

- **Victoria Pettersen Lantz**
Sam Houston State University, US

Black Fridays: Transatlantic Entertainments and the Racial Construction of *Robinson Crusoe's* Man Friday

Since Robinson Crusoe was first adapted into a staged pantomime in 1781, Crusoe's companion has been a stereotypical comic native. By the late 1800s, the narrative was one of the most popular texts for children, and British and American stages filled with comedic revisions of Defoe's characters. This article argues that transatlantic popular cultural exchanges transformed Friday into a caricature of blackface pantomime-minstrelsy by the 20th century. It traces the historical staging of Friday in popular entertainments such as pantomime in England and the colonies, Jim Crow blackface performances in America and London, and its survival in Al Jolson musicals and animated cartoons. These theatrical and cinematic representations played on racial stereotypes, and Friday has become a clown figure in the Euro-American collective imagination. In considering these representations, the article touches on racial constructions of Friday, the colonial power dynamics inherent in the original narrative, and the transatlantic exchange of ideas through popular entertainment. Victoria Pettersen Lantz is a visiting Assistant Professor of Theatre at Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas. She is the co-editor of the Routledge collection, Nationalism and Youth in Theatre and Performance (July 2014), and has book chapters in the collections Border-Crossings: Narrative and Demarcation in Postcolonial Literatures and Media and Adapting Chekhov: The Text and Its Mutations

Keywords: blackface, cartoon, Friday, harlequin, Jolson, minstrelsy, pantomime, race, *Robinson Crusoe*, transatlantic

Introduction

(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. ¹ / That was the first example of slavery. [...] But one day things bound to go in reverse, / With Crusoe the slave and Friday the boss.*

—Jackson Phillip, calypso singer, in Derek Walcott's *Pantomime* (1978)

For Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott, the character of Robinson Crusoe has been the subject of many works, most notably his collection *The Castaway and Other Poems* (1965). Exploring the voice of the coloniser through Crusoe, Walcott challenges notions of naming, ownership, and legacy. In his 1978 play *Pantomime* Walcott focuses on Friday, and all the baggage of over two hundred years of performance that come with staging/parodying *Robinson Crusoe*. The play takes the form of a dialogue between Harry Trewe, a white English pantomime performer and Tobagonian hotel owner, and Jackson Phillip, an Afro-Trinidadian retired Calypsonian and Trewe's employee. As the two develop a new *Robinson Crusoe* pantomime, with calypso music and hierarchical inversions (with Phillip as a black Crusoe and Trewe as a white "Thursday"), Walcott through the character of Phillip takes Trewe and the English colonial structure to task, explaining:

For three hundred years I served you. For 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.²

Trewe, on the other hand, speaks in pidgin English and mimics minstrel performance in the tradition of American minstrel Al Jolson (a figure I will discuss later) to create a lighthearted pantomime. He, the Englishman, thus appears as a mocking cartoonish figure juxtaposed to Phillip's serious arguments about colonial racism in the West Indies.

Significantly, the play hints at the grip Defoe's novel has had on popular culture since its publication in 1719. As an early English novel and an adventure story about the strength of individualism, *Robinson Crusoe* gained popularity in English mainstream culture through its use as a literacy tool (taught unchanged or abridged and adapted, in schools) and its adaptation to the stage in pantomime performances. The story is still the subject of numerous pantomimes.³ The publication and popularity of the text aligns chronologically with Britain's efforts to establish itself as a dominant colonial power and to implant its cultural traditions in its colonies. Walcott's play is in part a reminder that one of the longest-running English pantomime stories is that of Crusoe and Friday's various adventures, immediately recognisable as a popular entertainment as well as a novel. Moreover, Walcott, through character discussions of race and role-playing, indicates how easily

Friday transforms into a caricature of historically racist performance practices. Indeed, by the 1970s when Walcott was writing, the character of Friday was fixed as an Uncle Tom/Jim Crow/Al Jolson Bobolee, a slave minstrel devoted to his master. In *Pantomime*, Phillip combats those images by turning the tables on colonialism and pushing Trewe as Crusoe into the fool role.

Walcott's play demonstrates why, following postcolonial rejections of colonialism, Defoe's novel—with its West Indian setting and master/slave dynamic—has been an obvious point of departure for exploring race and culture. In essence, Walcott is offering in the play what Helen Tiffin calls “canonical counter-discourse” by subverting the canon (in this case *Robinson Crusoe*) “to investigate the means by which Europe imposed and maintained its codes in [its] colonial domination.”⁴ Both Walcott and Tiffin, along with other postcolonial artists and scholars, understand that Defoe's novel “was part of the process of ‘fixing’ relations between Europe and its ‘others.’”⁵ For the colonial world, *fixing* meant domination and oppression, and it is this tension between the colonial idea of fixing and the postcolonial idea of oppression that Trewe and Phillip battle over in the play. *Pantomime* is unique in its position as a counter-discursive text because Walcott is addressing the canonical text and the long, troubled history of *Crusoe* in popular entertainments. Essentially, it is an example of “performing back” to the Empire by evoking the history of *Crusoe* entertainments in the play.

