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## Araştırma Makalesi • Research Article

### The Study of Pantomime as an Example of ‘Decolonizing Fiction’

#### *Pantomime Oyununun Sömürge Sonrası Edebiyat Örneği Olarak İncelenmesi*

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#### ÖZ

Bu çalışma Derek Walcott tarafından yazılan *Pantomime* (1978) adlı oyunu Greimas'ın aktan modeline göre incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Oyun, kimlik konusunun yanı sıra effendi-köle ve beyaz-siyah gibi ikili karşıtlıkların geçerliliğini *Robinson Kruzo* eserinde canlandırılan effendi-köle stereotiplerini kullanarak sorunsallaştırır. Oyunda Trewe (Ö1) ve Jackson (Ö2) adlarında iki karakter vardır. Emekli bir İngiliz aktör olan Ö1 kendi kültürünü yerlilerin kültüründen üstün görür. Trewe'in hizmetçisi olan Ö2 ise siyahi olduğu için aşağılık kompleksine sahiptir. Bir gün, Tobago'da küçük bir otel işleten Ö1 oteldeki misafirlerini eğlendirmek için Ö2 ile *Robinson Kruzo* eserini canlandırmak ister. İlginçtir ki, bu performans *Robinson Kruzo*'daki sömüren ve sömürülen üzerine dayalı ikili karşıtlığı yansıtmaz. Aksine, bu performansla sömüren ve sömürülen tarafından oynan roller, Trewe ve Jackson'ın sürekli roller değiştirmesiyle tersine çevrilir. Oyunun sonunda Ö2, Ö1'den zam ister ve bu durum ikili karşıtlıklardan muaf bir dünya yaratılabileceğine dair bir umut olarak düşünülebilir çünkü bu ilişki patron ile işçiyi içine alan yeni bir tür ilişkiyi gösterir.

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#### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze the play called *Pantomime* by Derek Walcott (1978) according to Greimas's actantial model. The play problematizes issues of identity and validity of the binary oppositions such as master/slave and white/black through employing the master and slave stereotypes animated in the work called *Robinson Crusoe*. There are two characters named Trewe (S1), and Jackson (S2) in the play. S1, who is a retired English actor, sees his culture as superior to the native culture. S2, who is the servant of S1, has an inferiority complex as he is black. One day, S1, who runs a small hotel in Tobago and wants to entertain his guests at his hotel, wants to prepare a performance of the novel called *Robinson Crusoe* with Jackson. Interestingly enough, their performance does not reflect the binary oppositions based on the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized as in *Robinson Crusoe*. On the contrary, it openly reverses the roles performed by the colonizer and the colonized after a constant role-shifting by S1 and S2. At the end of the play, S2 asks for a raise from his employer S1 and this might be thought as a possibility for creating a world which is free from binary oppositions, and for starting a new sort of relationship based on an employee and an employer.

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## Introduction

*Pantomime* is a postcolonial work written by Derek Walcott. There are two characters in the play named Trewe (S1) who runs a small hotel in Tobago and Jackson (S2) who is the servant of Trewe. S1 wants to prepare a performance of the novel called *Robinson Crusoe* for his guests at the hotel. S1 wants S2 to play the role of Friday in the performance. At first, S2 refuses this suggestion, but then he is convinced by S2. The show starts as a reenacting of the colonialist work *Robinson Crusoe*; however, S2 experiences a new consciousness after many roles shifting with S1. S2 has a chance to look at the colonial history, which is founded on the binary oppositions, from Friday's perspective for the first time. This is new for S2, because he looks at his history from what he has learnt from white culture so far. After gaining this new consciousness, S2 reverses the roles of the colonizer and the colonized in the performance, and thus gets rid of his inferiority complex. The play ends with his asking for a raise from his employer S1, which may be taken as a hope for future in terms of starting a new sort of relationship free from the binary oppositions.

