

# A DECONSTRUCTIVE READING IN LEROY JONES' *THE DUTCHMAN*

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**Abstract.** Makalah ini membahas studi tentang ambivalensi (*ambivalence*) dan *undecidability* dalam oposisi biner (*the binary oppositions*) dalam drama karya LeRoy Jones berjudul *The Dutchman*. Studi didasarkan atas teori dekonstruksi Derrida, dengan tujuan melakukan analisis kritis terhadap drama tersebut melalui pendekatan ekstrinsik. Permasalahan dalam studi ini dijawab dengan pendekatan kualitatif. Hasil penelitian terhadap oposisi biner menunjukkan bahwa setiap oposisi biner memiliki ambivalensi. Ambivalensi kemudian menjadi ciri *undecidability* pada teks. Simpulan pada studi ini adalah bahwa teks terbukti menunjukkan *undecidability* dan memiliki ideologi 'superioritas kulit putih.'

**Keywords:** *binary opposition, ambivalence, undecidability, ideology.*

## INTRODUCTION

The study of literary works using deconstructive analysis has become an important aspect in the recent world of literary analysis. Deconstruction is 'a theory that states that it is impossible for a text to have one fixed meaning, and emphasizes the role of the reader in the procurement of reading' (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2005.) Proposed by Derrida in the late 1960s, deconstruction argues that language is not a stable system that people think it to be. Instead of a stable association of signifier and signified, deconstruction argues that language is a chain of signifier. In other words, for deconstruction criticism a signifier does not refer to a signified but instead refers to another signifier in which refers to other signifier which also refers to another signifier. By doing so, deconstruction argues that there is no fixed meaning in our language because each signifier does not refer to something fixed and tangible but, instead refer to yet another concept (Tyson, 2006). A deconstruction is first proposed as a way to analyze language, but because language is the medium in which ideologies and culture are passed on, deconstruction can also be applied towards

both the elements. A literature in which its main medium is language is no exception.

To deconstruct, to put it simply, is to try proving that something does not have a stable and concrete concept and that it can be taken apart part by part. In this point one might argue that why someone should try to prove that something unstable because there is no point in just proving that something is not stable. To answer such question, one only needs to relate it to our daily life. When one wishes to understand how a machine works, a television for example, the most effective way to do it is of course by taking it apart or in other words deconstructing it. In relation with this metaphor, one could also observe the underlying principle that operates a literature work, which is the ideology that drives and influence it, by deconstructing it. In order to deconstruct a literary text, deconstruction borrows two concepts from its predecessor, the new criticism, which are binary opposition and ambivalence.

Binary opposition, according to Ferdinand de Saussure and later mentioned by Sorcha, is the "means by which the units of language have value or meaning; each unit is defined against what it is not".

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Essentially, the concept of the binary opposition is engendered by the Western propensity to organize everything into a hierarchical structure; terms and concepts are related to positives or negatives, with no apparent latitude for deviation: i.e. Man/Woman, Black/White, Life/Death, Inside/Outside, Presence/Absence, and so on.' (Sorcha, 2005.) In other words, a binary opposition is two conflicting concepts in their most extremities. This means the shades of gray that exist between those two concepts will not be taken into account whatsoever. For instance the binary opposition between good and evil only recognizes good and evil, the instances between them are not taken into account when one discusses a binary opposition.

In this study, every binary opposition also functions as a hierarchy. In other words, one member of each binary opposition will always find itself privilege compared to its counterpart. For instance, when one discusses about the binary opposition of good against evil, one will immediately assume that good is the better while evil is the lesser. Even when one takes into account the not so black and white concept, as such wet against dry, when not provided with further information will assume that wet is better than dry. Later, the concept of binary opposition will be applied towards the themes that reside within the Dutchman.

Next, ambivalence means the state where a concept have both the attribute of 'good' and 'bad' simultaneously at the same time. For instance, when someone does something based on good faith, let's say he gave a beggar a dollar, is not necessarily a good thing. True the man have good intention, and it is also true that he helped the poor beggar by giving him a small sum of money, but this act in itself can also be considered a bad thing. By giving the beggar money the man has,

unknowingly, encourages the beggar to keep begging in the future because it is easier to earn money by begging when compared to the hardship of finding an employment. This concept will later contribute greatly towards proving the *undecidability* of the literary text itself and both the theme, and ideologies that drive a literary text (Tyson, 2006).

'Undecidability' neither means that the reader is unable to choose among possible interpretation, nor that the text cannot "make up its mind" as to what it wants to say. Rather, undecidability means that reader and text alike are inextricably bound within language's dissemination of meanings' (Tyson, 2006). By proving a text contains undecidability, deconstructive criticism proves that the text is bound by the language that controls it, and also proves that it is bound by the ideologies that is contained within that said language.

The present study conducts a deconstructive analysis on a literary work. For the purpose of the study, the data is taken from *The Dutchman*, originally *The Dutchman and The Slave*, which was a play written by LeRoi Jones, known as Amiri Baraka. At the time of its publication, it received both critical acclaim and a big share of controversies. This is common considering the fact that the other works of LeRoi Jones also receive the same reception such as one of his poem "somebody blew up America." In *The Dutchman*, LeRoi Jones criticizes the discrimination against the African American in the United States bluntly and harshly, that leads to the controversies.

(<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/amiri-baraka>, accessed 3 December 2013)

Considered as one of the most popular of Jones plays, the Dutchman has received a considerable critical attention. Despite being riddled with critique, praises, and controversies, the play, let alone the writer,

was almost never heard outside of the United States, i.e. Indonesia. The African American literature is rarely considered as a literary work at the time due to the fact that this literary piece is of course unpopular to the hegemony of literary world, which was dominated by the white people (Ndebela, 1994). Hence, *The Dutchman* is unpopular because it is written by a black man, whereas since the beginning the literary world is dominated by the whites. Jones's extensive use of symbolism and other experimental techniques to enhance the play's emotional impact and his ability to create a lifelike character but also at the same time detached from reality that intrigued the study on *The Dutchman*. Its critical acclaim is the main reason to know more about *The Dutchman*.