In this article, I am concerned with just that: the history of Crusoe and Friday in performance. As we shall see, many traditional, problematic forms of representation were perpetuated in pantomime, blackface minstrelsy, and animated cartoons. Looking at scripts, performance illustrations and photos, including film, the article traces performance traditions in England and America as they relate to popular stage/screen adaptations of *Crusoe*. These examples of diverse popular performances contextualise what exactly is critiqued in Walcott's play; more than the depiction of the master-slave dynamic, Walcott recognises how the Africanising of Friday and the notion of a “natural” servant became deeply entrenched in Euro-American culture. From an examination of different transatlantic entertainments, it is clear that between the American Civil War and World War II performers transformed Friday into a minstrel stereotype, with increasingly bigoted and xenophobic representations of an African or African-American figure. The racist imagery found in these entertainments highlights the fact that the *Crusoe* narrative helped define Africans/African-Americans as servile “others” in the white, mainstream imagination.

The postcolonial criticism leveled at Defoe's novel is well-trodden ground, yet the role of Friday as a predominant figure in Anglophone popular culture has not been discussed at great length, especially considering the attention paid to Crusoe and his one-man colonial industry. Neglecting the history of Friday is a gap in the growing fields of study surrounding characters like Caliban, Uncle Tom, and Jim Crow. Like these canonical (or counter-canonical) characters, Friday equally calls attention to the long, troubled history of colonial and American racial culture.

Mapping the character through different performance modes and representations may offer an insight into why Walcott suggests to audiences that it is through Friday that traditional social hierarchies can be inverted.

Defoe's Friday and 18th-Century Pantomime

Defoe offers a detailed account of Friday's physiognomy as Crusoe first observes him, giving some indirect indication of his ethnicity:

He was a comely, handsome fellow, perfectly well made, [...] he had all the sweetness and softness of a European in his countenance too, especially when he smiled. His hair was long and black, not curled like wool; his forehead very high and large; and a great vivacity and sparkling sharpness in his eyes. The colour of his skin was not quite black, but very tawny; and yet not an ugly, yellow, nauseous tawny, as the Brazilians and Virginians, and other natives of America are, but of a bright kind of a dun olive colour, that had in it something very agreeable, though not very easy to describe. His face was round and plump; his nose small, not flat, like the Negroes', a very good mouth, thin lips, and his fine teeth well set, and as white as ivory.⁶

The description casts the figure of Friday as composed of contradictions: clearly not African, not Amerindian nor Carib, at least compared to those Crusoe has observed, and at the same time not quite European. As Roxanne Wheeler explains, Defoe's depiction allows us "to read Friday, not in his difference from Crusoe, but in his difference from Africans and other Amerindians."⁷ In considering the performative history of Friday, one key aspect of Defoe's original character is that he is non-African and at the same time almost-but-not-quite-European.

Wheeler, in her extensive discussions of the Crusoe-Friday relationship, uses the physical description as the first indicator of Friday's exceptionalism. His non-ethnicity means he is the exception to other races Crusoe has encountered, making him more equal. A physical comparison between Crusoe, tanned and roughened by the castaway life and Friday, highlights what Wheeler asserts as the "partially collapsed boundaries of difference" in the text.⁸ It is the collapse of these boundaries that makes Friday hospitable to and worthy of education in the eyes of Crusoe, who sees him as a figure to be moulded to serve his Englishness. Friday, of course, serves his master, but by extension upholds English social conditions and belief systems.

The teaching of Friday is a key moment in the colonising influence of the text and one of the few moments that carries over into the stage versions, which were drastic reductions of Defoe's original novel. The popularity of the adventure tale meant various adaptations permeated the cultural landscape of Britain quickly, creating the subgenre of desert island fiction known as "robinsonade" by 1731.⁹ Not surprisingly, the story found a home on the English stage by 1781 in the form of pantomime performance. The stage versions, however, usually limited the over 121,000-word novel to just a few important vignettes: Crusoe's shipwreck, finding

animals, finding Friday, teaching Friday, and escaping cannibals with Friday and fleeing back to Europe. These moments allowed for drama and action on stage, the type of physical action that could easily fit into the comedic tradition of pantomime.

As we know, English pantomime owed much to the Italian Renaissance *commedia dell'arte* tradition, introduced to English audiences in the 17th century.¹⁰ Defoe's text and early English *commedia* performances share a similar timeline, in that John Rich founded Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre in 1714, and as a celebrated harlequin (Arlecchino), established that role as central to pantomime (or harlequinades).¹¹ Richard Brinsley Sheridan first directed *Robinson Crusoe; or, Harlequin Friday* at the Drury Lane Theatre in 1781, thus thrusting Friday into the most central role in the early pantomime tradition. Friday, due to his servitude to Crusoe, was a logical choice for the harlequin, who traditionally performed the role of a resourceful servant.

Was the harlequin Friday played on stage with any racial markers? By and large, there is little evidence to answer that question either way. Some critics look to the typical black mask of Harlequin as an indication of racial difference in performance. In fact, during the 18th century, many observers posed the question of why every Harlequin had a black face, or at least noted how his blackness stood in contrast to his fellow characters.¹² John O'Brien, in *Harlequin Britain*, offers a detailed account of the mask colour, asserting that the mask made Harlequin an Everyman "free to be filled with meaningful content" and "helped Britons conceptualize the similarly faceless mob of the 'people.'"¹³ The masking did not carry racial connotations, according to O'Brien, until the late 1700s, with pantomime that specifically called for African Harlequin characters, most famously *Harlequin Mungo* (1788).¹⁴ In terms of the *Crusoe* pantomime, the only reference to racial markers I have found comes from *Harper's Magazine* in 1889, which described the character with coffee-coloured face and tights in the 1791 Drury Lane production of Sheridan's *Robinson Crusoe; or, Harlequin Friday* (*Harper's* offered no citation to back up its claim).¹⁵ To all intents and purposes, Friday served more as the Everyman figure in the pantomime than did Crusoe, and casting him (and masking him) as Harlequin helped make him an accessible character for mass audiences.

