

Dutchman (Jones 1964/Harvey 1966)



(revised and expanded from *Dutchman* Heaped in Modern Cinema forthcoming in *MLA Approaches to Teaching Amiri Baraka's Dutchman*. Eds. Gerald Early & Matthew Calihman. MLA, 2016.)

My approach to teaching *Dutchman* compares Jones's original text (1964) and Anthony Harvey's 1966 cinematic version, addressing additions and excisions. I demonstrate how to carefully describe and interpret stylistic choices executed by camera (framing, spatial relationships, point of view), casting, set, soundtrack and costume design. Jones's highly allegorical retelling of the Flying Dutchman myth cleverly expresses radical black consciousness by cross-casting the damned Dutch Ship's Captain as a "tall, slender, beautiful" white woman (5). Cross-gendering is also indicated when Jones chooses the neutral "it" pronoun when in his didascalia (stage directions) he refers to the "woman" as "it" (4). Lula is symbolically overdetermined as the Clay-sculpting Yahweh-like God *and* the seductive Eve/Devil—she is therefore both the damned victim and the victimizing devil. The play invokes the ship's captain (Lula) striking a Faustian bargain with the Devil (depicted in the film by Lays potato chip ads on the train) as it references the role of Dutch companies and their ships in the Transatlantic Slave Trade by the film's long shot down the length of the subway car as Lula enters to reveal the famous advertisement for Dutch Masters cigars, which employs a matted-out reproduction of Rembrandt's 1662 *The Staalmeesters* (*Sampling Officials of the Drapers' Guild*). Harvey splits point of view between Clay and Lula as victims, a notion embedded in the script and consonant with Jones's call for a "theatre of victims" from his 1965 manifesto, "The Revolutionary Theatre" (4), and exemplified by the insert close-up shot of Lula in profile as she cries out to herself in an aside "*with knifelike cynicism*. My Christ. My Christ." (20) Here is Jones's clear textual clue to her identity as the damned Faustian character hopelessly pleading for mercy from her would-be Savior. I discuss the

distinction between the private practice of torture and the necessarily public wielding of terror by examining Lula's enlisting the passengers, who become surrogates of assenting racist America. With her violent denunciation and murder of bookish young African-Americans as middleclass White-wannabes, Jones's spokesperson exposes the seething violence beneath the mild-mannered surface of corporation man Clay, one of the "half-white trustees late of the subject people" (36). Although Jones does not designate it in his script, in any stage version Clay's dead body is flung across the fourth wall in front of the first row or orchestra pit. Clay's body needs to be there on the theater floor for the gruesome contemplation of his victimhood by the audience. Cinematic deaths are necessarily and notoriously handled differently than they are on stage and so they are by Harvey. While acknowledging the difficulties inherent in musicological interpretation by doing violence to a form that so beautifully resists the signified, I encourage teachers and students to analyze the John Barry theme music by assigning logical values to the two instruments in the film and working through those implications.

Heaped in Modern Myth

First performed as a stage play at the Cherry Lane Theater in Greenwich Village in 1964, *Dutchman* is a highly allegorical retelling of the Flying Dutchman myth recast in a modern day subway car for propagandistic purposes by the radical black consciousness of Leroi Jones who confirms that the title refers to the "ghost story" of The Flying Dutchman (*The Autobiography of Leroi Jones* 187). Whether drawn from the fictional 18th Century Captain Hendrik van der Decken or the actual 17th Century Captain Bernard Fokke, the legend depicts the skipper of The Flying Dutchman ship striking a Faustian bargain with the Devil in order to gain quick and safe passage around the Cape of Good Hope in exchange for his soul and eternal damnation. "Heaped in modern myth" as Jones writes in his didascalia (3), the play adds an additional layer of historical relevance by conjuring the fact that Dutch companies and their ships were major players in the Transatlantic Slave Trade, making the backdrop and Lula's business all the more sinister. Part of the play's ingenuity is to cross-cast the damned Dutch Ship's Captain as a thirty year-old "tall, slender, beautiful" white woman with "long red hair hanging straight down her back" at the helm of her allegorical sea vessel, a NYC subway train (5). Jones will cleverly express his radical black consciousness through *both* Lula as the militant prosecutor *and* Clay as the emerging but soon subsiding black avenger. Cross-gendering is also indicated when Jones chooses the neutral "it" pronoun when in his didascalia he refers to the "woman" as "it" (3).



