Autopoeisis of Performance and the "Mutual Mutation" of Identity in Derek Walcott's *Pantomime*

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Man *makes himself*, and he only makes himself
completely in proportion
as he desacralizes himself and the world.
- Derek Walcott

If the public does not frequent our literary
masterpiece, it is because
those masterpieces are literary, that is to say,
fixed and fixed in forms that no longer respond
to the needs of time.
- Antonin Artaud

As a major cultural tool, the theater has encoded the day-to-day realities of colonized people and added momentum to the realizations of their collective consciousness. In so doing, it has also empowered both performers and spectators and galvanized agency within them. Instead of remaining as a mere reflector of social realities and the dynamic flux of culture, the theater, in the Caribbean region, from the mid-twentieth century, has turned out to be strategic, exploring and interpreting. Premier among the Anglophone playwrights, Nobel Prize winner Derek Walcott deftly manipulated monocultural and monolingual source-texts for stage adaptation; these adaptations brought to the fore the jarring juxtaposition of popular, folk materials with the European theater troupe's imposition of the model of Western theater. In Erika Fischer-Litchte's succinct observation, "any given culture would appropriate individual elements of other traditions and weave them into its own theatrical fabric in order to expand its possibilities and means of expression" (114). While the classics captivated and rekindled his imagination, Walcott had also found in them an ample opportunity to intervene and challenge the tropologies of Empire. From the early phase of his creative career, the archetypes of Adam, Odysseus and Crusoe would fire his imagination. First produced in 1978, his comic masterpiece *Pantomime* is a generic transposition or a major stage adaptation of the Crusoe narrative; its "pre-text" is imbued with local signification and alternative interpretations. Its setting, locale and characters have accommodated disparate performance styles and their conflicting cultural legacies.

In place of resistance and oppositional ruses of carnivalesque performance, this essay concentrates on the way *Pantomime* de-authorizes the existing script and forges new forms of dramaticity which redeem the static, transparent representation on stage. By dissolving the dualism of aesthetic and political, presence and representation, it reveals the paradox, pressure, and anxieties surrounding its performance situation. Its self-reflexive structure and metatheatrical dimension allow the actors to devise acting strategies which transform rehearsal into an experience of self-making. Through continual improvisation and mutation, not only is the master script corrupted, but a fissure is opened between the director's interpretation and the expression of the performers. In this comic two-hander, Walcott, through his thoughtful insights, presents the metonymic tension between text and performance. Through an examination of how the actors and characters act out their own corporeal logic "within the framework: hidden impulses, energy dynamics and mechanics of the body …" (Lehmann 43), this paper investigates how they release themselves from the constraints of the text into creative self-expression.

I

The master narrative of *Robinson Crusoe* had spurred Walcott to find a fitting allegorical situation for the West Indian artist and led him to create "a multiplicity of Crusoes who collectively dismantle the very idea of hierarchical positions" (Thieme 78). Walcott's Crusoe was not a mere arch-colonizer or Friday a colonized subject, locked into polar opposition; rather they were "protean" hybrid figures, or Creolized Caribbean subjects. Thus the stage rendition of the Ur-text of Defoe transforms the Crusoe-Friday relation into an opportunity for re-imagining the race relations through two performers with a background in the field of entertainment - Harry Trewe and Philip Jackson. The innate hierarchy of the relation is effectively displaced through verbal and non-verbal gesture. By exploring a spectrum of behaviors in both of these actors, *Pantomime* truly becomes an "inventive riff' (Gilbert 129). In this reimagining, the interconnected cultural lives of the two actors meet at the interstices of different worlds, experiences, and expectations. This rewrite not only elicits slapstick, a jovial performance for the upcoming tourist season, but entails creative disruptions of the master narrative and suspends its ideological signs. In the process, it also dismantles the linear narrative and realistic representation of the original. Mounting a reprisal of Defoe's classic on stage, *Pantomime* collapses the interdependence of the text, the author and the player and transmutes the ready script into a 'new' text.

Structured around a popular form of vaudeville or *commedia dell'arte*, *Pantomime* adopts the style of Devising Theater, where the actors veer between the individual and the scripted parts and constantly improvise to problematize the representation of a 'real' real. It is not the text that prescribes the meaning of the performance; rather, it is the construction of the text within the specific apparatus of the ceremony that creates the performative force. Performance does not merely echo the text; rather it reconstructs it. Unlike theatrical communication in which gestures and a series of bodily movements convey meaning between manifestator and recipient, the rehearsal of the Crusoe-Panto becomes a "doing"; a process fissured with gaps and contradictions. Walcott's play provides a framework in which the text is reduced to "just one element among others and no longer the womblike origin of the whole show" (Danan 17) and the actors find an opportunity to perform, stripped of mimetic responsibilities and engaging with their playful self-reflexivity. As its mimetic dimension slowly begins to recede, and the actors perform as self-conscious subjects, the link between the author, director, and character is severed. Its initial plan of inverse rendition, laced with wit and piquant humor, seeks to dismantle the oppressive structure of power. As the actions unfold, the syncretic performance effectively 'de-codes' and 're-codes' the ideological signs embedded in the master narrative and refashions the stage into a site of departure rather than transcription.