Robinson Crusoe; or, Harlequin Friday was a hit, with a substantial run of thirty-eight nights, in addition to return performances as it went on to become a common Christmas pantomime.¹⁶ Accordingly, as cultural trends extended from the metropolis outward, *Crusoe* and its variations spread to different areas within Britain and its colonies, including the Americas. As early as 1785, Lewis Hallam, along with his American Company Theatre, opened *Robinson Crusoe; or, Harlequin Friday* in Jamaica as part of the final season in the colony before travelling to America.¹⁷ By this point, according to O'Brien, "English Harlequins could readily be racialized as Africans."¹⁸ American audiences generally were much more familiar with an African ethnicity because of the slave population in the Southern states, and performances of *Robinson Crusoe; or Harlequin Friday* in the United States reflected, in part, these master-slave dynamics. The *Crusoe* pantomime, then, is

central to early American theatre, and its popularity reflected the newly formed country's relationship with British popular culture. The popular entertainments of comic scenes, slapstick, and musical numbers found a logical home in the pantomime practice, and English performances were in turn soon infused with American traditions.

Jim Crow, Transatlantic Minstrelsy and the Blackening of Friday

While pantomime crossed the Atlantic to find a home in America, by the mid-19th century, Victorian pantomime began to include aspects of American popular culture, in particular blackface minstrelsy. Blackface performances were not an American invention, and the history of performing Africans and Amerindians in blackface in England dates back as far as the 14th century, with popular blackface roles appearing on stage in the 18th century.¹⁹ That said, blackface minstrelsy is a form of American popular performance closely connected with a parodic representation of African-American slaves and defined by set stereotypes of characters, costume, music, language, and physicality, along with the blackened (or corked) face and whitened lips. Early minstrels such as T. D. Rice (creator of Jim Crow) and Dan Emmett (composer of "Dixie") were national American successes as well as hits in London, and the Rice-inspired Jim Crow performances found a second home on the English stage, particularly when the minstrel traditions were incorporated into Victorian pantomime.

Though Friday may have appeared in blackface in England in the late 18th century, the early 19th century marks a clear shift in the character, influenced by American minstrel performances. T. D. Rice appeared on the London stage as Jim Crow in 1836, and audiences were so enthralled by the character, that "theaters rushed to capitalize on [Rice's] success by adding Jim Crow dances to their pantomimes"²⁰ (Fig. 1). Robert Nowatzki, in *Representing African Americans in Transatlantic Abolitionism and Blackface Minstrelsy*, borrows from famed postcolonial theorist Paul Gilroy²¹ to dub this period the "Blackface Atlantic."²² He asserts that "as [American] minstrelsy permeated British society, it increasingly shaped how Britons viewed persons of African descent and slavery."²³ The popularity of the comic Jim Crow routine in the 1830s perpetuated the British belief that Africans were an inferior race, subjugated easily and for their own good, while at the same time the Jim Crow and minstrel performances in England can be aligned chronologically with the abolition of slavery in its West Indian colonies across the Atlantic. As a character, Jim Crow was an amusing version of a slave,²⁴ a contrast to older, though still problematic characters in 18th-century popular entertainment. Earlier stage non-white/slave characters were primarily portrayed as noble savages or "pitiable victims."²⁵ British audiences, inundated with minstrel characters after 1836, had to reconcile the comic buffoonery of Jim Crow with characters like Friday. Thus, *Crusoe* entertainments created a pantomime of contradictions, as it became imbued with the minstrel qualities of slow-witted, black caricatures.

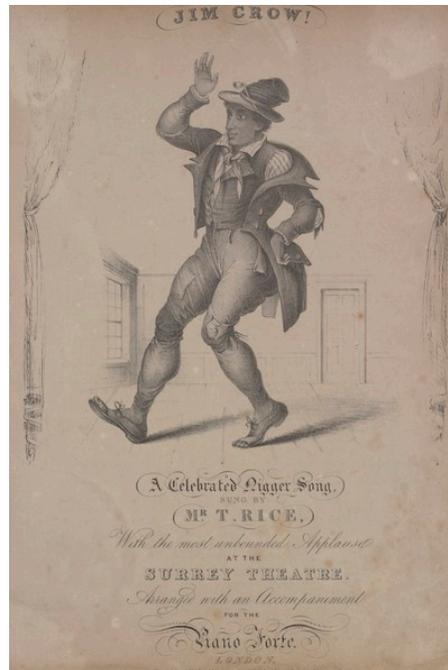


Figure 1. Front cover of the music sheet for "Jim Crow!, The Celebrated Nigger Song," sung by T. D. Rice at the Royal Surrey Theatre in London, 1836. By permission Victoria and Albert Museum, London

On the Victorian stage, Friday's slave identity meant he could appear in the American minstrel fashion while still being a figure of pity for Crusoe. In Henry J. Byron's 1860 *Robinson Crusoe! Or Harlequin Friday, and the King of the Caribbee Islands!* Crusoe rescues Friday and they have their first exchange:

CRUSOE. All apprehension, sombre party, smother;
 Although you're black, you are a man and brother.
 So tell me who you are, by action, nicely.
(Music— FRIDAY goes through pantomimic action, expressive of having been taken captive, &c.)
 [...]
(aside) He'd really make a first-rate servant-man,
 And would particularly useful be;
 He wouldn't cost me much for livery;
 That is indeed a thing he ne'er can lack,
 Nature provides him with a suit of black.
(to FRIDAY) Wilt be my servant?
 FRIDAY. Oh iss, massa: me
 You did deliber from de massa-cree.
 I'll be your slave. *(kneels and places CRUSOE'S foot upon his head)*²⁶

