



The ambivalence of Performing Post-colonial Identity in Everyday Life: Studying Derek alcott's Pantomime Through the Lens of Performance Studies and Post-colonial theory

Subro Saha

M.Phil Research Scholar, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences Guest Lecturer, Department of English, City College, Kolkata.

subhro129@gmail.com

Abstract:

The objective of the paper is to reach at an understanding of the complexities of 'performing' one's identity as a postcolonial being in everyday life. As such, synthesizing the concept of performance as it is seen through the lens of Performance studies with the theoretical formulations developed by the postcolonial thinkers, the paper attempts to explore how the question of ambivalence becomes crucial in terms of performing one's identity as a postcolonial being in a postcolonial 'hybrid' world where the binaries of the colonizer/colonized, master/slave, white/black has seemingly dissolved to give way to an altogether different, deterritorialized world of globalization. The paper therefore attempts analyzes Derek Walcott's Pantomime as an example to reflect upon a condition whereby not only the question of performing one's identity as a postcolonial being but also the question of representation becomes immensely problematic.

Keywords: Performance; mimicry; ambivalence; globalization; Americanization; representation; colonial-discourse analysis

“When an individual enters the presence of others, they commonly seek to acquire information about him or to bring into play information about him already possessed (emphasis added)...by virtue of experience

prior to the interaction, they can rely on assumptions as to the persistence and generality of psychological traits as a means of predicting his present and future behaviour [...] The others find...that the individual has informed them as to what is and as to what they ought to see as the 'is'.” (emphasis in original).

- Goffman, Erving. “Introduction”, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

Enough ink has already flowed in terms of deconstructing the myth of Western superiority. Since Derrida's formulation of the concept of logocentrism as inextricably linked with western metaphysics, especially how western metaphysics had always been modeled after “the white mythology which reassembles and reflect the culture of the west: the white man takes his own mythology...his own logos...for the universal form of that he must still wish to call Reason...”¹, Bakhtin's dialogics, theory of ideology, Lacanian psychoanalysis, Foucault's writings on power and knowledge and Lyotard's concept of the demise of the grand-narratives have proved pivotal in deconstructing the myth of Western

¹ From ‘*Of Grammatology*’ where Derrida uses ‘logos’ to refer how since Bible ‘Word’ has been used variously to signify presence, existence, voice, identity, authority etc. Also see Derrida's *Writing and Difference*



superiority. Theoreticians such as Franz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhaba, Talal Asad and Gayatri Spivak have provided crucial insights about the colonial context in which Western structures of knowledge developed and are shaped. We have been made aware how the source of structures of knowledge operates in terms of ethnocentric views, whereby West is defined, be it directly or indirectly, as modern, rational and homogenous, and its 'Other' (the 'East', the 'Third World', the 'Native') is perceived as less progressive and less rational. However, the discursive binary division of the Orientalist discourse are no longer operative today, rather it is a world where as Homi Bhaba says, we "are *neither the One nor the Other but something else besides* which contests the territories of both "(emphasis added); it is a state where "all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity" that "displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives...gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation"². Hybridity is the result of the colonial contact and emerges out from the 'third space of enunciation', where, as Edward Soja defines "...everything comes together ...subjectivity and objectivity,... the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable,...mind and body, consciousness and unconsciousness, the disciplined and transdisciplinary, everyday life and mending history"³. Synthesizing Michel Foucault's concept of

'heterotopia'⁴ with work of the postcolonial thinkers from Said to Bhaba, Spivak to Bell Hooks, Soja defines the 'Third space' as a radically inclusive concept that encompasses epistemology, ontology and historicity in continuous movements beyond dualisms and toward 'an Other'. The epistemological and academic focus today is centred therefore in understanding and explaining this state of cultural hybridization and its obligatory celebrating of cultural difference and fusion which resonates with the mantra of globalization and the supposedly inevitable transformation of all cultures. It becomes extremely troublesome therefore to define or sum up what exactly the term post-colonial identity designates today. Using the concept of "performance", as it is seen through the lens of performance studies and coupled with Erving Goffman's influential concept of performance in everyday life, with the theoretical formulations developed by postcolonial theory, the paper attempts to reach at an understanding, by analysing Derek Walcott's play *Pantomime*, of the complexities, multiplicities and ambivalences of *performing* post-colonial identities and how such performances sometime hold

² See Homi.K.Bhaba's "The Third Space: Interview with Homi K.Bhabha". Also see "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi, May 1817", "DissemiNation:Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation", and "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse"

³ See Edward Soja's *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*

⁴ Foucault defines it as "...the utopias...are arrangements which have no real space. Arrangements which have a general relationship of direct or inverse analogy with the real space of society. They represent society itself brought to perfection, or its reverse, and in any case utopias are spaces that are by their very essence fundamentally unreal. There also exist, and this is probably true for all cultures and all civilizations, real and effective spaces which are outlined in the very institution of society, but which constitute a sort of counter arrangement, of effectively realized utopia, in which all the real arrangements, all the other real arrangements that can be found within society, are at one and the same time represented, challenged, and overturned: a sort of place that lies outside all places and yet is actually localizable. In contrast to the utopias, these places which are absolutely other with respect to all the arrangements that they reflect and of which they speak might be described as heterotopias". see Michel Foucault's "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias".



within it the potential of subverting the expected hierarchical colonizer-colonized binary relation.