Fig. 1 Lula captains her Flying Dutchman ship through the “city’s entrails”

Yet another mythic layer, this time courtesy of the Book of Genesis, is applied by means of the apple-wielding female temptress Eve (Lula) seducing the ever-malleable Adam (Clay). Sumerian, Greek, Hebraic and other ancient creation myths all cast the first human as made of earth or clay, and the ancient Hebrew word is the same for both Adam and clay. Lula is symbolically over determined as the sculpting Yahweh-like God (CLAY: In honor of whose God? LULA: Mine. CLAY: Who is . . .? LULA: Me . . . 23) and, the seductive Eve, *and* the Devil—she is therefore both the damned and the executor of damnation. Throughout the course of the play, Lula molds Clay, first as her sexual prey who literally eats (apples) out of her hand, and then into the murderous, abusive black man she has been designating him inherently as from the beginning (“You’re a murderer Clay” 21.) When the audience first encounters Lula in Harvey’s film posing for Clay’s gaze, her internal framing through Clay’s window invites a voyeuristic contemplation of her beauty, as the internally framed reaction shot of Clay depicts him as the gazer eyeing the bait. Often created by doorways and windows within the film set, an internal frame visually brackets characters and props to create a picture frame around them that invites aesthetic contemplation. Al Freeman Jr., seen later in his career as Elijah Muhammad in *Malcolm X* (Lee 1992), and Shirley Knight, perhaps most recently recognizable as the mother of Helen Hunt’s character in *As Good as It Gets* (James L. Brooks 1997), each deliver nuanced, memorable performances. Wardrobe Designer (also Costume Designer—responsible for creating clothes for the cast), Brenda Gardner, takes as a cue Jones’ dressing of Lula in “skimpy summer clothes” by costuming the *femme fatale* in typical black and white *noir* fashion with stripes potentially representing prison garb, prison cell bars and certainly a mysterious, inscrutable mixture of good (white) and evil (black). Witness Brigid O’Shaughnessy’s striped robe in *Maltese Falcon* (Huston 1941) and Alicia Huberman’s striped midriff blouse in *Notorious* (Hitchcock 1946).



Fig. 2 Lula is costumed in typical femme fatale garb like those on *Maltese Falcon* and *Notorious* before her

French film critics writing during the 1950s in *Les cahiers du cinéma* codified the genre-linked features of *film noir*, a particularly American creation that includes the *femme fatale*, an existential perspective on the individual and fate, the hard-boiled tradition that deflects emotion, and the stylistic use of light and shadow, dubbing the genre “black film” or *film noir*. This stereotypical fatal woman to whom the male hero is attracted, yet must be resisted and defeated, actually has been part of the long history of Western culture. The misogynistic notion of the fatal temptress goes back at least as far as Eve in the Hebrew Bible and the Sirens and Circe in Homer’s *Odyssey*. The raging Clay pushes Lula back down into her seat, saying, “I’m not telling you again, Tallulah Bankhead!” (34), calling her by the name of one of Hollywood’s most notorious and politically liberal actresses noted for her career of playing the temptress and serving as the inspiration for Disney’s Cruella De Vil. Anthony Harvey’s decision to shoot in black and white encourages both a *noir* ambience and a contemplation of the script’s manifesto on race in America. Lula’s red hair, illegible via black and white film, is changed to blonde, which continues the polar opposition manifested by Clay’s skin and hair color. Like Mike Nichols’ choice that same year to film the play *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* in black and white, Harvey’s opts for this most antirealist medium. Black and white further distances the audience from comfortable consumption of a true-to-life narrative as it points out we are watching a film of a play that thereby invites attention to and creative analysis of style and detail.



Fig. 3 Characters internally framed for contemplation. Lula poses, Clay “eyes the bait.”