This exchange, the first we see of Friday, accomplishes all the key aspects of the Victorian minstrel pantomime, juxtaposing Crusoe's goodness and Friday's comic Crow act. Crusoe acknowledges Friday's inferior status by highlighting his blackness

multiple times, including a joke about his black skin as a “servant’s livery.” Crusoe positions himself as an abolitionist Englishman; he does *not* ask for a slave but for a servant. Abolitionism was a popular political view in Victorian London,²⁷ and Crusoe is a quintessential representative of the natural, free Englishman. It is Friday who immediately claims the position of slave, and by taking that label and role on himself, Crusoe’s gentility is not compromised and can still reflect an abolitionist, if stringently hierarchical, society. The pantomime, then, upheld both British notions of racial hierarchies and ideals of independence.

Byron more overtly makes the case for Crusoe as the abolitionist in his 1868 pantomime *Robinson Crusoe; Or, Friday and the Fairies!*²⁸ Friday attempts, non-verbally, to enslave himself to Crusoe, but the latter rejects the offer by saying, “An Englishman, my friend, does not make slaves / Of those poor individuals he saves. You shall my servant be”²⁹ (followed with a similar joke about his black body befitting a servant’s uniform). The resulting image of Crusoe is that on the one hand he views Friday as inferior and a servant, but on the other, that he shares an English anti-slavery worldview. Byron takes the onus off Crusoe by instilling in Friday the desire to be a slave. Thus for British audiences, the pantomime maintained an abolitionist stance while indulging their enjoyment of minstrel entertainments.³⁰

Some of the influence of minstrelsy can be seen in part in Friday’s use of the stereotypically poor pseudo-dialect of “iss, massa” for “yes, master,”³¹ and as well, he, together with the Native Americans on stage, depict variations of slow-witted, easily-scared, musical characters that sing minstrel songs and perform comic dances. Friday in *King of the Caribee Islands!* and the Indian Hoky in *Friday and the Fairies* run around the stage, saying, “Bress you, my chibberlins,”³² mimicking minstrel dialect (a distorted mimicry of slave sayings and songs). All these characteristics, along with white characters classifying Friday and others (Native American, Carib, or African) as “darky,” “blackie,” or “pickaninny,” are a direct result of what Hazel Waters dubs “Crow Mania.”³³ The end result is the emergence of Africanised/blackened caricatures that share the same physicality as Jim Crow and other minstrel roles.

Friday’s performance may derive from Crow Mania, but his actual blackness comes in part from the mere association of slavery and Africans during the Victorian era: essentially, if he was a slave, he therefore must have been African. The visual representations of Friday on stage agree with the descriptions of his “natural suit” of black. Unmasked and unclothed, the character’s body was on display to fit a stereotypical image of an African. Friday’s appearance struck a balance between recognisable blackface and what an African looked like in the popular imagination. In Lydia Thompson’s 1876 burlesque of *Robinson Crusoe*, Willie Edouin as Friday wore a large, flat false nose and white lips against a black face in the minstrel fashion and a black body suit to show off his “nakedness” (Fig. 2). His hair was wild and his only additional clothing was an animal skin, insinuating a savage, uncivilised nature. His only prop was an English dictionary so he could comically misuse words during his “education.”³⁴ Through his posture, by contrast to that of Thompson who

portrays Crusoe as the figure with power and authority, Edouin portrays Friday as childlike. The racial markers, the nakedness/blackness, and the physical subservience became recognisable traits of Friday in subsequent productions.



Figure 2. Lydia Thompson as Robinson Crusoe and Willie Edouin as Man Friday in Robinson Crusoe at the Folly Theatre, 1876. By permission Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Al Jolson, Porky Pig, and American Mainstream Minstrelsy

Friday's Africanisation speaks to the larger, much more problematic idea that English pantomime blurred any non-white ethnicities into the same minstrel blackface, erasing distinctive racial markers amongst the races in the West Indies and America. Painting every non-white character in blackface suggests that English audiences were interested in the buffoonery, sensationalism, and exoticism that the minstrel Other provided. Over the years, the colonial depiction of Africans, Indians, and both south and east Asians for English audiences created in the European imagination an exotic amalgam of various cultural differences. The titillation of these spectacles came in part from the simulation of naked bodies, which served as an example of moral inferiority and foreign fantasy. Moreover, the Other on display became a standard theme by the late 19th century in Euro-American culture. Expositions in London (1851), Paris (multiple years, notably 1889), Chicago (1893), and St. Louis (1904) marked the transition into the 20th century and the increasing globalisation of the world.³⁵ The "Peoples on Display" aspect of the expositions was a kind of transatlantic one-upmanship, leading promoters to seek out the newest and most exotic cultures to show off for entertainment purposes.³⁶