As Richard Schechner puts it “Performances are actions”⁵. As a discipline, Performance studies takes actions very seriously. As such behavior, artistic practice, “participant observation”, social practices and advocacies all come to acquire new significance when seen through the lens of Performance studies. As such, understanding the very concept of “performance” becomes crucial, specifically in relation to what differentiates it from any ‘doing’ and role of “norms”, “expectations” and “standards” emerges as pivotal in this context. For Schechner, a number of things contribute in separating “performance” from any doing: a doing in terms of expected norms and standards (to do it correctly, succeed, excel or fail) or doing as showing and as such keeping in mind an observer (which may be society itself). In Schechner’s words, “ “Being” is existence itself. “Doing” is the activity of all that exists, from quarks to sentient beings to super galactic strings. “Showing doing” is performing: pointing to, underlining, and displaying doing. “Explaining ‘showing doing’” is the work of performance studies”⁶. Erving Goffman, interestingly, expands the concept of performance to include all forms of ‘doing’ that we ‘do’ in our everyday ‘social’ life and as such we are performing every time. As Goffman puts it,

“A “performance” may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants. Taking a particular participant and his

performance as a basic point of reference, we may refer to those who contribute to the other performances as the audience, observers, or co-participants. The pre-established pattern of action which is unfolded during a performance and which may be presented or played through on other occasions may be called a “part” or a “routine.” These situational terms can easily be related to conventional structural ones. When an individual or performer plays the same part to the same audience on different occasions, a social relationship is likely to arise. Defining social role as the enactment of rights and duties attached to a given status, we can say that a social role will involve one or more parts and that each of these different parts may be presented by the performer on a series of occasions to the same kinds of audiences or to an audience of the same persons”⁷.

Performance studies as a discipline attempts to address, among many other things, questions regarding the multiple politics that operates in terms of performing one’s social and personal identity itself. It came into existence within, and as a response to, the radically changing intellectual and artistic circumstances of the last third of the twentieth century. As the twenty-first century unfolds, many people remain dissatisfied with the status quo. Equipped with ever more powerful means of finding and sharing information – the internet, cell phones, sophisticated computing – people are increasingly finding the world not a book to be read but a performance to participate in. Performance studies is an academic discipline designed to answer the need to deal with the changing circumstances of the “glocal” – the powerful combination of the

⁵ See Richard Schechner’s “What is Performance Studies?” (pg 2)

⁶ From Richard Schechner’s “What is Performance?”. (pg 22)

⁷ From Ervingt Goffman’s “Introduction” in his book , *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (pg 15–16)



local and the global⁸. Since there is no such thing that can be taken as unbiased, no such position as “neutral” or an approach as “a view from nowhere”, the need has emerged out for an increasing awareness of power-structures that shape, determine and affect one’s relation with other and Performance studies enables one to view the concept of “performance” in a “broad spectrum” or “continuum” of human actions ranging from ritual, play, sports, popular entertainments, the performing arts (theatre, dance, music), and everyday life events as inextricably linked with, continuously shaping, affecting and determining one’s own stance in relation to the enactment of social, professional, gender, race, and class roles. As Schechner explains,

“As a method of studying performances, the relatively new discipline of performance studies is still in its formative stage. Performance studies draws on and synthesizes approaches from a wide variety of disciplines including performing arts, social sciences, feminist studies, gender studies, history, psychoanalysis, queer theory, semiotics, ethology, cybernetics, area studies, media and popular culture theory, and cultural studies. Performance studies starts where most limited-domain disciplines end.”⁹

From all these it becomes clear how Performance studies enables us to view the very concept of performance in a different light and as such, when seen through the lens of Performance studies,

“performance” also enables one to comprehend the complex situation characterizing the post-colonial condition by means of raising certain crucial questions as:

⁸ See Richard Schechner’s “What is Performance Studies?” (pg 10)

⁹ Ibid. (pg 03)

What is the relationship between performance and power? How does performance reproduce, enable, sustain, challenge, subvert, critique, and naturalize ideology? How do performances simultaneously reproduce and resist hegemony? How can performance be used also to contest domination or subvert existing norms or power-structures?

With the development of postcolonial literatures and theory, the strategy of “writing back” had emerged as a crucial weapon among the post-colonial writers in terms of subverting the dominant [white, eurocentric] literary ‘canon’. In Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin’s words

“...Directly and indirectly, in Salman Rushdie’s phrase, the ‘Empire writes back’ to the imperial ‘centre’, not only through nationalist assertion, proclaiming itself central and self-determining, but even more radically by questioning the bases of European and British metaphysics, challenging the world-view that can polarize centre and periphery in the first place”¹⁰

Innumerable writers such as J.M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris, V.S. Naipaul, George Lamming, Patrick White, Chinua Achebe, Margaret Atwood, and Jean Rhys have all rewritten particular works from the English ‘canon’ with a view to restructuring European ‘realities’ in post-colonial terms, not simply by reversing the hierarchical order, but by interrogating the philosophical assumptions on which that order was based. However, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin makes us aware that the subversion of canon doesn’t simply mean replacing some texts by

