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Reconstruction of the Text through Performance in Derek Walcott's *Pantomime*

Abstract:

Performance often grows out of dependability to the dramatic text; surviving in tenuous relation with the text, it floats unrestricted of the tying of the written text to create other theatrical idioms and other gestures. As a post-linear play text, Derek Walcott's masterwork, Pantomime (1978), unleashes rejoinder to Western ideological constructs, its overriding conventions, and aesthetics. This essay attempts to deliver in what way the rehearsal fragment allows both participants to fetch their cultural opinion and mounts encounter to the predominance of the text and locus of authority. In producing their particular text, the concept of theatre as a specific and distinguishable cultural artefact is undermined. Immersed with creole dynamism, its artistic performance continually dismantles the predictable theatrical apparatus to befit above exhibition than denotation.

Key Words: Aesthetics, Creole, Pantomime, Performance, Reconstruction, Text.

Introduction

Tedious realities experienced by the colonized people have been compellingly arranged in theatre; besides offering a heightened ambition to the collective consciousness, theatre empowers performers and spectators and excite agency in them. In seeing social experience, the exciting instability of culture, Caribbean theatre targets to go past the imitative influences of Western traditions and customs. Its stage products represent fuel from the trembling link of popular, folk festivals and the expertise of European travelling theatre. Anglophone dramaturge, Derek Walcott's impression of the classics he read in school was whatsoever but ambiguous; though they charmed and resuscitated his imagination, he discovered in them satisfactory vision to alter and challenge the topologies of Empire. As he accepts: "Classics can console. But not enough" (Walcott 1978, 297). His consistent re-visit to classics is not driven by ingenuous 'writing back' maxim; rather he stirs and construes their loci of importance. By an extensive rearrangement of Crusoe narrative, his play *Pantomime* (1978) saturates upon its "pre-text" indigenous sagacity and auxiliary interpretations; in the realm of acting it has been accommodative to unusual performance styles and shifting cultural legacies. In lieu of centering upon divergence and oppositional ruses of performance this analysis concentrates upon the transformative potential of performance; how it de-authorizes the existing screenplay and how inventive forms of the dramatist use the static and obvious interpretation on stage.

By dispersing gap between graphical and philosophical, exhibition and validation, it reveals the wit, encumbrance and anxieties connecting its performance set. Its self-reflexive structure and metatheatrical characteristic authorize the actors to devise acting strategies which challenge the colonial ideologies and traditional modes of understanding by discovering, adjusting, and transforming their individual experience.

Ideology

Through the use of language, the article has discoursed the power subtleties amongst people, and of their preservation over hegemonic worldviews, as they are of pressing importance—especially as they advocate

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how these subtleties can be opposed and even deactivated. The article further aims to employ a bigger collection of thoughts and to contemplate in profundity their relation to the work of postcolonial theory. As Neil Lazarus has set in his evaluation of Edward Said's works on the function of the academic, the article attempts to propose a predominantly suitable, fitting, and captivating established tools for the investigation of ideology and authority in social relations. The theoretical application of this critique intends to pave the way for supplementary exploration employing different postcolonial concepts in this field.

The notion of black and white is the opponent side that cannot be disconnected from each other. That opponent side will be designed as dual disagreement, and it will form a different character of human being. Black and white also could be characterized as postcolonial identity. In Walcott's *Pantomime*, the two male characters are voiced obscurely that sway the interpreters to recognise the identity of the two male characters. Both the characters have created their identity, till there is presence and absence inside their character, where the absence is veiled by the presence. Also, all is controlled by language, whereas language is unhinged. This uncertainty irrevocably grants the deficiencies of human identity in the characters of *Pantomime*. When both the male performers act role shifting, they need to act mimicry also. Mimicry, in postcolonial literature, has been annulment and adoption of some external cultural characteristics without forsaking native cultures. Walcott's *Pantomime*, as a postcolonial play, explicates mimicry as writing back to resituate the conflict side between two parties: the English man epitomizes the colonizer and a Trinidadian man denotes the colonized. In the end, the notion of black and white, through Jackson Phillip's and Harry Trewe's performance in *Pantomime* will be formed into different identity of human being.

