

## **A Postcolonial Reading of Walcott's Pantomime**

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### **Abstract**

The paper aims at presenting a postcolonial reading of Walcott's Pantomime (1978). In the play, Walcott reintroduces Defoe's Robinson Crusoe in a reversed manner, giving voice and power to the voiceless, marginalized "Friday," and letting him gradually obtain and enjoy his postcolonial dignified, well-respected, politically independent, and culturally assimilated position .

Reversal, switching and/or blurring roles, the parrot, the manipulation of and transition between acts, and language are Walcott's means to show and survey the political, economic and psychological nature of, and development in, the relationship between the ex-colonizer and the ex-colonized in the postcolonial era.

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## قراءة ما بعد الاستعمار لمسرحية "بانثوميم" لوالكوت

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### ملخص

يهدف البحث إلى تقديم قراءة ما بعد الاستعمار لمسرحية "بانثوميم" لوالكوت. حيث قام والكوت بإعادة تقديم رواية "روبنسون كروزو" للكاتب ديفوبطريقة معكوسة ، معطيا بذلك الصوت والقوة لشخصية "فرايداي" المهمشة التي لا صوت لها، سامحا له في فترة ما بعد الاستعمار بالحصول التدريجي على ، والتمتع بمكانة محترمة، مستقلة سياسيا وندمجة ثقافيا. والوسائل التي استخدمها والكوت لإظهار واستعراض طبيعة وتطور العلاقة السياسية، والاقتصادية، والنفسية بين من كان مستعمرا وبين من سبق و استعمره، وذلك في فترة ما بعد الاستعمار، هي "العكس"، وتبديل و/أو طمس الأدوار، واللبغاء، وطريقة تناول فصلى المسرحية والانتقال بينهما، و اللغة.

The winner of Nobel Prize in Literature in 1992, Derek Walcott is a well-known West Indian poet, dramatist and essayist. He was born in 1930 in Castries, the capital city of the small Caribbean island of St. Lucia, a former British colony. He is known for his mixed European and African heritage; he is the son of a British father and a West Indian mother. In fact, both of his grandfathers are white, and both of his grandmothers have been the descendents of slaves. Walcott draws on his mixed-race background in describing his African heritage and the personal conflicts he has faced. Having learned English as a second language, and acutely aware of its status as the language of colonial power, he never loses sight of his Caribbean identity. He is "poised between . . . Africa and the West, between slavery and intellectualism, between the native Caribbean tongue and English learned from books, [and]between the black and white in his own body" (Dickey 8). He uses literature to explore themes of ethnicity, cultural chauvinism, and political inequality. In fact, he "has been widely praised as . . . a deeply committed postcolonial artist whose explorations of racial, cultural, and historical consciousness in the contemporary Caribbean have been considered moving, erudite, and technically masterful" (Witalec 499).

The present study aims at analyzing Walcott's play *Pantomime* (1978), "one of his best and most performed plays" (King 360), from a postcolonial perspective, revealing how the characters have undergone a state of metamorphosis as they rehearse the pantomime performance of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Of special concern is the transformation in the master-servant, white-black, colonizer-colonized, European-West Indian, superior-inferior, civilized-uncivilized, employer-employee relationship of Harry Trewe, the manger of a hotel in Tobago, and Jackson Philip, his factotum and sole employee. The study is to reveal how the two characters end up by treating each other on terms of equality and mutual respect, irrespective of color, political, economic or social background. They are finally bound in a human, man-to-man relationship.

In the colonial era, in order to justify their political control of their colonial empire and economic exploitation of its resources, and under the guise of carrying the sacred mission of civilizing and

culturally enlightening the colonized, "laboring selflessly for mankind, attending the sick, and spreading culture to the nonliterate" (Memmi 3), the colonizers kept talking about "the inferiority of the colonized, the primitive nature of other races, [and] the barbaric depravity of colonized societies" (Ashcroft et al., *Concepts* 43). This act brainwashed the colonized, making them really believe in their inferiority and backwardness, hence servitude to, and imitation of, the colonizers. They were estranged in their own colonies, neglected and marginalized. This sense of cultural inferiority has left its deep dark scars in the colonized even after the independence of their colonies, i.e. during the postcolonial era.

The term "postcolonial" is used "to signify the political, linguistic and cultural experience of societies that were former European colonies" (Ashcroft et al., *Concepts* 186). From the late 1970s the term has been used to discuss the various cultural effects of colonization. In most recent accounts, it has been "primarily concerned to examine the processes and effects of, and reaction to, European colonialism from the sixteenth century up to . . . the present day" (Ashcroft et al., *Concepts* 188). As Walder explains, it "demands a kind of double awareness: of the colonial inheritance as it continues to operate within a specific culture, community or country; and of the changing relations between these cultures, communities and countries in the modern world" (2). Waugh also describes it as that

which questions, overturns, and/or critically refracts colonial authority . . . [and] its claims to superiority. Postcolonialism therefore refers to those theories, texts, political strategies, and modes of activism that engage in such questioning that aim to challenge structural inequalities and bring about social justice. (341-42)

In short, postcolonial theory celebrates "the neglected or marginalized, bringing with it a particular politics, history and geography" (Walder 60).