Internal framing continues with a medium close-up of Clay outlined by poles to his left and right. The combined effect of also composing this shot in soft focus renders an image of Clay already isolated and trapped. Soft focus or shallow focus photography shoots with a specific lens that concentrates the depth of field so objects targeted by the camera appear in sharp, clear focus, while everything else remains out of focus. Soft focus photography is used to isolate certain images for inspection, granting a heightened interest in those objects in sharp focus. A meaningful distance or isolation can be indicated among two or more characters and/or objects when sharing a frame but only one is in focus at a time



Fig. 4 Internal framing & Soft focus Photography renders Clay isolated & trapped

When we first see the couple together, a pole that separates them visually punctuates their distanced spatial relationship. Later in the first and second scenes the same pole, marking the progression of Lula's plot, encompasses them.



Fig. 5 At first separated but soon encompassed by the same pole

Bet You Can't Eat Just One

Short of consulting production notebooks for the filming of *Dutchman*, it is unclear precisely who is responsible for the two significant, stylized background print advertisements inside the subway car, whether it is Set Decorator Ian Whittaker or Art Directors Jim Morahan and Herbert Smith or first time Director Anthony Harvey, or some combination of collaborators. A long shot down the length of the subway car as Lula enters reveals the famous advertisement for Dutch Masters cigars that employs a matted-out reproduction of Rembrandt's 1662 *The Staalmeesters* (*Sampling Officials of the Drapers' Guild*). The connection between the aristocratic Dutch cloth merchants and the Transatlantic slave trade is highlighted as the large ad perches above the door at the end of the subway car right above the head of the vampiric slave mistress, Lula.