¹⁰ From “Re-placing Theory” in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin’s *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures*.



others but rather changing the very view towards the text and the reading processes itself:

“The subversion of a canon is not simply a matter of replacing one set of texts with another...A canon is not a body of texts per se, but rather a set of reading practices (the enactment of innumerable individual and community assumptions, for example about genre, about literature, and even about writing). These reading practices, in their turn, are resident in institutional structures, such as education curricula and publishing networks. So the subversion of a canon involves the bringing-to-consciousness and articulation of these practices and institutions, and will result not only in the replacement of some texts by others, or the redeployment of some hierarchy of value within them, but equally crucially by the reconstruction of the so-called canonical texts through alternative reading practices”¹¹.

Similarly, practicing theory in everyday life is also not a simple task since one needs to negotiate continuously between the two extremes of expectation and reality. As a play based on performance itself *Pantomime* therefore enables us to explore the ambivalences not only that are involved in the act of performance (as mimicry) but also in terms of performing one's identity in a post-colonial society, showing how socio-economic roles and language play a deciding role in terms of how one decides to *perform* his identity in everyday life.

As a play based on performing a pantomime of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, the intertextual connections and references present Defoe's novel as an originary creation myth (of the colonizer-colonized relation) which the

¹¹ Ibid (pg 186-187).

present play attempts to subvert, re-write and re-present¹². [Crusoe, shipwrecked, reaches the island of Tobago where he meets a naked black native and names him Friday, and this is the setting also for the present play; we have a similar (white) master- (black) slave relation; and besides, the hotel name is Castaways Guesthouse]. Goffman notes how “In everyday life, of course, there is a clear understanding that first impressions are important...”¹³, and in this case the first impression becomes the white collective historical memory, that of the first colonial encounter of the civilized white man (Robinson) with the barbaric negro (Friday). The play can be seen, as it has been seen by some critics, also as reflecting carnivalesque inversion of the hierarchical social relationships and the previous occupations of the two principle characters- Harry Trewe, a retired English actor and Jackson Phillip, his servant and a retired calypsonian-almost reinforce the carnival theme with its potential for performance and spectacle as the title of the play further suggests. However, it is not simply a carnivalesque inversion since the refusal to perform in terms of the expected script subverts the roles which, coupled with the colonial relations, makes it something extremely serious and not something amusing as it was expected to be, and Harry repeatedly cautions "It's a pantomime, Jackson, just keep it light..." (perhaps as a security to his own identity). As Goffman writes, "Given the fact that the individual effectively projects a definition of the situation when he enters the presence of *others*, we can assume that events may occur within the interaction which contradict,

¹² It was not only Walcott, but other writers also have used the same *Robinson Crusoe* plot with the aim of reversing the colonial structure as in Samuel Selvon's *Moses Ascending* (1975)

¹³ See Erving Goffman's "Introduction" from *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*



discredit, or otherwise throw doubt upon this projection. When these disruptive events occur, the interaction itself may come to a confused and embarrassed halt..."¹⁴; and here too we find that pauses and silences emerge when Jackson performs in an unexpected manner or refuses to perform itself. It is herein that Bhaba's concept of "mimicry" comes to the forefront, as not simply an imitation but an imitation with a difference, something that holds the potential not only for copying but also causing "menace" by copying differently. With his concept of "mimicry" Bhaba evokes a deep sense of ambivalence whereby we are made to realize that the colonized too are able to retain their power despite the apparent domination of the colonizer. Bhaba makes it clear that "mimicry" is not "sly civility" or slavish imitation but rather an exaggerated one which presents that mimicry as one with a difference. Bhaba explains that "...the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference"¹⁵. Therefore, Jackson's mimicry and performance in the unexpected manner going beyond the assigned role disrupts the [master's] original purpose "to please" [perhaps the white european audience(s)] since such a performance interrogates the colonial relationship to a degree that Harry fears it to be "offensive", although it is obvious that it is from his own discomfort [raising from "the white man's burden"] that he recoils.

Language plays a crucial role in terms of the 'hybrid' postcolonial condition and as such to comprehend the complexities of performing one's postcolonial identity one needs to also

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ For further details, see "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" in *The Location of Culture*

comprehend the role that language plays, both in terms of shaping their once colonial identities as well as the way of their protest against the colonial hierarchical relations. Different writers have therefore attempted to address the question of language differently: using sentences or phrases of the native colonized culture (as Césaire does in *A Tempest* by using the culturally and thematically heavily loaded word "uhuro" suggesting "freedom") or by rejecting entirely the colonizer's language (as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's appropriation of the Gikuyu). Similarly, the colonial encounter and its resulting hybridity affected language and its use in the postcolonial societies. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin,