A post-colonial reading of a text is defined as a

way of reading and rereading texts of both metropolitan and colonial cultures to draw deliberate attention to the profound and inescapable effects of colonization on literary production; anthropological accounts; historical records; administrative and scientific writing. It is

a form of deconstructive reading most usually applied to works emanating from the colonizers (but may be applied to works by the colonized) which demonstrates the extent to which the text contradicts its underlying assumptions (civilization, justice, aesthetics, sensibility, race) and reveals its (often unwitting) colonialist ideologies and processes. (Ashcroft et al., *Concepts* 192)

In his book *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said notices that some postcolonial writers bear their past within them "as potential revised visions of the past tending toward a new future . . . in which the formerly silent native speaks and acts on territory taken back from the empire" (35). Other postcolonial writers "have put literary 'classics' to new uses for which they were scarcely originally intended. . . . They also make available new ways of dealing with the 'classics' which make new meanings possible" (McLeod 143). In *Pantomime*, Walcott carries out the two missions of having a future vision through which he gives voice to the marginalized by rewriting a classic novel reversely.

For Walcott, *Robinson Crusoe* represents "the first West Indian novel" (Walcott, "Figure" 36), and the figure of Crusoe is a symbol of "Adam, Christopher Columbus . . . [and] God. . . . He is Adam because he is the first inhabitant of a second paradise. He is Columbus because he has discovered this new world, by accident, by fatality. He is God because he . . . control[s] his creation, he rules the world he has made" (Walcott, "Figure" 35). Through *Pantomime*, Walcott reintroduces the character of Crusoe in a reversed manner, turning him into a black master to a white slave. In other words, he is to endow Friday, the slave, with the characteristics of Adam, Columbus and God who will carry out the mission of creating the indigenous anew and/or introducing his special postcolonial vision of the indigenous West Indians.

In the play, as a starting point for his special postcolonial treatment of the colonizer-colonized relationship, Walcott introduces characters, establishes a setting and creates an atmosphere similar to those of Defoe's novel: an almost deserted island with no human beings other than the master and his slave/servant. "*The action takes place in a gazebo on the edge of a cliff, part of a guest house on the island of Tobago, West Indies*" (*Pantomime* 130). Walcott makes it clear that the

place, called the Castaway Guest House, is in a deplorable, uncivilized condition, rather like a shipwreck. Jackson describes it, "The toilet catch asthma, the air condition got ague, the front-balcony rail missing four teet', and every minute the fridge like it dancing the Shango . . . brrgudup .. jukjuk . . . brrugudup. . . Termites jumping like steel band in the foundations" (*Pantomime* 132). Harry also gives the impression that the whole island of Tobago is primitive and undeveloped. He says, "Attempted suicide in a Third World country. You can't leave a note because the pencils break, you can't cut your wrist with the local blades . . ." (*Pantomime* 132).

Outwardly, Harry and Jackson are similar to the characters of Crusoe and Friday: a British, white, rich master versus a Trinidadian, black, poor factotum. Harry Trewe is both a king and an exiled person on the island. He is a retired British actor who has performed an intentional act of self exile as a result of personal, domestic and professional disasters and decline in his homeland. When he "moves to an exotic locale . . . the technological advantage of his civilization gives him immediate superiority over the indigenous population" and turns him into a colonialist (Brydon and Tiffin 43). Like Crusoe before finding Friday, Harry is suffering from loneliness, insomnia, and boredom. He tells Jackson, "I'm so bloody bored I could burst into tears" (*Pantomime* 131). Jackson also notes to Harry that it is "loneliness that sucking your soul as dry as the sun suck a dry shell" (*Pantomime* 148). In addition, as is the case in the novel after finding and saving Friday, the main action revolves around Crusoe and Friday.

In Defoe's novel, Friday's total servitude and enslavement to Crusoe are stressed right from their first encounter. Crusoe reports this encounter and describes Friday's submissive action:

He lays his head flat upon the ground, close to my foot, and sets my other foot upon his head. . . . and after this, made all the signs to me of subjection, servitude, and submission imaginable, to let me know how he would serve me as long as he liv'd. I . . . teach him to speak to me. . . . I likewise taught him to say Master, and then let him know, that was to be my name. (150)

By transforming Defoe's novel into a play, and by reversing the roles of Crusoe and Friday in the performed pantomime, Walcott gives

voice and prominence to the marginalized, almost silent voice of Friday. In fact, the "play sets up a context which displaces the centralized voice of Defoe's narrator while harnessing the theatrical power of local performance traditions" (Gilbert and Tompkins 36). Walcott shakes Crusoe's position as the "sole source of authority" (Jones 226). The single narrative voice of the novel has become an ongoing interactive dialogue and a dynamic confrontation between two characters that seem to play the game of shifting powers. In that game it is apparent that Jackson enjoys precedence. He talks and behaves in a manner that gives him privilege over Harry. While Harry seems hesitant, relatively weak and psychologically imbalanced, Jackson is strong-willed, decisive, well-balanced, dignified and independent. Comparing the two characters and observing their relative powers, both in the performed pantomime and in reality, King notices that although Harry represents the white economic power and domination, Jackson, the black employee turns to be "the one who is stronger, tougher, dominating, [and] threatening" (361). King adds that Harry, as the symbol of the postcolonial British, seems "soft, defeated, nursing old wounds" (360).

