "trash":

Eugene: You don't have to work for trash like Sheriff Morrison! You don't have to work at all! You own this house. Daddy sends you checks which you tear up. You could get a pension if you weren't so stubborn – you don't have to work at your age! And you surely don't have to embarrass the family by working for trash!

Mrs. Love: What am I supposed to do? Sit here and rot like an old apple? The minute a woman's hair turns gray folks want her to take to a rockin' chair and sit it out. Not this chick, baby. I'm keepin' active. I've got a long way to go and much more to do before I go to meet my maker. (*Contribution*, 427)

It is only due to her faith in her racial mission that makes the elderly Mrs. Love have this militant spirit which keeps her “active.” She is also ready to meet her maker courageously without the slightest sense of remorse or guilt, recalling Hitler’s words, she aims at the “the fulfillment of the mission allotted it by the creator of the universe” (Hitler 214). Her words are a clear manifestation of the violent resistance of the African American Master Race. She reveals the initial motivations of her mission when she tells Eugene:

Mrs. Love: ... I'm sick to my stomach whenever I pick up a paper or turn on the news and see where young folks is being washed down with hoses or being bitten by dogs – even killed! I get sick to my stomach when I realize how hungry some folks are – and how disrespectful the world’s gotten! I get sick to my stomach, baby, because the world is more messed up now than it ever was!  
(*Contribution*, 427)

Ironically, though Mrs. Love does not consider killing an immoral act, she condemns killing African Americans. This is due to the fact that, according to her nihilistic and utilitarian perspective, she kills in pursuit of her belief. She clings to a belief in the morality, even nobility of committing crimes. She even extends her philosophy to draw a comparison between the black race and the rest of the world so as to introduce the fact that the black race is the Master Race and thereby is qualified to rule the world.

Mrs. Love’s submissive attitude to the white society is highly crucial. She “bows down,” not “before any authority,” but rather “to gain authority.”

She explains to Eugene, who is "sick at the stomach" for her embarrassing attitude:

Mrs. Love: I worked to feed and clothe him like Katy's doin' for her children, but I had a goal in mind. Katy's just doin' it to eat. I wanted something better for my son. They used to call me "nigger" one minute and swear that they loved me the next. I grinned and bore it like you said. Sometimes I even had to scratch my head and bow, but I got your daddy through college. (*Contribution*, 428)

Mrs. Love's words about "bowing before an authority" are very symbolic as they assert her being a nihilist as firstly described by Crosby when he defines Nihilism in 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia and the concept of authority:

The term nihilism first came into prominent use in Russia with the 1862 publication of Ivan Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Sons*. Early in the novel, Arkady, the young disciple of Bazarov (the novel's chief character), refers to his hero as a nihilist. Arkady's Father inquiries into the meaning of this term, and the son explains that a "nihilist is a man who does not bow down before any authority, who does not take any principle on faith, whatever reverence that principle may be enshrined in." Later, Bazarov himself declares to Arkady's father and uncle, "We act by virtue of what we recognize as beneficial ... At the present time, negation is the most beneficial of all- and we deny ... everything." Arkady's father then states, "You deny everything ... But one must construct too, you know." Bazarov responds with a scornful air, "That's not our business now ... The ground wants clearing first." (Turgenev: 24, 56). (10)

The present writer argues that Crosby prophesied the far-reaching influence of this novel that extended to *Contribution*, a play written about one century later:

It is not hard to understand how this statement of the nihilist outlook, which became widely known because of the influence of Turgenev's novel, came to be associated with programs of political revolution and terrorism in which negation or destruction for its own sake seemed to be the dominant aim. (10)

Eugene is awestruck when he realizes that his grandma is a murderer. She justifies her motivations relying on the fact that she belongs to the Master Race:

Mrs. Love: Because I'm a tired old Black woman who's been tired, and who ain't got no place and never had no place in this country – you talk about a “new Negro”– Hell, I was a new Negro seventy- six years ago. Don't you think I wanted to sip me a coke cola in a store when I went out shopping! Don't you think I wanted to have a decent job that would have given me some respect and enough money to feed my family and clothe them decently? I resented being called "Girl" and "Auntie" by folks who weren't even as good as me. (*Contribution*, 431)

Dicker/son comments on Mrs. Love's "contribution" in the play in a different manner, tackling the play from a political perspective:

Ted Shine's play *Contribution* (1969) takes a darkly humorous look at the Civil Rights Movement and different generational attitudes to it. Eugene, the young protagonist, berates his grandmother for being an "Uncle Tom" and not supporting the struggle. But in the end, Grandmother Love has a surprise for the young warriors. She makes her own "contribution" when she sends the sheriff her "specially seasoned" cornbread, which leads to his painful death at the peak of the showdown with the students. (119)

The present researcher partly agrees with Dicker/sun since *Contribution* stems from the Civil Rights Movement. However, although this rebellious play is a product of the Black Arts Movement and the Revolutionary Theatre which incites violence, Mrs. Love and Eugene reacted in two contradictory attitudes. Eugene advocates peaceful resistance, whereas Mrs. Love prefers violent resistance.