For Walcott re-writing was not constructing simple 'copy' or change, secondary to its original; nor was it sheer re-presentation of a prior episode. In playing the Ur-text of Defoe, Crusoe-Friday relation had proved to be "an ideal starting point for Walcott's inventive riff and reimagining of race relations between the modern-day protagonists, Jackson and Trewe" (Gilbert 2001). It is in acquaintance and dispute between actors, their interconnected cultural lives that *Pantomime* performs an ethics of cordiality. In theatre's heterotopic space-crisscrossed by numerous currents of distinctive worlds, experiences and expectations that it reworks Defoe's well-known narratives and elicits the prospect of '(un) making' for its performers. Without being steered by or entrenched in demonstration, theatrical elements now rise past its enforced meticulous order. In the style of Devising Theatre, the actors now fluctuate between disconnected and scripted part and their recurrent creativeness makes perplexing the delineation of a 'real' real.

Practice as a Graphical and Social Occurrence

The leading proponents of Performance Studies, Artaud, Turner, and Schenecher, were averse to the perception of 'text' as a static inscribed documentation; conclusive in articulating socio-cultural contexts, as they maintained, the performance could advance the domain of artistic choice and direct the characters to "create themselves, to change, to become". Their roles and responsibilities are not categorically described or repressed by text-based theatre. Now in this two-actor play, the performers, Jackson and Harry hailing from fun milieu develop beyond their determinate part of 'text-bearer'. They practice performance as a graphical and social occurrence, a process in which the relationships are conversed and power struggle fought out. As their given part moves through cultural entanglements the text is primarily de-coded. Rich in stratagems like role-playing, imitation, role swapping, code switching, now the 'making' of the pantomime underscores revelation of the dramatic ideal. In the stirring combination of cultural realities into the classical text, the power of textual authority begins to emerge weak. What shapes and molds the segment are the beliefs and subjective politics of both the characters as Jackson, in the opening of *Pantomime*, broaches confutation of suppression and recognized identity:

Jackson: Mr. Trewe, you come back with the same rack again? I tell you, I ain't walking in front of a set of tourists naked playing cannibal. Carnival, but not canni-bal" (Walcott 1978, 133).

The lyric of Harry's introductory song, by conflicting 'carnival' and 'canibal' in dyadic encounter, has questioned the conversion of the island into exotica. In the common and intimidating capitalist sense cultural objects are turned into commodities; local cultural customs are constantly personalized for the consumption of the guests by tourism business. To be predisposed to the administrative position of Harry, Jackson accepts, is to descent into trappings of benefit-seeking tourist industry. As a waiter of guesthouse, it is his requirement to stress a "raise" of the pay rather dispassionately at the end. He repudiates the moneymaking apprehension of initiating fun and shows and urges Harry to start repair of the guesthouse before the tourist time:

Jackson: "This hotel is like a hospital. The toilet catches asthma, the air condition ague, the front-balcony rail missing four teet', and every minute the fridg like it dancing the Shango... brrgudp... jujuk... brrrugudp. Is no wonder that the carpenter collapsed. Termites jumping like steel band in the foundations" (Walcott 1978, 133).

Disallowing to be constrained to the scripted role of his master-director he sets out to exhaust Harry at his own game. He vents his bitterness not just on private excuse but moreover on the remembrance of loss and anguish:

... in the sun that never sets on your empire, 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... (Walcott 1978, 137).

Private and Public Memory

Attained from the larger questions of colonial history, the ascribed identity, the violent, suffering memories of dishonor, the dialectics instantly expose "the archives of public and private memory" (Kaul 1994). In re-validating the myth of industry and progress, Walcott's play explores the gamut between the colonialist dogmas of mid-seventh century to late twentieth century neo-colonial ethics of profit and loss. This relentless de-humanization has inspired in Jackson ferocious resolve to liberate by out-performing himself. His practice of the obvious banality of the colonial politics- "sun that never sets on your empire" accentuate how "the same signs can be appropriated, translated and read anew" (Bhabha 1984). This 'I' articulates the cultural variation, the hybridity of culture, a postcolonial focus in dissimilarity of the epistemologies of race. Such 'small voices of history' support encounter to the execution of authority and force; though undertaking constant dull duty of serving breakfast to his master he gestures towards 'effective political action' (Gopal 2004) and expelling "compulsive thinking in stereotypes" (Pandey 1989). His choice of parody seeks to accentuate our concern to convalescing self-assurance by the migrants and exiles: "And that is why all them Pakistani and West Indians in England, all them immigrant Fridays driving all you so crazy. And they go keep driving you crazy till you go mad. In that sun that never set, there is your shadow, you can't shake them off" (Walcott 1978, 137). The articulatory space generates possibilities of "re-creation of the self" (Walcott 1978, 2) and "performance of identity as iteration" (Walcott 1978, 10). Disturbing himself from the status of simple "performing animal" in addition his cross-cultural initiations, he re-names himself "Thursday"- a reaction to the "coercive right of Western noun" (Bhabha 1984). Such a dialogue is an effort to express postcolonial partiality in the argument of the restricted or indentured. Though Harry suggested the Pantomime to be 'man to man' occurrence, it turns out to be unevenness of racial burden, shared with memories of passion and intimidation. The linear model of modernist time and segmented background of plot is effectually used in parody. This alarming action calls into enquiry the possessed cultural dominance of Harry. Fictive reality of national or cultural identity is exposed with each exchange between the two.

