Summary

Creator: Baraka, Amiri, 1934-2014

Title: Amiri Baraka collection of unpublished poetry

Date: 1959-1965

Size: 0.42 linear feet (2 boxes)


Revision History: Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

Abstract: Amiri Baraka's collection of unpublished poetry consists of over two hundred poems, which, according to Baraka, were written between 1959 and 1965. With the exception of three poems, all are unpublished. Most items bear holograph corrections, changes, and deletions, and most are short poems of one page in length. Included in the collection is a four-page bibliography compiled by the author containing entries not noted in other publications. Additionally, there is a six-page manuscript entitled "Uncle Tom's Cabin: An Alternate Ending".

Preferred citation: [Item], Amiri Baraka collection of unpublished poetry, Sc MG 280, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English


Creator History

Imamu Amiri Baraka was a writer whose variety of forms included drama, poetry, music criticism, fiction, autobiography, and the essay. As a major and controversial author, his ideas and art, especially, as the primary architect of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s, have had a profound influence on the direction of subsequent African American literature.

Baraka was born Everett LeRoi Jones in Newark, New Jersey, to working class parents; he attended
Rutgers, Howard, and Columbia Universities and the New School for Social Research. He taught at several universities and founded the Black Arts Repertory Theater School in Harlem in 1964. His literary career began in 1958 when he founded Yugen magazine and Totem Press. Although Baraka started publishing in the early 1960s, he did not achieve fame until the 1964 publication of his play Dutchman, later made into a movie. Other important plays he wrote include The Slave (1964) and Toilet (1964). A prolific writer, Baraka published two books of poetry, Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note (1961) and The Dead Lecturer (1964). The mid-1960s saw the publication of The System of Dante's Hell, a novel, and Tales, a collection of short stories. Baraka also wrote a major social-aesthetic study of African American music, Blues People: Negro Music in White America (1963).

Baraka’s career went through a series of dramatic stages; first were his Beatnik years in the late 1950s through the early 1960s, when this apolitical avant garde writer refused to take action in the world. Then he became a Black cultural nationalist, renouncing the white world in the mid-1960s through mid-1970s, and then to a Marxist-Leninist rejecting monopoly capitalism in the mid-1970s. In 1974, dramatically reversing himself, Baraka rejected Black nationalism as racist and became a Third World Socialist.

Scope and Content Note

Amiri Baraka’s collection of unpublished poetry consists of over two hundred poems, which, according to Baraka, were written between 1959 and 1965. With the exception of three poems, all are unpublished. Most items bear holograph corrections, changes, and deletions, and most are short poems of one page in length. Included in the collection is a four-page bibliography compiled by the author containing entries not noted in other publications. Additionally, there is a six-page manuscript entitled “Uncle Tom’s Cabin: An Alternate Ending”.

Key Terms

Subjects
African American poets
African Americans -- Poetry
Authors, Black
Black arts movement

Names
Baraka, Amiri, 1934-2014
Container List

b. 1 f. 1 Poems 1-40

b. 1 f. 2 Poems 41-95

b. 1 f. 3 Poems 96-156

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b. 2 f. 5 Poems 189-236

b. 2 f. 6 Poems 237-279

b. 2 f. 7 "Uncle Tom's Cabin: An Alternate Ending"