"There are three main types of linguistic groups within post-colonial discourse: monoglossic, diglossic and polyglossic. Monoglossic groups are those single-language societies using English as a native tongue, which correspond generally to settled colonies. Diglossic societies are those in which a majority of people speak two or more languages, for example, in India, Africa, the South Pacific, ...and in Canada, where Québécois culture has created an officially bilingual society. In diglossic societies English has generally been adopted as the language of government and commerce, and the literary use of English demonstrates some of the more pronounced forms of language variance. Polyglossic or 'poly-dialectal' communities occur principally in the Caribbean, where a multitude of dialects interweave to form a generally comprehensible linguistic continuum."¹⁶

Within the context of Derek Walcott's play, being a 'polyglossic' society, performing

¹⁶ For further details, see "Re-placing Language" (pg 38-39) from their book *The Empire Writes Back*.

one's identity as a postcolonial being therefore becomes extremely difficult. In his famous essay "The Caribbean: Culture or mimicry?" Walcott notes that

"What we have carried over, apart from a few desultorily performed customs, is language. When language itself is condemned as mimicry, then the condition is hopeless and men are no more than jackdaws, parrots, myna birds, apes".¹⁷

And within the context of the play also Walcott emphasizes on the politics operating surrounding the role of language in the postcolonial condition:

"Jackson: Language is ideas, Mr. Trewe.

And I think that this pre-colonial parrot have the wrong idea.

Harry: It's his accent, Jackson. He's a Creole parrot.

[...]

Harry: The war's over, Jackson! And how can a bloody parrot be prejudiced?

Jackson: The same damn way they corrupt a child. By their upbringing. That parrot survive from a pre-colonial epoch, Mr. Trewe, and if it want to last in Trinidad and Tobago, then it go have to adjust (long pause)."¹⁸

Similarly, the question of race and its related concept of 'purity' and 'pollution' in relation to the issue of 'mixed bloods' add further to the complexity of the situation. Robert Young gives us an excellent picture of the 'diversifying hybrid progeny' as they were reported through the surveys in the 19thC: half-blood, half-caste, half-breed, cross-breed, amalgamate, intermix,

miscegenate; alvino, cabre, cafuso, castizo, cholo, chino, cob, creole, dustee, fustee, griffe, mamaluco, marabout, mestee, mestindo, mestizo, mestize, metifo, misterado, mongrel, morisco, mule, mulat, mulatto, mulatta, mulattress, mustafina, mustee, mustezoes, ochavon, octavon, octoroon, puchuelo, quadron, quarteron, quatralvi, quinteron, saltatro, terceron, zambaigo, zambo, zambo prieto and many more¹⁹. The focus behind such extensive surveys and reports was clear: to produce a *known* or a *knowable* subject so as to be able govern them easily. Therefore, Jackson's use of native language and phrases puzzles his master's own narrative of governing his slave since the *Other* speaks an other-language alien to the self of the master, as when in reply to Harry's exclamation Jackson remarks "kamalongo kaba! (*meaning Jesus is dead!*)" which results in an awkward pause from Harry's side, thereby threatening not only the white man's racial superiority but also the linguistic one.

Extending the master-slave dialectic it becomes clear that it is only in relation to the slave's submission to the role of the slave that the master becomes the master; in other words, for the master to be the master the slave must *perform* the slave. Similarly, to control the 'Other' the 'Self' must know the 'Other', since the 'Other' by virtue of its different otherness can threaten the identity of the 'Self' itself (as one can find in the portrayal of the character of Rochester in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*²⁰). Therefore,

¹⁹ For further details, see Robert Young's "Colonialism and the Desiring Machine" (especially pg176-181).

²⁰ Jean Rhys in her *Wide Sargasso Sea* re-writes the canonical Jane Eyre plot from the point of view of Bertha, the mad wife who was locked in the attic. In a section we are given a description when Rochester, in the Caribbean islands in company of the black niggers, feels his own sense of identity threatened

¹⁷ See pg 7

¹⁸ Act I, pg 133-34.

Jackson's refusal to perform the identity assigned to him threatens the secured identity of his master itself. In fact, as early as in the opening pages of the play, Jackson declares, "I tell you, I ain't no actor, and ain't walking in front of a set of tourists naked playing cannibal. Carnival, but not cannibal"²¹. We have already been made to realize that even though the empire writes back it still remains always already dependent on the master to claim its own voice and as such can never achieve the distant dream of absolute autonomy and freedom. Jackson seems always aware of this postcolonial condition and of his own position and role within the structure of postcoloniality:

"Jackson: (Rises, takes up parol, holding it like a guitar...Sings)

I want to tell you 'bout Robinson Crusoe.

He tell Friday, when I do so, do so.

Whatever I do, you must do like me.

He make Friday a Good Friday Bohbole;

That was the first example of slavery,

'Cause I am still Friday (the slave) and you ain't me.

And Friday, his slave, was a cannibal,

But one day things bound to go in reverse,

With Crusoe do the slave and Friday the boss"²².