The major proponents of Performance Studies like Artaud, Turner, and Schenecher were averse to the notion of 'text' as a static written record; they argued that besides articulating social-cultural contexts, the performance could expand the realm of creative freedom and guide the characters to "create themselves, to change, to become" (Lehmann 48). As their roles and responsibilities are not necessarily defined or restricted by the text-based theater, here, the professional entertainers, Jackson and Harry grow beyond their determinate part of 'text-bearers.' They experience the performance as an aesthetic and social process in which the relationships are negotiated and power struggles fought out. Jackson knows well that the comic skit of the Crusoe narrative will be heavily inflicted with histories of racial injustice and slavery. Harry, meanwhile, jauntily starts to get into the part of Friday and starts to take his pants off. With a sharp retort Jackson reminds him that he should maintain decency. It marks the commencement of how, within their own social and cultural context, they will investigate and integrate their personal views and experiences. This paves the way for transcending the present state of their social and professional lives and exploring states of becoming. As two gifted actors, they play their part imaginatively and innovatively to render the script more vulnerable. Harry's proposed rehearsal falters as he begins to lose control over the text as the 'light' comic skit assumes a new, challenging performative dimension. Working in collaboration, they

role-play, masquerade, and role-swap and in so doing the fragmentary experience of their cultural location begins to come to the fore.

The plot sets out with Jackson and Harry's plan to swap their racial identity; moving away from the organizational, deterministic categories of race, they devise their performance. These acts of 'devising' continuously undermine the dominant discourse and the hegemony of the 'text.' What shapes and moulds the play are the beliefs and personal politics of both characters. When Harry tosses up the plan of doing Crusoe-Panto, what happens next is most demonstrative of 'devising':

> HARRY: Friday, you, bring Crusoe, me, breakfast now. Crusoe hungry! (133)

At the outset, Jackson refuses to be interpellated:

> JACKSON: Mr. Trewe, you come back with the same rack again? I tell you, I ain't no actor, and I ain't walking in front of a set of tourists naked playing cannibal. Carnival, but not canni-bal (133).

By pitting "carnival" against "canni-bal," Jackson has resisted the transformation of the island into exotica. Aware of consumerist propaganda, he rebuts the commodification of native culture and the eagerness of attracting "Yankee dollars." In the rampant and aggressive capitalist logic, cultural artefacts are turned into commodities and local cultural customs are regularly catered for the consumption of the guests by the tourism industry. Jackson knew that to be manipulated by Harry's directorial guidelines is to fall into the trappings of the profit-seeking tourist industry. His refusal to cede to the directorial authority appears to resist what Rosi Braidotti has called "becoming third-world of the first world" (26). Performance helps invent forms of experience which destabilize the pre-given assumption of discrete categories of people or region. In what follows, Harry's notion of an essentialized 'third-world' will be disputed by Jackson's confident counterclaim. He calls the guests "casualties" and reminds the master of the need to provide the basic amenities for the guests before arranging the show. He repudiates the commercial interest of hosting entertainment and urges Harry to renovate the guest- house before the tourist season:

> JACKSON: This hotel like a hospital. 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 … brrgudp … jujuk … brrugudp. Is no wonder that the carpenter collapse. Termites jumping like steelband in the foundations. (133)

Though a waiter, he reminds Harry, the hotelier, of according priorities to amenities for the revival of his business which unsettles the master-slave hierarchy:

> JACKSON: Try giving them the basics: Food. Water. Shelter. They ain't shipwrecked, they pay in advance for their vacation (133).

After his grudging entry into panto, Jackson sets out to beat Harry at his own game. His grudge is not merely prompted by personal issues but by the memory of loss and suffering:

> … in the 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 … (stops giggling) and you smiled as a child does smile at his shadow's obedience … (137).