Jackson's state as a servant does not prevent him from facing his master and freely choosing when to take part in, or abstain from, Harry's pantomime. For example, at the beginning of Act I, he refuses to take part in the performance. He says to Harry, "I tell you, I ain't no actor, and I ain't walking in front a set of tourists naked playing cannibal" (*Pantomime* 132). He even threatens him, "If you ain't want me to resign, best drop the topic" (*Pantomime* 134). However, by the end of Act I, it is Jackson who insists on going on in the rehearsal. He finds it a good chance to express himself freely, liberate the hushed "Friday" in himself, and take on the challenge of "making Harry see the myth from Friday's perspective" (Juneja 262).

Walcott gives Jackson the chance to perform on his own conditions. He has the freedom to adopt whatever role he chooses – master, servant, goat or parrot – perform it the way he likes, and freely switch roles during performance without any interference from Harry. He tells Harry, "I could play anybody discovering anywhere, but I don't want you to tell me when and where to draw the line! Or what to

discover and when to discover it" (*Pantomime* 143). He does not respond to Harry's special perception of Crusoe's story, "a romantic, clichéd, rhyming song about Crusoe's isolation on a deserted island beach" (Gilbert and Tompkins 36). Instead, he insists on presenting his own version of it, "a calypso tune that foreshadows a possible social reorganization" (Gilbert and Tompkins 36). He is even allowed to give Harry orders and manipulate him into playacting whatever character, in whatever manner, he chooses – Harry has played the roles of Friday, the goat, the sea bird and the parrot. In other words, he turns into the main actor, sole author and director of the performance. This works as a symbol of the dynamics of his personal and political relationship with Harry, suggesting a practical, postcolonial attempt at self-liberation from his servitude to and mimicry of the ex-colonizer.

In reality, Jackson does not adopt the role of the submissive, obedient servant. Early on the play, he introduces himself to Harry as a self-dignified, "serious" person coming from "a very serious place" (*Pantomime* 135). Out of his self-esteem, he abides to work regulations and refuses to be manipulated. He makes it clear that he does not smoke on duty and that his "shift is seven-thirty to one" (*Pantomime* 136), after which he is free to do whatever he wants. He also objects to Harry's attempt to record his calypso saying, "You start to exploit me already?" (*Pantomime* 141). He behaves decisively, even violently, once his dignity and/or reputation are at risk. For instance, on seeing Harry naked, he says, "[I]f anybody should happen to pass, my name is immediately mud" (*Pantomime* 134). His self-esteem prevents him from accepting being treated as an inferior child, even if he is served by Harry, the white man/master. In this respect he addresses Harry, "I don't feel you have any right to mama-guy me, because I is a big man with three children, all outside. Now, being served by a white man ain't no big deal for me. . . . so it's not going to be any particularly thrilling experience" (*Pantomime* 133). This attitude shakes Harry's imperial authority and belittles, even erases, his ex-charming influence – as a representative of the ex-colonizer – on the independent, indigenous people.

Due to his free will, and caring nothing about Harry's threat to dismiss him, Jackson insists on resuming the pantomime the way Harry



describes as "serious art". This insistence not only marks a change in the master-servant relationship – in which Jackson rebuts the notion of the obedient, submissive servant to the authoritative, manipulating, oppressive master – but it also gives Jackson a chance to seriously turn the whole matter into a general political, historical issue of prejudice and imperialism. He firmly addresses Harry:

I think it is a matter of prejudice, I think that you cannot believe: one: that I can act, and two: that any black man should play Robinson Crusoe. . . . Here I am getting into *my* part and you object. This is the story . . . this is history. This moment that we are now acting here is the history of imperialism; it's nothing less than that. And I don't think that I can—should—concede my getting into a part halfway and abandoning things, just because you, as my superior, give me orders.

People become independent. (*Pantomime* 143)

Jackson is thus able to shake the conventional fixed roles of the superior colonizer and the inferior colonized. In the postcolonial era, the European authority and imperial relations are challenged, and the way is open for free self-expression, discussion and negotiation.

Through the reversed roles in the performed pantomime, Jackson presses the situation to its extreme when he succeeds in making Harry feel and voice the bitterness of the indigenous whose civilization and identity are sabotaged by colonialism. In the role of the white slave, whom Jackson chooses to name Thursday, Harry says objecting to the whole situation:

This cannibal, who is Christian, would have to start unlearning his Christianity. He would . . . have to be taught by this—African that everything was wrong, that what he was doing . . . for nearly two thousand years . . . was wrong. That his civilization, his culture, his whatever was . . . *horrible*. Was all . . . wrong. Barbarous, I mean, you know. And Crusoe would then have to teach him things like, you know, about . . . Africa, his gods, patamba, and so on . . . and it would get very, very complicated, and I suppose ultimately it would be very boring. (*Pantomime* 144)

Jackson keeps on establishing a parallel between his situation with Harry and the story/history of the British Empire with the

indigenous in the colonial and postcolonial eras. In his reference to the colonial era he stresses the indigenous' servitude to, and blind mimicry of, the British colonialists. In the role of the colonized indigenous/Friday, highlighting the different dialects for the word "master" in different British colonies, and emphasizing Crusoe as the symbol of the British colonialist, he tells Harry:

For three hundred years I served you. . . . boss, bwana, effendi, bacra, sahib . . . in that sun that never set on your empire I was your shadow, I did what you did, boss, bwana, effendi, bacra, sahib . . . that was my pantomime. Every movement you made, your shadow copied . . . and you smiled at me as a child does smile at his shadow's helpless obedience, boss, bwana, effendi, bacra, sahib, Mr. Crusoe. (*Pantomime* 138)

Referring to the postcolonial era, in which the development in the master-servant relationship is characterized by the indigenous' /Fridays' independence and dominance, Jackson stresses that "it is the shadow that start dominating the child, it is the servant that start dominating the master . . . and that is the victory of the shadow, boss. And that is why all them Pakistani and West Indians in England, all them immigrant Fridays driving all you so crazy" (*Pantomime* 138). This postcolonial condition is symbolically acted out in the play when Jackson takes the lead in improvising, rehearsing, role-playing and directing the whole pantomime with Harry totally under his control. In that pantomime the slave will be the boss and Robinson Crusoe will be the shadow.

In the introductory calypso, Jackson sums up the classical, historical condition of the master-servant, the Crusoe-Friday, or the colonizer-colonized relationship which he will reverse. He sings:

I want to tell you 'bout Robinson Crusoe.  
He tell Friday, when I do so, do so.  
Whatever I do, you must do like me.  
He make Friday a good Friday Bohbole;  
That was the first example of slavery,  
'Cause I am still Friday and you ain't me.  
.....  
But one day things bound to go in reverse,  
With Crusoe the slave and Friday the boss. (*Pantomime* 140)

By the end of the play, the audience are introduced to the postcolonial Friday – the voiced, liberated, independent, proud, assimilated indigenous. He is no longer the marginalized almost silent/voiceless shadow.

Walcott makes both Harry and Jackson shift between the roles of Crusoe and Friday, i.e. the identities of the master and the slave/servant. He also blurs the line between reality and fiction. In fact, "race, class, culture, and personal differences become obscures" (Fiet 145). This might indicate the ongoing tension between the ex-colonizer and the ex-colonized, suggesting the desire of each to keep a distinct, well-defined position in the postcolonial era. This is more evident with Jackson who wants to achieve a "better and truer self-representation" (Childs and Williams 106).

Walcott also suggests the tension between the two characters through the way he manipulates the play's acts and the transition between these acts. Act I can be considered an open discussion and a rehearsal of the pantomime, while Act II is the real performance. Act I starts with Jackson serving breakfast to Harry, who invites him to take part in the pantomime, and ends with the two characters "watch[ing] each other for several beats" (*Pantomime* 143), and with Jackson's order to Harry, who tries to straighten the table, "Don't touch anything. . . . Now that . . . is MY order" (*Pantomime* 145). This paves the way for the actual shift in the relationship between the ex-colonizer and ex-colonized in the postcolonial era, in which the once colonized transforms from a submissive recipient and/or executer of orders to an initiator of such orders.

Act II takes the audience to another level, blending together the real character of Harry Trewe and the fictional Robinson Crusoe, the British colonialist. This is exemplified in Jackson's addressing Harry, "Thank you, Mr. Robinson. . . . Mr. Trewe, sir! Cru-soe, Trewe-so! (*Faster*) Crusoe-Trusoe, Robinson Trewe-so!" (*Pantomime* 147). This directly invites the audience to consider the two characters as representatives of the (ex-)colonizer and (ex-)colonized and observe the nature of their political, economic and psychological relationship.

Act II reflects the transformation of the two characters' relationship from master-to-servant to man-to-man. "Let's sit down

man to man, and have a drink" (*Pantomime* 147), Harry invites Jackson. He calls him "Mr. Philip" (*Pantomime* 147), and apologizes for his earlier humiliating treatment. He addresses Jackson, "I wasn't trying to humiliate you. I meant nothing by it" (*Pantomime* 148). Embedded in the man-to-man relationship is a kind of confrontation or a combat between the two characters. In this confrontation, Jackson's precedence is observed once again, especially when Walcott turns Harry into a mimic parrot or an imitative monkey to Jackson. When Jackson says he wants to pee, Harry says he will join him. This insinuates Jackson's mocking comment, "Monkey see, monkey do" (*Pantomime* 153), and gets Harry's irritated, defensive response, "You're the bloody ape, mate. You people just came down from the trees" (*Pantomime* 153). A little later Jackson repeats, "Ape! Mimic!" (*Pantomime* 155). This carries their confrontation a step further turning it into a real one, between the master or the ex-colonizer and the independent or the ex-colonized, in which the mimic ape or the shadow kills the shadow in himself, gets his freedom, and achieves equality with the master. A major device through which Jackson achieves this freedom is the parrot.

The parrot plays a special role in Defoe's novel and Walcott's play as far as the colonizer-colonized and master-servant/subject relationships are concerned. In Defoe's novel, the parrot is positively viewed from Crusoe's perspective. Crusoe teaches it to say first its name then Crusoe's name. "It was some years before I could make him speak. However, at last I taught him to call me by my Name very familiarly," Crusoe reports (Defoe 87). He explains, "I quickly learn'd him to know his own Name, and at last to speak it out pretty loud POLL, which was the first Word I ever heard spoken in the island by any Mouth but my own" (Defoe 94). Crusoe also narrates how he was once awakened from sleep by the parrot's voice calling him by name several times, "Robin, Robin, Robin Crusoe, poor Robin Crusoe, where are you Robin Crusoe?" (Defoe 112). In Defoe's novel, the parrot is thus portrayed as an entertaining creature, keeping Crusoe's company and decreasing his sense of isolation and loneliness. It acts as a nice, obedient, mimic subject converting Crusoe's "encounter with the voice of the other . . . into an encounter with the self, a mirroring of the self in an act of self-recording" (Marshall 908). This is not the case with the

parrot of Walcott's play.