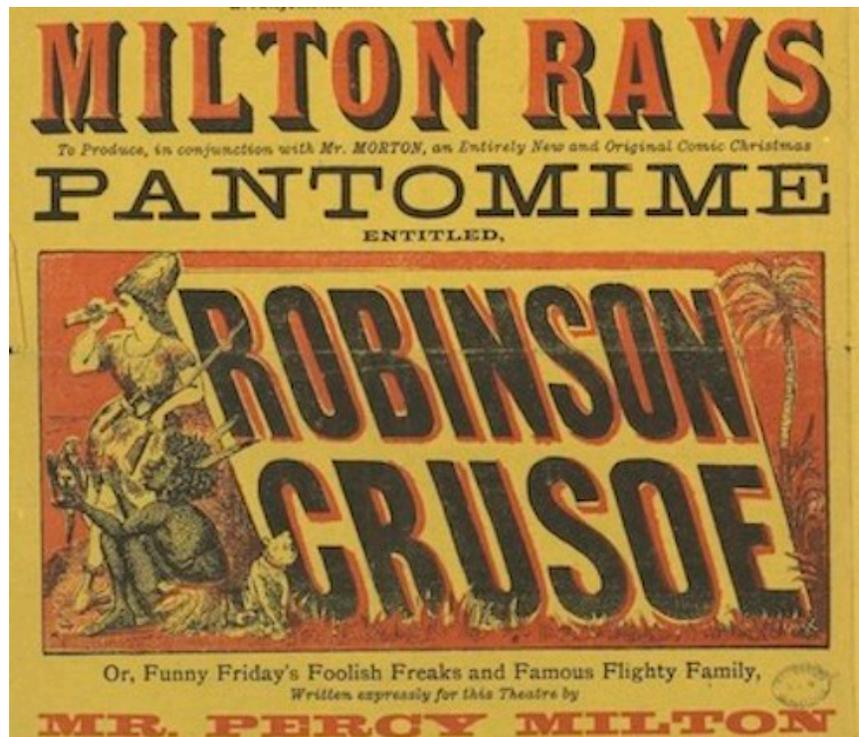


Figure 3. Part of advertising poster for the Prince of Wales's Theatre, 1886.
By permission Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

The *Crusoe* pantomime fed this desire to see the Other, but accentuated the cartoonish quality of the savage native roles, with nonsensical words used as “native language,” broken English, and stereotyped music and dance. The look of the cannibals mixed American Indian and South African warrior figures, often brandishing spears and theatre companies used these traits to advertise their pantomime (see Fig. 3). The 1886 advertisement cartooning of Friday was common practice, indulging in outlandish portrayals of the Other, and this image of the savage native as grass-skirted and feathered cemented itself in popular culture by the twentieth century.

The minstrel tradition kept its foothold just as American pantomime and vaudeville traditions were in decline. 20th-century minstrelsy arguably owes its sustainability to one man: Al Jolson. Jolson’s role in popular culture and entertainment history was one of international renown (not surprisingly earning him the epithet “The World’s Greatest Performer”). He predates and overlaps early animated cartoons which integrate the figure of Friday (referred to below). Jolson heavily influenced their physicality and jokes so before considering these, we need to trace Jolson’s impact on Friday, cartoons, and American entertainment more generally. Jolson, a Jewish immigrant, made his fame in blackface. However, he moved away from the waning vaudeville tradition to Broadway and in 1927 made history as the star, mostly in blackface, of the first talking motion picture, *The Jazz Singer*, in which he performed one of his most celebrated numbers, “My Mammy,”³⁷

and struck the now famous (or infamous) Mammy pose, down on one knee, arms extended outward, looking upward.

Early in his career, he played more stereotypical minstrel characters, singing Stephen Foster and antebellum songs. His big Broadway hit was in 1916 with *Robinson Crusoe, Jr.*, spawning both a hit song and star status for Jolson. The story, briefly, follows millionaire Hiram Westbury, who falls asleep after a busy day and dreams he is Crusoe and his black chauffeur Gus is Friday (Jolson), and the two travel to many exotic locales.



Figure 4. Al Jolson as Gus/Friday, along with dancing girls, Crusoe, and a goat.
Photo in the public domain.

The show was attempting to move past the revue tradition, but in fact contained only a vague narrative with comic scenes functioning as a vehicle for Jolson's singing and comedic talents, akin to pantomime. The plot mostly consisted of Gus/Friday's antics with a goat and a crocodile, pirates, and "Caribbean beauties" (see Fig. 4). However, *Robinson Crusoe, Jr.*'s plot did not appear to matter, for the show became a hit. As Michael Freedland notes, "it was quite plain that the story was not going to interfere with his [Jolson's] domination on stage."³⁸ Audiences were coming to see Jolson in the classic literary role of Friday, not for literary reasons but to watch his blackface performance. In fact, the relationship with Friday, as a character, was tenuous at best, because Gus was also a predetermined character. Gus, "a wisecracking servant drawn from minstrelsy,"³⁹ was one of Jolson's stock characters, and Jolson-as-Gus appeared in at least five Broadway musicals between 1912 and 1921. The audiences anticipated seeing Gus's typical antics perhaps more than the classic Defoean story, or at least, seeing Gus put into the familiar literary setting.

Jolson also controlled and changed the music as he saw fit, and so composer Sigmund Romberg's score was pushed aside to make room for the spirituals and original songs Jolson wanted to include in the show.⁴⁰ The show's original song "Where Did Robinson Crusoe Go with Friday on Saturday Night?" was extremely popular in America, with recordings and sheet music selling nationally. The hit show and the popular song secured Jolson's position as a celebrated American entertainer and enabled him to move into films, thereby reaching even wider audiences.