The play was named after The Dutchman since it is alluded to the legendary ghost ship story that was told among the sailors, The Flying Dutchman. At first one may assume that the title does not correlate at all to the legend of The Flying Dutchman but after several analyses, it is clear that both the play title and the legend have a connection. From the character aspect, for instance, the main characters in this play are the representation of the ghost ship's captain. It is also worth noting that the title correlate to the famous Dutch sailors who were the master of the seas predating even the Great Britain who also happens to be infamous slavers. (<http://www.musicwithease.com/flying-dutchman-source.html>, accessed 10 November 2013)

The Dutchman was written, or in other words, constructed around the concept of combating the racialism that run rampant in its time of writing. Hence there are several points in the play that are tied closely towards the said concept. (Kumar, Nita N. 2003) These points, however, either have been constructed so carefully, or have been

accepted commonly in the society. Therefore, these concepts will, at first glance, seem to be a stable and concretely built concepts. However, careful application of deconstructive analysis will reveal that these concepts are as unstable as the language that functions as its base. This study aims to prove the instability of said concepts through the application of deconstructive analysis on the play *The Dutchman*. *The Dutchman*, originally named in German *Der Fliegende Hollander*, is also the title of an opera created by Richard Wagner, a German composer who is famous for many of his works such as *Tristan and Isolde*, and *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (*The Ring of Nibelung*).

Due to the lack of research using deconstruction theory on literature in the Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, many questions have arisen regarding this analysis. This research is made while bearing in mind that it is one of the first study that applied the deconstructive analysis. Based on the background of the study, which runs parallel with the main purpose of deconstructive analysis, are formulated as follows: (1) What are the binary oppositions that occur in the text?, (2) What are the ambivalence in each of the said binary opposition?, and (3) How does the text reveal its undecidability?

By using deconstructive theory in analysing LeRoi Jones' *The Dutchman*, this study is expected to give a comprehensive outlook on the field of deconstructive analysis as well as to give an example on how a deconstructive analysis works and operate while also at the same time reveals how ideologies work and operates invisibly inside a literary work and in our daily life.

## METHOD

Due to the nature of data in this research, which lack any numerical and statistical nature, a qualitative research

method will be used. A qualitative research, “any kind of research that produce findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss and Corbin, 2006), will be more suited in this research due to the topic. A qualitative research will not confine the research into a mere statistical analysis. Therefore, enabling the researcher to engage more directly with the data, in this case the play, and acquire more optimal findings. Due to the nature of this study which focused on the use of the deconstructive analysis, the study will solely use extrinsic approach in which it could be defined as “ways to criticize literature in different terms. In Intrinsic approach, the critic is mainly concerned with the form, language, style, symbols, images, contrasts, structure and development of plot in literary work. Words on the page are of outmost importance for him.” (Maryam Iqbal, 2009). In accordance with the extrinsic approach, the study will not use any intrinsic method. However, aside from other intrinsic method and due to the necessity of deconstructive criticism, the themes that appear within the play will be mentioned and analyzed.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **DECONSTRUCTING THE TITLE OF THE PLAY ‘THE DUTCHMAN’**

Before attempting to deconstruct the title of *The Dutchman*, one needs to have examine several background points of the play. LeRoi Jones’ *The Dutchman* centers around the interaction between its two main characters, Lula and Clay. The interaction takes place in a subway car that seemingly unstopping during the course of the play. It is implied that the train may have made some stops but it is not shown during the course of the play.

Moving on to the title itself, *The Dutchman*, it can have several intriguing

meanings behind it. The words *The Dutchman* are immediately associated with the image of a man from Netherland. Another image that people commonly associate the words *The Dutchman* is the image of a cursed man damned to sail the seven seas forever in his ghostly form, seeking victims during the course of his suffering and he is only able to take anchor once in a seven years journey and he is known as the Flying Dutchman.

Putting the pieces together, people may wonder what is the connection between the social identity and interaction between white and black people, discrimination, and racism with a story of ghost who is damned to travel the sea forever, or, putting the ghost story aside, with a man from the Netherland.

Examining the connection from the second angle, some historical facts come to surfaces. The story of the play is most likely take place in the city of New York, one of the major port cities of the United States of America. Taking into account that the original name of the play is *The Dutchman and The Slave*, slaves from the early times of the founding of the United States of America are brought by ships which of course takes port in the major port cities of the eastern coast, and one of them, of course, is the New York City. It is also worth mentioning that when New York is first founded, it is originally a Dutch colony with the name of New Amsterdam. After a certain amount of time, New Amsterdam is then conveyed towards the British and along with it, its name is changed into New York. This is where the name Dutchman becomes relevant. During that time, human trafficking is still legal and slavery is as common as a modern businesses. The men from Netherland or the Dutchmen are renowned sailors predating even the Britain, but at the same time they are also infamous as the slave trader who brings the slaves

from the uncivilized part of the globe such as Africa to the west world, including the United States of America.

When relating the title to the infamous *Flying Dutchman* however, it is a completely different story. The very first instance of the *Flying Dutchman* is the rumors, superstitions and legends that circle around the sailors as early as the fifteen century. Originally, *The Flying Dutchman* true story is that of a ghostly ship that haunts which, according to the Dutch version, the seas around the Cape of Storms (the Cape of Good Hope.) This story is then romanticized and dramatized in the form of movies such as *Pandora* and *The Flying Dutchman* in 1951. In this movie, the Dutchman kills his wife because he thinks that she is unfaithful, therefore condemning him to roam the seas until he finds the true meaning of love. He only can shore once in seven years for the duration of six month in order to find a woman who loves him so much and she would die for him. This romanticized version of the story has actually taken its inspiration from one of the grimmer instance of the *Flying Dutchman* legends. The larger part of the legend remains the same in which the Dutchman is damned to sail the seas for all eternity, but in this particular version of the legend it is said that he can escape his curse by sacrificing a woman to a sea monster.