In *Pantomime*, following the principle of reversal, Walcott not only relates the parrot to the servant Jackson, but also presents it negatively. It acts as an intimidating creature, stirring Jackson's anger and dissatisfaction all the time by reminding him of his past slavery to the colonial imperialist. This appears through repeatedly and teasingly saying, "Heinegger" (*Pantomime* 133), whenever Jackson passes by. To Jackson, this word means "Hi nigger". Harry's attempt to explain that "Heinegger" is the name of the parrot's ex-German owner does not either convince or satisfy Jackson. Showing his dissatisfaction with the parrot and its alluding words, Jackson says to Harry, "[I]t playing a little havoc with me nerves. This is my fifth report. I am marking them down. Language is ideas, Mr. Trewe. And I think that this pre-colonial parrot have the wrong idea" (*Pantomime* 133).

On another level, viewing it as a mimic creature, the parrot's repetition of what it has been taught to repeat "appears to posit language as an oppressive imperialist tool" (Gilbert 130) through which the colonizer uses the colonized as a puppet or a toy working according to the colonizer's whims. The parrot is thus "prejudiced" and corrupted by the influence of the colonizer in the "same damn way they corrupt a child. By their upbringing," as Jackson puts it (*Pantomime* 133). It is this helpless condition which Jackson opposes to and wants to change when he says to Harry, "That parrot survive from a pre-colonial epoch, Mr. Trewe, and if it want to last in Trinidad and Tobago, then it go have to adjust" (*Pantomime* 133). It makes him eager to kill it from the very beginning of the play, as he says, "I see nothing wrong in taking him out the cage at dawn, blindfolding the bitch, giving him the last cigarette if he want it, lining him up against the garden wall, and perforating his arse by firing squad" (*Pantomime* 133).

Jackson strangles the parrot in himself when he actually strangles the parrot and hands its dead body to the shocked Harry who formerly referred to it as "a Creole. parrot" (*Pantomime* 133). Jackson wants to practically emphasize that he is no longer "Friday", the submissive, imitative "Creole" slave. Adopting the role of Friday, he says, "Me na strangle him, bwana. Him choke from prejudice"

(*Pantomime* 156). After throwing the dead parrot into the sea, Harry takes its role. He flutters his wings and squawks calling Jackson "Heinegger. Heinegger" (*Pantomime* 156), an address which might indicate that according to Harry, Jackson is still the nigger or at least the inferior follower, an idea which Jackson rejects totally when a little later he announces, "That master-and-servant shit finish" (*Pantomime* 157). Then he orders Harry to bring him a beer, a gesture stressing he is no longer adopting the role of a servant.

One can claim that Jackson carries out a special kind of revolution against the colonizer. That revolution starts cunningly, smoothly and peacefully and ends violently by the symbolic murder of the parrot. The tools of this revolution are Jackson's pride in his origin, his self-confidence, his intelligence, good manipulation, and smart improvisation of the whole pantomime in a manner which serves his aims and personal interests. Harry realizes the real aim of Jackson's action at a late stage of the play. In this respect he addresses Jackson, "You've been pretending indifference to this game, Jackson, but you've manipulated it your way, haven't you? Now you can spew out all that bitterness in fun, can't you?" (*Pantomime* 155). Gilbert refers to the theatrical value of the pantomime when she writes, "Theatre becomes a kind of culture laboratory in which identities are tested, remodeled, played out – and played with" (131).

In the play, the authority and precedence of the master are so much shaken that he, feeling threatened, either takes guard against the servant or befriends him. Harry's general apprehension and discomfort from Jackson are noticed and expressed verbally, in action and in reaction. For example, when Harry is leaning in the deck chair with his eyes closed, Jackson comes quite close to him with hammer in hand. This makes Harry bolt from the chair. A little later, Harry says to Jackson, "Don't think for one second that I'm not up on your game, Jackson. You're playing the stage nigger with me. I'm an actor, you know. It's a smile in front and a dagger behind your back, right? Or the smile itself is the bloody dagger" (*Pantomime* 150). In addition, it is not quite acceptable for Harry to be addressed without the title "Mr." Jackson observes to Harry, "I just call you plain Trewe . . . and I notice that give you a slight shock. Just a little twitch of the lip, but a shock all the same, eh, Trewe? You see? You twitch again" (*Pantomime* 149).

On the other hand, Jackson stresses the notion that, even after their independence, the indigenous still suffer from the ex-colonizer's hostility and skepticism. The ex-colonizer is still thinking of the indigenous passively as representatives of "ugliness, sin, darkness, [and] immorality" (Fanon 192). This is evident in Jackson's reaction to Harry's threat to commit suicide: ". . . it ain't going be suicide. They go say I push you" (*Pantomime* 132).