As the play has been studied according to Greimas's actantial model in this paper, especially semiotic theory and Greimas's actantial model have been explained in detail. First and foremost, according to semiotic theory, "meaning is not inherent in objects, they do not signify by themselves, but meaning is constructed by a competent observer - a subject - capable of giving 'form' to objects" (Martin & Ringham, 2000, p. 118). Likewise, according to Greimas, narration is very important in giving the meaning of the text and it is not only composed of languages but also of the other systems. He tries to understand "the grammar of the narrative sentence to find the paradigmatic langue of narrative, and to see how it is embodied in the parole of the individual narrative...Greimas looks for sememes, the smallest unit of semantic signification, which he finds in the actant" (Duvall, 1982, p. 192). Greimas claims that the individual narrative can be reduced into a sentence and literature can be reduced into a language. Thus, a common grammar for the stories may be mentioned. Greimas' actantial model can be described as

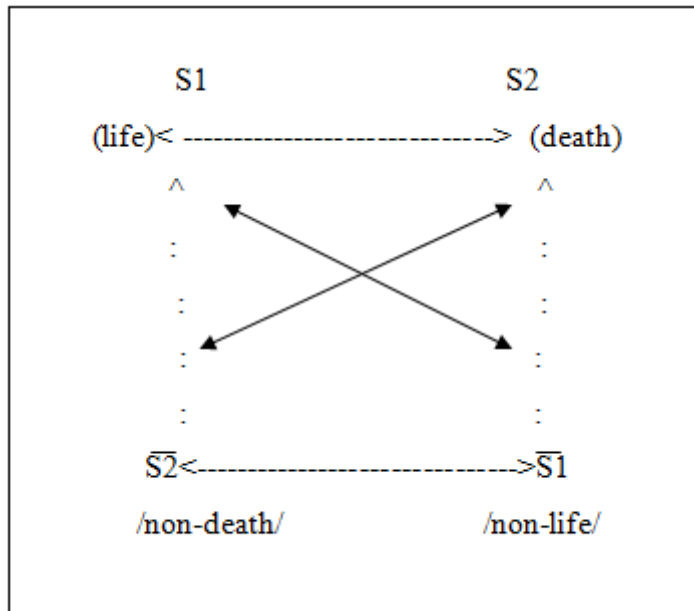
Three basic binary oppositions underlie all narrative themes, actions and character types (which he collectively calls 'actants'); namely, subject-object, sender-receiver and helper-opponent- note that the hero is both subject and receiver. The subject is the one who seeks; the object is that which is sought. The sender sends the object and the receiver is its destination. The helper assists the action and the opponent blocks it...in traditional syntax, 'functions' are the roles played by words - the subject being the one performing the action and the object being 'the one who suffers it'. (Chandler, 2002, pp. 118-19)

Furthermore, there are three axes on which these six actants work: the axis of desire through which the subject gets the object after fulfilling his/her action, the axis of communication through which the sender delivers the item to the subject, who is the receiver, and the axis of conflict via which not just helpers but also the subject meet. (Duvall, 1982, p. 192). Greimas (1989) similarly describes the function of a verb as being made up of modalities in his narrative semiotics:

The modalities were explored and then articulated into four fundamental ones: two virtualizing and two actualizing ones. On the one hand, wanting and having-to virtualize the process and, on the other, being-able and knowing actualize it... What became obvious is that if you want to construct a narrative grammar, then it has to be a modal grammar. From this point of view the whole grammar is composed of modalities; the rest is simply content, semantics. (p. 545)

In other words, it can be said "the subject's competence is organized by means of a modal grammar that accounts for their existence and performance" (Cobley, 2001, p. 195). The subject may either succeed or fail in obtaining the target at the end of the narrative program. It is useful to draw a semiotic square to indicate the meaning of the text, which can be defined as

“a visual presentation of the elementary structure of meaning. Articulating the relationships of contrariety (opposition), contradiction and implication, it is the logical expression of any semantic category” (Martin & Ringham, 2000, p. 13). Below is an example based on Martin and Ringham.



**Figure 1:** Semiotic square about life and death axis

This semiotic square can be explained as follows: “(1) S1 and S2 are in a relation of opposition or contrariety. (2) S1 and  $\bar{S1}$  are in a relation of contradiction:  $\bar{S1}$  negates S1. S2 and  $\bar{S2}$  are also in a relation of contradiction:  $\bar{S2}$  negates S2. (3)  $\bar{S1}$  and S2 are in a relation of implication:  $\bar{S1}$  implies S2. Similarly,  $\bar{S2}$  implies S1” (Martin and Ringham, 2000, p. 13). It can be claimed that a semiotic square helps understanding the meaning of the text through studying the oppositions. In addition, it is effective in displaying “textual dynamics by plotting essential stages or transformations in a story and to follow the narrative trajectory of the subject” (Martin & Ringham, 2000, p. 13).