Extracted from the larger questions of colonial history, Jackson's rejoinder to the colonial axiom, here, unlocks "the archives of public and private memory" (Kaul 125). Harry's proposed walk as a "cannibal" under the tourists' voyeuristic gaze suggests how he expects his handyman to count upon the benevolence of the master. Jackson's non-coercive attitude as a performer is resistive of what Dabydeen has called the convenience and availability of the Blacks for the business of 'commerce' and 'civilization' (105). Here, Jackson's role-playing explores the continuum between the colonialist ideology of the mid-seventeenth century and late twentieth-century neo-colonial ethics of profit and loss and also repudiates the vaunt of industry and progress. Jackson's iteration of the colonial axioms as well as his manoeuvring of the seeming truism in colonial politics—"the sun that never sets on your empire"—underline how the colonial authority is split within or is deeply ambivalent and "how the signs of authority can be translated and appropriated by the colonized" subject (Bhabha 55). Meanwhile Jackson's assertive improvisation articulates a hybrid, postcolonial subject position and promises a productive confrontation with the epistemologies of race.

From the early Saint-Lucian plays, Walcott brought to the fore the "small voices of history" to offer resistance to the practice of domination and oppression; while performing the regular menial duty of serving breakfast to his master, he gestures towards "effective political action" (Gopal 142). His regular early morning duty is re-coded into an "everyday pantomime." His reassessment of the voices from the "margins" within the center or the metropolitan West underscores the diasporic population as a disturbing presence within the homogeneous collective of the nation:

> JACKSON: And that is why all them Pakistani, and West Indians in England, all them immigrant Fridays driving you all so crazy till you go mad. In that sun that never set, they's your shadow, you can't shake them off (137).

This strident claim of the "global minorities" and their identification with other "national and international histories and geographies" (Bhabha ix-xxv) remained a major concern of Walcott's "cosmopolitan" worldview. Jackson as a Black subject "does not

merely recall the past as a social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past" (Bhabha 10). By claiming identity to be divided, incomplete, always "in flux" and by identifying Friday's stories with woes of those other "wretched of the earth," those other "unhomely lives," Jackson points to the limitations of the dangers of fixity and fetishism in identity formation. His parodic acting with self-referential cultural views destabilizes the ontology of the colonized Black subject and challenges the traditional model of locating the subject in one particular nation-state and culture. With his versatile acting, Jackson refuses to be immured in the attributed identity and proceeds to exhibit "performance of identity as iteration" (Bhabha 10) which generates possibilities of "re-creation of the self"(Bhabha 12) or self-fashioning.

In another of his cross-cultural initiations, Jackson re-names himself "Thursday"; a rejoinder to what Bhabha calls the "coercive right of the Western noun" (Bhabha 334). Walcott wrenches away from Crusoe the authority to name his slave and indicates the violence inherent in the politics of naming. Such parodic speech is an attempt at enunciating postcolonial subjectivity within the discourse of slavery, or indentured servitude; it steadfastly discards attributed identity upon the slave and the blacks. As Hegel put it, "[t]he only essential connection between the negroes and the Europeans is slavery … we may conclude slavery to have been the occasion of the increase in human feeling among the Negroes" (qtd. in Gilroy 41). This Hegelian phrase, used as an epigraph to the fourth chapter of Gilroy's ground-breaking work *Black Atlantic*, emphasizes the slave's significance in recuperating Black modernity and the transnational Black experience. In situating his chore of serving breakfast against the backdrop of historical master-slave narratives, Jackson demonstrates how his act of "colonial mimicry" is expressive of "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha 122). Jackson's mimic acts, be they verbal or gestural, no doubt produce its "excess" and "difference" and move towards further self-fashioning. Though Harry intended the Pantomime to be a "man to man" experience, it begins to appear blurred with memories of violence and oppression. Harry's assumed cultural superiority is disrupted as Jackson calls into question his reiteration of the "third world" stereotype:

> HARRY: (jumping down) I'm not a suicide, Jackson. It's a good act, but you never read the reviews. It would be too exasperating, anyway.
>
> JACKSON: What, sir?
>
> HARRY: 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 …
>
> JACKSON: We trying we best, sir, since all you gone (133).

This interaction not only teases out the attempts of reclaiming the cultural dignity of the colonized; it also disrupts the stasis of identity and interrogates the paradigm of "thirdworld-ism." This centrist assumption and historical construction of a specific position undergo a process which "discovers a new continent of performance, a new kind into which the 'actors' have mutated" (Lehmann 43). Here the performance practice unsettles seemingly natural connections between motivation and reasonable action for both Jackson and Harry (playing a reverse rendition of Crusoe and Friday) and also contravenes the conventional concept of a dramatic character.

