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Black Crusoe, White Friday: Carnivalesque Reversals in Samuel Selvon's *Moses Ascending* and Derek Walcott's *Pantomime*

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Partiendo de la premisa de que una de las características principales del discurso literario poscolonial consiste en la apropiación de los textos canónicos de la metrópoli, en este artículo se explora la reescritura de uno de los textos coloniales emblemáticos para la literatura caribeña en lengua inglesa, Robinson Crusoe, *presente en* Moses Ascending *de Samuel Selvon y* Pantomime *de Derek Walcott. Ambas obras abordan la cuestión de la hegemonía colonial y la consiguiente condición poscolonial desde perspectivas divergentes (la del sujeto poscolonial en la metrópoli y en las Antillas, respectivamente), aunque utilicen la misma técnica de la inversión carnavalesca para distanciar el hecho colonial y enfocarlo desde la visión del Otro o subalterno. Estas dos obras ilustran la complejidad de la condición poscolonial, así como las estrategias utilizadas para establecer una definición propia de tal estado, lo que implica que la inversión carnavalesca del orden establecido sea a su vez problematizada para trascender los discursos coloniales anclados en la oposición binaria de centro y periferia.*

«the world turn upside down»[1]
«"carnivalesque" [...] is *not* simply a metaphor of inversion»[2]

The two quotations above express the complexity of the familiar idea of carnivalesque reversal. Reversals or inversions of the social structure or in cultural relations as expressed in the literary work may usually be defined as carnivalesque. These reversals are seen to turn the world upside down. The term «world upside-down» has become synonymous with Carnival and the carnivalesque, and is used to describe the «reversal of order, the time when the low shall be high and the high, low, the moment of upturning» since «symbolic categories of hierarchy and value are inverted [...] [therefore becoming a] potent metaphor of social and symbolic transformation» (White, 1993: 6, 7). James C. Scott (1990: 168) also argues that reversals can «create an imaginary breathing space in which the normal categories of order and hierarchy are less than completely inevitable». Allon White (1993: 8), however, also points out the complexity of the assumption of a

1. Samuel Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (1956).
2. Allon White, *Carnival, Hysteria and Writing: Collected Essays and Autobiography* (1993: 8).

world upside-down, and argues that the carnivalesque is «not simply a metaphor of inversion» that preserves «a binary structure of [...] division». Instead, hierarchy is blurred,

> creating not simply the triumph of one aesthetic over another [...] [but] revealing [...] the inextricably mixed and ambivalent nature of all cultural life, [...] and exposing the arbitrary exercise of cultural power, simplification, and exclusion which are the mechanisms upon which the construction of every limit, tradition, and canonical formation, and the operation of every hierarchical principle of cultural closure, is founded. (White, 1993: 8)

The world, therefore, is not simply turned upside-down and the metaphor invites further analysis of the power relationships in texts.

The actual complexities underlying the idea of carnivalesque reversal are mirrored by those attending the familiar post-colonial notion of «re-writing» canonical, colonial texts. The reference to canon formation is especially relevant to the post-colonial struggle for the recognition of «marginal» writing in the face of the firmly established literary canon of English Literature and the Classics. According to post-colonialists, by using these sources in their own work and reversing the implicit hierarchical structures and relationships inherent in the dominant literatures of the colonial era, West Indian writers are able to interrogate such biased assumptions, to assert their selfhood and to affirm their own literary craft. However, one might contest the strength of this newly asserted power, for these works, if read according to post-colonialism, remain marginalized, since they are seen only in relation to the coloniser, that remains the centre. The relationship between West Indian Literature and English Literature is therefore much more complex than a simple reversal.

Two obvious «classic» works of English Literature have invited rewritings from the post-colonial perspective. These are *The Tempest* (a novel such as George Lamming's *Water with Berries* immediately springs to mind) and *Robinson Crusoe.* Defoe's novel, like the Shakespearean play, are both considered «moments in a developing discourse which was attempting, in a variety of ways, to manage Europe's understanding of its colonial relationships with native Caribbean societies», both dealing with «that mythic "beginning" moment of the colonial encounter» (Hulme, 1986: xiii-xiv, 190). The colonial relationships in these works have often been reversed thereby offering an informative way of interrogating the relationships between the (ex-)coloniser and the colonial, or by extension and more specifically, between the whites and the blacks in the West Indies. In both Samuel Selvon's *Moses Ascending* (1975) and Derek Walcott's *Pantomime* (1980), the reversal of the Crusoe-Friday myth is the subject of comedy; but there is also an underlying attack on the colonial models prescribed by English Literature that seemed to suggest not only the inferiority of the black or colonial to the European white colonisers, but also that colonisation sought the improvement of the subject peoples and, therefore, was a desirable process. Whereas Selvon explores these relationships in the landscape of London, using the genre of the novel, Walcott uses the multicultural and linguistic diversity of the West Indies to reveal the complexity of reversal in the action of his play. I will examine these two works as my main examples in this essay, bearing in mind also the differences in their respective locations.