The play has been investigated on several levels, from the surface to the abstract or deep, i.e. narrative, discursive, and logical-semantic. At the surface level, there have been three main segments including many sub-segments. The actions and actants have been shown according to their temporal and spatial locations, and figurative natures of the actants have also been studied. Following the surface level, the logical-semantic level has been studied with a focus on the oppositions composing the main theme of the narrative via semiotic squares.

### Surface Level: Discursive and Narrative level

When the play starts, there is a familiar scene taking place in Tobago where there are Trewe (S1), an English man who runs a hotel, and his black servant Jackson (S2). It is postcolonial period in which there is decolonization of the colonized and the deconstruction of binary oppositions. Although Tobago is an independent country now, binary oppositions such as master and slave, white being superior and black being inferior are still hold in the minds of both S1 and S2. S2 shows some attempts to challenge his role as a black servant by giving orders to S1 from time to time. For instance,

Jackson: Mr. Trewe, I am trying to explain that I myself feel like a  
ass holding this tray in my hand while you standing up there naked.

[. . .]. So, when you put back on your pants, I will serve you

breakfast.

Harry: Actors do this sort of thing. I'm getting into a part.

[. . .]

Jackson: (exploding) Put on your blasted pants, man! You like a blasted child, you know!

(Silence. HARRY puts on his pants.)

Harry: Shirt, too? [. . .] (HARRY puts on his shirt.) [. . .] Sit, and I'll serve you breakfast. You can teach me manners. There is more manners in serving than in being served. (Walcott, 2001, pp. 134-35)

However, these sudden bursts of anger do not make S2 master of S1, because S2 has an inferiority complex as a result of having internalized the binary oppositions for a very long time. There are many scenes in the play exemplifying S2's having inferiority complex. For instance,

Mr. Trewe? (English accent) Mr. Trewe, your scramble eggs is here! are here! (Creole accent) You hear Mr. Trewe? I here wid your eggs! (English accent) Are you in there? (To himself) And when his eggs get cold, is I to catch. [. . .] What the hell I doing? That ain't go heat them. It go make them more cold. Well, he must be leap off the ledge. At long last. Well, if he ain't dead, he could call. (Walcott, 2001, p. 132)

S2's mimicking of S1's language shows S2's hybrid culture, split identity and desire to resemble his master. An important change is detected in S2 when S1 asks S2 to perform Friday in Robinson Crusoe for the guests in the hotel. The performance starts to be delivered as it is in the imperialist work Robinson Crusoe; that is, S1 is the white master and S2 is the black servant. However, S2 wants to make changes in their roles by acting out Friday as a black master. S2 even wants to change the name Friday with Thursday as he says that he does not want to do what is told him anymore. Thus, the colonialist text is reversed with S2's wishes to change the names and the roles. As it is expected, S1 is quite disturbed from the situation even if he accepts these changes during the performance. He says

All right, so it's Thursday. He comes across this naked white cannibal called Thursday, you know. 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 . . . I mean . . . he would have to be taught by this – African . . . 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 . . . and it would get very, very complicated, and I suppose ultimately it would be very boring, and what we'd have on our hands would be . . . would be a play and not a little pantomime. [. . .] the whole thing would have to be reversed; white would

become black, you know. (Walcott, 2001, p. 141)

After getting rid of the binary oppositions and inferiority complex, S1 can look from a different point of view both to himself and to S1. He starts to see the binary oppositions as constructed things by the colonizers and realizes that they are all prejudices. He states

May I say what I think Mr. Trewe? I think it's a matter of prejudice. I

think that you cannot believe: one: that I can act, and two: that any

black man should play Robinson Crusoe. A little while aback, I came out here quite calmly and normally with the breakfast things and find

you almost stark naked, kneeling down, and you told me you were getting into your part. Here am I getting into my part and you object.

This is the story . . . this is history. This moment that we are now acting here is the history of imperialism; it's nothing less than that.

And I don't think that I can – should – concede my getting into a part

halfway and abandoning things, just because you, as my superior, give me orders. People become independent. Now, I could go down

to that beach by myself with this hat, and I could play Robinson

Crusoe, I could play Columbus, I could play Sir Francis Drake, I

could play anybody discovering anywhere, but I don't want you to

tell me when and where to draw the line. (Walcott, 2001, p. 140)

After this kind of enlightenment, S2 has a new relationship with S1. He demands that “Starting from Friday, Robinson, we could talk ‘bout a raise?” (Walcott, 2001, p. 152). This can be considered as a possibility for creating a world free from the binary oppositions and inequalities for both races, because the relationship between S1 and S2 moves from the one based on the master-slave to the one based on the employer and the employee. Thus, the colonial polarizations are abandoned and a human to human relationship starts.