When seen through the lens of the contemporary socio-political and economic power-structures, Jackson's hope of this distant "one day" seems an almost impossible utopian dream. The very first page of 2nd Act also repeats this speech, however, we are

made to realize that this is a repetition with a difference, one that holds the power to disrupt and shatter the image of the cosy, secure, already-given superiority of the master. As such it may be said that what disturbs Harry is not so much the noise of the hammer but rather Jackson's ironic "mimicry" of the master since it is what creates the real hammering effect on the supremacy-driven-consciousness of the master. As long as Jackson unquestioningly performs his role as the (negro) servant to the (white) master there seems a harmonious relation between them, however the tension rises whenever Jackson raises up with his *non-servium*. Harry, always tries to perform the role of the sympathetic, friendly, liberal master so that the situation never goes out of his hands. Whenever he feels the threat of a protest he comes in either with a liberalistic outlook of a practitioner of equality, or with a justification or repentance of his deeds. It may also seem that Harry really wants to bridge the historical gap between them, however, within the hierarchically arranged signifying system of the master-slave, colonizer-colonized relation that seems to encompass almost every sphere of human existence, it seems an impossibility and Jackson seems to understand that very well. Therefore, to Harry's confessional, seemingly remorse-tricken plea for forgiveness—

"I daresay the terror of emptiness made me want t act. I wasn't trying to humiliate you. I meant noting by it. Now, I don't usually apologize to people. I don't do things to apologize for. When I do them, I mean them, but, in your case, I'd like to apologize"²³

— Jackson could only reply that "Well, if you find here boring, go back home. Do

²¹ Act I, pg 133.

²² Act I, pg 138 and also Act II, pg 142.

²³ Act II, pg 143.



something else, huh?”. It seems that both Harry and Jackson seems inextricably trapped within their historically assigned roles: whereas the former remains embodied within the white man’s civilizing, philanthropic paternal burden; in the latter’s case, it seems to suggest not only the return of the historically repressed voice but that too with a vengeance, the hatred, angst and agony of which comes to the forefront with the slightest of spark.

What differentiated colonialism from the ancient capturing of territories was the economic side of it, its association with capitalism. Imperialism, as Lenin noted it in his celebrated essay, formed the highest stage of capitalism, and this is something the effects of which are still visible in the postcolonial nations by virtue of making the colonized dependent on the colonizer, even after independence. Walcott himself was acutely aware of the economic side of colonialism, and latter the 'neo-colonialism' of America, the effects of which he himself had suffered being a postcolonial writer:

“We live in the shadow of an America that is economically benign yet politically malevolent. That malevolence, because of its size, threatens an eclipse of identity, but the shadow is as inescapable as that of any previous empire... In the case of my own identity, or my realness if you like it, is an absurdity that I can live with; being both American and West Indian is an ambiguity without a crisis, for I find that the more West Indian I become, the more I can accept my dependence on America as a professional writer...”²⁴

And this is clearly reflected also in the relation between Harry and Jackson, since the

²⁴ From “The Caribbean: Culture or mimicry?”, pg 3-4.

latter would have to remain dependent on the former (his master) for his own sustenance and as such cannot protest directly even if he wants. As such Harry’s idea of a pantomime, by which he wanted to amuse himself (and other white men like him), provides Jackson with an opportunity to protest in the guise of the carnivalesque inversion and express a sense of historical hatred against the (white, European) master :

“Jackson : [...] 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...Now...

Harry : Now? (*Jackson’s speech is enacted in a trance-like drone, a zombie*)

Jackson : But after a while the child gets frighten of the shadow he make. He says to himself, That is too much obedience, I better had stop. But the shadow don’t stop, no matter if the child playing that pantomime, and the shadow does follow the child everywhere...He cannot get rid of it, no matter what,...until it is the shadow that start dominating the child, it is the servant that start dominating the master...(*laughs maniacally, like The Shadow*) and this is nthe victory of the shadow...(*Normally*) And that is why all them Pakistani and West Indians in England, all them immigrant Fridays driving all you so crazy till you go mad...”²⁵

²⁵ Act I, pg 137.



Using Goffman's concepts of everyday performance we can also interpret it in a different manner. As Goffman notes,

"Sometimes he will intentionally and consciously express himself in a particular way, but chiefly because the tradition of his group or social status require this kind of expression and not because of any particular response...each participant is expected to suppress his immediate heartfelt feelings, conveying a view of the situation which he feels the others will be able to find at least temporarily acceptable...Each participant is allowed to establish the tentative official ruling regarding matters which are vital to him but not immediately important to others, e.g., the rationalizations and justifications by which he accounts for his past activity; in exchange for this courtesy he remains silent or non-committal on matters important to others but not immediately important to him. We have then a kind of interactional *modus vivendi*. Together the participants contribute to a single overall definition of the situation which involves not so much a real agreement as to what exists but rather a real agreement as to whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honoured."²⁶