In *Moses Ascending*, there is a reversal of the Crusoe-Friday myth in the relationship between Moses and Bob, his man-servant, that becomes a «key structural basis of the story, offering many comic possibilities» (Baugh, 1988: 248). Here, the black man becomes Crusoe and the white man, Friday. Their relationship is directly described in these terms by a Moses who has recently acquired a property of his own that he believes gives him a social status higher than that of his compatriots; and in his position as landlord he imagines himself in a position of grandeur. He hires Bob, an Englishman just arrived in London from the Black (!) Country of the West Midlands, to help him with household chores while he determines to enjoy his retirement and hard-earned property in peace. This inversion of power relations in the relationship between the black man and the white man forms the basis of Moses's application of a reversed Crusoe-Friday model to their interaction.

Moses's description of his taking Bob under his wing is expressed in a similar (but parodic) manner as Crusoe's civilisation of Friday:

> He was a *willing worker, eager to learn the ways of the Black man*. In no time at all he learn to cook peas and rice and to make a beef stew. [...] The only thing I didn't like about him was he went out most evenings and come back pissed, drunk like a lord. As we became good friends, or rather *Master and Servant*, I try to *convert* him from the *evils* of alcohol, but it was no use. [...]
> And whilst I was *indoctrinating* him, I also learn a lesson myself, which is that Black and White could live in harmony, for he was *loyal and true*, and never listened to all that shit you hear about black people. Afterwards he tell me he used to believe it, but since coming under my employ **he realize that black people is human too**.
> *I decided to teach him the Bible* when I could make the time.
>
> (*Moses Ascending*: 4-5 [my emphasis])

I have emphasised phrases in this passage that convey much of what is powerful about Selvon's allusive discourse. The italicised phrases suggest the similarities between Moses's «domestication» of Bob and Crusoe's colonisation of Friday. With these terms, Moses depicts Bob as a docile Friday in his willingness to learn and be indoctrinated (to use the provocative word in the passage) into the cuisine of the black man. The description of Bob made by Moses as «loyal and true» also contributes to reinforcing this idea. Moses's plans to teach him the Bible point to the colonisation process in which the slaves were meant to absorb the religion of their masters, also discussed later in *Pantomime*. Equally, Moses maintains that their relationship is between a «Master and Servant» –both words significantly capitalised as if to seal the distinction between and importance of their roles. The sentence, «he realize black people is human too», however, implicitly presupposes the prior power of the white man. The lower case «b» in «black» in this sentence –as opposed to the upper case «B» when Moses is universalising the races (he emphasises «the ways of the Black man» and capitalises «Black and White»)– also suggests this. The phrase in bold suggests notions of racial superiority on the part of the white man, even though Moses delights in the fact that Bob now accepts him as an equal. There are many such ironies at play in the Crusoe-Friday relationship between Moses and Bob throughout the novel.

Nevertheless, deluded by his notions of grandeur and his fancy about being a writer of great literature, Moses delights in having the upper hand. He frequently describes himself as Bob's saviour: «Witness how I take in poor Bob, and make him my footman, when he was destitute and had no place to go when he land in London. I create a home for him, giving him the joys and comfort of a warm hearth in winter, and a fridge with ice and orange quash in the summer» (*Moses Ascending*: 25). Moses, however, seems to be aware that this situation is rare when he admits that «It is not easy to get a man Friday –even importing au pairs and domestics from the Continent is becoming ticklish, as we in the upper echelons know so well» (*Moses Ascending*: 102). The latter part of the sentence only emphasises Moses's social aspirations and notions of superiority.