### **Segmentation**

To have a better understanding of the text's deeper meaning, there are three main segments including a few subdivisions designed according to time, space and action. There are not many subdivisions according to place since place does not change in the play. As for the time, there are only a few references to time. That is why, subdivisions are created mostly according to the change of the actions. The first segment shows that S1 and S2 have colonialist ideas in their minds. The second segment includes challenging and deconstructing these binary oppositions as a result of shifting roles of Crusoe and Friday by S1 and S2. In the last segment, the binary oppositions are abandoned and a new sort of relationship starts to build on a human to human relationship with S2's demanding a rise from S1. In order to differentiate each segment from the others, A, B, C have been used to name each segment. Subdivisions are called as A1, B1, C1, etc.

A1, the first segment begins with some background information about where the action takes place. It takes place under a gazebo on the cliff's edge, part of a guest house on the Caribbean island of Tobago. Time is not mentioned exactly, but it is understood from the speech of S2 that it is postcolonial period. Although the natives are independent now, it is ironic to see that S2 as native being the servant of British S1. S1 carries a tape recorder and dances by listening to Robinson Crusoe. This imperialist work is of great importance in that it shows the colonialist ideas such as the superiority of Europe and inferiority of natives as natural and as the rule of the world. S1 feels bored of routine of the hotel and complains about feeling lonely

although S2 is with him. This shows S1 is not seeing S2 as a person to talk. S1 says “there’s no one here but I, just the sea and lonely sky” (Walcott, 2001, p. 133). S1 does not seem to be happy for being there and he also complains about the primitiveness of natives as he cannot find a blade or pencil there.

A2 starts when S2 brings S1’s breakfast and speaks in a mimicking way of S1’s accent, which shows S2’s internalizing colonialist ideas. That is, S2 imitates S1, because S2 wants to be like his master S1. A3 starts with S2’s complaining of the parrot (S3) in the hotel. S3 only says Heinegger who was the previous owner of Trewe’s hotel. S2 does not like S3 because it speaks whenever S2 starts to speak. In addition, S3 reminds Jackson of past, that is, colonial history. A parrot does what is taught to it. Similarly, natives do what is taught to them by the colonizers. Thus, S2 resembles S3 in that S2 accepts what is taught to him by British in the colonial period. A4 starts when S2 orders S1 to wear his pants; otherwise, S2 does not serve S1’s breakfast. S2 says

Jackson: (exploding) Put on your blasted pants, man! You like a blasted child, you know!

(Silence. HARRY puts on his pants.)

Harry: Shirt, too? [. . .] (HARRY puts on his shirt.) [. . .] Sit, and I’ll serve you breakfast. You can teach me manners. There is more manners in serving than in being served. (Walcott, 2001, pp. 134-35)

In this scene, S2 is like the master of S1. However, it is not a foreshadowing of the end of the play, because this is another sort of binary in which black is the master and white is the servant. The play aims to get rid of any kind of binary oppositions and achieve equality for both races. A5 starts when S2 explains what he thinks about performing *Pantomime* asked by S1. S2 explains as follows:

For three hundred years I served you. Three hundred years I served you 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. (Walcott, 2001, p. 137).

These lines explain why S2 still holds binary oppositions such as master and slave in his mind although it is postcolonial period and S2 is a free man. Namely, black people has served for white people and done what is asked from them without questioning. They have internalized these master-slave relations; thus, S2 cannot act as a free man. At this point, performing Crusoe as a black master provides S2 a different perspective. The colonialist Robinson Crusoe is told from the colonizer’s perspective while S2’s version of the novel of *Robinson Crusoe* is told from the once colonized’s perspective.