Cartoons or animated shorts, as a popular entertainment, became a sensation about the time of *The Jazz Singer*. In fact, Walt Disney was inspired by the synchronised sound in the film, and recreated it for the first sound cartoon, *Steamboat Willie* (1928). American cartoons during the early 20th century, through to World War II, paraded and exaggerated racist ideas about black Americans, as well as Indians and Africans, all influencing the images of Friday for young American audiences. *Crusoe* cartoons, as a family entertainment, demonstrated the novel's status as an established educational tool and as well the pervasiveness of racist popular performances. As with pantomime, however, the aspects of the original text that appear in cartoon form are shipwrecks, Friday, and cannibals. Cartoons just continued the process of sifting and simplifying the material to create more slapstick humour of, say, outrunning or outwitting cannibals. Because these *Crusoe* cartoons recycle recognisable popular traditions, it is not surprising to see them mimic minstrel acts or tributes to Jolson.

Popular American characters including Mickey Mouse, Porky Pig, and Popeye all appear in cartoon versions of *Crusoe* and all have a minstrel Friday who sings as he attends to Crusoe. The animated short film, *Mickey's Man Friday* (1935), depicts a shipwrecked Mickey Mouse encountering a monkey-like creature in grass skirt and top hat (which Mickey gives him), who uses his feet instead of his hands. When Mickey says "You Friday, me Mickey," Friday replies only "You Flyday, me Mick-ay."⁴¹ For comic affect, the cartoon shows Friday as a poor mimic of Mickey's humanoid (or more human than animal) behaviour. The Friday minstrel moment in this short film comes when Friday helps Mickey build a fort with his tap-dancing ability. In the Van Beuren Studios cartoon, *Molly Moo Cow and Robinson Crusoe* (1936), the story varies slightly, Molly is the Friday character, following Crusoe around doggedly, much to his chagrin, until she saves him from the cannibals. She longs for his attention but does not mimic him. His annoyance remains until she blackens her face with ash and strikes the Mammy pose, to which Crusoe immediately smiles and cries "Friday!"⁴² (see Fig. 5). That is, Crusoe only names her Friday once she costumes herself as the recognisable, stereotypical Jolson minstrel character. The Jolson-ing of Friday dominates the 1941 Warner Brothers' *Robinson Crusoe, Jr.* (a possible nod to Jolson), in which Porky Pig gets stranded on an island, only to see Friday waiting. Friday is wearing a top hat, skirt, and spats over bare feet, and welcomes Porky with "Hello Boss."⁴³ Friday proceeds to cook and clean while singing and dancing. While all three Fridays are extremely different, they carry traits of Othering and the minstrel tradition in appearance and performance (singing, tap-dancing, vocal inflection).



Figure 5. Molly Moo Cow/Friday echoing Jolson in the Mammy pose.
Still from cartoon in the public domain.

The uniting factor in all three cartoons lies in the appearance of the cannibals. In all three, the cannibals are the same species/race as Friday, dressed only in skirts and decorated hair pieces (bones, feathers) and throwing spears. The cannibals come *en masse*, with weapons, to eat Crusoe, but he and/or Friday outwit the hordes to escape the island. If Friday is the minstrel in the cartoons, the savages are the Other on display. Or perhaps, more accurately, the imagined Other. Whereas in World's Expositions the non-white cultures exhibited were real people (though posed or staged to a certain extent), the cartoonists took a broad-spectrum image of Africans to present stereotyped savages. The bones in the hair, the nakedness, the dancing around a cauldron turned the cartoon savage into an object of immediate recognition, perpetuating a popular conception of how primitive natives looked and acted. These exaggerated and inaccurate racial markers and the cannibals' failure to defeat Crusoe further turned the savage into an object of ridicule. The medium of the cartoon film insured the propagation of these values and racist assumptions to mass audiences in America and internationally.

Conclusion: Shifting Audiences

In *Pantomime*, Walcott addresses the serious socio-economic ramifications of the colonial system using the Crusoe-Friday relationship to debate race politics in Tobago, England, and America. At the same time, he acknowledges racist traditions in pantomime and in Jolson's representations to underscore the troubling results of *Crusoe's* performances on the Western cultural imagination. In the play, Harry Trewe performs for Jackson Phillip to engage him in the creation of his inverse

Crusoe pantomime. As he performs his song-and-dance routines, he throws in echoes of Jolson, specifically striking the Mammy pose at different moments. Trewe brushes past Phillip's song about Friday becoming boss to sing a comic bit on "animal husbandry": "(Kneels, embraces an imaginary goat, to the melody of 'Swanee.' Sings) Nanny, how I love you, / How I love you, / My dear old nanny."⁴⁴ This minstrel moment of a Jolson parody in Tobago reminds audiences of just how wide spread has been the influence of popular entertainments in shaping our cultural understanding.

The sheer number of adaptations, illustrations, and performances of Defoe's narrative in both Britain and America demonstrates its popularity and serves as a marker for the transatlantic conversation of race. The ubiquity of Friday as a slave/black stereotype comes in part from his continuous iterations in popular performances, beginning in the 1780s. Friday was re-created on stage to easily fit expectations of how a "natural" servant or "inferior" culture should act, according to Euro-American standards. Walcott "performs back" this colonial history by satirising Euro-American performance traditions, particularly pantomime. More importantly, he privileges West Indian performance traditions. The play ends with Jackson Phillip resigning from working for Trewe and returning to calypso: "caiso is my true work."⁴⁵ Caiso is an older form of calypso explicitly referring to pre-emancipation singers who derided slave owners and oppressive rule. Caiso, based in African traditions of public criticism, is one of the earliest Afro-Caribbean art forms more politically aggressive and anti-British than contemporary calypso.⁴⁶ Trewe, in the end, is a sad joke of a performer, literally weeping over his lost stage glory and empire. Phillip sings about his equality in a traditional Caribbean performance form, ending the play on a more serious and sophisticated tone than might be expected in the low comedy traditions of minstrelsy and pantomime.