A telling instance of the inversion of roles occurs in Moses's description of Bob carrying the furniture on his back «like a safari porter» (*Moses Ascending*: 33). This simile invokes the Eurocentric view of Africa as untamed and primitive, populated with wild animals and governed by extreme weather. Still, it is Bob here who is the safari porter assuming the place of the black man who carries the heavy luggage brought by the white visitors. However, when Bob leaves for his holiday home, Moses is faced with the responsibility of taking care of the tenants' problems and complaints about the dilapidated condition of the house. According to Moses, «Crusoe was swapping roles with Friday» (*Moses Ascending*: 117), an ironic reversal of a reversal.

If Moses is Crusoe and Bob is Friday, their roles further swap towards the end of the novel. Moses first offers his «penthouse» to Bob and Jeanie on their wedding night as a sort of present; but this sets a precedent for a permanent arrangement when, later, Moses is caught «in *flagrento delicto*» (*Moses Ascending*: 133) with Jeanie, whose back he had the habit of scrubbing. Bob demands the penthouse and Moses is reduced to sleeping in Bob's much more modest room to save face. The white man resumes his position of superiority and the black man shamefacedly takes the bottom rung of the ladder once more. Moses laments: «Thus are the mighty fallen, empires totter, monarchs de-throne and the walls of Pompeii bite the dust» (*Moses Ascending*: 134). His hyperbole emphasises his own delusions of grandeur and the sorry state in which he now finds himself for his indiscretion.

Bob's inability to read also allows Moses to engage in another situation in which he is able to take the upper hand. He is shocked that this Englishman is illiterate especially when he himself is writing his Memoirs. He laments his own failure to realise that the many comic books in which Bob buried his nose, and all those times when Bob waited for him to lead the discussions on what appeared in the newspaper were in fact hints at his inability to read. The assumed cultural superiority of the English is challenged, and Moses, who has been striving to be the perfect English gentleman, cannot allow this to persist. He therefore hastens to teach Bob the alphabet, creating another reversal in the novel since «the colonial in the Mother Country is now the English teacher and the white man is the barbarian» (Nazareth, 1988: 237). In a sense, Moses must teach Bob his own culture.

The reversal of the roles of coloniser and colonised therefore is not a neat inversion where power relations are simply overturned. Instead, the novel interrogates these colonial relationship and reveals the precariousness and ambivalence of power structures. According to Susheila Nasta (2002: 87),

> whilst much of the novel is built on an extended parodic reversal of the Crusoe / Man Friday paradigm, Selvon not only constantly destroys Moses's misplaced desire to become a Crusoe in relation to Bob, his nouveau Man Friday, but also, more importantly, breaks down the illusory structures on which Crusoe rested his authority.

Derek Walcott's *Pantomime* shifts the scene to the West Indies, where the complexity of the colonial relationship and the carnivalesque reversal are expressed through performative action and linguistic diversity. Here again, the «Robinson Crusoe» story is reversed and the black man takes on the role of the dominant coloniser, while the white man adopts the role of the colonised. The roles frequently reverse, however. The play is set in Tobago, often considered Crusoe's island, at a hotel, «Castaways Guesthouse», belonging to a retired English actor, Harry Trewe. The other character in the play is Jackson Phillip, Harry's servant and a retired calypsonian. The previous occupations of these two characters reinforce the Carnival theme with its potential for performance and spectacle as the title of the play further suggests. The heart of the play rests on Harry's idea of performing a pantomime based on *Robinson Crusoe* to amuse his guests.

This, however, soon develops into something much more complex as Harry realises the potential of plays to reverse the roles of coloniser and colonised.[3] He realises that it could be a «heavy twist, heavy with irony» (*Pantomime*: 100) and later, he tells Jackson, «You could say things in fun about this place, about the whole Caribbean, that would hurt while people laughed» (*Pantomime*: 111). Although Harry is referring to the satiric potential of his idea of colonial inversion, these lines could aptly be applied to calypso and to Carnival modes in general. This is further emphasised near the end of the play when Harry, annoyed at Jackson's success at exposing the serious implications at play in these role-reversals, shouts, «you can spew out all that bitterness in fun» (*Pantomime*: 153); and also when Harry shows Jackson the old stage trick of producing a sound which could represent either laughing or crying. These metaphors also reveal the paradoxes and ironies –and therefore the complexity– of the idea of the carnivalesque reversal. The pantomime in the end, that is, the play, *Pantomime*, as well as the play within the play, are therefore not only mere amusement –Harry's original «purpose is to please» (*Pantomime*: 93)–, but the «committing» of Art that Harry calls «a kind of crime in this society» (*Pantomime*: 125). Such a performance interrogates the colonial relationship to a degree that Harry fears may be «offensive» (*Pantomime*: 125), although it is obvious that it is from his own discomfort that he recoils.