B1, second main segment, starts with S2’s questioning of the Eurocentric views imposed on him after performing black Crusoe as the master of white Friday. For instance, S2 wants to name himself as Thursday instead of Friday while performing the play as he refuses to ‘copy’ what is told to him now. B2 starts when S2 says “that was the first example of slavery, ‘Cause I am still Friday and you ain’t me. Now Crusoe he was this Christian and all, and Friday, his slave, was a cannibal, but one day things bound to go in reverse, with Crusoe the slave and Friday the boss” (Walcott, 2001, p. 138). S2’s desire to be black Crusoe becomes disturbing for S1 and S1 asks S2 to give up performing and to take out the breakfast. In a sense, S1 wants to remind both to himself and to S1 of the rules of the colonial world in which white is the master and black is the servant. Upon this, S2 gets angry which starts B3. S2 mentions

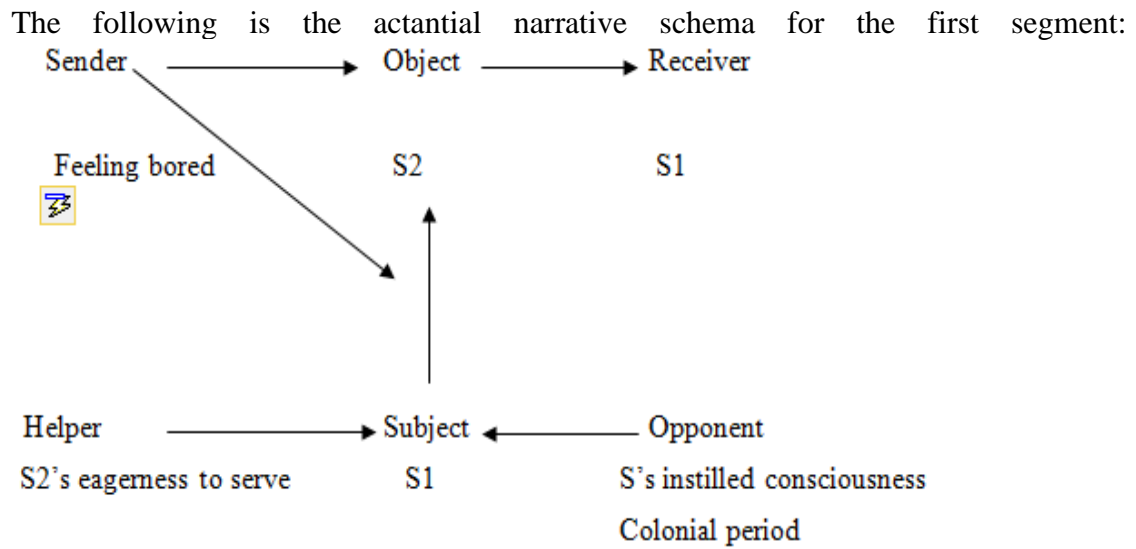
May I say what I think Mr. Trewe? I think it's a matter of prejudice. I think that you cannot believe: one: that I can act, and two: that any black man should play Robinson Crusoe. A little while aback, I came out here quite calmly and normally with the breakfast things and find you almost stark naked, kneeling down, and you told me you were getting into your part. Here am I getting into my part and you object. This is the story . . . this is history. This moment that we are now acting here is the history of imperialism; it's nothing less than that. (Walcott, 2001, p. 140)

B4 starts with S2's asking for respect from S1. This is important to detect the change in S2 in the sense that S2 abandons white supremacy and black inferiority by demanding respect from S1. B5 starts when it is told 'noon' when S2 disturbs S1 with the sounds of hammer. S2 also sings a song and makes noise intentionally. B6 starts when S2 suggests S1 leaving the hotel if S1 feels himself bored there. This is not expected from a person who feels himself a slave. He believes that he deserves respect as a free man now. B7 starts when S1 says that he wants to have a man to man relationship with S2; however, S1, ironically, keeps giving orders to S2. B8 starts when S1 permits S2 to use his bathroom; nonetheless, S1 changes his mind and asks S2 to use servant's bathroom. Upon this, S2 reveals the fact that neither himself nor S1 are ready for this kind of 'man to man' relationship. S2 states:

I will go to my bathroom and let's keep things that way until I can feel I can use your towels without a profound sense of gratitude, and you could walk round the guest house in the dark, put your foot in the squelch of those who missed the pit by the outhouse so many tourists take Polaroids of, without feeling degraded, and we can then respect each other as artists. (Walcott, 2001, p. 147)

S1 finds this speech sarcastic and gets angry with S2. From this point on, it is observed that S1 loses his authority as a master on S2. B9 starts S2's asking for a drink from S1. S1 brings a drink to S2, the master and slave relation is reversed here.