Austin's concept of "performative utterances"²⁷ emerges out as crucially significant in this context, whereby, he himself acknowledges that such utterances needs to be met with specific conditions to achieve their intended action. For Austin context plays a crucial role. In the present context of the play, Harry-Jackson relation

mirrors colonial relations whereby Harry's role as the white man grants him the authority to determine which of Jackson's utterances are fulfilled and which are not. Therefore it becomes clear that Jackson's protests cannot achieve its action because it goes against colonial convention for a slave to free himself by speaking. While Jackson is allowed to "speak" his social status as a slave removes the potential for his words of resistance to expressly perform their intended action, therefore suggesting the close relationship between speech and power and politicizing the action of Jackson's utterances within a colonial system. Regarding the void that exists between the utterance and its intended action, Judith Butler updates Austin's argument to suggest how even inappropriate utterances can become active. Identifying the inherent politics of the performative utterance, Butler emphasizes their ability to work within social conventions to produce subjects for control. In *Excitable Speech*, Butler places Austin's ideas in a more political context, arguing that the performance of "injurious speech acts" causes a loss of context that disorients the receiver, allowing a temporary loss of control that places him/her into a new social order. By synthesizing Austin's productive performative utterance with Althusser's theories of ideological interpellation²⁸, Butler points out that some speech acts move beyond action in the restricted definition that Austin particulates. Instead, these words are active in the sense that they function to call a new *subject* into being. Therefore, Jackson's performative utterances holds in itself the potential for subverting the master-slave

²⁶ From "Introduction", *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

²⁷ According to Austin, for words to be active, they must operate within the correct context, and to illustrate he gives the example of marriage, whereby, if the circumstances are inappropriate, a person saying "I do" cannot actually perform a marriage; the person would simply be saying, "I do" and that "I do" would not declare the success of the marital consent.

²⁸ In *Bodies that Matter*, using Althusser's concept of interpellation, Butler substitutes Althusser's "Hey, you there!" with the statement "It's a girl!" to illustrate how the infant comes to be constituted as the subject in the very act of naming it: "[I]n that naming the 'girl' is 'girl'd', brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender".



structure, however he still needs to remain the slave despite his will to *non-servium* because of the structure of economic dependence, and this marks the paradox of Jackson's postcolonial situation.

Gayatri Spivak decides to describe this condition as 'Neocolonialism' and terms it 'New-Orientalism'. 'Neocolonialism', as Spivak describes, "is more economic and less territorial: it is like 'radiation'- you feel it less like you don't feel it- you feel like you're independent...so that in fact what Marx calls the absence of extra-economic coercions is broadly speaking true"²⁹, and to which the assent is sometimes given unwillingly or unknowingly. It is carried out through a practice analogous to Marx's phrase 'exporting capital's mode of exploitation without its mode of production'.. Spivak's concept of "Planetarity is crucial importance here in terms of comprehending the politics of space that is practiced by using a concept of a singular, all-encompassing, borderless oneness for creating its all-encompassing hegemony. Spivak prefers the word 'planetary' to 'global' because the globe is in our fingertip today through internet but 'planetarity' suggests something beyond the limitations of our globe, something unreachable, against which we all share a singular identity of being global. She develops her argument by using her concept of "Cosmopolitanism" and "Worlding". Breaking "Cosmopolitan" into "cosmos" and "politea", Spivak focuses on 'politea' which is related to 'polis', and tracing the use of the word from Plato's *Republic* and Kant she locates it in the present time to concentrate on its meaning of 'imaginative making' of the world or "cosmos". A similar related concept is "worlding"³⁰. Developed from

²⁹ Gayatri Spivak's "Neocolonialism and the secret agent of knowledge : an interview with Robert Young"

³⁰ Spivak introduces this concept in her celebrated essay "The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the

Heidegger's notion of reading Heraclitus- where he said that the work worlds and fulfill the earth's destiny making "the earth be an earth" - Spivak coins her famous phrase "*the worlding of the world*" to emphasize on this "imaginative making" of the "Third World" and for describing the present postcolonial condition. The "worlding" is exercised by way of the globality of capital and its free flow. That is why she doesn't focus on territory because we are now in a new borderless globe and the territorial imperialism of the past has now given way to a slow submission into capitalist neocolonialism. The powerless and dependent economic structure of the decolonized, third-world post-colonial nations reflects on the paradoxical situation whereby even though it achieves its high cherished, idealized dream of being independent 'nation' that independence simultaneously shows its continuous dependence on the systems of the (white, eurocentric) colonial masters, be it in relation to the concepts of development, civilization or progress which are valued directly or indirectly through the lens of western modernity, or in relation to the

Archives" showing how the various discursive structures operate in the creation of an ideological and imaginative Other world that we call today "the Third World" (which as we know was a product of Bandung conference). Spivak writes, "...the consolidation of Europe as sovereign subject, indeed sovereign and subject,...produce an alternative historical narrative of the "worlding" of what is today called "the Third World." To think of the Third World as distant cultures, exploited but with rich intact heritages waiting to be recovered, inter-preted, and curricularized in English translation helps the emergence of "the Third World" as a signifier that allows us to forget that "worlding," even as it expands the empire of the discipline". For further details regarding Spivak's use of the term "worlding" see "The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archive". The essay was first published as a paper of the 1984 Essex Conference in a collection titled *Europe and its Others: Proceedings of the Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature, July 1984, Volume 1*.