Likewise, it is important to mention Klein's reference to the evolution of domestics in African American literature "from mammies to militants," shedding light on the political changes the African Americans were going through. She states that

by the 1970s, black domestics were being portrayed as not only no longer being mammies but as sometimes being lethal. For example, in Ted Shine's play "Contribution," a militant young black man learns that his seemingly submissive old Granny has been aiding the civil rights movement by poisoning the bigots for whom she cooks. Just before the sheriff goes out to confront the young demonstrators, including her grandson, she sends him a basket of food. The sheriff dies of a "fit" in the street. (195)

There is no doubt that Mrs. Love is a product of the Black Arts Movement and the Revolutionary Theatre. Besides being one of the "assassins" in this "theatre of assault" as Baraka instigates, she clings to a belief that only the Master Race has the Will to Power as Hitler affirms:

Everything on this earth is capable of improvement. Every defeat can become the father of a subsequent victory, every lost war the cause of a better resurgence, every hardship the fertilization of human energy, and from every oppression the forces for a new spiritual rebirth can come – as long as the blood is preserved pure. (327)

Hitler's words support the strategy of subversion Mrs. Love adopts to stress the fact that the African American is the Master Race. Similarly,

Aiken explains the concept of Power from the Nietzschean perspective, which is practiced by Mrs. Love:

Power, for Nietzsche as for Spinoza, symbolizes self-determination. It means, for him, doing and being able to do what you will, not what some class, institution, or general will considers to be right for you. In Nietzsche's view, so long as the individual remains caught in a web of collective rituals and impersonal social routines, however much they may conduce to something called the general "welfare," all tampering with the political or economic order leaves the fundamental predicament of modern life completely untouched. (208)

Undoubtedly, Mrs. Love possesses self-determination that makes her do whatever she believes to be right, as long as she believes in her philosophy, and this is obviously manifested in her "contribution." When Eugene asks Mrs. Love about the reason for her denial to live with his father, she answers him "'cause I'm stubborn and independent! And I want to see me some more colored mens around here with pride and dignity!" (*Contribution*, 428). Her reasons are supported by Aiken's view:

Nietzsche accepts it as a fact that will is inherent in all life and remains as long as life itself lasts. For him, therefore, there can be no question of denying or transcending will. The only question is: whose will shall prevail? And this, he holds, is simply a question of power. (210)

Thus, Mrs. Love, in a Nietzschean manner, keeps answering the question, "whose will shall prevail?" She succeeds in reaching a state of "peace of mind and satisfaction" when her will prevails over the whites and thereby asserts the superiority of the black race. Ironically, she tells Katy, "You'd be amazed at what my heart's done took all these years" (*Contribution*, 425). Also, the irony lies in the fact that Katy is blindly involved in the murder of Sheriff Morrison as she is the one who has delivered him the poisoned cornbread and killed him. Mrs. Love's recruiting

Katy to become a “militant” without her consent conveys to what extent Mrs. Love believes in her mission for the happiness and benefits of the black race. She acts like a caring and loving mother who advises her daughter for a better future, “Why don't you think about your children's future? Them few pennies you make ain't shit! And if things stay the same it'll be the same way for those children too, but Lord knows, if they're like the rest of the young folks today they're gonna put you down real soon” (425). Motivated by her belief in the supremacy of the African American race, Mrs. Love leaves a legacy for black mothers to resume her mission. Since Katy’s passivity conflicts with Mrs. Love’s will, Mrs. Love warns her that it would threaten her image in front of her children in the future. In other words, these children must have a “militant” kind of mother whom they would be proud of. She advises her:

Mrs. Love: Them kids got eyes, Katy, and they know what's happenin' and they ain't gonna be likin' their mama's attitude that much longer. You're a young woman, Katy, there ain't no sense in continuing to be a fool for the rest of your life.

Katy: I don't know what you're talking about, Mrs. Love!

Mrs. Love: You'll find out one day – I just hope it ain't too late. I thank you for that favor. (*Contribution*, 480)

Raskolnikov's article on crime is highly important as it explains the division of people into two categories, because it is applicable to Mrs. Love and Katy in *Contribution*:

As for my division of people into ordinary and extraordinary, I acknowledge that it's somewhat arbitrary, but I don't insist upon exact numbers. I only believe in my leading idea that men are in general divided by a law of nature into two categories, inferior (ordinary), that is, so to say, material that serves only to reproduce its kind, and men who have the gift or the talent to utter a new word. There are, of course, innumerable sub-divisions, but the

distinguishing features of both categories are fairly well marked. The first category, generally speaking, are men conservative in temperament and law-abiding, they live under control and love to be controlled. To my thinking it is their duty to be controlled, because that's their vocation, and there is nothing humiliating in it for them.

(*Crime and Punishment*, 261)

Katy represents the first category whereas Mrs. Love represents the second category:

The second category all transgress the law; they are destroyers or disposed to destruction according to their capacities. The crimes of these men are of course relative and varied; for the most part they seek in very varied ways the destruction of the present for the sake of the better.