By granting Phillip this sophisticated tone, Walcott gives the Afro-Caribbean character and music/performance agency and power in the play. The play makes clear that Friday remains a distorted misrepresentation of his origins and native Caribbean cultures. The character endures as part of popular culture, but with the racial constructs placed on him during his transformations on stage and screen. Friday may not be a slave, but he is always an Other. The audience for entertainments like Victorian pantomime, minstrelsy, and pre-World War II cartoons were economically and educationally diverse crowds. The broad appeal of stereotypical (race-based) humour and a widely available/taught text like *Crusoe* meant that many of these popular shows were aiming at typically plebeian audiences. The success of Walcott's play as a counter-discursive text lies in its ability to manipulate typical images of Friday with images of the revolutionary West Indian. This figure of course is only recognisable by and accessible to Caribbean audiences and politically aware English or American audiences with some understanding of the colonial system. His audience, then, may be more limited when compared with the popular entertainments he is lambasting. Yet, the play is necessary to any postcolonial discussions of Defoe's text. His repositioning of Friday

is fundamental to our understanding of how popular performance affected colonial worldviews and the continued belief in Friday, the African slave.

¹ In Walcott's play, Phillip invents a calypso song using Trinidadian idioms to mock the idea of Crusoe and Friday's relationship, and by extension the relationship between coloniser and colonised. Originally, the Bohbole (or more commonly bobolee) was a Judas effigy hanged on Good Friday and beaten at Easter in Trinidad and Tobago. The bobolee has also come to signify "a person who allows another to beat him up, misuse him or make him a fool." Lise Winer, ed. *Dictionary of the English/Creole of Trinidad & Tobago*, (Montreal: McGill/Queen's University Press, 2008). s.v. "boboli, bobolee, boubery." The role of a bobolee is often one of scorn or ridicule, so Walcott's colloquial rhyme is a satirical representation of Defoe's Friday. For Phillip, the character is Good Friday, a fool figure misused by Crusoe and subject to disdain for his unquestioning fealty. His goodness marks him as complicit in his oppression, an idea which Phillip rejects in the play.

² Derek Walcott, *Pantomime*, in Helen Gilbert ed. *Postcolonial Plays: An Anthology*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 137.

³ The *Crusoe* pantomimes of recent years in the UK are usually a variation on *Robinson Crusoe and the Pirates of the Caribbean*, including pirate humour with many Capt. Jack Sparrow references and lookalikes. The pirate tradition in the *Crusoe* performances dates back to the 19th century and the influx of pirate literature in popular culture. Victor Emeljanow details the appearance of pirates on stage and the connections between popular literary and theatrical trends in "Staging the Pirate: The Ambiguities of Representation and the Significance of Convention." In the article, he discusses pantomimes as a major genre in the stage pirate tradition along with a detailed historical record of pirates on stage and their role in 19th-century popular culture. See Grace Moore, ed., *Pirates and Mutineers of the 19th Century: Swashbucklers and Swindlers* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 223-42.

⁴ Helen Tiffin, "Post-colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse," in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 2006), 99.

⁵ Tiffin, "Post-colonial Literatures," 101. Sam Selvon, J. M. Cotzee, and Bessie Head have also adapted or responded to *Crusoe*. See Ann Marie Fallon, *Global Crusoe: Comparative Literature, Postcolonial Theory and Transnational Aesthetics* (London: Ashgate, 2013).

⁶ Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (New York: Pocket Books, 2009), 230.

⁷ Roxanne Wheeler, "'My Savage,' 'My Man': Racial Multiplicity in Robinson Crusoe," *ELH* 62:4, (1995): 883-884.

⁸ Roxanne Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in 18th-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 80.

⁹ The term was coined in 1731 by German writer Johann Gottfried Schnabel in the preface to *Die Insel Felsenburg*. See Andrew O'Malley, *Children's Literature, Popular Culture, and Robinson Crusoe* (London: Palgrave, 2012) for a discussion of robinsonade as well as a detailed history of the use of *Crusoe* as an educational tool and subject for popular entertainments like pantomime.

¹⁰ See John O'Brien, *Harlequin Britain: Pantomime and Entertainment, 1690-1760* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004) for a detailed historical account of how *commedia dell'arte* influenced early modern theatre in England.

¹¹ O'Brien, *Harlequin Britain*, 3.

¹² O'Brien, *Harlequin Britain*, 118.

¹³ O'Brien, *Harlequin Britain*, 121.

¹⁴ O'Brien, *Harlequin Britain*, 136. The character Mungo comes from the comic opera *The Padlock*, set in the West Indies, and he is credited as the first stage negro/stage African slave. He is a comic, bumbling character who speaks and sings in dialect. The success of the play is due in large part to the slave caricature. See also Theresa Saxon, *American Theatre: History, Context, Form*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁵ *Harper's Magazine* in 1889 offers an account of the 1791 Drury Lane production, stating that Friday wore "coffee-colored tights and blackened face." Laurence Hutton, "The Negro on the Stage," *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, (1889), 132.

¹⁶ The Victoria and Albert Museum's collections illustrate the popularity of *Crusoe* in the pantomime tradition, along with other staples like Cinderella, Aladdin, and Jack and the Beanstalk.

¹⁷ Errol Hill, *The Jamaican Stage, 1655-1900: Profile of a Colonial Theatre* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 125. The American Company was one of the first professional theatre companies in America. Lewis Hallam, Jr. took over the running of the company after the death of his parents and is credited as the most famous actor before 1800s as well as America's first blackface actor as Mungo. See also Jeffrey H. Richards, *Drama, Theatre, and Identity in the American New Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁸ O'Brien, *Harlequin Britain*, 136.