In fact, Harry's apprehension might develop into a desire to kill. Jackson observes that Harry's "whole honest intention is to take that feller [i.e. Jackson] by the crotch and rip out he stones, and dig out he eyes and leave him for corbeaux to pick" (*Pantomime* 149). In addition, when Jackson role-plays Ellen, Harry is intimidated into virtually killing/attacking her with an ice pick. Those situations thus reflect a mutual defect in the postcolonial relationship between the indigenous and the ex-colonizer.

Jackson's ultimate goal of his confrontation with Harry is to properly practice and enjoy his postcolonial independence and lead a dignified living, built on equality with the ex-colonizer and devoid of any form of humiliation or a feeling of gratitude for just practicing one's own rights. However, he makes it clear that the indigenous are not yet psychologically free from an innate feeling of being marginalized and inferior. They are not yet fully qualified to perceive and practice their independence. This is humorously expressed in his refusal to use Harry's bathroom and insistence on using the servants' lavatory. He explains:

Equality is equality and art is art, Mr. Harry. . . . You mustn't rush things, people have to slide into independence. They give these islands independence so fast that people still ain't recover from the shock, so they pissing and wiping their hands indiscriminately. . . . and if you have to go, you go to your place [bathroom], and I'll go to mine, and let's keep things that way until I can feel I can use your towels without a profound sense of gratitude, and you could if you wanted, a little later maybe, walk round the guest house in the dark, put your foot in the squelch of those who missed the pit by the outhouse . . . without feeling degraded, and we can then respect each other as artists. (*Pantomime* 154)

Another tool Jackson uses in his revolution is language. "Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchal structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth,' 'order,' and 'reality' become established. Such power is rejected in the emergence of an effective post-colonial voice" (Ashcroft et al., *Empire* 7). In Defoe's novel, *Robinson Crusoe* imposes his own language on Friday, teaching him to say "Master," "yes" and "no". He exerts no attempt to know anything about Friday's real name or native language. Instead he makes "him know his name should be Friday" (Defoe 150). In fact, Friday is viewed mainly as "my savage, for so I call him now," Crusoe says (Defoe 159). He becomes no more than a mimic parrot recording Crusoe's language. He is a practical enactment of colonial relations as David Marshall puts it when he writes:

The enactment of colonial relations . . . is familiar: either the other is considered to be so other from the self that it is denied a name, language and identity of its own, named as a savage or barbarian; or, the other is converted into an image of the self, so it no longer faces the self as an other. (915)

Friday's adopted language is thus a tool of enslavement, subjection and identity disruption. In *Robinson Crusoe*, nothing is revealed about Friday's native language. Only English is the prevailing, perpetuated and appropriated language. This is not the case in *Pantomime*.

In *Pantomime*, applying the principle of reversal to language, Jackson, in the role of Crusoe, or Adam, who gives things their names in his own language, makes that language take precedence over and, at times, obliterate English. Inventing that language, he says, "Amaka nobo sakamaka khaki pants kamaluma Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ kamalogo!. . . . Kamalongo kaba! (*Meaning: Jesus is dead!*)" (*Pantomime* 139). In fact, Harry and the English-speaking audience hardly grasp that language. In the stage directions, the meaning of some words is offered. For example, the words "Rogoongo! (*Meaning: keep it rolling*)" and "Booora! (*Meaning the world. . . .*)" (*Pantomime* 139). To make the situation more intense for Harry, Jackson performs a short scene, in front of an imaginary rolling camera, in which he carries the job of naming things and teaching them to the audience. He points



*out the objects which he rechristens, shaking or hitting them violently. Slams table) Patamba! (Rattles beach chair) Bakarada! Bakarada! (Holds up a cup, points with other hand) Banda! (Drops cup) Banda karan! (Puts his arm around Harry; points at him) Subu! (Faster, pointing) Masz! (Stamping the floor) Zohgooooor! (Resting his snoring head on his closed palms) Oma! Omaaa! (Kneels, looking skyward. Pauses; eyes closed) Booora! Booora! (Meaning the world. Silence. He rises) Cut! And dat is what it was like, before you come here with your table this and cup that. (Pantomime 139)*

In this scene, Jackson wants to teach Harry the African language, i.e. the language of the colonialist, in order to make him practically realize what "would it feel like to have to acquire an alien language that belonged to the master" (Juneja 262).

In reality, Jackson's spoken language, which is a mixture of English and Creole, is another means of self-liberation, identification and empowerment. It situates him above his historical origin as a nigger, a servant or a slave. He upgrades himself by incorporating English, the language of the other, into his own language and freely switching between the two languages. He is not acting like a mirror or a record to the ex-colonizer. He defies the other by neither totally adopting or parroting English nor abandoning his native language. He also shakes the total colonial authority by creating an identifying third, or in-between, language, the special accent of which distinguishes him from that of the colonizer. Commenting on the likes of Jackson's speech manner, Ahern writes:

By speaking the colonial language while retaining an accent and a diction that differentiate them from the colonizers, post colonial subjects are supposed to reflect the colonial presence without appropriating it. Thus, postcolonial subjects represent the power of the colonizer while signaling that they themselves are outside of it.  
(1)

In other words, Jackson appears as an assimilated, hybrid person carrying both the white civilization of the ex-colonizer and the native West Indian civilization. He reflects Walcott's belief that "[w]e take as long as other fellow creatures in the natural world to adapt and then blend into our habits" ("The Caribbean" 10). Through Jackson's

character and language Walcott "splices together the multiple and overlapping legacies of the colonizer and the colonized in the Caribbean to claim the rich diversity of the region's cultural resources while still recognizing the trauma of the colonial experience" (Pollard 198).