II

Within the framework of a light-hearted comic skit, Walcott's play eliminates the transparent representation, and the hierarchical arrangement, of Defoe's original text. Resonant of Derrida's challenge to consider the script as "citation" rather than "origin," Walcott's reimagining of Crusoe-Friday relations ceaselessly makes fun of the serious. From the outset, Harry insists on making it "light" and suggests an evading detour towards making an "art." Here, Harry and Jackson's different performance styles—Calypso style and British Music Hall Comedy—are enmeshed to re-configure power relations. In his espousal of radical theatrical form, Brecht had dismissed the text as the ultimate authority and theater as more of an evolving "process." After several decades, as the concept of postdramatic theater began to gain ground, the theater *was* found to lean heavily on the process of de-emphasizing text, narrative, and fictional character. Jackson's playful allusions to the Crusoe story, and their de-coding, unsettle the notion of the script as an antecedent to drama. As it is set adrift from the context of theatrical production, the action eschews the linear progress. After the action is set in motion, the proposed "script" of the reverse rendition of *Robinson Crusoe* comes under erasure; through the entanglement of different cultural systems, the script undermines the epistemological and political authority of Europe.

Improvisation and devising as major strategies of 'making' theater underline the indeterminacy of the 'text' and its authorial design. As a performance event confronts authority, or supposed authorial intention, this rehearsal appears to take precedence over 'script.' In his seminal work *Postdramatic Theatre*, Lehmann noted that drama and theater exist inseparably only in the popular imagination and that the audience's attempt to organize the cohesive ideas of the plot from the performance ends up in frustration. In the "contact zone" of theater, cultures collide and collude over the course of a performance; the maintenance of kinship of disparate cultural performances becomes declarative of shared humanity while claiming the uniqueness of each participatory culture. Performance, as one of its major proponents

Victor Turner had found, is a process of learning and theater is a major mutual space of performance which retains the grammar and vocabulary of different performance styles. Despite Harry's reminder to focus on entertainment only, Jackson finds his role of Black Crusoe entwined with political macro-histories:

> HARRY: Got really carried away that time, didn't you? It's pantomime, Jackson, keep it light. Improvise! (137).

Such gestures and manoeuvers cause discomfort and undermine the claim of directorial control; Harry exploits his superior position to stop or restart the rehearsal. As Shalini Puri contends, " …'man to man' interaction [is] misleading because Harry can stop the play whenever he likes, pull rank and revert to being master instead of servant or equal" (120). Harry, assuming directorial authority, now reminds his co-actor:

> HARRY: We're trying to do something light, just a little pantomime, a little satire, a little picong. But if you take things seriously, we might commit Art, which is a crime in this kind of society. (140).

All that Harry wants to put up, here, is a rehearsal before staging; a show set within a fixed duration and circumscribed space. Instructed by his master, Jackson reluctantly takes part in it: "Mr. Trewe, I keep begging you to stop trying to make an entertainer out of me. I finish with show business … If you ain't want me to resign, best drop the topic …" (102). While Jackson is an extrovert, a lively performer, Harry is "stiff-lipped" and of "unemotional reserve"; but they both act by maintaining a critical distance from the script. They are no longer mimes who must embody a role, but functionaries who have to make an inventory of it. Like early Walcottian heroes, Jackson also acts in a non-conformist way; he transgresses, time and again, to interrogate and subvert the apparatus of cultural hegemony. As Biodun Jeyifo observes, "… Jackson Philip [sic] in particular deploy[s] a surfeit of brilliant, witty conceits and tropes to debunk this epistemic, nomenclatural hegemony" (378). The pre-season entertainment for the guests is manipulated into a subversive and thought-provoking strategy which paves the way for cultural self-definition. In one of his brilliant mimicries, Jackson acts out the 'history of imperialism'; he paddles his canoe, mimes a shipwreck and then proceeds to teach his white slaves in the African language. Harry's reminder of placing a time limit on piss-break and of advising to use a personal toilet is a ploy for extorting more labor which undermines 'man-to-man' communication. In the fluid theatrical exchange between Harry, the hotelier and his handyman, the 'real' irrupts, time and again; their self- reflexive gestures disrupt the 'fictive' roles and the performance dissolves the border between the actor and the character. Jackson's array of acting modes—"classic acting, creole acting" (131)—revises the discourses

of slavery and colonialism and tears apart the seeming authenticity of Defoe's classic. Jackson will not acquiesce to all the terms and conditions Harry has set for the Crusoe-panto: "I am not putting that old goatskin hat on my head and making an ass of myself for a million dollars" (134). He refuses to remain a servile follower and acts more like a reprimanding parent to his master. This self-devised acting and self-critical model of performative utterance conceive identity as "open" and "in the making" (Tejumola 4). No longer rooted in the collective, it constitutes itself within representation and undergoes a startling transformation. Rather than playing "victim," Jackson re-invents himself in the "playful openness of the text" (Jackie 101). Coming from different cultural backgrounds, they collaborate to forge a hybrid theatrical practice which inscribes Defoe's text within the Caribbean context:

> JACKSON: Now, the way I see it here: whether Robinson Crusoe was on a big boat or not, the idea is that he got … (pause) shipwrecked. So I … if I am supposed to play Robinson Crusoe my way, then I will choose the way in which I will get shipwrecked (139).

