



**PROJECTING THE ARCHIVE**

# Dutchman

*This screening will be introduced by curator and writer Karen Alexander, who'll be joined by academic Dr Clive Nwonka for a post-screening discussion chaired by Voice4Change Director Kunle Olulode.*

*Please note: this film contains overt racism but uses this as a tool to convey racism from a Black perspective.*

## **SPOILER WARNING** The following notes give away some of the plot.

As a New York subway train rattles through the darkness, two passengers – a Black man and a white woman – meet and converse, the woman alternately courting and taunting the man. Freeman Jr and Knight brilliantly reprise their stage roles in this powerful and affecting adaptation of the award-winning play by Black activist Amiri Baraka (aka LeRoi Jones). British director Anthony Harvey effectively exploits the claustrophobic setting, while Gerry Turpin's camera reframes and explores the characters and space in creative and dynamic ways.

## **A contemporary review**

Anthony Harvey's film, based very faithfully on LeRoi Jones' searing one-act play, gives us the collision of nightmares, black dreams, white fantasies twining and crashing together in a terrible crunch of violence. It opens at dawn on the New York subway, long deserted platforms, bare rails, naked steel curves like the system of Dante's Hell (title of a LeRoi Jones novel). A succession of held shots, almost stills, makes a chilling prelude to what will be a hot and dangerous day.

The first figure we see is striking. A long blonde is suddenly waiting on the empty platform. She wears a figure-clinging, insubstantial striped dress, heeled sandals that make her totter sexily, and huge sunglasses, turning her into a voracious wasp. A train draws in, with only one passenger, a young Negro in a tight-buttoned suit, smart, neat, compact. Their eyes meet, he looks at her belly, legs, she sizes him up greedily. The train moves off, and she's come into his carriage. We are about to witness a tormented tournament.

She comes towards him in the swaying train. She takes an apple out of her paper bag, stands by his seat sinking her teeth into it, into him, sits next to him. 'Weren't you staring at me through the window?' She begins to draw him out, she circles round him, climbs all over him with her words, leans across him, runs her hand up his leg, draws him on in a hundred different ways. Jones' dialogue is spare, edgy, catches perfectly the uneasy oscillation of attraction and resentment between white female and coloured male. LULA: *What are you prepared for?* CLAY: *I'm prepared for anything. How about you?* LULA (laughing loudly and cutting it off abruptly): *What do you think you're doing?* CLAY: *What?* LULA: *You think I want to pick you up, get you to*

*take me somewhere and screw me, huh? CLAY: Is that the way I look? LULA: You look like you been trying to grow a beard. That's exactly what you look like. You look like you live in New Jersey with your parents and are trying to grow a beard. That's what. You look like you've been reading Chinese poetry and drinking lukewarm sugarless tea. You look like death eating a soda cracker.*

Like Cassius Clay, she dances away from him and he follows, and every time he pokes forward she's either not there or he runs into a sharp counter-blow. She plays with him relentlessly. Harvey films this whole first movement in long fluid takes, using a zoom lens to move in and out of their sparring-match. The threatening, electric silences grip us, and when the cuts come, when there is a change of camera position, they're placed acutely, like an uneasy shifting in the seat. It's almost a scientific documentary, and it's irresistible.

She makes him a proposition. He's going to a party, right? Will he take her? A dangerous but exciting sexual complicity grows between them. LULA: *We'll pretend that we are both anonymous beauties smashing along through the city's entrails.* (She yells as loud as she can) *GROOVE!* Undertones of murder and aggression blend in with the restless, neurotic sexuality of Shirley Knight's performance here. Cut to exterior of the train shooting headlong along the tracks. Back to the carriage. They've moved, his jacket's off, her head's on his shoulder, legs across his lap. She lulls him along with a come-on description of what they will do at the party. LULA: *And with my apple-eating hand I push open the door and lead you, my tender big-eyed prey, into my... what can I call it... into my hovel.* But like all magic, this white witch's spell has a sting in its tail. LULA: *Real fun in the dark house, high up above the street and the ignorant cowboys. I lead you in, holding your wet hand gently in my hand ...* CLAY: *Which is not wet?* LULA: *Which is dry as ashes.* CLAY: *And cold?* LULA: *Into my dark living room. Where we'll sit and talk endlessly, endlessly.* CLAY: *About what?* LULA: *About what? About your manhood, what do you think? What do you think we've been talking about all this time?*

The camera pulls back, and we realise that there are other passengers, some white, some coloured, in shirtsleeves for the heat, with shopping bags, spectacles, newspapers. At first this intrusion of urban commuters into something so deeply private and shameful shocks us: we thought this was all a dream, without 'the real world'. But we wait to see what will happen, and something tells us that this nightmare the boy and girl are acting out is not private, it must explode in the real world.

And it does. She throws a hysterical fit of sexual challenge, screaming like a berserk virgin intoxicated with dreams of impossible orgasm, a mad evil Ophelia freaking out in a stream of primitive jelly-roll invective, mixing jazz-talk and sex-talk as she races round the carriage, hugging steel columns, shaking her body, daring him to come and screw her. And the commuters watch, half-embarrassed, half-hooked. The provocation is intolerable. The Negro seizes her, slaps her down, and takes off, all his pent-up energy bursting out against her, to her, to all the spectators, in the carriage, in the cinema.