In the milieu of a light-hearted comic skit and its "creole" theatricalities, Pantomime eliminates the obvious explanation; in stitching the original plot the apparatus of racial order is enormously problematized. Resonating Derrida's encounter to consider text as "citation" rather than "origin" Walcott's reimagining of Crusoe-Friday relations repetitively makes fun of the serious. Their various performance styles such as

Calypso style and British Music Hall Comedy show re-configuration of power relations. In the ensuing decades, post-dramatic theatre has been insistent to develop the process of de-emphasizing text, plot, and fictitious character. Jackson's happy allusions to Crusoe story and its de-forming unsettles the perception of text as a precursor to drama because theatre as a "doing" or process is immensely intervening and reliant. The different dramaturgy used now is proven free from the basis of theatrical production. Once the action is set in motion, in course of impulsive performance happening it begins to un-write the intended "script" of Harry; through cultural entanglements of distinguishing cultural systems the text engenders more possibilities of counter-discourse. Improvisation and growth (as leading strategies of a validation process) accentuate the indeterminacy of the "text" and its authorial disposition. As performance skill wrenches away dominance or mastery what is accomplished is a "break" from the restriction of held authorial focus; thus supposed, performance appears to emphasize domination with respect to the written text. Though Harry reminds his co-actor to maintain things "light" and humorous, Jackson finds his character of Black Crusoe entrapped with political macro-histories, "Harry: Got really carried away that time, didn't you? It's pantomime, Jackson, keep it light. Improvise!" (Walcott 1978, 137).

At the opening of the play Harry wishes to do a "panto" for enchanting guests in the forthcoming time:

Harry: We're trying to do something light, just a little pantomime, a little satire, a little picong. But if you take this thing seriously, we might commit Art, which is a kind of crime in this society . . . I mean, there'd be a lot of things there that people . . . well, it would make them think too much, and well, we don't want that . . . we just want a little . . . entertainment. (Walcott 1978, 140)

Now Harry wants to put up a rehearsal afore dramatizing, a spectacle set in fixed time and restricted area. And Jackson would merely enter it unenthusiastically:

Mr. Trewe, every day I keep begging you to stop trying to make a entertainer out of me. I finish with show business. I finish with Trinidad. I come to Tobago for peace and quiet. I quite satisfy. If you ain't want me to resign, best drop the topic. (Walcott 1978, 102).

Improvisation and Text: Interconnection and Rationality

Whereas Jackson is gregarious, energetic performer, Harry is "stiff-lipped, unemotional reserve"; the earlier player's improvisation helps him keep a critical impartiality from the pre-existing text. Like the first heroes of Walcott, Jackson also plays in a non-conformist style; he transgresses repeatedly to catechize and conquest the apparatus of cultural authority. Pre-seasonal amusement of the guests is engaged into groundbreaking and interesting style, a means of cultural "self-fashioning." In one of his powerful imitation he acts out the "history of imperialism"; Jackson paddles his canoe, mimes a shipwreck and then proceeds to tutor his white slaves in African language. Jackson's notice of utilizing time limit on piss-break and driving added struggle undermines "man to man" communication. At such moment of "irruption of the real" and through such modification of hierarchy of cultural roles, numerous and differing discourses of slavery and colonialism split apart the supposed validity of Defoe's classic. Approaching from a distinguishing cultural understanding they conjoin to emulate a mix theatre practice which inscribes Defoe's text in Caribbean situation:

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. Now, as Robison Crusoe is rowing, he looks up and he sees this huge white sea bird, which is making loud sea- bird noises, because a storm is coming. And Robinson Crusoe looks up toward the sky and sees that there is this storm. Then, there is a large wave, and Robinson Crusoe finds himself on the beach. (Walcott 1978, 139).