Their voices and visions diverge to destabilize the coherent theatrical experience and at the same time induce "the sense of liberation from conventional restrictions; the satisfaction of connecting with one's 'deeper self'" (Smart 102). In another of Walcott's major reprisal of the canon, *A Branch of the Blue Nile*, the actors undergo the tension between theater and reality; between local, African-based performance style and classical European style or between 'classical' and 'creole.' This tension of vibrant creolity and high seriousness, running through these two major rewrites, is described by Edward Baugh as "postcolonial angst, the so-called margin in relation to the center …" (143). The center-margin relation appears more fraught in this case as the performers find that staging the classics always involves counter-discursive performance which forges the link between Egypt and Trinidad or between eighteenth-century and late-twentieth-century Tobago. In moving across time and spatial boundaries, the actors demonstrate theater's disruptive potential, its fluidity:

> HARRY: We could turn this little place right here into a little cabaret, with some very witty acts. Build up the right audience. Get an edge on the others. So I thought, suppose I get this material down to two people. Me … and well, me and somebody else. Robinson Crusoe and Man Friday. (136)

Through this recreative performance, Jackson and Harry aspire to move beyond the confines of space and time and offer a new organizational format.

III

Etymologically, the English word 'theatre' derives from *theatron* which comes from *thea* ('to show') and the Caribbean theater, for Walcott, could rebuild a self-image and deliver or 'show' it up to the world. From the outset of his career, he was eager to surpass the attributed self-image of the Caribbean people: "To see ourselves, not as others see us, but with all the possibilities of the new country we are making" (Walcott *Critical* 15). Refusing to be stuck in a false image overdetermined by colonial fantasy, Walcott re-signified the stage and 'creolized' performance styles. In the Caribbean archipelago, non-scripted and ceremonial everyday performances were rich in theatricality; "theater was about us, in the streets, at lampfall in the kitchen doorway, but nothing was solemnized into significance" (*Twilight* 7). These vibrant customs and their performative dimension had no moorings in the scripted drama or the authority of playtexts. The complex signifying system of theater allows scope for a non-hegemonic encounter between drama and its performance. The 'creole' improvisation of Caribbean performance style enables non-linear devising where acting becomes a particular way of 'devising' or making theater which collapses the chasm between life and play, a staging existence and a scripted play. It defers closure and finality of adaptation for the Caribbean stage (Oddey 5). In such a format, acting no doubt becomes a liberatory experience. Harry and Jackson exchange their respective past performance experiences and a promise of "mutual respect" (135) forges a new bond between them. Their artistic *élan* demonstrated through gestures, movements and verbal gifts ensures creative freedom and restores lost self-confidence. For both these professional entertainers, the diminishment of character has attested to the new forms of dramaticity; rather than merely 'playing,' the actors here play "upon the character." Here Harry's off-season entertainment show is prompted by a desire to do a better "panto" than his ex-wife and redeem his frustration. Though Jackson only craves for a mere salary raise after the performance, returning to his pragmatic self, his creative freedom is underscored by a blithe mixing of daily labor with performative zeal which may be described in Paul Gilroy's phrase as "the centerpiece of emancipation" (qtd in Puri, 112).

His exuberantly carnivalized performance exhibits how the Caribbean stage may decenter imperial convention and its race-based hierarchy. Errol Hill, Walcott's noted predecessor, had also pointed out how freedom from slavery might also pave the way for indigenized Carnival which the native dramatists may seize on as an empowering

strategy. Walcott was strongly critical of carnival to be adapted for the stage, though sometimes he also borrowed from its forms to forge a counter-narrative. Instead of embodying the authorial vision, this parodic and flamboyant rendition, here, redefines the bequest of colonial legacies. Jackson argues with his master Harry why the reworking of the original is necessary:

> JACKSON: Now, I could go to the beach by myself with this hat, and I could play Robinson Crusoe, I could play Columbus, I could play Sir Francis Drake, I could play anybody, discovering anywhere, but I don't want anyone to tell me where and when to draw the line! (Pause) (140).