From an early stage of the play, as indicated in the stage directions, Walcott stresses Jackson's switch between two accents. For example, on bringing breakfast to Harry, Jackson says, "Mr. Trewe? (*English accent*) Mr. Trewe, your scramble eggs is here! are here! (*Creole accent*) You hear, Mr. Trewe? I here wid you eggs! (*English accent*) Are you in there?" (*Pantomime* 131). In addition, he deliberately violates or sabotages English grammar and/or proper pronunciation. For example, he says, "Your breakfast ready" and "I bringing breakfast" (*Pantomime* 131). On fanning the eggs with one hand, he says, "What the hell I doing? That ain't go heat them. It go make them more cold" (*Pantomime* 131). A little later he addresses Harry, "We trying we best, sir, since all you gone" (*Pantomime* 132), and "I don't feel you have any right to mama-guy me, because I is a big man" (*Pantomime* 135). He also says, "In that sun that never set, they's your shadow" (*Pantomime* 138). He mispronounces the word "tragedy" which he utters "tradegey" (*Pantomime* 150). This makes Harry say, "You mispronounce words on purpose, don't you, Jackson?" (*Pantomime* 150).

Walcott makes Jackson stick to and feel confident about his special English with its mistakes. For example, when Harry wants to check the word "Mariner", which Jackson wrongly utters "Marina", Jackson insists, "'The Rime of the Ancient Marina.' So I learn it in the Fourth Standard" (*Pantomime* 159). He adds, "I stand corrected. Now, you ain't see English crazy? I could sit down right next to you and tell you I *stand* corrected" (*Pantomime* 159). He even goes as far as mocking Harry's language mistakes. For example, he mocks the word "fuflee", which Harry writes by mistake, "So, how you does fuflee, Mr. Harry? Is Anglo-Saxon English?" (*Pantomime* 151). Harry explains that he wants to express the speaker's hesitation in uttering the word "flee", and asks Jackson to leave the word out. Jackson teasingly responds, "Just because I read it wrong. I know the word 'flee,' you know. Like to take off. Flee, faster than run. Is the extra *F* you put in

there so close to flee that had me saying fuflee like a damn ass, but le' we leave it in, nuh? One fuflee ain't go kill anybody. Much less bite them" (*Pantomime* 151). Thus, the play shows that English is not taken for granted as the colonizer's sacred, untouchable, or invincible language. It is not the only source of precedence and empowerment. Other languages/dialects compete with it. Even a new form of deformed English takes precedence with the indigenous. By his constant and effective shift in "accent, tone, and diction . . . [Jackson] satirizes [and rejects] the hierarchy of identity categories generally connoted by those linguistic features" (Ahern 4). This constitutes a positive change in the nature of the indigenous' relationship with the ex-colonizers in the postcolonial era. On the other hand, it works as an identity marker the way Zabrus observes, "A character's utterance in a novel [or a play] may . . . be interpreted as the performing of 'an act of identity' or 'speech-act' whereby the character reveals his/her search for identity and for social role" (79).

In addition, with his English and Creole languages, Jackson reflects Walcott's belief that "English language is nobody's special property" (Baer 109). Walcott explains, "I do not consider English to be the language of my masters. I consider language to be my birthright. I happen to have been born in an English and a Creole place, and love both languages" (Baer 82). In this way Jackson's character acquires strength and validity as a true representation of Walcott's perception of the postcolonial indigenous and pride in his own assimilation.

The forms of address, which each character uses towards the other within the course of the play, are another linguistic factor revealing their postcolonial relationship. Such forms reflect the dynamic shift of power between the two characters. They especially indicate Jackson's subversion of Harry's superiority and mastery. They gradually reduce the gap between the master and the servant and reflect the newly born intimate, almost equal relationship.

Most of Harry's forms of address to Jackson reflect his colonial prejudice. He addresses him as "Jackson" (*Pantomime* 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 138, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 154, 156), "Friday" (*Pantomime* 131), "boy" (*Pantomime* 134, 155, 156), "lad" (*Pantomime* 136), "my boy" (*Pantomime* 137),

"you bastard" (*Pantomime* 149), "bloody ape" (*Pantomime* 153), "ape" (*Pantomime* 155), "mimic" (*Pantomime* 155), on killing the parrot, "son of a bitch" (*Pantomime* 156), and "bloody savage" (*Pantomime* 156). However, especially towards the end of the play, after his "fake" superiority is shaken through Jackson's constant upgrading confrontation, he slips into respectful forms. He even opens himself up to Jackson so much that he urges him, "Try to call me Trewe" (*Pantomime* 152), and addresses him as "mate" (*Pantomime* 136, 139, 152, 159), "Big Chief" (*Pantomime* 136), "friend" (*Pantomime* 139, 155), "my friend" (*Pantomime* 153), and "man" (*Pantomime* 147). He feels so close to him that he tells him about his ex-wife and the death of his only son. He even describes him as a "kind man" (*Pantomime* 157). More than once he addresses him as "Mr. Jackson" (*Pantomime* 133), "Mr. Philips" (*Pantomime* 135), and "Mr. Philip" (*Pantomime* 136, 147, 160, 161).