The play opens with Harry practising his lines for the pantomime he proposes. The Crusoe story is immediately introduced and, when he pretends to discover the footprint in the sand after Jackson has come in and left barefoot with his breakfast, the implications of the theme begin to unfold. Harry ruminates whether what he pretends to see is the «footprint of a naked man» or the «naked footprint of a man» (*Pantomime*: 94). Walcott's interest in the minutiae of meaning is apparent throughout, since the subtle reversal of word order reflects a different interpretation. The «naked man» suggests the

3. This may be based on the traditional reversal of the pantomime genre in which «the dame in a panto is played by a man» (Walcott, 1980: 107).

kind of primitivism associated with the way the word «cannibal»[4] (as applied to Friday) is used in the play, even though Jackson, who has just been barefoot in the room, is no cannibal. So, issues both of colonial perspective and role-playing are involved.[5]

Jackson initially resists Harry's enticement to take part in his pantomime. He says that he will play «Carnival, but not canni-bal» (*Pantomime*: 96). Jackson and Harry are indeed playing Carnival in a sense –the «high» (the «superior» white coloniser) becomes the «low» (the «inferior savage») and vice versa in a temporary release. Robert Stam's (1989: 125-126) discussion of the relationship between cannibalism and Carnival is also very relevant here. He argues that «Within the Western tradition, cannibalism has often been the "name of the other," the ultimate marker of difference in a coded opposition of light / dark, rational / irrational, civilized / savage». Stam's further observation that «The "cannibalist" and "carnivalist" metaphors [...] evoke a kind of dissolving of the boundaries of self through the physical or spiritual commingling of self and other» may also be applicable to the play, where the reversal of the Crusoe story allows Harry and Jackson finally to meet «man to man» in a powerful unmasking of Harry's insecurities, leading to a relationship of mutual respect. The result is therefore not an inversion of power relations but an understanding of the complicated roles which history has ascribed to them.

By refusing to play cannibal, Jackson is also refusing to act the part traditionally ascribed to the black man, with all its racial and prejudicial connotations. Even when Jackson plays Friday, then, there is still a sort of inversion, since he is playing something that he is not. He portrays, instead, a stereotypical and Eurocentric view of the African[6] when he adopts «the stance of the Noble Savage» as indicated in the stage directions (*Pantomime*: 114); and later when Harry accuses him of «playing the stage nigger» (*Pantomime*: 40). This becomes evident when Jackson brings the dead parrot and Harry calls him «a bloody savage», to which he replies in the manner of the slave: «Me na strangle him, bwana. Him choke from prejudice» (*Pantomime*: 155). Here the orthography and the grammar of the line contribute to a particular reading or construction of the language of the African slave as seen through European eyes. When Harry first plays Friday, he, too, imitates a slave begging forgiveness from his «Mastah» (*Pantomime*: 102) –and the provocative word is reminiscent of Moses's capitalised «Master and Servant»– reinstating the view of the African as inferior. However, when Jackson does the same later, there is a sense of mockery towards the assumed superiority of the colonisers, while there is also an underlying acceptance of a history of victimisation:

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4. Notably, Hulme (1986: 3) observes that cannibalism was «the special, perhaps even defining, feature of the discourse of colonialism as it pertained to the native Caribbean».
5. In fact, as Lowel Fiet (1991: 139) argues, Walcott uses «the act of performance itself, the play and/or plays within the play, rehearsals, creative processes, theatre settings, and actor/writer/artist characters» as «metaphors in the interpretation of Caribbean culture and society».
6. This is not to say that the Friday of Defoe's novel was African (in fact, he seems Amerindian), but for the purposes of the play, Friday becomes representative of the colonised man. The criticism of the Crusoe-Friday myth being made may be applied to any colonised people.

Pardon, master, pardon! Friday bad boy! Friday wicked nigger. Sorry. Friday nah t'ief again. Mercy, master. Mercy.
(*He rolls around on the floor, laughing*)
Oh, Jesus, I go dead! I go dead. Ay-ay.