economic dependence on the World Bank itself. As Walcott notes,

“Perhaps powerlessness leaves the Third World, the ex-colonial world, no alternative but to imitate those systems offered to or forced on it by the major powers, their political systems which must alter their common life, their art, their language, their philosophy. On the other hand, the bitterness of the colonial experience, its degradations of dependency and its cynicism of older "values" tempts the Third World with spiritual alternatives... Large sections of the population of this earth have nothing to lose after their history of slavery, colonialism, famine, economic exploitation, patronage, contempt. But the tragedy is that most of its politicians are trapped in the concept of a world proposed by those who rule it, and these politicians see progress as inevitability... In that sense Naipaul is right, that their mimicry of power defrauds their own people. Such politicians insist on describing potential in the same terms as those whom they must serve; they talk to us in the bewildering code of world markets, and so forth. They use, in short, the calculus of contemporary history, and that gives them and us the illusion that we really contribute to the destiny of mankind, to foreign policy... but the truth is that there is something else going on, that this is not the force of the current, and that its surface may be littered with the despairs of broken systems and of failed experiments... You see, the degradations have already been endured; they have been endured to the point of irrelevancy”³¹

The logic of a common oneness, that characterizes the politics of globalization, becomes clearly evident in Harry when he declares “We’ve come closer to a mutual

respect, and that things need not get that hostile...” and that “Look, I’m a liberal, Jackson...”, to which Jackson could only reply that “I want you to come to your senses, let me fix the sun deck”³² probably realizing the impossibility of such an idealistic union of the master and the slave at least within the capitalistic structures.

In “The Fetishism of the Commodity and its Secret Thereof”, Marx had suggested that commodity products become part of an obfuscating network of signs that obscure the history of labour that went into their production³³. Similarly, Spivak also suggests that the 'Third World', like 'commodity fetish', becomes a sign that obscures its modes of production, thus making dominance appear somehow given or natural. It is an ideological image of (the white European) superiority which we internalize and therefore feel a 'lack' within us and therefore we 'desire' it and finally end up emulating 'them', similar to what Fanon had said about the psychology of colonialism in his *Black Skin, White Masks*. The result is a dislocation

³² Act I, pg 136.

³³ Marx describes how

“...In the act of seeing, there is at all events, an actual passage of light from one thing to another, from the external object to the eye. There is a physical relation between physical things. But it is different with commodities... There it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things... [as in]... the religious world... [where]... The productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities. This Fetishism of commodities has its origin, as the foregoing analysis has already shown, in the peculiar social character of the labour that produces them”. For further details regarding Marx’s concept of “fetishism” see “The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof”.

³¹ From “The Caribbean: Culture or mimicry?”



of culture as well as identity. It is this threat of cultural dislocation that the postcolonial nations are facing today, and postcolonial theory as a branch of episteme not only focuses on studying all these aspects of colonialism and its aftermath but also seeks to find out ways of being liberated from the modes of colonialist discourse and speech, whether it occurred a hundred years ago or today. Although

postcolonial theory has been charged by critics on grounds that it created in the (western) academy, deals with (western) academy, and is meant for (western) academy³⁴, the need is for a radical reconstruction of the ways of representation, to move beyond the realms of "colonial discourse analysis"³⁵ which has assumed a similar totalizing grand-narrative that continues to treat West as the privileged site of study within academia. It is for this purpose that later-day postcolonial theory enlarged its scope to include other disciplines as well, such as gender studies, culture studies etc³⁶. Since the problem is diverse the ways of representing or addressing it must also remain open for such diversity or plurality rather than giving it a form of a common, singular *oneness* labelled simply as 'postcolonial', for, to do it would be falling back to the same structure of binaries, be it Said's concept 'contrapuntal' act of 'writing

back', or Spivak's "strategic essentialism", or the formation of what she calls 'counter collectivities' by the 'Third world' intellectuals against the transnational popular of global capitalism. We must realize that the aim should not be "... to master the canon of criticism, to initiate and apply it...[rather] we must turn to the...[native] tradition itself to develop theories of criticism indigenous to our cultures" (Gates, Henry Louis)³⁷; against the ethnocentric anglophone discourse we must create a counter discourse which would disrupt the logocentrism of western metaphysics by means of celebrating 'Otherness' instead of disdaining it, and the present play makes an attempt towards that ideal, however ambiguous it may appear.

The post-colonial condition of 'hybridity' shows us a disturbing picture of the impossibility to claim absolute autonomy and freedom from the (white, eurocentric) master-signifiers that go on to shape and determine not only the identity, role and status of the signifier-signified relationship but in fact the very process and way of signification itself. So dense, deep and intertwined the structure has become that a simple claim to reverse the process or ways of signification would clearly not solve the problem. And similarly, a simple claim of an alternate, new structure remains an impossible utopian dream. In such a condition, if one can have their identity, recognition and voice only by playing their roles as "the mimic men"(a phrase that V.S. Naipaul coins as the title of his epinymous novel and has been used by so many intellectuals), the need is to realize how the same mimicry can also be used to assert difference within its own processes of imitation and therefore sustains within it also the traces of self-discovery. Those who see

³⁴ see Kwame Anthony Appiah's "Is the 'Post' in 'Postcolonial' the 'Post' in 'Postmodern'?"

³⁵ Robert Young notes how a certain textualism and idealism operates within colonial-discourse analysis which has been criticized by many critics such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Benita Parry and Aijaz Ahmad. Interestingly he also notes that "... It was always India that received the greatest economic, cultural and historical attention from the British. In the same way, today India quite clearly retains that position of pride of place, the jewel in the crown of colonial-discourse analysis". For further details, see Robert Young's "Colonialism and the Desiring Machine" (pg 159-166).