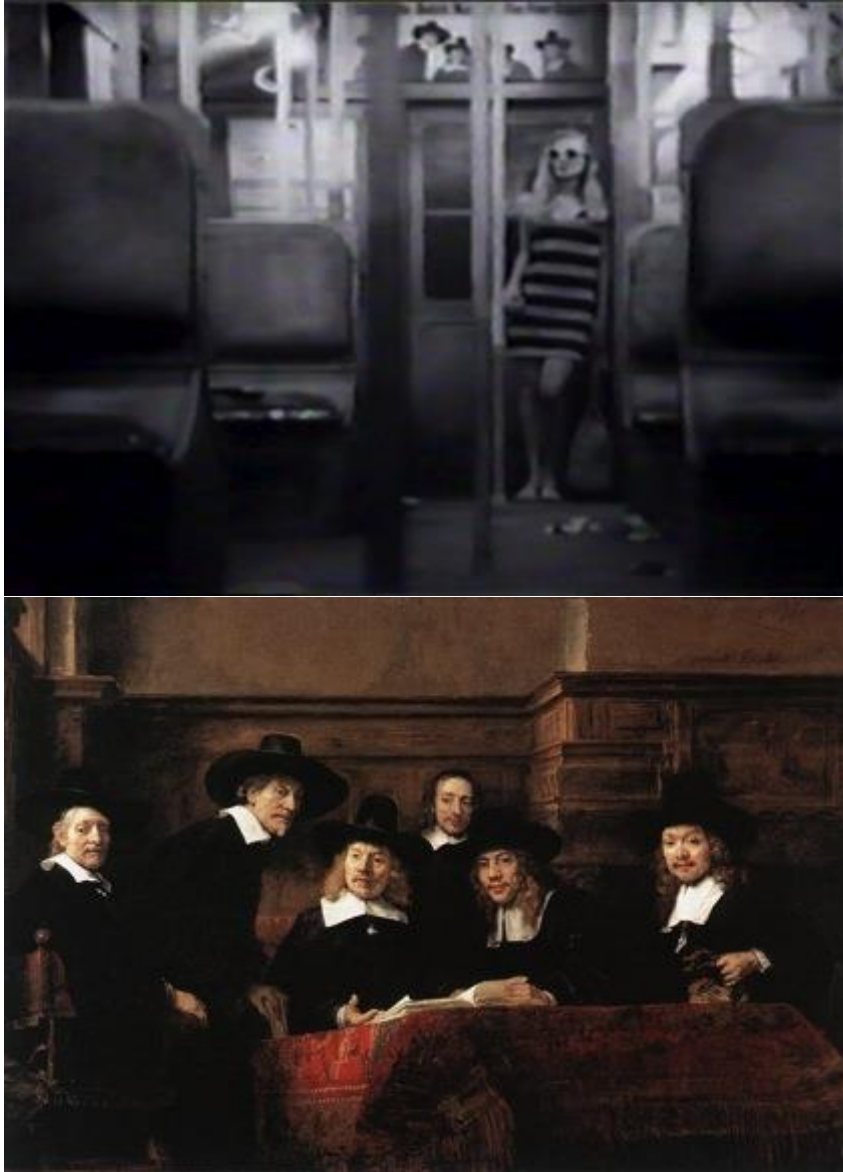


Fig. 6 Production Designers extend the play “heaped in modern myth” by associating two enslavers. Famous print ad for Dutch Masters Cigars and Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn’s *The Staalmeesters* (*Sampling Officials of the Drapers’ Guild*) 1662 Oil on canvas, 191,5 x 279 cm Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

America’s “original sin” of slavery is further illustrated with the placement of a second stylized backdrop: the famous Lay’s Potato Chip ad campaign from the 1960s recently reprised in 21st Century ads starring Bert Lahr as the Devil tempting his audience with the wager: “Bet You Can’t Eat Just One.” The ad is subtly placed, first visible behind Lula when she leans forward in the seat she shares with Clay, and then with the White Devil’s horns seemingly growing out of her head when she leans back as her temptation unfolds.



Fig. 7 Devil horns growing out of her head when she leans back as her temptation of Clay unfolds.

Near the end of the film, the ad is clearly legible on *both sides* of the subway car as Lula recruits the crowd and Clay rages and slaps Lula; evil has permeated the train.



Lula recruits the crowd



Clay rages.



Fig. 8 The ad clearly legible on both sides of the subway car, Clay slaps Lula.

My Christ. My Christ.

There is a way in which the play is as much about Lula as it is about Clay. After Clay's death, we witness Lula continue her eternal murderous quest of middle class-aspiring intelligent young black men. The play is named after her; she is the eternally damned Dutchman fated to endlessly search aboard her modern ship. Harvey splits point of view several times in the film. Point of view shots are taken from a particular character's subjective perspective as if seen through that character's eyes. A director grants a particular privilege to any character afforded such a shot since the audience is being let in on that character's view of the world. Most POV shots indicate that the subject is the center or protagonist of the film. Harvey splits point of view several times in the film, for example, near the end as Lula dances like "the lady who smoked up her grass skirt" (31), showing first Lula's point of view with the camera tilted down on her victim Clay, followed by his vision of the superior White Devil pole dancing above him. The split point of view helps develop the notion embedded in the script that both Clay *and* Lula are victims.



Fig. 9 The film splits point of view several times

Much like the bifurcated point of view so often employed by Hitchcock, particularly apt is the example of the real Judy Barton allowing her Madeleine mask to drop during several revealing moments in *Vertigo* (1958), there are similar moments when Lula drops her sweet young thing pose. For example, as a result of her bargain with the Devil, she is the ageless undead: “My hair is turning gray. A gray hair for each year and type I come through” (13); she is also the weary eternal wanderer: “LULA: . . . *swings down into the seat, pushing her legs straight out as if she is very weary*. Oooof! Too much weight. CLAY: Ha, doesn’t look like too much to me . . . LULA: It’s so anyway” (6). The most obvious out-of-character break is signaled by an insert close-up shot of Lula in profile as she cries out to herself in an aside “*with knifelike cynicism*. My Christ. My Christ” (20). Here is a clear textual clue of her identity as the damned Faustian character hopelessly pleading for mercy from her would-be Savior as she echoes the wretched appeal by

Doctor Faustus: “FAUSTUS. Ah, Christ, my Saviour/Seek to save distressed Faustus' soul!” (Marlowe 2.5.78-79).