(*Pantomime*: 158)

James C. Scott (1990: 4), when discussing power relations between the dominant and the subordinate, argues that the subordinate «speak[s] the lines and make[s] the gestures he knows are expected of him». Although Jackson is not subordinate to Harry in any way except in his position as his domestic, he recognises that historically his race has been subordinate to the European white, and, so, acts the part it implies –with derision. The final line of the passage therefore switches from the subservient and servile tone and language of the slave to the derisive and sarcastic tone of the West Indian.

When Jackson agrees to going along with Harry, the implications of the Crusoe story, as well as its reversal, begin to unfold. By addressing language and religion, two of the main instruments of colonisation and enslavement, Jackson inverts the story such that the ramifications of colonisation are revealed. Language plays an important role in the play, both as inherited and indigenous. This is immediately apparent in the code switching –complete with accents– between English and Creole on Jackson's first appearance on stage. Additionally, towards the end of the play, when Jackson pronounces «Mariner», «Marina», after having been corrected a number of times, Harry gives up, «It's your country, mate», to which Jackson replies, «Is your language, pardner» (*Pantomime*: 165). This points to the ambiguous character of Creole, which is at once indigenous to the country in which it develops as it is reliant on the «mother language» from which it derives.

In the sequence in which Jackson plays the black coloniser, he invents a language and proceeds to teach it to Harry. He first insists on calling himself «Thursday» instead of «Friday» and he says to Harry: «Robinson obey Thursday now. Speak Thursday language. Obey Thursday gods». In response to Harry's exasperated exclamation of «Jesus Christ!», Jackson kills the European God:

Amaka nobo sakamaka khaki pants kamaluma Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ kamalogo!
(*Pause. Then with a violent gesture*)
Kamalongo kaba!
(*Meaning: Jesus is dead!*)

(*Pantomime*: 114)

Jackson's renaming of things and explaining through gestures is a reappropriation of the language taken from the Africans through colonisation, as well as an affirmation of his African past, even though he can only now invent such a language. Harry's resistance and calling for subtitles imply a reinstatement of the colonial story that they are attempting to reverse, since Harry wants this language translated into comprehensible English in the same way as the indigenous languages of the Africans were replaced by the European languages. He significantly asserts: «I'll tell you one thing, friend. If you want me to learn your language, you'd better have a gun». The colonial implications of this line are glaring since it was through force and threats that the colonised people were made to

learn the language of the colonisers while theirs was eradicated. Jackson gives up: «You best play Crusoe, chief. I surrender. All you win. [...] Table. Chair. Cup. Man. Jesus. I accept. I accept. All you win. Long time». (*Pantomime*: 115)

The continuation of this dramatic competition in *Pantomime* also reveals the relationship between language and religion, and their association with colonialism. While Harry thinks the reversal could be «hilarious» (*Pantomime*: 111), Jackson has the acumen to realise its potential for becoming something serious. Consider the following exchange:

> JACKSON
> Hilarious, Mr Trewe? Supposing I wasn't a waiter, and instead of breakfast I was serving you communion, this Sunday morning on this tropical island, and I turn to you, Friday, to teach you my faith, and I tell you, kneel down and eat this man. Well, kneel, nuh! What you think you would say, eh?
> (Pause)
> You, this white savage?
> HARRY
> No, that's cannibalism.
> JACKSON
> Is no more cannibalism than to eat a god. [...]
>
> (*Pantomime*: 111-12)

This passage is similar to the previous one, where it was suggested that the white European should unlearn his language. Harry thinks cannibalism is enough grounds to reject Jackson's imposition of religion, but, if we consider Stam's (1989) argument that cannibalism is an acceptance or dissolution of the other into the self, we might read this exchange as Harry's resistance to accepting the Other. In turn, Jackson's characterisation of communion as cannibalism is also reminiscent of the slaves being forced to accept the religion and the customs of the Other. As Tejumola Olaniyan (1995: 39) observes, «The imposition of colonial languages is the imposition of colonial culture». Similarly, Franz Fanon (1967: 17-18) argues that «To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilisation». Jackson's comeback, therefore, reveals not only the weakness of Harry's argument, but also the exploitative character of colonisation. Harry himself seems to realise the profundity of the reversal:

> And then look at what would happen. He would have to start to . . . well, he'd have to, sorry . . . This cannibal, who is a Christian, would have to start unlearning his Christianity. He would have to be taught that everything was wrong, that what he was doing . . . I mean, 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 . . . [...] the whole thing would have to be reversed; white would become black, you know . . . (*Pantomime*: 126-27)

The ellipses in the passage reveal Harry's horror at the true meaning of their seemingly playful and harmless reversal.

