

# Exploring rita dove's "the darker face of the earth"

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" An expert poet, a creative story writer and adept at writing scripts of various genres"; all things, which make the world filled with writings. This is one of the gorgeous ways of delineating the character of an American poet and author, Rita Frances Dove. " I think the worst thing that can happen to a poet is to be self-conscious, to think, ' I'm writing a poem' the moment that you're writing a poem." With all this line, as quoted by Ingersoll (2003) during an interview held at the University Press of Mississippi, Rita Dove shows her philosophical adage and belief about the essence of every event happening around her.

It merely signifies that whatever things come along the way should be given an explicit notion whether it could bring good and a noteworthy happening or an adverse occurrence. In other words, exploring the never-ending queries that come to her mind is what makes her personality an avid " truth seeker" to find the real significance of her surroundings. For a better comprehension about where her life revolves around and to what principle does it lie, her play entitled " The Darker Face of the Earth" explains how Dove exploits the story Oedipus Rex for her own purpose.

As a writer who delves into the stone of knowledge, she brings more insightful prospects with regard to the contemporary issues arising from her community—trying to compare the huge difference or similarity between all characters of the two stories, The Darker Face of the Earth and Oedipus Rex.

Significance of the Play ' The Darker Face of the Earth'

Her notion concerning the mixture of races leads her to creating a more compelling play, which she entitled ' The Darker Face of the Earth' (Pereira).

Hence, her views concern marriage, cohabitation, or sexual intercourse between a white person and a member of another race. Such a perspective comes from the event, which has taken place in the late 20th century America (" History of slavery in America starts in 15th century Europe: The Cincinnati Enquirer," Bauer).

As an analysis of the play's title, Dove picks it from one of the lines in the play depicting sexual intercourse between two different races—White and Black: " When the pear blossoms / cast their pale faces on / the darker face of the earth" (1st ed. 76). Augustus, a mulatto (the first-generation offspring of a black person and a white person) delivers this line as he explicates about his notion on miscegenation. A variety of scholars that criticize the play focuses more on the usage of ' cast' in the line, which connotes that the presence of insult while using the " pale faces" on " darker face(s)" is inevitable.

Therefore, the line is obviously a representation of rapes done by the white men to the number of black women prior to the American Civil War. Such coercive intercourse between a white person and a member of another race is emotionally or psychologically untroubled in the play. For a better comprehension, such kind of relationship is shown in the play where Amalia, the white plantation mistress, finds the way to having a sexual intercourse with the slave Hector.

As a result, the existence of Augustus, the mulatto, is just inevitable. Based on the play, his mother Amalia willingly finds measures only to obtain a sexual intercourse with Hector in response to her husband Louis, who have raped slave girls (1st ed. 14-16).

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The Darker Face of the Earth begins the flow of its story with the Augustus's natal day to Amalia Jennings LaFarge, a white slave mistress, from a sexual intercourse with the black slave Hector. Augustus is obviously born with combined characteristics of more than one kind—White and Black races.

With stormy or turbulent characteristics, Louis LaFarge makes way so that people may never acknowledge Augustus as Amalia's child. The couple tells the people that her child died at birth in spite of the fact that a doctor takes him away with an aim at raising baby Augustus as a slave. Consequently, Hector becomes devastated by grief. Helplessly, he does not know what to do with his life; anguish overshadows his life for a number of years.

Augustus's fatherly white master gives him the twenty years of education and various kinds of journey from different places; hence, he experiences combined cultural aspects. No later than this period, the white master brings the twenty-year old Augustus to the Jennings even though he knows that this son of Amalia had an insurrection lately. Unknowing that Amalia is his mother for he has once told that he was a child of a slave woman, who had been raped by his white master; he begins an affair with his biological mother.

Nevertheless, there is one slave woman named Phebe who desires an affair with him but it does not take too long as another slave Scylla tells him about the possible outcome of their affair that would lead him in a certain demise. He listens to what Scylla tells him; however, he unintentionally kills Hector when he becomes involved in a rebellion. He does not know that Hector is his biological father to Amalia; thus, he puts his father to certain demise in

order to prevent him from divulging the machination, which has just taken place between him and Amalia.

Ultimately, he has been ordered to kill Amalia that makes him troubled. However, he thinks Louis LaFarge is his father so he kills him. In spite of that fact, Amalia tells him the reality, and whilst in a good position of doing so, her son learns that she and Hector are his parents—a fact that he has just learned and realized to be all machinated.

As an analysis of such circumstances, it becomes quite easy to learn that there is the presence of sexual intercourse between a white person and a member of another race; hence, a mulatto or the first-generation offspring of a black person and a white person comes to existence—Augustus, the son of whom he links to.