Fig. 10 *And with knifelike cynicism. My Christ. My Christ.*

Thank You For Your Support

Part of Lula’s strategy is to enlist the slowly building crowd of passengers on the subway, who serve as surrogates for the assenting racist American population at large. Just as George and Martha in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* trade most of their barbs and insults in front of their party guests since they would carry less venom when attempted in private, Lula’s insults are more easily sloughed off by the assimilated Clay when he is not on public display. It is the public humiliation factor on which Lula now in particular relies. A distinction can be made here between this terrorist strategy of public violence, or propaganda by the deed, from the private infliction of torture. The spectacular aerial destruction of New York’s Twin Towers for example, covered by nearly every TV network in the world, was preeminently public, and relied on an audience for its terroristic impact, while the secret torture of alleged terrorists at Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay, and other secret American prisons around the world was to be a national secret, not intended to instill generalized fear. As spokesperson for Leroi Jones’ militant black radical agenda with her violent denunciation and punishment of those bookish young African-Americans who are “middle-class, fake white” men (34), Lula exposes for the on-lookers the seething righteous violence beneath the mild-mannered surface of Corporation man Clay.



Fig. 11 CLAY: Hey I didn't even notice when those people got on. LULA: Yeah I know.

In his manifesto “The Revolutionary Theatre,” first published in the Black Arts journal, *Black Dialogue*, in 1965, Jones argues for a “theatre of victims” like Clay and the “Young Negro” next in line for execution by Lula, so that “their brothers in the audience will be better able to understand that they are the brothers of victims,” and these victims will become “new heroes, and their enemies most of you who are reading this.” By admitting in the final line of his essay an intellectual, “hip,” and even white audience, Jones acknowledges two audiences: victimized black men hopefully being spurred into action, and educated white audiences being scared to death. Several of the subway riders in the film version who are afforded close ups are black, although the play script refers only once in the CHARACTERS section to “RIDERS OF COACH, white and black” (3), but otherwise described as race-neutral “people” (22, 24, 29, 30, 31), “riders” (32, 33), “the others” (33, 37), and “another person” (25). It is effective for Harvey to have populated the train with African-American, Caucasian, and Asian riders so as to indict all for their complicity, to provide Clay with a sympathetic black audience for his murder-rather-than-metaphor speech, and to heighten his embarrassment and outrage at Lula’s “Uncle Tom” salvo (32).



Caucasian- and Asian-Americans



and African-Americans all complicit



Fig. 12 Sympathetic Black riders heighten Clay's embarrassment.

The script describes Lula's incendiary dance among the riders as a "*rhythmical shudder and twistlike wiggle, which she continues up and down the aisle, bumping into many of the standing people and tripping over the feet of those sitting. Each time she runs into a person she lets out a very vicious piece of profanity*" (30). In a significant foreshadow, Harvey casts as young black men two of those "riders," one standing, who she purposefully bumps backside to backside, and the other, seated, who she seems to cut across the forehead by recklessly swinging her bag in his face.





Fig. 13 Harvey foreshadows Lula's future violence toward young black men

The Flora Cameron Gambit

By openly riling him up and capping it with *the* ultimate racial insult hurled toward African-Americans—"Uncle Tom"—Lula manipulates the black man into publically slapping a white woman, which helps her create allegiance from the subway car crowd. Harriet Beecher Stowe's title character from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and his subsequent minstrel show exaggeration is the epitome of the subservient collaborateur, a self-abnegating Christian black man who endorses his own oppression. Lula's insurance policy that the passengers will be on her side to do her bidding is underwritten by the fear behind a long-standing racial stereotype of the "escaped nigger" (29) as Lula calls Clay, i.e., the fear of the sexually threatening and uncontrollable black male or "Buck." This white paranoia is best illustrated by an episode from D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915). The newly emancipated, amorous "renegade" slave Gus (Walter Long in blackface) pursues Flora, the delicate daughter of KKK sympathizer, Dr. Cameron, into a forest, and despite his assurance, "Wait, missie, I won't hurt yeh," she runs to the top of a rocky cliff and jumps to her death rather than face what she believes is certain rape by Gus despite his protestations. The inserted title card explains: "For her who had learned the stern lesson of honor we should not grieve that she found sweeter the opal gates of death." Footage of Gus' castration was reportedly deleted after the film's first showings. His corpse is then deposited on the steps of the Lieutenant Governor's house. Lula is able to stab Clay in view of several motionless and uninvolved witnesses, both black and white, who either misunderstand she is defending her "honor" or haven't the courage to stand up to this hysterical white Devil.