Another legend of *The Flying Dutchman* comes in the form of an opera by Richard Wagner. The aptly named *Der Fliegende Hollander*, literally: *Flying Dutchman*, just like *Pandora* and *The Flying Dutchman* follows the romanticized version of the legend. In this version *Der Fliegende Hollander* however, the Dutchman has to find salvation by finding a woman that would be faithful to him until his death, which means that the death of the woman is not necessary in order for him to be released from his curse. In this opera

version, *The Dutchman*, who refers to ‘the stranger,’ meets the sea captain named Daland who just goes back to his hometown. Hearing that Daland has an unmarried daughter, Senta, *The Dutchman* asks to marry her, promising treasures to Daland in exchange for her daughter’s hand in marriage. Unable to resist the temptation of wealth given by the Dutchman, Daland agrees. Meanwhile at the residence of Daland, Senta is already enamored by the stories of the legendary *Flying Dutchman*. She is so enchanted by the painting of the *Flying Dutchman* in her house, and further enraptured by the stories of the cursed sailor, she decides to save him. Her former lover, Erik, however, comes and warns her that her father will come home with a stranger that ultimately will marry her, while at the same time desperately asking for her hand in marriage. Unable to convince Senta and failing in his attempt to ask Senta to marry him, Erik departs in anguish. Not long after Erik’s departure, Senta meets her father and a man that she immediately recognizes the stranger as the Dutchman. They are so captivated by one another and almost pay no heed to Daland who is present there. Consequently, Senta agrees to engage with the Dutchman. Upon hearing Senta’s decision, Erik rushes to find Senta in order to convince her once more. Upon seeing them, *The Dutchman* fell into a state off despair and decides to sail off. Upon Senta’s insistence that he should stay, *The Dutchman* cries out in despair declaring that he is *The Flying Dutchman* and set sails short after. Senta tries to follow but is held back by Daland and Erik. She struggles and tears herself away from them and runs to a cliff overhanging the sea while crying out to the Dutchman declaring her faithfulness. Short after, both the Dutchman’s ship and Senta sunk into the depth of the ocean at the same time, achieving salvation.

*Der Fliegende Hollander* also has a correlation to the play *The Dutchman* in the term of theme it takes. In *The Dutchman* it is painfully depicted how a black African American is marginalized by the White American society. *Der Fliegende Hollander* also takes the issue of marginalization as one of its essence. To understand it, however, one needs to take into account the history of the early Germany and Netherlands. The Netherlands are once part of Germany, or in their language Deutschland, who travels and colonizes far parts of Europe away from German territory who finally separates themselves from their parent country and during the course of time produce a distinct but, in a several instance, alike language. This language which is used by the Netherlands, is considered as a lower language by the Germans. Even the name of the country, Netherland, reflects this in which the word 'nether' literally means low, poor, and lowly. This ideology find its reflection in *Der Fliegende Hollander* though a bit faintly. Almost the entirety of *Der Fliegende Hollander* is colored by xenophobia. Erik for instance, is already suspicious of the Dutchman even before he meets him because to him the Dutchman is simply a stranger. In Daland's case, however, the xenophobia is dampened by the temptation of treasures provided by the Dutchman. Hence why he favours the presence of the Dutchman compared to Erik. This also holds true to the behavior expressed by the villager. The xenophobia is painfully apparent when the Dutchman reveals who he actually is. Both Daland and Erik clutch Senta vigorously is not only because he is the legendary Flying Dutchman but also because at that time when the Dutchman reveals who he really is, he becomes an enigma for them, the great unknown. If racial marginalization is to be taken into account, both man and the

villagers suddenly reject the notion of Senta's conviction simply because the stranger is a 'Dutchman,' a man who belongs to the lower race therefore instantly making him unfit to be Daland's son in law and Senta's husband. In both previous instances Richard Wagner's *Der Fliegende Hollander* holds a correlation with LeRoi Jone's *The Dutchman*.

If a correlation is to be made between the title and the characters of the play, it is commonly accepted that Lula is the representation of the Dutchman in this play. Firstly, Lula is obviously the representative of the whites in the play because she is a white person. At the same time The Dutchmen are obviously white, in this case both of them belonged to the white race. Secondly she is the one who actively shows obvious signs, or more accurately act as if she is cursed:

Lula (bursting into laughing, but too shrilly): Don't understand? Well, don't look at me. It's the path I take, that's all. Where both feet take me when I set them down. One in front of the other. (Scene II line 60)

Here, Lula is somehow contradicting herself. In one part she acts that everything she does is under her full control and that it is her choice, implying that she believes that what she does is in fact her choice and is not influenced by an outside factor by saying 'It is the path that I take.' On the contrary to her previous statement, she also says that 'both her feet take her when she set them down.' By saying that her feet are the ones that take her to go without any indication of self-controlled action, she 'blame' her feet for where she has gone. On another note the sentence itself gives the implication of action. Therefore, by 'blaming' her feet she, in a sense, actually blame some outside force for all of her action. Consequently implying that her

previous statement is some sort of self-denial. Thirdly, at the end of act II after Lula kills Clay and order the disposal of his body, she proceeds to observe another young African American who enters the car in an almost similar fashion to how Lula stares at Clay in the beginning of the play. One then can easily conclude that Lula is in fact observing her next prey and that it is also possible that Lula will repeat the procession after she finish handling the young African American in the ending of *The Dutchman*. This action pattern precisely mirrors the legend of the Flying Dutchman in which the Dutchman is cursed to sail the seas for eternity while preying on the lives of the sailors who are unfortunate enough to meet the ghostly Flying Dutchman ship. All of the implications stated above bring to the conclusion that Lula is in a way cursed. Therefore, this fact proves her association with the mythical sailor that haunts the seven seas, *The Flying Dutchman*.

It is unusual for one to relate the image of the legendary and ghostly Flying Dutchman with Clay for it is painfully apparent that he is the victim in the play *The Dutchman*. Clay, just like Lula and The Dutchman, is also cursed. Similar to The Dutchman who is cursed to sail the seas forever and can only find salvation in a woman who would be loyal to him unto death, Clay is also cursed forever in a journey until he find that one thing that will become his salvation. Clay's curse comes in the form of his search for his self-identity. Clay, just like the Dutchman, is cursed to be forever in a journey, a journey to search for his self, his individuality, and if he cannot find it, he will search for it until the end of time. Shankeswari, states that there is a crisis of identity happening inside of Clay. Examining his appearance, especially because the setting of the play is around the 1960's, one would say that clay is unusual.

During that period of time the discrimination and marginalization against the African American was still so strong. African American will normally be considered as either a simpleton or a criminal, owing to the long history of slavery in the journey of United States of America. Clay in *The Dutchman* wears a three button suit, and a tie, which is not only unusual for an African American at the time but also unusual considering the setting that is set during the summer. He graduates from college, another rare feat by the African American at the time, aspires to a poet and is a poet himself. From a 60's American point of view, Clay is totally out of character. They may even suspect that Clay steal the suit from someone. Moreover Clay's past is also a testament for his long search for self-identity. In these conversations between Lula and Clay one can see the struggle that Clay experienced in his younger days:

Lula: You look like you been trying to grow a beard. 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 sugarless tea. (Laughs, uncrossing and recrossing her legs.) You look like death eating a soda cracker.