This ability to "play" upon character other than "replaying" his Crusoe part underscores a transgressive potential for theatrical performance. Rather than a "bi-polar clash of cultures," what engaged the postcolonial vision of Walcott was hybrid, creole acting in which the actor's relentless self-reflexivity draws our attention to the existential anomaly of colonially inspired contexts. Unlettered, Jackson pronounces "marina" in alluding to Coleridge's Ancient Mariner and desacralizes its immediate classic intertext:

> JACKSON: He not sitting in his shipwrecked arse bawling out … O silent sea, O wondrous sunset', and all that shit. No. He shipwrecked. He desperate, he hungry. He look up and see this fucking goat with fucking beard watching him and smiling, the goat with its forked fucking beard and square yellow eye, just like the fucking devil standing up there (*Pantomimes the goat and Crusoe in turn*)
> Smiling at him, and putting out its tongue and letting go one fucking *bleeeeeh*! And Robie ent thinking 'bout his wife and son and O silent sea and wondrous sunset; no, Robie is the First True Creole, so he watching the goat with his narrow eyes, narrow, and he say *blehhh,*eh? (146)

The highly inventive, gleeful rhetoric and piquant humor of Jackson, as Edward Baugh has described, is a "hilarious send-up of the language being given to the black savage by the civilized white man" (134). Such subversive strategy not only turns the gaze back upon the colonizer but also dismantles the hegemony of the imperial tongue; the exaggerated form of Creole diction and code-switching help him satirize the condescending tone of the servant and unsettle the directorial authority of Harry. The status quo of the stage experience is defied whenever verbal ploys of code-switching as well as piquant humor are adroitly maneuvered by Jackson (Megan 5). This sarcastic choice of diction foils the attempt to express coherent identity through the normative, "standard" version of the metropolitan tongue and topples the hierarchy of identity categories. His verbal gift reflected through parodic, disruptive speeches and the adroit use of mixed register and code-switching render the 'text' aporetic. In the re-telling of all source texts and the reworking of received cultural systems, Walcott's mongrelized vocabulary generates a new power relation through which "… identities are tested, remodelled, played out – and played with" (Gilbert 130). This autonomous, expressive recreation

destabilizes languages as a marker of identity and dismantles its own register.

The tensile space of rehearsal in *Pantomime* structures the non-linear performance in a way that the classic and creole acting merge and sunder. A creative confrontation between different positions and styles renders the "Crusoe-panto" indeterminate. If Harry values British pantomime and other cultural forms highly, he also avoids serious political acting or committing too much to art. Rather, being a purist, he lays bare his "unconscious" preference for creole, as Shalini Puri has put it in relation to Harry's " lack understanding that he himself is deeply Creole" (Puri, 126). He tries hard to convince his handyman, Jackson, that their rehearsal would be based upon mutual "respect" and not "hostility"; he describes himself as "liberal":

> HARRY: Aldermaston, Suez, Ban the Bomb, Burn the Bra, Pity the Poor Pakis, et cetera.
> I've even tried jumping up to the steel band at Notting Hill Gate, and I'd no idea I'd wind up in this ironic position of giving orders, but if the new script I've been given … (136).

He appears to have shed all racial prejudice behind to venture into a cross-cultural performance. In the theater's live context and its multiple sign-systems, the representation becomes more complicated than in the strident political discourses.

In his ground-breaking study of *Post Dramatic Theatre*, Hans-Thies Lehmann forefronts the evolution of a performative aesthetic and the ascendency of the material situation and stage situation over drama. Some of his insights illuminate our understanding of the way Walcott staged the Crusoe myth. Lehmann had argued that it makes no sense to expect that theater will represent political conflicts in the globalized world because the notion of conflict it entails is binaristic and oppositional. In postcolonial plays, however, the freedom articulated in stagecraft undermines the hegemony of any theatrical element, and the representation endows theater with an alternative political vision. Such theater breaks, through its aesthetic limitations, follows its political responsibility to let in other voices that are never heard in oppositional politics. In the 1990s the internationally acclaimed theater director, Thomas Ostermier had re-imagined the classics of Ibsen with a realist aesthetic and the inseparability of dramaturgy from the *mise-en-scène* and rupture of the actor from the character in his productions of *A Doll's House* and *Hedda Gabler.* Directed by Anne Bogart, *Going, Going, Gone* uses performance to interrogate textual functioning; its cast consists of an older and younger couple whose ages, gestures, costumes evoke the action of Albee's *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf*? In lieu of Albee's dialogues, the actors allude to literary pieces and colonial discourses/cultural stereotypes. Therefore, they speak in snatches from both the literary

and non-literary intertexts. The performance appears "as a realization, translation, interpretation or citation" (Norton 1102). As the director of Trinidad Theatre Workshop, Walcott was also actively involved in practices and rehearsal before mounting his plays upon the stage. No doubt the play-text of *Pantomime,* in setting up an encounter between local and received traditions, benefited from the directorial experience of theater-making. Here the stage-space is experienced as a space of multiple crossings and new theatricalities where identities may be negotiated and re-fashioned. Harry's tragedy of the loss of a son and failed marriage irrupts into a panto performance when Jackson impersonates his ex-wife and provokes Harry into an imagined argument. This cross-gender performance unsettles the stable notion of gender and the abiding sense of a gendered self, as Butler argues in her famous study *Bodies that Matter*, which questions the body's boundaries and normative constraints. Here the black body of the actor articulates the possibility of unsettling cultural determinism and subverting an identity grounded in purportedly ontological categories (Butler 520). Time and again, within the ambit of performance, Harry's traumatic past and failed career disrupt his actor's part and blur the life/art distinction. Sinking into the loneliness of a widower, he bitterly confesses:

> HARRY: so there's absolutely no hearth for Crusoe to go to home to. While you were up there, I rehearsed this thing (145).