Fig. 14 She stabs Clay in view of several assenting witnesses

The mixture of sex and violence/love and death (“CLAY: Morbid. Morbid” 27) between Clay and Lula throughout the play (and in Western Society at large) presents this intercourse as a kind of inverted rape whereby the Vampire Lady sticks in her fangs (knife) as the choker close-ups capture her drinking in her victim’s stunned look, while sacrificial Clay can only sputter forth muffled cries, “*his mouth working stupidly*” (37). As the lights dim within the train, Lula’s delighted grunts and Clay’s ever-escalating violent cries easily double as the diegetic soundtrack of vigorous lovemaking.



Fig. 15 Vampire Lady sticks in her fangs and drinks the muffled cries of her stupid prey

To further the sexualized element of this murder in the film, Lula pulls down to the subway floor on top of her the dying Clay (he merely “*slumps across her knees*” [37] in the script) in order to simulate the sexual positioning for which Clay had hoped and in which the passengers believe.



Fig. 16

An inverted rape

Cinematic Deaths

In the script the other unidentified passengers heed her call, but in the film it is the white riders only who respond to Lula's command to "Get this man off of me. Hurry" (37), while the African-American riders sit passively still. Her next lines in the script: "Open the door and throw his body out," and "All of you get off at the next stop" are cut from the film (37), though that is presumably what they do in the film as well. Although Jones does not designate it in his script, in any stage version Clay's dead body is likely flung across the fourth wall in front of the first row or orchestra pit, etc., not unlike the body of Gus deposited on the steps of the Lieutenant Governor's house in *Birth of a Nation*. In the theater the fourth wall is that invisible line between actors and audience. Everything that happens behind that imaginary line is virtually real for the duration of the performance. It is the social convention we all accept as explained by Coleridge's "poetic faith" dictum: "the willing suspension of disbelief" (Coleridge, Ch. 14). In traditional proscenium arch theatrical productions, that line is never to be crossed in order to maintain the illusion that what happens behind it, on stage, is "real." Out of a fear of breaking this "fictive reality," one of the cardinal rules of stage acting prohibits the actor from looking directly into the eyes of the audience members, and film acting continues that tradition by forbidding direct eye contact with the camera. The likely tossing of Clay's body across this illusory but all-important line grants meaning to that body. Nobel prize winning playwright and novelist Samuel Beckett once explained in a 1957 letter to his American publisher Barney Rosset of Grove Press why he did not want his mime-play *Act Without Words* (1956) turned into a film by claiming that it was "Primitive theatre . . . it is not a film, not conceived in terms of cinema. It requires that this last extremity of human meat—or bones—be there, thinking and stumbling and sweating under our noses" (Beckett 3). Clay's body slumped somewhere near the first row meets Beckett's existential demand of the theater by this "human meat being there" as it also illustrates literary critic Walter Benjamin's claim in his *Origin of German Tragic Drama* that characters on stage, because of their complexity, do not begin to symbolize until they are dead (Benjamin 226). The inert Clay on the house floor now allows for an allegorization

of the corpse. Clay's body needs to be there on the theater floor for the gruesome contemplation of his victimhood by the audience, like Willie Loman's body, though entombed in a coffin and presumably covered in dirt, permeates with ironic pathos the Requiem scene that ends that play. Cinematic deaths are necessarily and notoriously handled differently than they are on stage. Harvey manages a nod to the extremity of death and cinema's inability to render it palpable relative to the stage by shooting Clay's face out of focus in faux documentary style as he is carried past the camera. This stylized gesture is immediately followed by another: a deep focus canted angle shot of the clean subway platform and the sparkling light of the oncoming high-speed "F" train. A canted frame is achieved by tilting the camera on its axis resulting in a framed shot at an oblique angle. A canted frame usually depicts a world askew or off-kilter. These two moments stand out as the only out of focus and canted angle shots in the film, one depicting cinema's inability to effectively represent physical death and the other signifying how out of kilter the racist world is according to Leroi Jones. The "F" train is likely a double entendre nod to the sexualized nature of Lula's trade ship and her inverted rape of Clay.