Clay: (*cocking his head from one side to the other, embarrassed and trying to make some comeback, but also intrigued by what the woman is saying ... even the sharp city coarseness of her voice, which is still a kind of gentle sidewalk throb*) Really? I look like all that?

Lula: Not all of it. (*She feints a seriousness to cover an actual somber tone*) I lie a lot (*smiling*) It helps me control the world Clay (*relieved and laughing louder than the humor*): yeah I bet. Lula: But it's true, most of it, right? Jersey? Your bumpy neck? Clay: How'd you know all that? Huh? Really, I mean about Jersey . . . and even

the beard. I met you before? You know Warren Enright? (Scene I line 30-35)

For the sake of argument, line 31-35 is mentioned here in order to indicate that Lula's 'guess' is accurate. All of the private life mentioned by Lula here is an indication in which Clay is looking to find who he really is. A young adult by the age of 20 is still trying to grasp what he is and what part he should play in the world while feeling that uneasy feeling of not knowing who one really is. At the same time however he also tries to be acknowledged as an adult. The beard mentioned by Lula in the line above is an icon of manliness and adulthood. By trying to grow beards, Clay is trying to be acknowledged as an adult. The Chinese poetry, represents wisdom and understanding, an element that is usually inherent in Chinese poetry. The sugarless tea and the tea itself both represent adulthood and fineness, due to the fact that elder people that care for their health rarely consume sugar, and the tea itself is the trademark drinks of the British which undoubtedly considered as a finer man compared to the man in United States of America. It is apparent that Clay has an ideal image of man and of course he tries to aspire and copy it. This concept of ideal man seems to be the WASP. The WASP itself is an acronym for White Anglo Saxon Protestant. The WASP itself is attributes that almost always inherent in every United States presidents. Hence the rumor that circulates is that if one wishes to become the president of the United States he also needs to have these WASP attributes. Similar to the prevalent misuse of Indonesian pronunciation that apparent in most of the high ranking officials in Indonesia, the WASP trend follows similar pattern. Hence, many upper and middle class citizens try to copies it, though mostly

they can only copy the style of clothing because most of the other element of WASP cannot be copied easily. Clay who tries to pursuit of a higher image has adopted this trend. This copying and aspiring to an ideal image is the first several step that normally taken by teenagers and young adult in order to find their personality.

### **DECONSTRUCTING THE ELEMENTS AND THEME FOUND IN THE DUTCHMAN**

Before an extensive analysis on the theme and elements of *The Dutchman* can be made, it is imperative to understand how the deconstruction theory will be applied. The most common method in deconstruction is at first to find the binary oppositions that exist in a literary work. This is done due to the fact that it is more easily for a human brain to perceive parts of life in the form of contrasting one to another, such as black and white, man and woman, and life and death.

It is true that most literary theme do not necessarily come in the form of binary opposition, but all of the themes can be later extracted into a form of binary opposition. For example, in the case of *The Dutchman*, one of the main themes that exists in this play is the oppression of whites on the blacks, it can easily be turned into the binary opposition of black and white.

In every binary opposition that has been conceived by human, there always exists a sort of hierarchy. This means that, in every binary opposition there will always be one aspect that is considered superior or better than the aspect that opposes it. For instance, in white and black, white will always be considered better than black, and such is the case with light and dark. In man and woman on the other hand, though none of the two aspects is considered the good and



the other the bad, it is obvious that the concept of man is superior to woman. This hierarchy is to be taken into account when one tries to apply a deconstruction towards something.

Afterwards, from the binary opposition that can be found in *The Dutchman* and after considering its hierarchy, the study then moves on to discuss the ambivalence, or in other words to find that none of the two parts of any binary opposition is superior than the other. From this ambivalence, it can be concluded then that there is some undecidability in the base idea of the literary work. The following 5 part-discussion is presented, each discussing about one set of binary opposition and the ambivalence that can be extricated from it.

### **Black and White**

The concept of black and white is already well known to man throughout the generations. In fact almost every religion has integrated the concept in one way or another. The concept commonly pictured black as evil while white is good or holy, along with the triumph of light or goodness against dark or evil. Though not many there are some exceptions, such as the concept of yin and yang, which does not state that the white or good will triumph over black or evil but instead both elements need to coexist in harmony where one cannot exist without the other. Due to the generations' old existence of this concept, it has become internalized in the human psyche and commonly considered as natural, or something as it should be. So internalized and integrated this concept inside the culture of many societies, that when someone asks a person which one is superior, or in other words asking about the hierarchical position, between the ideas of white and black, one will instinctively answers white.

The concept of black and white that exists in *The Dutchman* is most apparent in the form of its characters' skin color which is also the indication of race. Throughout the play it is obvious that the white representative, Lula, takes herself as a more superior and righteous existence when compared to the representative of the black color, Clay. This can be seen from Lula's constant harassment and condescending attitude towards Clay. Lula uses this concept to her advantage as a sort of justification to harass Clay similar to how it is used by the missionaries and colonist of the colonization era. It is apparent that the colonists and missionaries of the colonization period are aware of this concept seeing how the majority of them believe that they are the carrier of light and order, which are usually associated with the color white, towards the land of savage that does not have order or civilization. All of this conception that white is better than black serve the purpose of creating a sort of internalization for the colonized nation. It is also in a sense a propaganda that serve the purpose to lessen the resistance of the 'savages' against the representative of the light and order, the colonists and missionaries, who also happens to have a white skin color.

Lula in *The Dutchman* also likely has internalized this concept. She has obviously taken herself as a superior being as opposed to Clay. This fact is supported by how she acts towards Clay. It is painfully apparent that Lula is looking down on Clay, while at the same time, thinking that Clay will be easily swayed by some 'party talk.' Her condescending attitude is also plainly laid out if one would observe her constant harassment, both direct and indirect by its implied meaning. This is so because harassment, or bullying, is a way to show, and at the same time instill, a sense of superiority towards somebody. Regarding

her lines, Lula herself admitted that she 'lies' to 'control the world' a statement fitting for a conqueror of nations that consider herself above and beyond the common man.