³⁶ see Elleke Boehmer and Rosinka Chaudhuri's "Introduction" from *The Indian Postcolonial*.

³⁷ see Henry Louis Gates's "Introduction" from *Race, Writing, and Difference*.



only disorder, futility and chaos must also look for patterns within the same existing condition and they may find new ways of representation. As such the concept of “mimicry” also needs to be seen in a new light and not just as a slavish, static imitation. For Walcott, mimicry “is an act of imagination” which can be seen even in some animals and insects as 'endemic cunning' for survival, as in lizards, chameleons, butterflies, and certain insects who adapt the immediate subtleties of color and even of texture both as defense and as lure. Mimicry is also “...the process by which we were Christianized. The imitation of Christ, the mimicry of God as a man... The imitation of Christ must be carried into human life and social exchange”. For Walcott “mimicry” is an inextricable part of existence, and the present condition calls for a re-conceptualization, re-formulation and renewed use of the concept of mimicry in newer lights:

“We invent nothing, that is, no object. We do not have the resources, we can argue. Well, neither did Ford, neither did Edison. But electricity and light and even the idea of the car existed before they were discovered. They were not creations, they are also mimicry... We continue far enough and we arrive at Voltaire confronting Nietzsche: “It is necessary to invent God”, and “God is dead”. Join both, and that is our twentieth-century credo. “It is necessary to invent a God who is dead”. ”³⁸

To use Judith Butler's words, if “discourse” is all we have today and there is no such position that can be taken as “outside discourse”, “prediscursive” or “outside” discourse then the need emerges to disrupt from “within” the existing, dominant

discourse³⁹. Herein emerges the need and importance of performance as “strategy” and not the slavish imitation without awareness of what is done. If 'social' identities are formed and internalized by means of performance and reiteration of a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of the substance, of a natural sort of beings, the need then emerges to deconstruct these “congealed” substances in order to reveal the myriad ways in which 'social' identities, roles and norms are “done” or “produced” within discourse. However, as Butler makes it clear, the deconstruction of the subject is by no means equivalent to its destruction, that “[t]o claim that the subject is itself produced in and as a general matrix of relations is not to do away with the subject, but only to ask after the conditions of its emergence and operation”⁴⁰. As such the need is for a strategic *rejection* since “[s]trategies always have meanings that exceed the purposes for which they are intended”⁴¹; and by the similar logic, it can be therefore asserted that if “Camouflage... is mimicry”⁴² then it becomes clear that in the context of the postcolonial condition characterized by hybridity one needs mimicry not simply as an imitation but as design, as both defense, lure and strategy. At the same time one also needs to be aware that the notion of imitative identity defended here

³⁹ From her essay “Contingent Foundations:

Feminism and the Question of “Postmodernism”

⁴⁰ Butler makes these formulations in relation to show how gender identities and heterosexuality comes to acquire its “natural”, “given”, “prediscursive” by means of performative character and internalization and reiteration of the “norms” of performance itself. Using her influential concepts I have attempted to emphasize social and cultural identities themselves depend on such a performative aspect and internalization and reiteration of the “norms”. For further details see “Introduction” to *Bodies That Matter*.

⁴¹ For further details see her book *Gender Trouble*.

⁴² Derek Walcott uses this phrase in his essay “The Caribbean: Culture or mimicry?”

³⁸ From “The Caribbean: Culture or mimicry?”, pg 11-12.



does not assume that there is an original or ideal identity that is to be imitated. Rather, it is an imitation of the very notion of an ideal or original, similar to the psychoanalytic notion of identification of gender or consciousness which comes to be constituted by a fantasy of a fantasy, the transfiguration of an Other who is always already a “figure” in that double sense. As such, like gender, sex, desire and body, the “performative” and “performance” also cannot be taken as singular, abstract concepts, for, to do so would be to fall back in the same line of logocentrism that characterizes Western metaphysics. At the same time, as Butler cautions us, one also needs to be aware of the limits of one's own subjective position and how subversive performances risk becoming “deadening clichés” through their repetition in a commodity culture⁴³. The questions of difference, partial perspectives, interdisciplinarity, or context-specific approaches have emerged as crucial issues in relation to the question of 'representation' itself and have been variously stressed by innumerable thinkers to counter or disrupt the monologic, totalitarian structure of the logocentrism of Western metaphysics. The need is to extend the norms of “livability” of identitarian performance from “within” the limits of existing discourse. As Butler puts it, “The critique of the subject is not a negation or repudiation of the subject, but, rather a way of interrogating its construction as a pre-given or foundationalist premise”⁴⁴; any strategic, parodic performance, like critique itself, must realize both its strength and limits as well as the ambiguity and plurality inherent in a performative act, it is never fixed, never static, never one, and so is the concept of parody, performativity, and the ‘I’ itself...

⁴³ From her essay “Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of “Postmodernism”

⁴⁴ Ibid.

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Name of the author: Subro Saha

Designation/ affiliation: M.Phil Research Scholar, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences and Guest Lecturer, Department of English, City College, Kolkata.

Email Id: subhro129@gmail.com