¹⁹ Robert Nowatzki, *Representing African Americans in Transatlantic Abolitionism and Blackface Minstrelsy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 72.

²⁰ O'Brien, *Harlequin Britain*, 136. Jim Crow was so adored, in fact, that he replaced the vaguely defined Black Man/Foreigner in Punch & Judy puppet shows, appearing as a regular in the popular street performances. The character even had his own pantomime, entitled *Cowardy, Cowardy Custard; or, Harlequin Jim Crow and the Magic Mustard Pot*. The fusing of genres lasted until the early twentieth century.

²¹ Paul Gilroy, born in the UK to Guyanese parents, is a theorist who has focused on the development of Black culture, identity and modernity. One of his best known texts is *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1992).

²² Nowatzki, *Representing African Americans*, 6.

²³ *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 62. Nowatzki posits that Jim Crow was at times an abolitionist character, singing about emancipation.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Henry James Byron, *Robinson Crusoe! Or Harlequin Friday, and the King of the Caribee Islands!* (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, 1889), PDF e-book, <http://victorian.worc.ac.uk/modx/assets/docs/pdf/Vol49viiRobinson.pdf>.

²⁷ There were large numbers of pro-slavery Britons, as well as pro-slavery performances, such as the pantomime *Obi* (1800) and *The Padlock*. See Hazel Waters, *Racism on the Victorian Stage: Representation of Slavery and the Black Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

²⁸ As both texts are readily accessible, I am using these two plays for examples. There are numerous Victorian era *Crusoe* pantomimes with similar, but varying, plots. See Andrew O'Malley, *Children's Literature, Popular Culture, and Robinson Crusoe* (London: Palgrave, 2012) and Jill Alexandra Sullivan, *The Politics of the Pantomime: Regional Identity in the Theatre, 1860-1900* (Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2011).

²⁹ Henry James Byron, *Robinson Crusoe; Or, Friday and the Fairies!* (London: J. Miles and Co., 1868), PDF e-book.

<https://play.google.com/books/reader?printsec=frontcover&output=reader&id=Wt9ZAAAAcAAJ&pg=GBS.PA1>.

This example is just one of many moments of self-congratulation on the English stage after the abolition of British slavery. This narrative of the natural Englishman ignores the fact that the prostrating of slaves was also a theme in the popular *My Poll and My Partner Joe* (1833). For Hazel Waters, this play epitomised the shift from noble Africans (with Othello and Oroonoko) to a "pleading, almost feminised dependency" in Victorian slave characters. Waters, *Racism on the Victorian Stage*, 57.

³⁰ This dual interest could partly account for the popularity of minstrel and melodramatic *Uncle Tom's Cabin* performances in England. See Sarah Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania: Slavery, Minstrelsy, and Transatlantic Culture in the 1850s* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005).

³¹ Friday speaks relatively little in the pantomime. The really racist language and imagery in the show comes in the form of the "fierce" Indians, Hokee-Pokee and Wanky-Fum. They use the same minstrel

language that Douglass critiques. For example, Hokee says at one point “De signal of great Hoop-de-dooden-doo! [the fat Indian king] Wanky, me lub you.”

³² Byron, *Harlequin Friday, and the King of the Caribee Islands! and Friday and the Fairies!*

³³ Waters, *Racism on the Victorian Stage*, 98.

³⁴ Kurt Gänzl, *Lydia Thompson, Queen of Burlesque* (New York: Psychology Press, 2002), 182.

Thompson as Crusoe reflects the growing trend in the late 1800s of female actors playing hero leads in pantomime as Principal Boys.

³⁵ Different West Indian colonies were featured at the Chicago fair. In fact, there was a tense debate between Chilean officials and the Warden of Tobago, each claiming they had Crusoe’s island (in the case of Chile, Crusoe lived on the Juan Fernández Islands). The Warden of Tobago went so far as to send the skeleton of a goat, claiming it was Crusoe’s very goat found buried on the island.

³⁶ For a more detailed account of Victorian era displays of “Others” or “savagery,” see Jane Goodall, *Performance and Evolution in the Age of Darwin: Out of the Natural Order* (London: Routledge, 2002) and for some firsthand accounts of exotic displays, see Richard Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

³⁷ Along with “Swanee,” Mammy is a character from minstrel performances.

³⁸ Michael Freedman, *Jolson: The Story of Al Jolson*, quoted in Gerald Martin Bordman, *American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 363.

³⁹ William A. Everett, *Sigmund Romberg* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 62.

⁴⁰ Bordman, *American Musical Theatre*, 363.

⁴¹ “Mickey Mouse - Mickey's Man Friday - 1935,” Youtube video, 7:13, posted by “Cartoon Station,” June 7, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8QRHobbu54>. The dialect transcription is my own.

⁴² “Molly-Moo Cow & Robinson Crusoe,” Youtube video, 7:13, posted by “tamarinds,” September 26, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=crYCCOqqfI>.

⁴³ “Robinson Crusoe Jr. (Redrawn Colorized),” DailyMotion video, 6:58, posted by “Average Jones,” July 26, 2006, http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x8rnl_robinson-crusoe-jr-redrawn-colorize_news.

⁴⁴ Walcott, *Pantomime*, 138.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁴⁶ Richard D. E. Burton, *Afro-Creole: Power, Opposition, and Play in the Caribbean* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 187-190.