‘ The Darker Face of the Earth’ and ‘ Oedipus Rex’

The Darker Face of the Earth is a narration of Sophocles’s drama entitled ‘ Oedipus Rex’ that is shaped from the image of a pre-Civil War plantation near Charleston, South Carolina. Like Oedipus Rex, the play harmoniously relates the loveliness and royalty of the old concept of legendary conspiracy as Dove portrays the surpassing authority, an underlying cause of change when it comes to erotic occurrences. Moreover, the play is not created from the Oedipus myth but also from the real events of slavery in the 15th century America (“ History of slavery in America starts in 15th century Europe: The Cincinnati Enquirer,” Bauer).

One of the most significant events happens in the play is that concerns with the critical scene in which Amalia interviews Augustus, her newly purchased

slave ("The Darker Face of the Earth: Completely Revised Second Edition," Dove). Amalia listens as the new slave sings "the sorrow songs," and explaining, "They don't need a psalm book." (2nd ed. 82). Notwithstanding his explication, he gives assurance on his own literacy; lists the books of his formative education: "Milton. The Bible. / And the Tales of the Greeks" (2nd ed. 83). Amalia holds the book and reads about "Tales of the Greeks".

While reading the contents, Amalia tries to narrate the latest event, which she learned through both newspaper and word of mouth accounts particularly when it comes to the story of slavery. However, she revises some of the events happened in the history in order to make it suitable to her present life. As the conversation of the two continues, Augustus narrates his personal history about slavery (2nd ed. 89-90). Meanwhile, they listen to Amalia's husband, Louis LaFarge in his room while reading the night sky for portents (2nd ed. 87-88). Therefore, as a result, such a scene brings about the fact that Amalia and Augustus are embracing, according to Pereira (2003).

Nevertheless, prior to such an embrace, Augustus turns poetical as he reads an imaginary past portraying Amalia's views of his personal notion: "One soft spring night when the pear blossoms cast their pale faces on the darker face of the earth, Massa stood up from the porch swing and said to himself, "I think I'll make me another bright-eyed pick-aninny." Then he stretched and headed for my mother's cabin." (2nd ed. 92).

Therefore, Augustus makes a certain fictionalized interpretation of his personal life by means of verbal imagery. This is to say that, such narration of his own life opposes much of the actual experiences and circumstances

with regard to his nativity. Moreover, even though Augustus is indeed a child who is born by the union of combined bloods—a white and a black slave, still it is a union of love, and is not achieved by force or threat or any act of compelling. Furthermore, as to his story, his mother is white while his father is black. Hence, the presence of an irony on his narration is obviously overshadowing the story.

The Darker Face of the Earth has a similar involvement of sexual intercourse between persons so closely related that law forbids them to marry or the statutory crime of such a relationship. The practice of slavery by contradicting the marriage to the slave and by restraining sexual interest in intermediate relation to a slave and a master, contradicts authority to give the title father, mother, sister, or brother with conviction and reality.

On the other hand, in Oedipus Rex, the so called, ' King' never mentions the name of his parents because of his ' sexual intercourse between persons so closely related that law forbids them to marry' or ' the statutory crime of such a relationship' and the act of murdering his or her father, mother, or a close relative (Sterren, M. D.). Therefore, The Darker Face of the Earth remains bold and strong without the presence of a king or Oedipus Rex.

The Darker Face of the Earth comes after the prototype but not the story line of Oedipus Rex. Based on comparison of the two stories, Sophocles begins the flow of his story with the vision of a comprehensive constitutional king or queen. For a better comprehension, Oedipus appears as a stranger to his city, which is under his rules. Moreover, Thebes is permitted as a right or privilege by the former king in terms of marriage as a sort of recompense for solving an enigma in a murderous Sphinx.

The story begins with the appearance of tranquility; however, the entire city is ravaged by the plague. In addition, Oedipus kills his father and marries his mother. However, Dove begins his play with the birth of an Oedipus—Augustus, the child of an African slave named Hector and Amalia Jennings.

### Conclusion

When it comes to analyzing a variety of poems, dramas, and plays, a number of critics and scholars believe that *The Darker Face of the Earth* and *Oedipus Rex* make contemporary issues with regard to slavery and racial union a world of antiquity, which continues to revolve. Despite of the fact that two authors, Dove and Sophocles, create a harmonious flow of the story, yet the presence of some sorts of variation in terms of the story's themes and lines become inevitable due to the environment or scene in which the characters move and play their roles. Dove's 1994 play entitled 'The Darker Face of the Earth' mirrors numerous themes or artistic representations and certain machinations or contrivances, which take place in an ancient Greek play by Sophocles's 'Oedipus Rex'.

In *The Darker Face of the Earth*, there is the presence of ignorance and anger as the issue that concerns with slavery is much concerned. Intelligence never completes this play, as the characters seem to be marked by a lack of restraint although some events are not coercive. However, there is the presence of these themes in Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*; intelligence overshadows the characters, as they do every thing in accordance with the right way—no merciless qualities. In both plays, fortune obviously works as the protagonists act as victims while doing the part of voluntary agents. Hence, the fortune of every individual works out with his personal behavior



without focusing on his culture. Although Oedipus and Augustus exist in different ways, yet they have the choice to control their fortune.