Clay on the other hand, is also painfully aware of the white superiority over black concept and embodies it. During the earlier part of the play he acts passive and reactive fitting with the nature of the color black which absorbs every other light color spectrum. His passiveness is also a statement that he submits to Lula whom he considered a more superior being as compared to himself. Shankeswari, in his paper 'Assimilation vs. Identity: A Study on Amiri Baraka's (LeRoi Jones) Dutchman', expresses that Clay is a young man that is in a search for his self-identity and in that search he has taken into himself the culture of the whites. Therefore, he is, in a sense, a fake white, a fact that he himself must be aware though unconsciously. The fact that he is the representative of the black and at the same time a fake white have caused him to adore the true white, which in this case is Lula.

The ambivalence that exists in the concept of black and white can be easily inferred from each of the color characteristics. White is commonly associated with holiness and purity while black is commonly associated with evil, impurity and the unholy. The color characteristics, however, proves to be the exact opposite. White which is commonly associated with purity is in fact the color with the most light-spectrum, while on the other hand Black does not have any light spectrum in it. This means that white is composed from the aggregate of every other color beside it. While the color black on the other hand, came from the fact that the substance that we see as black is in fact absorbing all other light spectrum meaning it does not have any light spectrum

associated with it. Applying these characteristics with the concept of purity, one will find that the black and white binary opposition can be perceived quite differently from how the binary opposition commonly professed. If one takes into account the meaning of pure and then apply it to the binary opposition concept of black and white while taking into account their respective color characteristics, then one will find that the color black is in fact is the closest one to the concept of purity while white is the most far from it.

Another supporting point for this argument can be found in the Book of Genesis which can be found in the Holy Bible. In the book of Genesis it is told that in the beginning of time there is nothing while only darkness exists. Then, God comes and creates the earth and along with it brings light into the world. From this short passage one can easily infer that the darkness, which commonly associated with the color of black, is in fact the state of purity where nothing has been added. While on the other hand, light, commonly associated with the color of white, is in fact an addition that comes later in the history of the universe, an impurity that should not have existed if only God do not come and meddle with the matter of the universe.

Applying this idea towards the play, one would find this concept of ambivalence of black and white holds true. Clay, the representative of the color black, embodies the characteristic of that color quite prominently. During the duration of the play, Clay is often portrayed as calm reactive and naïve to a certain level. He shows quite a remarkable restraint when faced with Lula's earlier advances and harassments, showing almost no indication of being offended while at the same time maintains his composure. His naivety is shown most notably by his portrayal and conception of the plantation. For a Black

person, a plantation is commonly associated with the memories of slavery that the black people have to endure during the early period of United States of America. However, Clay on the other hand considers the plantation as a heavenly and calm place, a point of view that most people would find as naïve. On the other hand, the other character, Lula represents the color white also embodies the impurity of the color white. Along the play, Lula is commonly depicted as a liar, she even admits that she lies a lot. Easily put a liar is hardly in close relation with purity. Lula at several points of the play, also tries to seduce Clay sexually, a trait which many would find as impure. She is also depicted as a manipulator, in which she manipulates clay towards her goal. Manipulation in itself is considered by many as an underhanded act due to the fact that manipulation takes away the freedom of the manipulated person, hence by all means it does not fit the concept of purity.

### **Man and Woman**

Throughout the history, the patriarchal concepts and idea is accepted as something that is common, and something that is considered as it should be. Though there are some parts in this world that practices matriarchy instead of patriarchy, patriarchy is the most widespread between the two. In a patriarchy society men will always be superior and considered as a ruler or controller while women are the inferior and the controlled or ruled. Therefore, the imagery of men and women and the traits attributed to them by the majority of those who practice patriarchy, goes hand in hand with the concept of superiority of men and the inferiority of women. It is commonly accepted that men are strong, independent, dependable and rational. On the other hand women are often depicted as weak, irrational, dishonest and undependable. In

other words men are described as more humane and superior, while women are often described as less humane and inferior.

In reality, however, one would find that the traits that are commonly attributed towards the imagery of men and women are often false. Men, for instance, are more aggressive than women and rarely give any second thoughts before they perform something indicating impulsiveness which contradicts the popular beliefs. This is one of the reasons why rapist are mostly male. Also contradicting the common conception is that men are also fond of gossiping in which it is commonly accepted that only women likes to gossip. On the other hand, women are often less impulsive and more patient as compared to men, which indicates a rational behavior. This is also the reason why mothers are more caring as compared to fathers. Many modern women also proves that they can be independent, contrary to the patriarchal beliefs.

Applying the patriarchy concepts into *The Dutchman*, it is apparent that both of the main characters are representatives of their respective gender archetypes, not only because of their inherent genders but also because of their traits. Lula for instance, embodies the patriarchal image of women properly. She is a liar, in which are most notably shown during the first few scene where she accuses Clay of 'staring down' in the vicinity of her ass and legs, she even confesses that she lies a lot to control the world. It is also shown throughout the play that her action and behavior are somewhat impulsive and irrational. Her impulsiveness can be seen in most of her conversations with Clay in which she always seem to act or answer Clay without any hint of consideration whatsoever. In scene II one would undoubtedly notices both of Lula's impulsiveness and irrationality when she erratically perform the 'belly rub' dance and also at the same time asks Clay to join

her. It is also in this scene, in which Lula is shown to fall in some sort of hysteria where she dances erratically and rambles like a lunatic. It is a notable mention due to the common patriarchal imagery of woman being emotional. Also, hysteria in itself is a condition that is commonly associated with women. In fact during the earlier period of study concerning hysteria, it is established that hysteria is a condition that happen exclusively to women in which it is believed that hysteria happens because of a disruption that takes place inside of the womb (Gilman, et al., 1993). The word hysteria itself originated from the Latin word 'hystera' meaning 'uterus' or 'womb.' Contrary to patriarchal view however, Lula is mostly depicted as a more superior entity as compared to Clay. This can be seen by observing most of their conversation where in most cases Lula is leading the direction of their conversation. Lula is also manipulative, in which she manipulates Clay through seduction and lies so that presumably she can kill him with as minimal resistance as possible. Her manipulation of Clay is an indication of planning and preparation which concede with rationality. In this case both of Lula's rationality and superiority contradict the commonly accepted patriarchal imagery of women.

