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Changing Dynamics Between Harry and Jackson in One Beat of *Pantomime*

The beat under consideration in this essay starts on page 142 with the stage directions at the beginning of Act II and ends on page 143 when Jackson and Harry “*toast and drink.*” Tension between Jackson and Harry has been building throughout Act I as they attempt to reverse their servant and master relationship in order to perform Robinson Crusoe with Jackson as Crusoe and Harry as Friday. At the end of Act I, Jackson forces Harry to confront the social context and implications of their pantomime; Harry is getting increasingly uncomfortable with the shift in dynamic, saying he has “had enough of this farce”, and Jackson explains “This moment that we are now acting here is the history of imperialism.”¹ Eager to regain control of Jackson and the pantomime, Harry responds that it’s “just a little pantomime, a little satire”² and goes on to say he would “like things to return to where they were”.³ At the beginning of Act II, Jackson has returned, sarcastically, to his role as servant. Yet, it becomes clear in this beat that things cannot “return to where they were”; the dynamics of Harry and Jackson’s relationship have shifted and Jackson is intent upon introducing Harry to the reality of imperialism.

Stage directions act in this beat to reflect Harry’s discomfort and reveal his fear of both Jackson and of losing his authority. As the scene unfolds, the stage directions help to create a mood of unease. Initially the directions indicate that Harry’s shirt is unbuttoned like Jackson’s was in the beginning of the first act; this adds visually to the inversion of the two characters. Tension begins to rise immediately with Jackson’s loud, purposefully annoying hammering from

¹ Walcott, *Pantomime* (1978), 140.

² Walcott, *Pantomime* (1978), 140.

³ Walcott, *Pantomime* (1978), 141.

off stage. Harry emerges as highly indecisive in this beat as he repeatedly gets up from and returns to his deck chair, uncertain about how or whether to confront Jackson about the noise he is making. When Jackson enters the scene holding a hammer, Harry “bolts”⁴ from his chair, seemingly scared. Jackson asks “the hammering not disturbing you?”⁵ in a sarcastic, jovial tone – which he continues to use throughout the beat – as he mocks Harry, even from off stage. Stage directions describe Jackson swinging his hammer in a playful way that matches his tone of voice; this action, playful as it may be, intimidates Harry and foreshadows the later action when Jackson uses the hammer threateningly.

The tension in this beat reaches its height as Jackson begins to sing from off stage. Even though he is not visible in the scene, Jackson continues to upset and frighten Harry, as Walcott reveals through Harry’s continued anxious movement and his increased temper once Jackson starts singing.⁶ Jackson sings, “But one day things bound to go in reverse,/ With Crusoe the slave and Friday the boss”, the same lyrics he earlier improvised, thereby adding purposefully to Harry’s distress, reasserting his cleverness and advantage over Harry, and using Robinson Crusoe as a metaphor to talk about race and imperialism under the guise of comedy.⁷ He is shrewdly telling Harry that their relationship will one day be reversed for real, as he jokingly calls Harry “Robinson Trewe-so.”⁸

The beat comes to an end when Harry orders Jackson to “bring the bloody beer!”, showing his exacerbation, and Jackson leaves and returns with a tray.⁹ Harry tells Jackson, “That

⁴ Walcott, *Pantomime* (1978), 142.

⁵ Walcott, *Pantomime* (1978), 142.

⁶ Walcott, *Pantomime* (1978), 142.

⁷ Walcott, *Pantomime* (1978), 142.

⁸ Walcott, *Pantomime* (1978), 143.

⁹ Walcott, *Pantomime* (1978), 143.

was the most sarcastic hammering I've ever heard,"¹⁰ letting Jackson know he is aware of what he is doing and setting up his assertion on the following page that Jackson "mispronounce[s] words on purpose."¹¹ The beat concludes with the final release of tension when the two men "toast and drink," as they calm down and the audience understands that, for now, the action will not escalate into a fight.¹² Though Walcott has defused the tension, this beat sets the stage for more overt conflict to come.

Bibliography

Walcott, Derek. *Pantomime*. 1978.

¹⁰ Walcott, *Pantomime* (1978), 143.

¹¹ Walcott, *Pantomime* (1978), 144.

¹² Walcott, *Pantomime* (1978), 143.