When he waxes sentimental, Jackson goads him to overcome the trauma induced by all past setbacks;

> JACKSON: Crusoe must get up. He have to face a next day again (164).

After Harry has poured his heart out, Jackson motivates him out of his morose state. The performance now proves more revelatory and its outcome surpasses the immediate goal of being mere entertainment. With more emotional sharing, and expression of interpersonal understanding, they help us glimpse into the crevices of their mind. Moreover, the flux of performance allows the performers to find themselves as defying the status quo of theater through a fluid, mutating process and redeem the actors from the straitjacket of "essential identity" (Thieme 127).

Walcott had always been insistent about the "confessional" nature of this comic play. And the personal revelations of Harry and Jackson identify them more and more as actual human beings rather personae conditioned and constrained by historical convention. As Butler observes, "[a]s subjects, they are neither fully autonomous nor entirely determined, partaking in and partially responsible for the situation in which they are engaged" (*Performative,* 523). Of the two actors, it is Jackson who remains more disengaged and dispassionate about the

masquerades he performs; he is more self-dramatizing and aware of his own theatricality. All his individual gestures downplay the overdetermined cultural role and de-subjugate him from the structures of power. And as Jackson is not conceived as a "character," he is freed from the rational or reasonable behaviour who finds "a fractured whole with bits and pieces of character flying off the central theme" (35). Elinor Fuchs has considered this de-emphasizing of the modern concept of psychologically consistent dramatic characters and the emergence of fragmented, flowing, uncertain identities to be a sign of postmodern theater. Both Harry and Jackson in the course of their performance are stripped away from being mere *personae* that lay bare "existential nakedness, unconstructedness" (Craig 57-58). In such metatheater, their views, beliefs and ideas intersect and the participant's improvisatory output branch off into a new text; into an alternative semiotic texture. As their roles become more versatile, the coherent psychological interiority of the "character" begins to disappear; their "play within the play" sharpens the awareness of the audience of the fact that life is unlike art. At the same time, it throws a challenge to the notion of 'character' as foreclosed or predetermined. As Jackson asserts:

> JACKSON: Now, that I could go down to that beach myself with this hat, and I could play Robinson Crusoe, and I could play Columbus, I could play Sir Francis Drake, I could play anybody discovering anywhere, but don't you tell me where to draw the line! (140).

This underscores how, by re-imagining identity, the performance can demythify Western heroes and open a counter-hegemonic space.

VI

Drawing from the insights of Plessner, *Theatre and Performance Studies,* scholars have analyzed acting in terms of tension generated by the co-presence of the actor's *phenomenal body* and the *semiotic body*. In the eighteenth century, acting theories were no longer supposed to foreground playfulness, improvisational talents or virtuosity. But with the development of new forms of acting, the material character of the body came to the fore. It is through the semiotic body that the actors came to express emotions and thought processes. This comic skit demonstrates how the tension between phenomenal and semiotic body dissolves into unity in Jackson's performance. His easeful switch between creole and standard accent as well as his gender swapping imbue the text with alternate semiotic signs and throw language into constant mutation. As Katalin Trencsenzi describes it:

> The actions of the actor's body, the expression of his face, the sound of his voice, all at the mercy of the winds of his emotions … emotions possess him; it seizes upon his limbs, moving whither at will … Art as we have

> said, can admit of no accidents. That, then, which the actor gives us, is not a work of art; it is a series of accidental confessions. (Katalin 108).

Harry's proposed show elicits the accidental confession of his carefully guarded past and emotions pour out during his performance. Jackson's expressions, accents, code-switching, as well as his deliberate over-performing, as Meyerhold observes, testify to the confident, ebullient joy which Meyerhold deemed to be a necessary condition for performance (108). As the actions unfold, Jackson buoys up and impersonates as Ellen-Harry's ex-wife, which restores Harry's confidence and puts an end to his sense of inferiority:

> Harry: 'That's the real reason I wanted to do the panto. To do it better than you ever did. You played Crusoe. You played Crusoe in the panto, Ellen, I was Friday. Black bloody greasepaint that made you howl. You wiped the stage with me … Ellen … well, Why not? I was no bloody good (150).