Going hand-in-hand with the patriarchal concept of men, Clay also embodies the traits that patriarchy commonly assume towards men. During the early scene of the play, Clay is described as a well-dressed, well-behaved, and well-educated young man, a perfect image of a gentleman. Moreover, when faced with Lula's incessant temptation and harassment, Clay shows a great deal of self-control and willpower, both of which are an indication of rational personality and patience which commonly attributed towards men in a patriarchal society. However towards the

end of the play, in which more prominently shown in the later part of scene II, Clay is shown to have lost his self-control, in which he slaps Lula and retort her violently, mentioning murder and killing while at it. This in itself is an indication that Clay can abandon his rationality and fall into an irrational and unpredictable state. Moreover, Clay is a poet a profession that, in a country such as Indonesia which also a country with patriarchal ideas, is not considered a 'real' profession befitting a man, hence contradicting a patriarchal point of view.

### **Rational and Irrational**

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, rational means '(of behavior, ideas, etc.) Based on reason rather than emotions,' while irrational means 'not based on, or not using, clear logical thought.' This binary opposition, rational and irrational, correlates with the black and white binary opposition in which the white people are commonly accepted as rational and civilized while the black people are usually considered as irrational and uncivilized. This conception has its roots all the way to the colonization era. During the colonization period the white people, or the western people, rapidly explore and colonize the orient in pursuit of resources and settlements. At this period the west with well organized and already form countries meet with the colored people and with it also come into contact with the colored people tribal custom and civilization. This contact has given the impression to the white people that the colored are still primitive and irrational due to their superstitious custom and tradition. While on the other hand, the western people almost magical appearance and weaponry has, at first, given off the impression of godhood towards the black people. This image of godhood, however, gradually

becomes the image of superiority and rationality as soon as the black people learned that the westerners are also human. This impression then go down throughout history and become internalized by both the white and the black people.

Lula, as the representative of the white people in *The Dutchman* is supposed to be rational and logical. However, throughout the play Lula is pictured as an impulsive woman that talks flippantly and ‘picks line from the air.’ In the later part of the play, during the scene where she tries to persuade Clay into performing the belly rub dance with her, her portrayal even go as far as someone who is both erratic and hysterical. Moreover, in the scene where she stabs Clay, it gives of the impression that she stabs Clay on impulse because of what Clay had just said. Jones even supports this idea by referring the stabbing Lula as a ‘girl.’ Lula, who is in her thirties, can hardly be considered as a girl. The reference ‘girl’ here functions as an indicator of impulsiveness which goes hand-in-hand with the inexperience that exists within the concept of youth. Finally, after the body of Clay has been disposed of, Lula picks her next target, another young black African-American who just entered the car, by only glancing at him with no background checks or other preliminary action indicating an impulsive and irrational decision.

Although Lula is easily recognized as an impulsive and irrational person, contradicting the common white people imagery, upon closer inspection she is in fact a very rational and methodical person. The base of this argument is Lula’s confession that she ‘lies a lot.’ By using the argument that Lula lies a lot it can be concluded that most of what she says, if not all, is a lie including her statement that Clay is a well-known type and that she is only guessing about his past and habits. This means that she does not guesses Clay’s past

and habit but instead she knows it as a fact. Therefore, it can be said that Lula has monitored Clay for a certain amount of time before their meeting in the subway train, a preliminary action before the execution. Secondly, basing on the argument that Lula lies a lot, it can also be concluded that her flippant and whimsical personality is also a lie. By basing her planning on the concept that the black people are irrational and impulsive, she created the personality that she shows through the most part of the play. As an impulsive and irrational person, Clay would have been easily lured by Lula’s sexual temptation and also easily provoked by her racial insults. Although resistant at first, this tactics proves to be effective, seeing how Clay finally become Lula’s victim. Another indication of Lula’s highly rational and methodical personality is the composure that she shows shortly after stabbing Clay, in which she shows no signs of panic nor regret. A composure befitting a professional and methodical killer.

Concerning Clay, despite his three button suit and his appropriate education, he still fits the traits that are commonly attributed towards the black people, irrational and impulsive. These traits are most notably shown when he finally lost his temper after Lula tries to invite him to perform the belly rub dance. His following act of violence by slapping Lula and short after continued by his monologue about murder perfectly suits the image of uncivilized black people who only know violence while acting only on impulse and do not think things through beforehand. However, the majority of Clay’s behavior indicates a rationality that is commonly attributed towards the white people. When Lula bombards him with surprisingly accurate details about his past and daily routines, Clay immediately tries to keep his composure while at the same time tries to rationalize the information, in which he

concludes that Lula might know his friend, Warren, or his sister, Georgia and proceed to inquire Lula about it. Furthermore, his monologue that he perform in the later part of scene II (Scene II line 99) which at first may seem to be erratic and irrational while at the same time violent, is in fact contains a staggering amount of cold hard logic. In his monologue Clay mentions murder several times, in which it is a solution that he propose on how black people should perform their protests instead of using art. In essence, Clay knows that the oppression and the madness that clutches the black people can be easily eradicated if only they would express their protest through a more practical action in this case murder. Clay even advises the white people not to promote logic and practicality towards the black people because they would be doomed if they do so. From a different point of view, this advice is a form of a throughout thinking because Clay does not only propose the solution on how the black people should start the black revolution, he also considers the main weakness of his very own solution. In other words the first most essential element to the black revolution that Clay proposes is also the main weakness, which is a cold hard logic and rationality. For if the black people does not obtain rationality, which promoted and taught by the whites, the black revolution through murder will not be set in motion.

### **Man and Beast**

Throughout the history, human always consider themselves as a being separate from the rest of living creature. However, after Darwin has exposed his theory of evolution, man starts to doubt their existence as the chosen species. After realizing that they are an animal that has developed a higher and complex cognitive process, human starts to question their humanity and along the way start

comparing themselves with animals. By using this as a basic idea, people starts to consider civilized, educated, and sometimes successfulness as a criteria in order for one to be considered as human or in this case 'man.' On the other hand, an uneducated, uncivilized and unsuccessful person is often considered as a lesser-man or more extremely as an animal or beast. The idea of comparing a human being with an animal or beast came into fruition if the said person did not possess the attribute that is considered as human-like, for example rationality. The idea will also come up if the person in question express the attributes that are commonly considered as animal-like, such as ruthlessness, impulsiveness and brutality.