CLAY: *You wanted to do the belly rub?... Belly rub hates you. Old bald-headed foureyed ofays popping their fingers... and don't know yet what*

*they're doing... Charlie Parker? All the hip white boys scream for Bird. And Bird saying 'Up your ass, feeble-minded ofay I Up your ass!' And they sit there talking about the tortured genius of Charlie Parker. Bird would have played not a note of music if he Just walked up to East 67th Street and killed the first ten white people he saw... All it needs is a simple knife-thrust. Just let me bleed you, you loud whore, and one poem vanished. The only thing that would cure the neurosis would be your murder... Crazy niggers turning their backs on sanity. When all it needs is that simple act. Murder. Just murder I Would make us all sane.*

The unspeakable has been spoken. Murder is the subject of this film. Pain and murder, it says, are the only ways white and coloured can recognise each other now. It's not simple, not just a Black Power slogan: we have seen it fester into truth before our eyes, and it makes us deeply uncomfortable, torn all ways. The last shameful act of this tragedy has still to be played: she stabs him dead, and with the help of her white fellow-travellers, the corpse is thrown out of the carriage. The tournament is over. The Negro has given satisfaction, and we spectators are ashamed. We can hardly bear to look at the epilogue, as she sidles up to another Negro, another day, in another empty carriage, and the whole white sorcery starts again. Harvey winds up the film with a sure touch, tracking back out of the carriage, which disappears into the dark, a fierce white rectangle of hatred.

The performances are so committed they are undeniable. Al Freeman Jr plays the Negro with a quiet, almost mute vulnerability, and his big outburst has a magnificent dignity. Shirley Knight plays the girl with an acute Actors' Studio precision, releasing a frightening storm of tension, contradiction. Gerry Turpin's photography catches the harsh sultry heat of the subway, and it's astonishing to realise the carriage was a Twickenham studio set. Anthony Harvey's achievement is to have translated LeRoi Jones' white-hot, black-fierce anecdote into a disturbing and enduring cinema image.

**Michael Kustow, *Sight & Sound*, Spring 1967**

**Karen Alexander** is a London-based independent film and moving image curator and researcher. She has worked with and for the Royal College of Art and the BFI. She has been a guest curator for a wide range of cultural institutions and art galleries, including Iniva, the Watershed Bristol, Up Projects, Tate, Autograph and the Serpentine Gallery.

She has lectured and spoken nationally and internationally about film, race and representation – her areas of research are UK-based artists' film and video, feminist and post-colonial politics of representation and gender. In 2014 Karen founded Curating Conversations, a practice-based professional development initiative aimed at emerging visual artists. She curated Spinning from History's Filthy Mind with Danish/Trinidadian artist Jeannette Ehlers in 2015 and the Black Atlantic Cinema Club both for Autograph in London.

In 2017 she co-founded Philomela's Chorus, a moving image commissioning and exhibition platform for women of colour, and Dream Time: We All Have Stories for Nuit Blanche Toronto in 2018. Karen is a guest curator with Cinema Rediscovered at the Watershed in Bristol, on the boards of

Longplayer and is currently a lecturer at Central St Martins, University of the Arts, London.

**Dr Clive Nwonka** is a Lecturer in Film, Culture and Society at UCL's Institute of Advanced Studies.

Nwonka's research centres on the study of Black British and African American film, with a particular focus on the images of Black urbanity and the modes through which Black identities are shaped by representations of social environments and the hegemony of neoliberalism within forms of Black popular culture. In addition, he has published extensively on racial inequality in the film industry and 'diversity' policy frameworks that are equally born from broader political discourses on race, racism and cultural difference.

Nwonka is the co-editor of the book *Black Film/British Cinema II* and is the author of the forthcoming book *Black Boys: The Aesthetics of British Urban Film*. Nwonka is the Principal Investigator on the Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project *The Colour of Diversity: A Longitudinal Analysis of the BFI Diversity Standards Data and Racial Inequality in the UK Film Industry (2021-2024)*, a major study of the continued crisis of race and racism in the UK film sector and the efficacy of cultural diversity policy.

**Kunle Olulode** is the Director at Voice4Change England, a Black led charity and infrastructure support body. With over 460-member organisations at its helm. Its aim is to strengthen the Black and ethnic non-profit sector to meet the needs of disadvantaged communities.

A keen film buff and film historian, he is known for his groundbreaking work in debating film. He is part of South Bank's BFI's African Odyssey programming board responsible for 2018 Black and Banned Season; which examined censorship in black film, art and sport.

A Trustee of the English Heritage Trust, becoming its first black board member in 2017 alongside David Olusoga.

With a strong belief in social change, he argues that it is time to develop a new narrative around race equality away from deficit models. Working in a sector that, he is acutely aware of has deep-set attitudes that are crippling serious debate on social policy, particularly in the area of race.