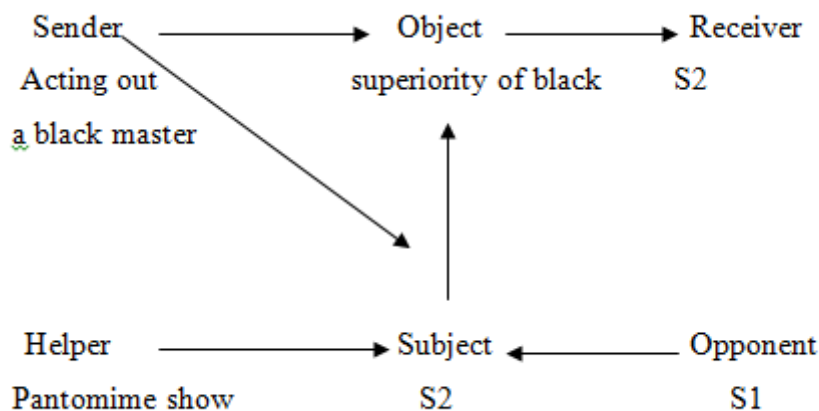
The last main segment, C1, starts with S1's sharing some sad memories about his life with S2, which shows that S1 sees S2 as a person to talk instead of a servant to give orders. C2 starts when S1 and S2 cry and laugh together while acting out their roles. Instead of a master-slave relation, there is a picture of two actors on the stage acting out their roles. C3 starts when S2 says "starting from Friday, Robinson, we could talk 'bout a raise?" (Walcott, 2001, p. 153). These segments aid in comprehending the actions of the narrative's characters and the narrative's structure. The narrative studied in three segments can be summarized as follows: Both S1 and S2 have colonialist binary oppositions in their minds even in postcolonial time; white-master and black-servant binary oppositions are challenged and deconstructed after shifting the roles of Crusoe and Friday by S1 and S2; and, a human to human relationship is built between S1 and S2 after having abandoned the binary oppositions.



**Figure 2:** The Actantial Narrative Schema in the First Segment

Boredom stimulates action by informing S1 about the modalities of desire. As a result, a contract is formed, and the receiver, S1, is assigned to the quest as a subject. In order to bring about this contract, the subject has the ability to act as he is the master and asks S2 to prepare a pantomime show of Robinson Crusoe for the hotel guests. S1 wants to play the role of the white master Crusoe and asks S2 to play the role of the black servant Friday as a result of his colonialist binary oppositions in his mind. Because S2 has also these binary oppositions in his mind, he accepts to play Friday.

S2 does not want to play Friday as he feels powerful after changing roles from black servant to black master. Now, S2 has a chance to look at the colonial period from a different perspective through which he can question Eurocentric ideas such as the superiority of white and inferiority of black. S2 imagines that as a black master he brings civilization to the white and considers this as the black man’s burden. This segment can be represented as follows in the actantial narrative schema:

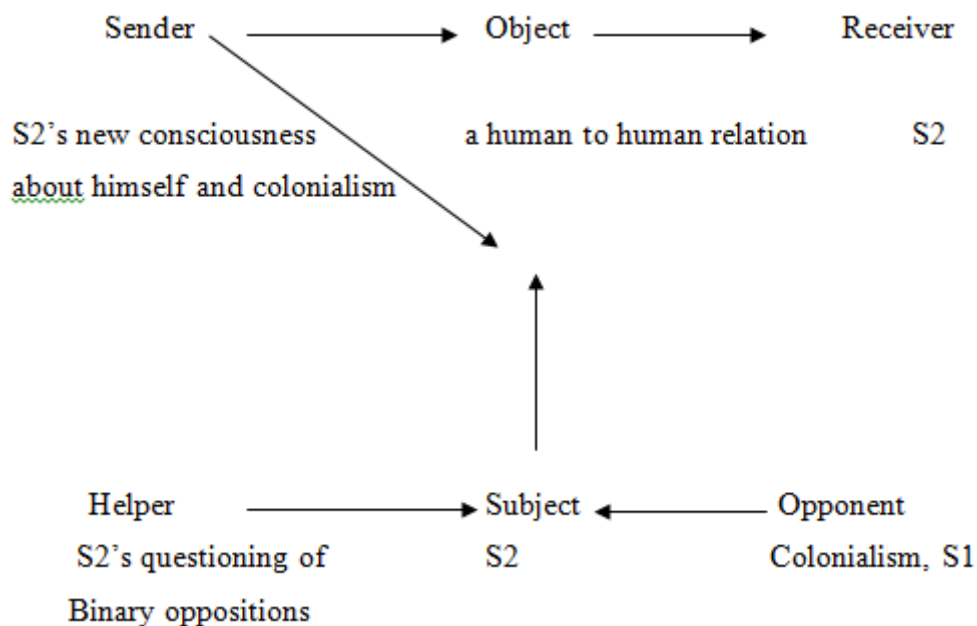


**Figure 3:** The First Actantial Narrative Scheme in the Story

In the last segment, the binary oppositions are abandoned as a result of starting a ‘man to man’ relationship between S1 and S2. A new sort of power struggle starts between S1 and S2 but it is solved because it is free from the binary oppositions. It is a problem between an



employee and an employer instead of a mater and slave. The actantial narrative schema for this segment looks like this:



**Figure 4:** Second Actantial Narrative Schema in the Story

The starting situation: S V O

The ending situation: S  $\wedge$  O

Namely, S represents Jackson and the O represents Trewe who epitomizes the colonialist ideals. What a narrative programme does is to show “the transformation of a syntactical relationship between a subject and an object from one of conjunction to one of disjunction, or vice versa” (Martin & Ringham, 2000, p. 50). S2 is in a disjunction relationship with his object at the beginning of the play, but at the end, he has changed and is in a conjunction relationship with his object. Instead of having a success in action, S2 has an achievement at the level of consciousness. S2 has a relation with S1 based on master-slave relationship. Through performing shifting roles, S2 has a new perspective on himself and white domination. At the end of the play, he abandons the binary oppositions in his mind and tries to create a new sort of relationship free from the binary oppositions with S1. In conclusion, S2 succeeds in achieving his goal at the level of consciousness.

### The Abstract or Deep Level: Semantic-Logical Level

S1 is introduced as a white master of S2. S1 is bored at his hotel in Tobago. From the utterances of S1, it is understood that he has superiority complex as an English man. S1 belittles S2 because of S2's race. For instance, while S1 and S2 are acting out Robinson Crusoe S1 does not accept S2's performing a black master. Thus, it is very obvious that S1 has binary oppositions of supremacy of white and primitiveness of black, which may be illustrated in a semiotic square as below:

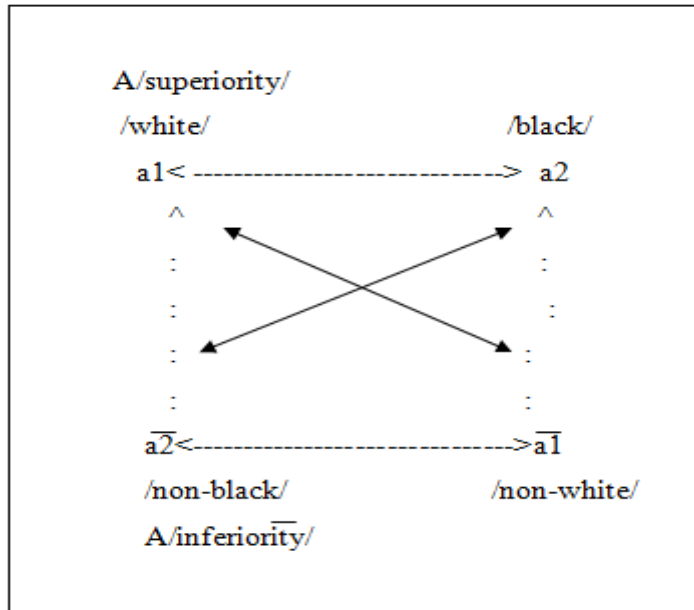


Figure 5: Semiotic Square on Binary Oppositions

Ironically enough, S2 also has the binary oppositions just like S1, which makes S2 a willing servant for S1. Nonetheless, after S2 has a chance to look at colonial period from a different perspective through performing Friday as a black slave and, then, as a black master S2 achieves a new consciousness on colonial period. Thus, there is a sort of transformation from ignorance to knowledge for the part of S2. S2 questions the colonial ideas instead of seeing them as his taken for granted realities anymore. S2 knows that all the colonial ideas are made up by the colonizers to justify their exploitation of natives' lands. This new consciousness helps S2 to build a new sort of relationship between ex-colonizer S1 and free S2, which may be portrayed in a semiotic square as given below:

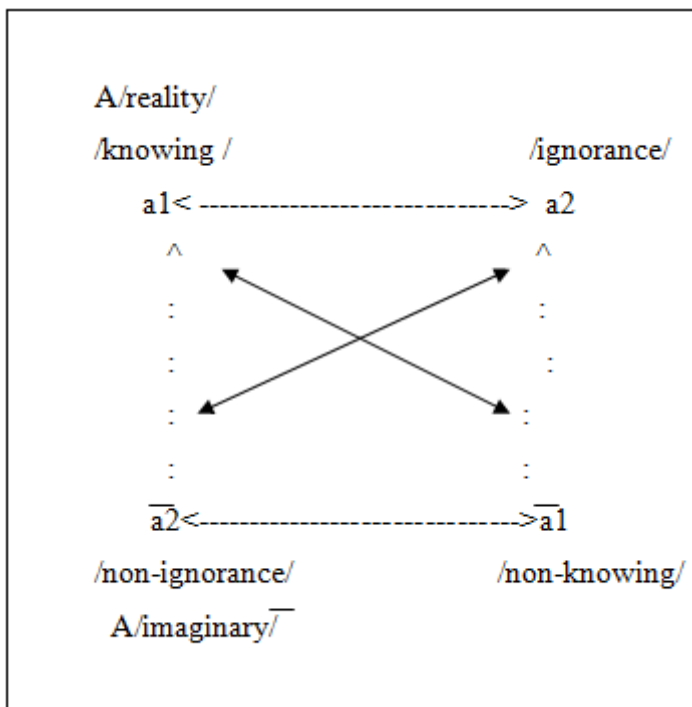
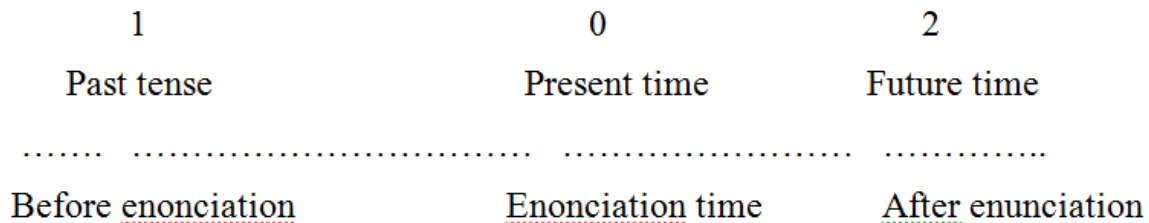


Figure 6: Second Semiotic Square on Binary Oppositions

The play does not give a specific date for when the story takes place. There are references to time such as later, morning, and afternoon, and so on. There is no narrator because it is a play. Stage directions are provided. The action takes place during the enunciation period. It can be depicted as



Space means different things for S1 and S2 and it is critical to construct the meaning of the text. It may be displayed as

Inclusive space Tobago Real and unsafe Open, unsafe	Included Space S1's hotel fictive and safe Closed, safe
<u>Beginning stage</u>	<u>Ending stage</u>
Tobago      Unsafe	Safe
Hotel        Unsafe	Safe

At the beginning of the play, because S2 believes that S1 is the master of both black people and lands in Tobago, S2 feels unsafe both in his country and at the hotel. However, as a result of abandoning master-slave relationship in his mind and starting a new relationship with S1, S2 feels safe both in his country and at the hotel.

In conclusion, Derek Walcott's work *Pantomime* is a postcolonial work. Trewe (S1), who manages a hotel in Tobago, and Jackson (S2), who is Trewe's servant, are the two characters in the play. S1 wants to put on a performance of the novel *Robinson Crusoe* for his hotel guests and he wishes for S2 to take on the role of Friday in the performance. Although S2 initially rejects this suggestion, he is eventually persuaded by S1. The program begins as a reenactment of the imperialist novel *Robinson Crusoe*; however, as several roles are switched with S1, S2 develops a new consciousness. That is, S2 gets rid of binary oppositions instilled on his mind through colonialism. At the end of the novel, S2 asks about a raise from S1, which shows the fact that their relationship based on master and slave turn into a new one in which there are employer and employee. These changes are shown both in the actantial narrative schema and in a semiotic square in the paper.

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