Fig. 17 out of focus shot shows cinema's inability to render death; the canted frame represents a racist world askew

Wiggles in the Dark/Curses in Code

When in his didascalia (stage directions) Jones writes, “The subway heaped in modern myth” (3), he indicates not only his over determination of ancient (garden of Eden), early European (Flying Dutchman) and modern (African-American stereotype) myths, but his ridicule of them. The Biblical apples (“Eating apples together is always the first step” 11) that Lula continues to fetch from her seemingly inexhaustible purse serve as metaphors for the forbidden fruit as described in Genesis. John Milton canonizes the forbidden fruit as apples in his *Areopagitica* (1644); for the black male in America the white woman is the forbidden fruit par excellence. Jones’s hits the audience over the head with this metaphor as in Scene II with Lula “*Searching aimlessly through her bag . . . finding things in her bag, taking them out and throwing them over her*

shoulder into the aisle (28). In Harvey's film all of these "things" are apples, and as she tosses them about the train she hits several of the passengers, further alerting them to and involving them in the ensuing black/white "pageant." Here is an opportunity to break the fourth wall and directly address the audience in a stage performance. The obviousness of the flying metaphors aptly expresses the playwright's disdain for such devices, and Clay's as well.

In the middle of Clay's rant he delivers the play's most disturbing lines proposing a race war:

Bird would've played not a note of music if he had just walked up to East Sixty-seventh Street and killed the first ten white people he saw. Not a note! And I'm the great would-be poet. Yes. That's right! Poet. Some kind of bastard literature . . . all it needs is a simple knife thrust. Just let me bleed you, you loud whore, and one poem vanished. A whole people of neurotics, struggling to keep from being sane. And the only thing that would cure the neurosis would be your murder. Simple as that. I mean if I murdered you, then other white people would begin to understand me. You understand? (35)

Clay reiterates this position moving from Charlie Parker to Bessie Smith as assassins:

If Bessie Smith had killed some white people she wouldn't have needed that music. She could have talked very straight and plain about the world. No metaphors. No grunts. No wiggles in the dark of her soul. Just straight two and two are four. Money. Power. Luxury. Like that. All of them. Crazy niggers turning their backs on sanity. When all it needs is that simple act. Murder. Just murder! Would make us all sane. [*suddenly weary*]. Ahhh. Shit. Who needs it? I'd rather be a fool. Insane. Safe with my words, and no deaths, and clean, hard thoughts . . . (35).

If the temporarily radicalized Clay speaks for Jones here, it is a monumentally unique position for a poet and playwright to take: No more metaphors! Without the use of tropes, symbols, metaphors, the creative writer has nothing; s/he might as well compose a lecture or speech. Clay casts his rejection in post-slavery terms alluding to the slave practice of cursing in code. The oral history of American slavery chronicles secret code words, quilt patterns, dances, and other symbols that enabled slaves to speak "over the heads" of their white owners to both express their disdain and to plan their Underground Railroad escapes. As I recount elsewhere, one version of the high-stepping "cakewalk" is that it was a coded mock dance by slaves lampooning the uncritical pretention of white owners (McBride 72-3). But in the end Jones condemns Clay as an Uncle Tom heretic for whom he has no sympathy: "Like Dante I put the heretics in the deepest part of hell, though Dante had them spared, on higher ground. It is heresy against one's own sources, running in terror, from one's deepest responses and insights . . . that I see as basest evil (7). (*The System of Dante's Hell*).

In Martin Scorsese's first of eight segments of the 2003 documentary series *The*

Blues entitled “Feel Like Going Home,” socially conscious Mississippi bluesman Willie King tells his young delta bluesman interlocutor Corey Harris about the black man’s cryptic use of the blues. With the racist oppression of slavery that has

Children cryin’ at the age of suicide,” the “good Lord of spirit had to send something down to the people to help ease their worried mind. And that’s when the music come in . . . And they would use a lot of these songs, of course they would talk about a woman but they was telling you about the boss man. Them old blues songs talkin’ ‘bout the woman ‘Oh my baby, she so mean. She just won’t treat me right. She take all my money,’ Well he talkin’ about the boss man. But there’s a way that they have to get the message undercover. So they couldn’t just come out and say well my boss man ain’t treating me right . . . and you’re gonna find yourself hanging from one of them trees in the morning, yeah before day in the morning. And the blues just survives. As John Lee Hooker say it’s a healer.