This playful complexity of theatrical illusion and reality in the plot makes us aware of the different dimensions of the play. Jackson's virtuosity helps accentuate the factitiousness (or artificiality) rather than the facticity (or factuality) of gender and race; his multiple manoeuvring of both racial and gender identity contests the autonomous subject positions of both the actors. As Butler has famously argued, the gendered body is inevitably "performative"; rather than being ontologically static it radically troubles a stable subject position and the immutable categories of identity (136).

All the performative strategies within the ambit of spontaneous physical and verbal acting underscore how they 'live' their role. Jackson's "phenomenal body" exists in the script of the play; his "bodily-being-in the world" moves along a continuum with the semiotic body which performs and evolves into a different sign system. This blurring also underscores how the illusory, fictional world, may be juxtaposed with the world of reality. Thus, performance enables a threshold experience that can transform those who experience it. In the course of switching their roles, the audience becomes both spectator and commentator of their respective role.

In *A Day of Absence*, Douglas Turner Ward tells the story of the disappearance of African-Americans for one day in a small Southern town where all the white characters are played by blacks in "whiteface" which adds a trenchant comment on racialized discourse. Here, Jackson seems to have superseded the role of an agent of the director who merely reproduces the director who in turn repeats the words of the author. Rather, in this "drama-in-life" the time-honoured interdependence of author-director and performer becomes ruptured. Harry and Jackson experience their individual performance as a learning experience as they both refuse to be mimetic players and slide into "play-within-the-play-within-the-play." The "wholeness" of

performance is called into question in the make-belief of the stage where the marginal society acts out their own histories and in replaying, their assigned role the contingency and dissonance of the performance are underlined (Gilbert and Tompkins, 22). Jackson's own comments are highly indicative:

> JACKSON: So both of we doesn't have to *improvise* so much as to *exaggerate*. We are faking, faking all the time (144).

This seems strongly resonant of Pirandello's onstage divide between actor and character where their relation is more one of discord than one of compatibility. Reflecting on this crosscutting of illusion and reality, in an interview, Marina Abromovic comments in an interview:

> Theatre is fake, there is a black box, you pay for a ticket and you sit in the dark and see somebody playing somebody else's life. The knife is not real, and the emotions are not real. Performance is not the opposite; the knife is real, the blood is real, and the emotions are real. It's a very different concept. It's about true reality (5).

This is how a theatrical scene exists in its own right where the real effect propels the performer to efface the impression of a character. Without being sealed into a fixed and absolute otherness, their performance leads towards what Lehmann called "… disintegration, dismantling and deconstruction within the drama itself" (44). In confronting the master narrative, *Pantomime* inflicts violence upon the colonizer's perspective on past, present and future. The uneasy juxtaposition of the Crusoe narrative and its creole counterpart, the intersection of standard and mongrel idioms corroborates how the different cultural sensibilities travel across time and space. And this rehearsal or practice performance disrupts the reality of narrative coherence and its prescribed finality by refusing to maintain "… the seamless contiguity between a classical past and a post-colonial present that the empire strives to preserve" (Gilbert 51).

V

In staging a critique of cultural representation, *Pantomime* has registered a liberatory space, a mode of self-fashioning (*autopoiesis*) or a performed ethical practice which recognizes "the self-in-the-other/ other-in-the-self "(Chinna 15). In this shared experience of liberating performance, the chasm between process and product, idea and achievement, transmission and reception, is created for the mutation of identity. In self-referencing performative acts, the play dissolves the binaries like stage-page, performer-actor, and 'original' and 'copy.' The stereotypes of black/white, master/servant are re-deployed to contravene the ideological construction of 'otherness' in non-dialectical, non-oppositional terms. The blend of performative styles not only decenters and ruptures, but also steers towards self-regulation and self-determination. Thus theater-praxis becomes a political

statement and performative space becomes a major site of cultural intervention.

Here, the cross-pollination of different performance styles which navigate between the Trinidad of the late twentieth century and Tobago in the days of early colonial enterprise reanimates Defoe's 'ante-text.' This creolized stage space and carnivalized performance endow both the actors with a new consciousness, a healing experience to their ego and complexity. Though 'man to man' negotiation is sutured for some unavoidable practical limitations, Walcott's Robinsonade offers a vibrant, comedic commentary on the post-independence Anglophone Caribbean world and reinvents its canonical 'pre'- text in the territories of contested beliefs, manners and worldviews. And in *Pantomime* an auto-poetic performance generates what Glissant has described as the unlimited creative dimension and the infinite openness of postcolonial textuality.

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