The man and beast binary opposition discussed in this study ties closely with the black and white binary opposition due to the fact that black and white represent the opposition between the white and the black people. The white people, or the westerner, are commonly considered, and consider themselves, as an intellectual, civilized, and superior race, hence the whites or the westerners are considered as more human. The black, or the colored race for that matter, is always considered by the westerner as a less civilized and intellectual race to the point of referring them as savages. Hence the colored races are commonly considered as a lesser human, a state closer to the concept of animal and beast as compared to the westerner. Uniquely, the colored race subconsciously accepted and internalized this conception due to the fact that most of the colored races are victims of westerners' colonization.

In *The Dutchman*, both main characters, each, represents his/her respective race, also each represents one side of the man and beast binary opposition. Lula represents the whites or the westerner which consequently

made her the representative of 'man' side of the man and beast binary opposition. On the other hand, Clay who is the representative of the black people also consequently becomes the representative of the 'beast' side of man and beast binary opposition. Being true to each of their representative race and binary side, both Lula and Clay show qualities that holds them true as the representatives of man and beast. In Lula's case, her manipulative behavior that she shows throughout the play in order to kill Clay is an indication of intellectuality. Her chosen method, temptation and insult, is an indication that Lula had prepared beforehand to face an impulsive person. Although a blunder, it proves that Lula had a measure of planning before execution another indication of intellectuality. Both of the qualities mentioned beforehand coincide with the concept of 'man.' On the other hand, Clay as a representative of the black people also shows a good measure of beastly qualities. For instance, his obsession with murder as a way of liberating the black people is a clear indication of his bestial nature. It is commonly accepted that a civilized person will not resort to murder before exhausting all other option. In Clay's case, however, he immediately chooses murder over all other possible method before considering them.

Like all other binary opposition inherent in *The Dutchman*, the man and beast binary opposition also expresses ambivalence. For instance, the representative of the idea of 'man,' Lula, proves to be a beast of her own. Though it is true that her planning and choosing of method is an indication of intellect, her end goal, which is the murder of Clay, is hardly a humane thing to do. Also, Lula's flippant and seductive personality prominently shown throughout the play is hardly what one would consider as civilized. In fact instead of a human, the majority of Lula's behavioral pattern

closely resembles an animal that mainly follows her impulses.

On the other hand, despite of Clay's racial background, he shows attributes that commonly considered as humane and civilized. First of all, Clay is adequately educated, a feat rarely possessed by a black African American during *The Dutchman* setting's time frame. Clay is also a poet and he regularly reads poem, both of which one would hardly consider as an uncivilized profession and action. Therefore, although his racial background is often considered as a lesser human being, or a beast, Clay also proves to be the contrary.

### **Master and Slave**

Much like the rest of binary oppositions found throughout the play, the master and slave binary opposition in the *Dutchman* is based on the black and white binary opposition. The binary opposition comes into form due the historical background between the white and black people. During the colonization era, the white or the westerner realize that they need more laborers in order to help them build their colonies. After exhausting most of the local human resources, the westerners realize that they are in an immediate need of more laborers. The westerner then finds the labor force they need in the form of slaves imported from Africa. This establishes the image of white people or the westerner as master due to the fact that most people who owned slaves are the white people. Unfortunately, this long history of slavery also establishes the image of a slave and the oppressed towards the black or the African American people.

As a representative of the white or the western people, Lula takes the role of master throughout the play. It is true that both her behavior and action does not fit a masterly conduct or given off the impression that command respect. However

her machination in manipulating Clay has earned her the role of master. By using her charm, which is further enhanced by her skimpy summer dress, Lula does not only charm Clay but she also manipulates him into agreeing to go to her apartment with her, in which she presumably will kill him. This plan of Lula works to a certain level because it is shown in the play that Clay plays along with her in their imaginary visit to Lula's apartment. Apart from her manipulation through her beauty, Lula also manipulates Clay through the outlet of anger. Lula's manipulation through anger serves as her contingency plan in which if her manipulation through sexual drive should fail she still have a secondary means to manipulate Clay. In practice throughout the play, Lula performs both of her manipulation technique simultaneously, presumably so that she can ensnare Clay no matter which of her manipulation come into fruition first. The second 'master' attribute that Lula possess is her seemingly godlike knowledge over Clay. She achieves this effect by mentioning where Clay live, what he is been doing, and Clay's past with staggering accuracy. True, Lula claims that she easily guessed all of her guesses because Clay is a well-known type, but her guessing accuracy will make one wonder.

On the other hand, Clay who is a member of the black or African American people also takes the role of a slave. As it is mentioned before, Clay is manipulated by Lula through seduction and intimidation. In other word, Clay's free will has been taken away by Lula, therefore in this case Clay fits the definition of a slave.

Moreover in the section discussing *The Dutchman's* title, it is mentioned that Clay is in the process of searching for his self-identity. While he is searching, Clay has taken into himself the image that are commonly associated with the white people as his own. In other words, Clay has

idolized the white people and the white people's image. For Clay the image of a white man is an ideal state of being. In other words, Clay is so enamored by the image of a white man, so far in fact that he has taken it as his. This action also categorizes him as a slave due to the fact that Clay is actually enslaved by his image of an ideal state of being.

However, both Lula and Clay each contradict their master and slave role. It is true that if Clay is taken into consideration, Lula fits the role of a 'master.' However, if Lula's fate is to be taken into consideration it is entirely a different matter. In the section discussing the title of *The Dutchman*, it is mentioned that Lula consider herself as being cursed in a similar manner to the legendary Dutchman. Her curse forces her to keep killing black people who have similar circumstances with Clay. This is shown most prominently in the end of the play, where Lula is shown looking at a young African American who just enters the train, presumably establishing him as her next victim. This young African American, like Clay, is educated which is shown by the books he is carrying. In other words, Lula's cursed state has disabled her to choose her own action freely which in turn made her a slave of her curse. It is also mentioned that Lula is in a state of denial, blaming her action on the imaginary curse. In this case, it can be concluded that Lula is a slave of her own delusion of an imaginary curse that she created in order to justify her actions.