Their voices and visions struggle to destabilize the coherent theatrical practice and at the same time reassure "the sense of liberation from conventional restrictions; the satisfaction of connecting with one's 'deeper' self" (Smart 2014). The theatre-actors in Walcott's another crucial reprisal of the canon A Branch of

the Blue Nile (1983), sense the tension between theatre and reality, between local, African-based performance style and classical European style or between “creole” and “classical”. In moving across time-space boundaries, the actors authorize theatre’s upsetting prospective, its changeability and at the same time the performers pass beyond the confines of space and time to conquer positions of both actor and spectator.

From the initiation, Walcott’s was an eager search for surpassing the recognized self-respect: “To see ourselves, not as others see us, but with all the possibilities of the new country we are making” (“Society and the Artist”). In the Caribbean archipelago, non-scripted, ritualized and diurnal–life performances were rich in theatricality. The involved demonstrating organization of theatre has always been approving of non-hegemonic contest between text and its performance. Through artistic vigor, gestures, movements, and enunciated gifts of the actors mark the point of gap in contact and strength between the character and the performer and so pledge more artistic liberation. Dwindling of character has in fact proved to the innovative forms of drama where the actor plays “upon the character”, rather than simply playing it. Now Harry’s off-season acting presentation is provoked by an urge to do a grander “panto” than his ex-wife. It is for the purpose of purgation that he devises this role-reversal. Jackson craves for simple income escalation after his act to support his economic status.

The dexterity to “play” upon character other than recapping his Crusoe part is the skill to execute any white colonizer and knowingly poking fun at the icons of Western narrative point to the versatility of Jackson, the butler. Rather than “bi-polar clash of cultures” what involved postcolonial image of Walcott was a blend, creole acting where the actor’s relentless self-reflexivity draws our attention to the existential absurdity of colonially stirred contexts.

The Fundamentals of Rhetoric

The very original, joyful rhetoric, as Edward Baugh has noticed, has been hilarious send-up of the language being “given to the black savage by the civilized white man” (2006). In the pliable space of rehearsal, Pantomime is intended in such a way that the classic and creole acting fuse and split. If Harry values British pantomime and other cultural forms remarkably, he also avoids serious political acting or encouraging too much to art. And he lays visible his “unconscious” preference for creole, what Shalini Puri calls Harry’s lack of understanding of the ways in which Harry is himself deeply Creole ([Puri 2004](#)). In his now-classic study on post-dramatic theatre, Lehman argues that it makes no sense to assume that theatre will symbolize political conflicts in the globalized world for the thought of combat. In postcolonial plays live power to express resentment to the primary power of the colonial character helps in differentiating politicized style of the theatre; such theatre breaks through its graphical limitations, follows its political requirement to let in other voices that do not get heard and have no representations in the political order. In the past Walcott as director of Trinidad Theatre Workshop was truthfully involved in rehearsal before mounting his plays upon the stage. No doubt the play-text of Pantomime in putting up a conflict between indigenous and received traditions benefited from the directorial process of “(un) making” theatre. Now the stage space is distinguished as a space of numerous crossings and ingenious theatricalities where identities may be discoursed and re-fashioned. Harry’s private tragedy of loss of son and failed marriage irrupt into a panto performance when Jackson impersonates as his ex-wife and Harry enters into a made-up dispute. This cross-gender performance like his earlier performance unsettles the continual understanding of gender and the principal reasoning of gendered self “... body is not merely a matter but a continual and incessant materializing of possibilities” ([Butler 1988](#)). In the realm of performance Harry’s upsetting past and fruitless work intervene in his actor’s part, blurs the life-art split once more. Dejected into loneliness he is a widower still: “So there’s absolutely no hearth for Crusoe to go home to. While you were up there, I rehearsed this thing” (Walcott 1978, 145). When he waxes emotion, Jackson goads him to overcome the misery of all past setbacks; “Crusoe must get up, he must make himself get up. He has to face a next day again” (Walcott 1978, 164). Inspired behavior identifies them more and more as actual human beings rather personae-conditioned and repressed

by old convention. Of the two actors it is Jackson who remains further divided and self-possessed about the masquerades he performs; he is more self-performing and aware of own theatricality. All his distinct gestures contain the over stubborn cultural role and its traditionally fixed part. And as Jackson is not viewed as a character, he is agile from the stable or sane behavior who finds “a fractured whole with bits and pieces of character flying off the central theme” (Walcott 1978, 35). Together Harry and Jackson in course of their performance are visible from being unpretentious personae and are showed in “existential nakedness, unconstructedness” (Craig 1908). In such meta-theater, views, beliefs, and ideas interrelate and participant’s improvisatory production branch off into an inventive text, into a different semiotic texture. As more pliable their roles become, the vibrant psychological interiority of the character is dispensed with; by twisting various performance styles they urge us to consider beyond seamless identity and challenge the conception of ‘character’ as fenced or static.