The «shadow passage» that follows immediately after further develops the political and psychological implications of the imposition of European language, religion and values on the colonised peoples:

> For three hundred years I served you. Three hundred years I served your breakfast in . . . in my white jacket on a white veranda, 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 . . .
> (*Stops giggling*)
> and you smiled at me as a child does smile at his shadow's helpless obedience, boss, bwana, effendi, bacra, sahib, Mr. Crusoe. Now . . . [...]
> But after a while the child does get frighten of the shadow he make. He say to himself, That is too much obedience, I better hads stop. But the shadow don't stop, no matter if the child stop playing that pantomime, and the shadow does follow the child everywhere; when he praying, the shadow pray too, when he turn round frighten, the shadow turn round too, when he hide under the sheet, the shadow hiding too. He cannot get rid of it, no matter what, and that is the power and black magic of the shadow, boss, bwana, effendi, bacra, sahib, until it is the shadow that start dominating the child, it is the servant that start dominating the master . . .
> (*Laughs maniacally, like The Shadow*)[7] (*Pantomime*: 112-13)

This idea of the shadow is developed throughout the play. In Jackson's improvised calypso, he sings about Robinson Crusoe: «He tell Friday, when I do so, do so. / Whatever I do, you must do like me» (*Pantomime*: 117); in Jackson's Creole proverb, «Monkey see, monkey do» (*Pantomime*: 149); and in Harry's accusatory, «You people create nothing. You imitate everything. [...] You can't ever be original, boy. That's the trouble with shadows, right? They can't think for themselves» (*Pantomime*: 156).

These ideas, I think, have serious implications for the status of post-colonial writing, which tends to take its point of reference from dominant discourses, with the inevitable corollary of at least some imitation, thus becoming «filial and tributary», as Walcott (1998 [1970]: 28) puts it in his essay, «What the Twilight Says», even though critics may insist on originality in the process of writing back. However, *Pantomime* is not so easy to characterise, since the point does not seem to be originality as much as it is the creation of multiple, sometimes even ironic, discourses and perspectives. The play is therefore not merely a reversal but a freeing of the discourse to take on multiple meanings. In a much later essay, «The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory» (1992), Walcott (1998 [1992]: 73) delights in «watching a literature –one literature in several imperial languages, French, English, Spanish - bud and open island after island in the early morning of a culture, not timid, not derivative, any more than the hard white petals of the frangipani are derivative and timid».

The parrot appearing in the play is significant in this regard. A parrot, of course, can only imitate sounds and has no command over language. It persists in repeating «Heinegger, Heinegger» (*Pantomime*: 99), which understandably unnerves Jackson. The

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7. The Shadow is a well-know Trinidadian calypsonian whose «maniacal» laugh is one of his trademarks. In his dark garb, he often resembles the traditional Trinidadian Carnival character, The Midnight Robber, who represents Death and the darker side of the festival.

excuse that the parrot is only calling the name of its former German owner brings to the fore notions of racism and prejudice rampant during World War II as well as the colonial period. Jackson asserts: «Language is ideas, Mr. Trewe. And I think that this pre-colonial parrot have the wrong idea» (*Pantomime*: 99). The parrot, in its mindless mimicry of a name it has been taught, perpetuates these «pre-colonial» prejudices. Jackson's killing of the parrot is therefore more than the consequence of exasperation: it is a symbolic cessation or changing of the terms of reference that would lead to an understanding between Harry and Jackson on a different level, as representatives of the white and black peoples respectively.

The charge of mimic may be revisited in light of Jackson's decision to play *Robinson Crusoe* in his own way. He insists on how the story should proceed and calls for Harry to act the part of a white sea-bird (which links with his constant recitation of lines from *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, representing his own psychological burden about losing his son and being overshadowed by his wife), while he determines the manner in which he would be shipwrecked on the island. Jackson is acting the «great classic», but he is revising it and reversing it on his own terms. Harry's objections to these proceedings bring to the fore many pertinent considerations. His insistence that they call off the whole play just as Jackson is getting into his part is precipitated by his realisation of the serious consequences of reversing the colonial story, as well as by his own discomfort. However, Jackson insists that this is another instance of imperialism: «You see, it's your people who introduce us to this culture: Shakespeare, *Robinson Crusoe*, the classics, and so on, and when we start getting as good as them, you can't leave halfway» (*Pantomime*: 124). He insists that «People become independent» and objects to the «history of the British Empire» (*Pantomime*: 125) in which the English colonised the New World to call the whole thing off when things did not go the way that they wanted, giving the islands their independence and expecting things «to return to where they were» (*Pantomime*: 128) before colonialism. The quote suggests that returning to the way things were means using the same terms of reference of colonialism (as represented by the parrot). Jackson seems to react against this by proposing independence and, by implication, the escape from the prison of post-colonialism and the limiting binaries emerging from such an approach.