Just like Lula who contradicts her 'master' role, Clay also contradicts his 'slave' role. Firstly, throughout the play clay is shown to possess a certain attribute that is commonly associated with someone who mastered a certain form of art. That certain attribute is Clay's reservation. Clay's reservation is most prominently shown in scene one, in which Clay is shown



to respond to Lula's aggressive approach with a measure of calmness and composure. The second instance where Clay contradicts his role as the 'slave' is ironically shown in his admiration towards the image of an ideal white man. While it is true that Clay is enslaved by his idolization of the ideal white man, he is also freed by it. By taking the image of his ideal white man, Clay has freed himself from the image of the black man. In essence by assuming his new appearance, Clay has set himself free from the image that is commonly attributed towards black people. When he is dressed in his three button suit, Clay's being is free from the idea of brute, uncivilized, and inferior. Alluding the idea with the binary opposition of man and beast, Clay fits the definition of 'master' due to the fact that he is in control of his own fate. The idea is that Clay chose to become a white man on his own free will. Instead of succumbing to a fate of violence or servitude, Clay has chosen to break free by obtaining education in pursue of a higher state of being.

### IDEOLOGY IN THE 'THE DUTCHMAN'

The ideology that is contained within the play *The Dutchman* can be found by examining all of the above binary opposition and several facts surrounding the play. The writer of the play and its main character are both black people, therefore this play originally needs to promote the superiority of the black as compared to the whites. However, not only the main character assume the white culture and clothing, the play also displays the physical triumph of the white against the black when Lula murders Clay. At first this seems to be a counterproductive move when considering the fact that this play function as a harsh criticism towards the white people. However, it become sensible when the black people history of slavery is taken

into account. The long history of slavery and colonization has internalized the concept that the white people is superior into the subconscious of the black people. Therefore, as a member of the black people, LeRoi Jones cannot escape this ideology that has been rooted deeply in his subconscious. However hard Jones tries to criticize the white people, the ideology that has taken root in himself has subtly guided him into incorporating the superiority of the whites ideology in his play *The Dutchman*. The ideology is also supported by Lula's position in the binary oppositions' hierarchy. For a female character that functions as an image of madness and impulsiveness she is primarily shown as the master in the master and slave binary opposition's hierarchy. At the ending of the play, it is also shown that Lula triumph over Clay. Both of the previous points also support the hypothesis that *The Dutchman* is controlled by the 'superiority of the whites' ideology.

### CONCLUSION

Despite the criticism and uproar that surrounds it, LeRoi Jones' *The Dutchman* was critically acclaimed by the literary community. The play itself is a harsh criticism towards both the white society that discriminates the black people and towards the black people who cannot maintain their culture and therefore adopted the white people culture.

The title of the play itself is an allusion towards the legendary Flying Dutchman. In which Lula becomes representation of the Flying Dutchman whereas both of them are eternally cursed. In *The Dutchman* case, he is cursed to forever search for a woman who would die for him whereas in Lula's case, she is cursed to eternally hunt and kill black people who tries to assume the white people culture. However, after a careful observation, it is apparent that Clay is also

cursed. In Clay's case he is cursed to eternally search for a self-identity in a world that undermine and reject his true self. The title itself is also an allusion towards the grim history of slavery in the United States of America. *The Dutchman* title alludes to the title of a renowned opera by Richard Wagner, *Der Fliegende Holländer*, which literary means 'The flying Dutchman.' Both works features the theme of curse and discrimination. The title of the play, *The Dutchman* implies a connection to the renowned Dutch Slavers, and the earlier name of New York 'New Amsterdam.' Finally the title is also an allusion towards discrimination in which the Netherlands is considered to be a lower class of human by the Germans.

The play also carries many binary opposition elements inside it. These binary oppositions are black and white, man and woman, rational and irrational, man and beast and master and slave. Each binary opposition are shown throughout the two main character Lula and Clay, in which both of them each takes the role of a representation of one part of that opposes each other. However, the deconstructive criticism demands that every binary opposition is to be shown its ambivalence to show that ambivalence exists within them.

Firstly when on precept black and white binary opposition it is commonly accepted that white is better than black because white represents purity while black represents corruption. However, according to the book of genesis and the theory behind color, it is revealed that black is actually the state of purity in which it represents nothingness while white is the one that corrupt the color black. In accordance to the play, Lula who is the representation of white is shown as the character who is corrupted most, while clay is the one less to the point of naivety proving the binary's ambivalence.

Secondly, the man and woman binary opposition are also shown to possess undecidability. The woman character, Lula, is shown to be contradicting the patriarchal imagery of woman in which she shows a great deal of rationality. While Clay on the other hand contradicts it by showing his unpredictable emotional nature and his choice of profession.

The rational and irrational binary opposition shows its undecidability prominently throughout the characters of the play. Lula who is shown to be whimsical and flippant is actually capable of a rational planning and precise execution. While on the other hand Clay who is shown to be rational through his rationalization attempt and his ability to suggest a cold solution, is also capable of impulsive and irrational behavior show in his violent outburst.

Similar to the rational and irrational binary opposition, man and beast binary opposition shows its undecidability mainly through the character Lula and Clay. Lula who is shown to be an intellectual person shown by her careful planning and choice of method which categorize her as a civilized 'man'. However her flirtatious, explosive, and unpredictable behavior along with her act of murdering Clay would be considered as a 'lower than a human action' therefore classifying her as a beast. In Clay's case however, despite his violent outburst and constant obsession as murder that classify him as a 'beast', his normally civilized and calm nature as well as his reasoning capability classify him as a 'man'.

The master and slave binary opposition also takes it undecidability from both of the main character. Lula suits the role of 'master' due to the fact that she is white, in which slave masters are almost always a white person, and her ability to manipulate Clay. However, despite her being a master

over Clay, she is a slave to her curse in which she cannot stop killing black people who assumes white people persona. It is also possible that she is a slave of her own delusion of a curse that she creates to justify her killings. While in Clay's case, he assumes the role of the slave due to him being manipulated by Lula and his obsession with the intellectual white people persona. However, Clay able to master his own destiny by breaking away from the savage and violent image of a black man and thereafter taken into himself the image of and intellectual white person.

Finally, all of the previous binary opposition analysis have given a contribution towards the finding of The Dutchman ideology. Despite trying to criticize the white people for their oppression, Jones still incorporate the concept of white superiority over the black. Therefore, it can be concluded that 'the superiority of the whites' ideology is incorporated within Jones' play The Dutchman.

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