In the eighteenth century, acting theories were no longer assumed to focus on the playfulness, improvisational talents or

practice. Nevertheless, with the progress of advanced forms of acting, the significant application of the body came to the foreground. It is through the semiotic body that the actors came to express emotions and thought process-transforming themselves into a possible “text” made up of signs which re-signify the actions and emotions of character. In Jackson’s performance the tension between phenomenal and semiotic body dissolves into synchronization. His easeful transference between creole and standard accent imbues upon the text unusual semiotic signs and throws language into endless transformation: “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” (Smart 2014). Jackson’s cross-gender acting, code-switching, and cautious over-performing may be described as confident and creative internal joy that is considered necessary for improvisation. As the actions progress Jackson buoys up for impersonating as Hellen, Harry’s ex-wife, as Hellen helps Harry divulge his crushed self-assurance; it restores Harry’s reassurance and redeems his sense of subservience:

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 (Walcott 1978, 150).

In the last minutes Harry’s bitterness is removed as Harry threatens to chase Jackson, masked as Hellen. And Jackson’s practice helps focus factitiousness rather than facticity of gender and race. It is through multifarious direction racial and gender identity change to confront the autonomous subject positions of both the actors. Spontaneous and physical activity becomes autonomous artistic manifestation. Thus, performance enables a beginning experience that can transform those who practice it; in course of exchanging their roles they both become witness and viewer of their individual character. In a *Day of Absence* (1965), 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 performed by blacks in white faces which adds a critical account on racial discussion. Now Jackson seems to have outdone the function of manager of the director who merely reproduces the director who in turn repeats the words of the Author. The expected interdependence of author-director and performer is exhausted. And the fragments of “drama-in-life” enormously interrupt the process of acting classics in the settlement of Empire. Devises like clown routines, ironical repartees, slapstick comedy not simply control but also disengage the wholeness of performance; in the make-belief or re-designing of reality the exterior society acts out “their own histories, identifies in a complex replay that can never be finished or final” (Gilbert 2001). As Jackson comments on their role: “So both of we don’t have to improvise so much as to exaggerate. We are faking, faking all the time” (Walcott 1978, 85-86). This is how a theatrical scene exists in its own right where the real product propels the performer to exterminate the impression of character. The un-easy harmony of Crusoe narrative and its

creole equal, dominant and mongrel vernacular authorize how various cultural sensibilities pass across time and this rehearsal and practice performance dismay the reality of narrative accord and its appropriate decisiveness by declining to reserve "... the seamless contiguity between a classical past and a post-colonial present that the empire strives to preserve" (Gilbert 2001).

Conclusion

In dramatizing appraisal of the cultural interpretation, Pantomime also registers a liberating space, a custom of self-molding - a gifted ethical implementation of differentiating between 'the self-in-the-other/other-in-the-self' ([Chinna 2003](#)). In this restorative space of performance, the chasm between process and product, concept and completion, expression and retort is designed. In defining performance as politically enacted, the power of textual supremacy is called into question, time and again. In self-referencing performative encounter, distance, bewilderment, re-combinations of theatrical signs, the play dissolves binaries like stage-page, performer-actor, and original-copy. The stereotypes of black/white and master/servant are re-deployed to rupture the political conception of "otherness" in non-dialectical, non-oppositional terms. All the performative styles not simply de-center and rupture but also direct towards self-regulation and self-determination. And interpret the ways in which theatre-praxis becomes political interpretation and performative space becomes a leading position of cultural interest. In rehearsal of Crusoe-panto all the incongruity and inconsistent development takes place in a "performative now".

Now the master-servant relation undergoes mutual mutations in re-fashioning a fictive cosmos. What comes to the frontage is metonymic tension between text and performance rather than the stasis of victim-victor gulf. In this joint process a process of "psychic healing" ([Baugh 2006](#)) is begun which imbues upon them a fresh consciousness, a mutual regard, a temperament of overriding historically determined role. This auto-poetic performance, as Dipesh Chakraborty establishes in all postcolonial restatement, becomes a "creative expression" which generates "a form of newness" ([qtd. in Mukherjee 2014](#)).

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