The speech Harry writes for the performance contrasts with Jackson's attitude to the story of «Robinson Crusoe», characterised by Harry as «the difference between classical and Creole acting». The speech is a piece of poetic writing on the solitude and desolation that Harry imagines for Crusoe, which is in fact a reflection of his own psychological state. Jackson, though admiring the piece, insists that the one thing missing in the piece are the goats. He maintains that «this man ain't facing reality. *There are goats* all around him» (*Pantomime*: 146). He argues that «Robbie is the First True Creole» because, like the transplanted people of the New World, he faces reality, takes charge of his wretched situation about being shipwrecked on an alien land, kills the goats «and Robbie is next seen walking up the beach with a goatskin hat and a goatskin umbrella, feeling like a million dollars because *he have faith!*» (*Pantomime*: 148). This is the difference between Crusoe and Harry, who has given up his life to simply existing on an island far away from his home, licking his wounds and nursing grudges. After the pantomime sequence in which Jackson plays Harry's wife and reveals Harry's fears and insecurities in a sort of

cathartic moment, Jackson finally proclaims: «Crusoe must get up, he must make himself get up. He have to face a next day again. (*Shouts*) *I tell you: man must live!*» (*Pantomime*: 164). This is a message to Harry but it is also a dictum to the ex-colonised peoples, who must reclaim their landscape and, with faith and resourcefulness, learn to survive not by the terms of colonialism but with a new independence and sense of responsibility for one's life.

The carnivalesque inversion of roles, therefore, allows Harry and Jackson to move from a relationship that was characterised by hierarchy and separation to one of mutual respect. David Danow (1995: 25) observes that «the carnivalesque is animated by a [...] human *need* to dissolve borders and to eliminate boundaries [and is] designed to allow one extreme to flow into another, to provide for one polarity (the official culture) to meet and intermingle with its opposite (unofficial culture)». This seems to be the case in *Pantomime*, whose use of role-reversal allows the two characters to meet on a different ground where «socially generated feelings are at least partly exorcised» (Fiet, 1991: 145), leading to a better understanding of themselves and their relationship. The play therefore moves from a rehearsal of the colonial / post-colonial dichotomy to a position of mutual respect. The binary oppositions that would have resulted from a certain post-colonial reading are not simply avoided but complicated. The play therefore seems to propose the movement towards the dissolution of borders and the elimination of boundaries in human relationships.

The West Indian texts chosen in this essay contrast two different approaches to the carnivalesque reversal in their setting and technique. Selvon's London provides a landscape in which the physical structure of the house is exploited to suggest hierarchy and its subsequent rearrangement. Walcott's play shifts the scene back to the West Indies, where the linguistic and cultural legacies inform and interrogate power structures represented and then questioned through the discourse. In both works, the main characters are a white man and a black man whose relationships are those of master and servant, providing the basis for the rewriting of the «Robinson Crusoe» story. The differences in setting are important for the development of each story, but they also provide a wider survey of the way power relationships between the races in the post-colonial era have been constructed. *Moses Ascending* seems to begin and end with a fixed perception of hierarchy, even though by the end of the novel the power is almost completely reversed; on the other hand, *Pantomime* uses role reversal to move beyond inversion to the prescription of new terms of reference from the ones associated with colonialism, resulting in relationships based on mutual respect. Simply applied, the post-colonial reading is therefore not sufficient.

In conclusion, the carnivalesque reversals discussed in this essay are more complex than at first suggested by the term. There are many deliberate inversions, but their effects are often more complex than reversals: they tend to interrogate the relationships between the dominant and the subordinate and reveal more complicated patterns of power. To read these relationships simply as inversions is to preserve a binary opposition of the powerful and the powerless which only seems to limit the reading and interpretation of the text. However, the discourses are often structured in such a way that multiple perspectives and ironies resisting easy categorization are created or revealed. The notion of carnivalesque reversals should not therefore support only binary readings, but also open up the possibilities of other analytical discourses.

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