Kunle is also a regular on UK television and radio including Radio London, Al Jazeera, Sky TV, RT on debates relating to politics the arts, diversity, and race.

He was honoured with an MBE in October 2020, for leading his charity to raise and distributing over £1.4m to struggling community groups at the height of the Covid emergency.

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## DUTCHMAN

*Director:* Anthony Harvey  
*Production Company:* Gene Persson Enterprises, Dutchman Film Company, Kaitlin Productions  
*Producer:* Gene Persson  
*Associate Producer:* Hy Silverman  
*Production Manager:* John Comfort  
*Production Assistant:* Joanne Fazio  
*2nd Unit Director:* Edward R. Brown  
*Assistant Director:* Christopher Dryhurst  
*Continuity:* Rita Davison  
*Casting:* Paul Lee Lander  
*Based on the play by:* Le Roi Jones  
*Photography:* Gerry Turpin  
*2nd Unit Camera:* Edward R. Brown  
*Camera Operator:* Ron Taylor  
*2nd Unit Assistant Camera:* James C. Brown  
*Electrician:* Richard Falk Sr  
*Editor:* Anthony Harvey  
*Assistant Editor:* Denis Whitehouse  
*Art Director:* Herbert Smith

*Assistant Art Director:* James Morahan  
*Set Dresser:* Ian Whittaker  
*Wardrobe:* Brenda Gardner  
*Make-up:* Micky Morris  
*Hair:* Ann Box  
*Music Composed and Conducted by:* John Barry  
*Sound Recording:* George Stevenson  
*Sound:* John Aldred, Vivian Temple-Smith  
*Studios:* Twickenham Film Studios

## Cast

Shirley Knight (*Lula*)  
Al Freeman Jr (*Clay*)  
Howard Bennett, Robert Calvert, Frank Lieberman, Sandy McDonald  
Dennis Peters, Keith James, Devon Hall (*subway riders*)

UK 1966  
55 mins

A BFI National Archive print

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## REGULAR PROGRAMME

**BFI Flare: Marlon T Riggs: Tongues Untied + intro by programmer Rico Johnson-Sinclair**

Wed 20 Oct 20:30

**Experimenta: Frantz Fanon: Black Skin White Mask + discussion**

Thu 21 Oct 18:00

**BFI Flare: Marlon T Riggs: Black Is... Black Ain't + intro by programmer Rico Johnson-Sinclair**

Thu 21 Oct 20:40

**Relaxed Screening: Summer of Soul (... Or, When the Revolution Could Not Be Televised)**

Tue 26 Oct 18:00

**BFI Blu-ray Launch: Short Sharp Shocks II + intro**

Wed 27 Oct 18:10

**Art in the Making: The Black Arts Movement on Film + discussion**

Wed 27 Oct 20:40

**Woman with a Movie Camera Preview: Anatomy of Wings + pre-recorded Q&A**

Thu 28 Oct 18:15

**Silent Cinema: Body and Soul + intro**

Sun 31 Oct 14:20

**20-22 Omega**

Sun 31 Oct 14:30; Thu 4 Nov 18:10

**Member Picks: Moonlight**

Fri 5 Nov 18:10

**African Odysseys: Black History Walks Presents:**

**Cause for Concern: Equal Before the Law**

Fri 5 Nov 18:30-21:30

**African Odysseys: A Date with the Devil: Darcus Howe's Journey from Black Power to Broadcasting**

Sat 6 Nov 12:00-18:00

**African Odysseys: Travels with my Camera: Is This My Country? + White Tribe**

Tue 9 Nov 18:10

**African Odysseys: Trouble in Paradise + Darcus Howe: Son of Mine**

Sun 14 Nov 15:30

**Terror Vision: Tales from the Hood**

Thu 25 Nov 20:40

**Missing Believed Wiped Session 1: The London Palladium Show**

Sat 27 Nov 13:00

**Missing Believed Wiped Session 2: Introducing 'The Precious Things': Holiday Startime**

Sat 27 Nov 15:50

**Seniors' Free Matinee, in partnership with African Odysseys:**

**Once Upon a Time... When We Were Colored + intro**

Mon 29 Nov 14:00

**Relaxed Screening: Petite Maman**

Tue 30 Nov 18:15

## IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

**Preview: Last Night in Soho**

Thu 21 Oct 17:50; 31 Oct 17:40 (+ Q&A with Edgar Wright)

**Screen Epiphany: Adjoa Andoh introduces Mandabi**

Sun 24 Oct 18:30

**Mike Leigh in Conversation**

Thu 28 Oct 20:40

**Doctor Who: Galaxy 4 (animated)**

Sun 7 Nov 12:00

**Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI**

Mon 8 Nov 18:10

**Preview: Drive My Car (Doraibu mai kâ)**

Mon 15 Nov 19:40

**Preview: The Hand of God (È stata la mano di Dio)**

Thu 18 Nov 18:30

**TV Preview: The Amazing Mr Blunden + Q&A with writer-director-actor Mark Gatiss and actor Tamsin Greig**

Mon 29 Nov 18:15

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Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

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