

Reflecting on my Friendship with Amiri Baraka

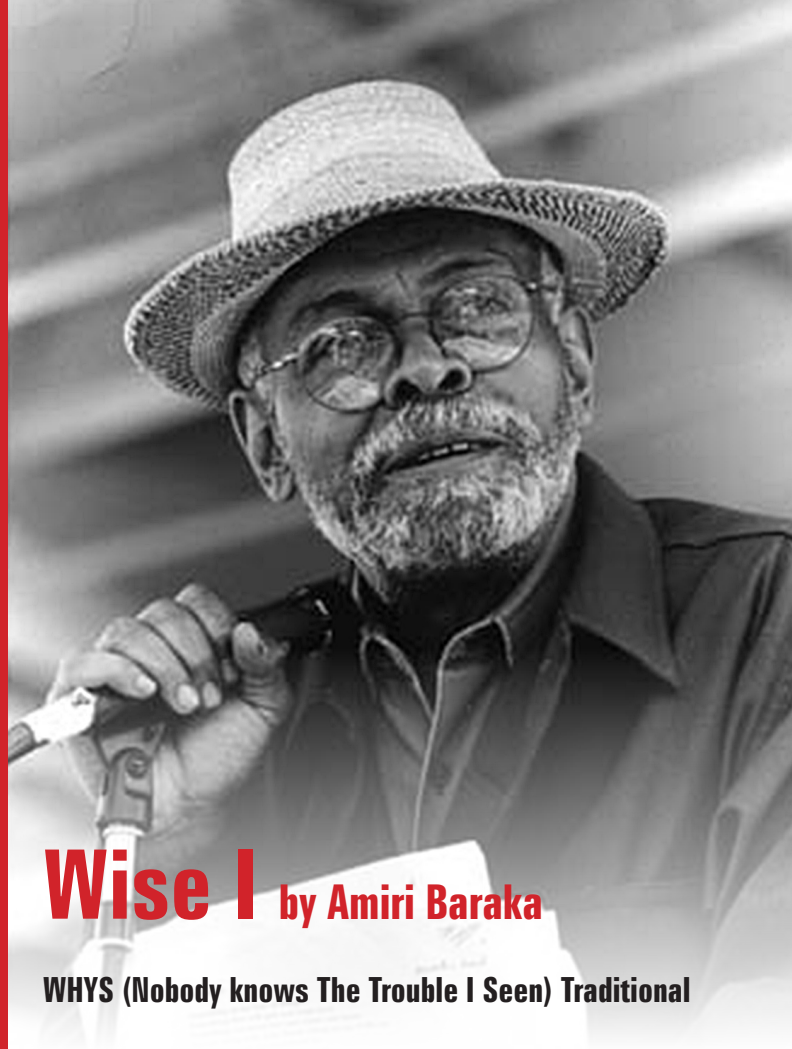
By Ted Wilson

Amiri Baraka is probably one of the most prolific writers, political activist, revolutionaries since W.E.B. Du Bois. He is a human being who, early in life, recognized that he was gifted. Brother Roi as he was formerly known did not take his gifts lightly. He honed them for seven years in his early adulthood and integrated his writing and speaking skills with a growing appetite for political education and culture as a pragmatic weapon.

During these same seven years, Brother Roi started self publishing, due to the many rejections he received from establishment publishing houses. He also published his friends and associates who were having the same issues; they were the Beat poets and artists of many genres. To this day, even with his fame and marketability, he continues to do this for himself and others. He continually encourages other artists to produce their own work and much has come from his prodding.

When I began working for Roi at the Black Arts Repertory Theatre School, our friendship started to develop in an odd sort of way. Sometimes, I would go to his Harlem apartment just to be with him. I hoped whatever he had would rub off on me. I thought I'd magically become a hip, learned, revolutionary writer.

By the end of the seventies, Amiri and I started to develop a stronger relationship. He would come out of nowhere like the old Nuyorican Poets Café or the Kamelian (my loft) and quote a line from one of my poems from *Black Fire* or elsewhere. He continued to encourage my writing. At events of one type or another he would introduce me as a *Black Fire* writer. When I wrote my first book *Slo Dance* at his urging, He gladly wrote the introduction to my first collection. He kept the fire alive.



Wise I by Amiri Baraka

WHYS (Nobody knows The Trouble I Seen) Traditional

*If you ever find
yourself, some where
lost and surrounded
by enemies
who won't let you
speak in your own language
who destroy your statues
& instruments, who ban
your omm bomm ba boom
then you are in trouble
deep trouble
they ban your
own boom ba boom
you in deep deep
trouble*

humph!

*probably take you several hundred years
to get
out!*