(*Crime and Punishment*, 261)

Consequently, guided by her belief in her race's superiority, Mrs. Love tells Eugene by the end of the play:

Mrs. Love: Cheer up! I done what I did for all yawl, but if you don't appreciate it, ask some of the colored boys who ain't been to college and who's felt ol man Morrison's stick against their heads – they'd appreciate it. Liberation! Just like the underground railroad – Harriett Tubman – that is me, only difference is I ain't goin' down in history.

(*Contribution*, 431)

Mrs. Love warns the educated and the cultured blacks who are not aware of the fact that they belong to the African American Master Race. She calls for their recognition of their superiority in general and her mission in particular. She even compares herself to Harriett Tubman whose accomplishments were mentioned by Lantier as follows:

[She was] an escaped slave from Maryland, became an abolitionist, military spy, and women's activist. The statue in

the South End of Boston honors Tubman in her role as an emancipator of slaves. Working under the cloak of darkness, she led dozens of slaves out of captivity. During the Civil War, in an act of stunning bravery and military leadership, Harriet guided an expedition of Union soldiers on a raid in South Carolina that freed more than 700 slaves. (4)

Mrs. Love believes that she is another Harriet Tubman who could also serve her race, in spite of the difference in the two women's philosophy. From her perspective, Mrs. Love sees that the only difference between her and Tubman is that she will never be mentioned in history. In response to Mrs. Love's comparison with Tubman, a view is offered by Fabre:

One play that features the common people is Ted Shine's *Contribution*, which pays tribute to an elderly black woman who uses well-worn strategies to conduct her own revolution. In a small southern town, Mrs. Love does not participate in the demonstrations for civil rights, but on the day when whites prepare to police the streets, she slips poison into the cornbread she regularly bakes for the Sheriff. This new Harriet Tubman will not go down in history, for unlike the demonstrators, who are exposed to repression, she remains above suspicion. She simply offers the delicious bread to the Sheriff as she has done for the past ten years.

Does she not deserve recognition? By killing the Sheriff she foils the repression and contributes to the success of the desegregation campaign. Her eagerness to serve the enemy is part of a subversive strategy. The play ends with the simple question "Who's next?" Who are Mrs. Love's next victims, and who will take up her role? (81)

Fabre conveys the "subversive strategy" Mrs. Love adopts by which she asserts the superiority of her black race. Thus, she should receive the

same attention like Tubman. At the end of the play, she resumes the role of the Superman: she is traveling to Mississippi to support black college students who suffer from the governor, her next victim. Since he stands as an obstacle in society, she will have him removed "for the sake of the better." Finally, she says, "Ain't much left, Lord ... I wonder who'll be next? I'll put me an ad in the paper. Who knows, it may be you ... or you ... or you ..." (*Contribution*, 431). Harris criticizes this ending:

One of the forms of drama in the 1960s frequently allowed for the breakdown of the imaginary distance between actors on stage and audience members to illustrate how close what was happening on stage could be to reality. In Ted Shine's *Contribution* (1969), for example, an elderly black woman who poisons her employers addresses the audience directly at the end of the play and queries which one of them will be the next. Such dramas were designed to provoke conversation as much as they could potentially frighten non-black audience members. That cultural work can certainly assist in consciousness-raising, but it cannot provide precise blueprints for living. (39)

The present writer agrees with Harris' words because they affirm the fact that *Contribution* aims at raising the African American consciousness in relation to the new political era. Also, the ending of the play marks a new period in African American drama characterized by inciting violence and crime. "This is a theatre of assault" where "assassins" are the "new kinds of heroes" as Baraka, the father of the Black Arts Movement, mentioned in his essay, "The Revolutionary theatre."

It is notable to cite Robinson's comment that sees that Shine and Mrs. Love share a unique "contribution" to black drama, a view the present researcher totally agrees with:

Similar to one of his best known characters who did her part to bring about change— though bizarre her actions may have been – Shine, in his own way, helps bring about change in

black theater. Let us be reminded that like Mrs. Grace Love, who went about her work silently, quietly – Ted Shine too has quietly, but surely and profoundly, gone about his work. He too, let us all remember, has certainly made his contribution. (415)

Robinson's words are highly correct, especially that Shine is one of the influential writers of the Black Arts Movement. *Contribution* is a representative play of the "sixties" movement that incites violence and crime as acts of resistance. Shine fulfills Baraka's requirement, "we want poems that kill," but in drama. He succeeded to represent the "assassin" in the "theatre of assault" as the "new kind of hero" as Baraka declared.

#### NOTES

1. Gray, Alex. Rev. of *Crime and Punishment*, by Fyodor Dostoevsky. *Crime and Punishment Book Review* 24 May 2010. 11 Aug. 2011 <[http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/3016202/crime\\_and\\_punishment\\_book\\_review](http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/3016202/crime_and_punishment_book_review)>

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