On the other hand, most of the time, practicing his official job as a servant, Jackson addresses Harry formally and respectfully as "Mr. Trewe" (*Pantomime* 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 138, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 147, 149, 151, 155, 157, 159, 160, 161), "sir" (*Pantomime* 131, 132, 133, 134, 145, 146, 147, 148, 150, 152, 153), "Mr. Harry" (*Pantomime* 134, 137, 146, 151, 154), "boss" (*Pantomime* 138), "Chief" (*Pantomime* 135), "master" (*Pantomime* 139), and, in the role of Friday, "Mr. Robinson" (*Pantomime* 147). But when he is able to gradually bridge the gap and shake Harry's prejudice, Jackson addresses him cordially as "boy" (*Pantomime* 146, 155, 156), "Trewe" (*Pantomime* 149, 155), "Harry" (*Pantomime* 155, 156, 159), "Harold and "Harry" (*Pantomime* 158, 159), "pardner" (*Pantomime* 159, 161), and "Robinson" (*Pantomime* 161).

The gradual change in forms of address between the two characters takes the audience smoothly to the end of the play in which the colonizer-colonized gap is bridged, and master-servant formality is discarded with. Their confrontation, or power game, ends positively in a manner reflecting the nature of the new postcolonial relation between the ex-colonizer and the ex-colonized. Commenting on the end of the play, Taylor writes:

The play . . . does not end on . . . [a] note of a return to a 'colonial' *status quo ante*, at least on the individual, person-to-person, existential level. Indeed, Trewe and Philip both ultimately abandon completely the distance, formality and protocols of employer and employee, 'white' and 'black', English and Creole that had prevented them from playing the revised text of *Robinson Crusoe* to the bitter end. (385)

In a final calypso, acting like a chorus presenting the epilogue of the play, with a final commentary and a special stress on the outcome of the events, in which he is finally able to bring about social justice and challenge structural inequalities, Jackson sings the initial part of a previous calypso, which summarizes the play and points out how Harry asks him to play a role in the pantomime, then he adds the lines, "let we act together with we heart and soul. / It go be man to man, and we go do it fine, / and we go give it the title pantomime" (*Pantomime* 161). Such concluding lines stress Harry's final man-to-man treatment of Jackson whose final words, away from the calypso, can be considered a further stress on his independence and freedom of choice. Immediately after announcing his resignation, he goes back on his announcement and, surprisingly, asks for a raise. He says to Harry, "I benignly resign, you fire me" (*Pantomime* 161). Then he says addressing Harry as "Robinson," silencing the music, the final applause of the audience and Harry's participation in the song, "Wait! Wait! Hold it! Starting from Friday, Robinson, we could talk 'bout a raise?" (*Pantomime* 161). Here Jackson shows practically that he is totally free either to remain at or leave work. On the other hand, with his new egalitarian relationship with Harry, and the final achievement of mutual respect, he finds nothing wrong in resuming his work as his servant/employee, especially with a raise in salary.

The close reading of the play has revealed that Walcott takes from Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* a means to tackle postcolonialism. He manipulates and reintroduces the characters of Crusoe and Friday to present his own perspective of the ex-colonizer's relationship with the ex-colonized in the postcolonial era. He starts by establishing an atmosphere, creating a situation and introducing characters similar to those of Defoe's novel. Then he begins to reverse situations, switch character roles and blur characters in a manner that enables the audience to see the situation mainly from the perspective of the

marginalized, neglected, voiceless native/servant, rather than the master, and practically feel the suffering and bitterness of the whole situation.

There is a mutual defect in the postcolonial relationship between the indigenous and the ex-colonizers. The ex-colonizers may still have their own skepticism and prejudices against the indigenous. On the other hand, despite their political independence and social reconciliation with the idea of adopting and/or adapting with the civilization of the ex-colonizers and assimilating it with their own civilization, the postcolonial indigenous are still economically dependent and psychologically suffering as a result of their long-practiced servitude and inferiority all through the colonial era.

All through the play, the audience follow the steps through which both Harry and Jackson go to finally come in terms with one another on the basis of a man-to-man, rather than master-to-servant, relationship. Reversal, the parrot, the manipulation of and the transition between the play's acts, and language are Walcott's means to show and survey the political, economic and psychological nature of this relationship.

Walcott uses the parrot to stress the new independent condition of his alleged postcolonial "Friday", i.e. the servant Jackson. Jackson strangles the parrot in himself or the mimic shadow when he actually strangles the parrot. Jackson's language, with its tone, accent and diction, which combines and switches between English and Creole, reflects the postcolonial condition of the assimilated indigenous who live in harmony with their own civilization and the British one. Forms of address detect the gradual change in the nature of the two characters' relationship with one another.

The end of the play, in which Jackson freely chooses to resume working for Harry with a raise in salary, especially after receiving and ensuring a well-respected egalitarian treatment, conveys the final note which Walcott wants the audience to leave the theatre with: despite his economic dependence on the ex-colonizer, the ex-colonized is self-dignified, free and assimilated. He has nothing to feel ashamed of or inferior about. He is not trapped in the past with its prejudices. He looks forward to building up his dignity and self-esteem as well as living in harmony with, and availing from, all the factors and resources that contribute to producing his postcolonial assimilated character.

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