Fig. 18 Willie King: there’s a way that they have to get the message undercover

But it appears Jones sees that kind of practice as akin to the “old Negro conductor” at the end of the play “*doing a sort of restrained soft shoe, and half mumbling the words of some song*” (38). Clay informs Lula: “You don’t know anything except what’s there for you to see. An act. Lies. Device. Not the pure heart, the pumping black heart” (34). Hidden behind Clay’s “three-buttoned suit and striped tie” (18) is a frustrated, neurotic integrationist poet for whom the only cure is the murder of white Americans. The “great would-be poet” who, in the past, might have attempted cursing white racist America in code, by writing lies, employing the poetic device of metaphor, putting on an act in order to create [s]ome kind of bastard literature” now announces his new anti-metaphor/pro-murder manifesto. Clay is ready: “. . . all it needs is a simple knife thrust. Just let me bleed you, you loud whore, and one poem vanished” (35). Or perhaps this “Negritude” truth can successfully be expressed only in “Blues and jazz . . . the only consistent exhibitors of ‘Negritude’ in formal American culture simply because the bearers of its tradition maintained their essential identities as Negroes” (165-6).

Chopsticks in Crisis

Writing much of the music for the early James Bond films, composer John Barry has been paired with Anthony Harvey on several film versions of stage plays, in addition to *Dutchman*, most notably *The Lion in Winter* (1968), *They Might Be Giants* (1971), and *The Glass Menagerie* (1973). For this their first project, Barry matches the two main characters with his sparse and haunting soundtrack scored for two representative instruments: piano and xylophone. The piece, just under three minutes and heard only at the beginning and end of the film, begins with a dramatic opening burst of lower register, double octave piano notes pounded out slowly allowing for much space between resounding notes, one ascending slightly after the other, and then returning as if issuing a challenge. After one measure the left hand begins a throbbing of the bass note in double time and the sparse progression continues, now joined by the xylophone figure in quadruple time hurriedly filling in the spaces on the downbeat left by the piano, creating at times a kind of syncopation. This “conversation” between instruments repeats, and then the piano overtakes the irregular xylophone figure in its upper register while the xylophone resorts to extremely high notes that serve more of a percussive than melodic function as it disjointedly falls in line with the piano’s lead. When each instrument reaches the end of the melodic line, all left handed throbbing and lower register notes from the piano drop out. A dramatic stage is set for the xylophone and piano to stutter in staccato unison the now regularized syncopated three notes in the upper register with significantly long rests, repeated several times. The effect resembles a broken rendition of the one-finger waltz “Chopsticks” reaching a crisis. The piano-xylophone conversation then begins anew. There is always an inherent danger of literalizing when attempting musicological interpretation, of doing violence to a form that so beautifully resists the signified. However, with programmatic music composed for films at least, the allegorical mode is often warranted as in the birdlike screeching and knifelike stabbing of Bernard Herrmann’s famous shower scene score from *Psycho* (1960). Just as Herrmann split the music for *Taxi Driver* (Scorsese 1976) between the military drumming signifying Travis Bickle’s Marine Corps training as it battles with the noir-like sax riff of Tom Scott representing the cabdriver’s attempts at romance, and as Hans Zimmer splits the cold technological synthesized music representing the Arizona State Police as it battles for supremacy over the various pop tunes heard on Louise’s Thunderbird radio in *Thelma & Louise* (Scott 1991), so Barry splits his score here. The ominously prowling piano figure of Lula engages in order to extinguish the exotic xylophone sounds of Clay (the instrument is thought to have originated in eastern Asia,

and soon spread to Africa). The grand instrument of Europe and the West with its refined black and white keys concealing the miniature mallets within the machine soon mimics and corrals the nervous downbeat of the drum-like open mallets upon wooden bars, overtaking it, and soon cutting the life from it, only to resume again with a “new” xylophone entering, awaiting the same fate.

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