

Transatlantic Traffic  
AND  
(Mis)Translations

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

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# Coloniality, Performance, Translation

## The Embodied Public Sphere in Early America

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What is left over when the act of linguistic translation is complete? What are translation's remnants—the bodily remains of translation? These are questions of more than passing concern with regard to American culture, and this is so because American/U.S. culture originates in a scene of colonial encounter. The scene of encounter involves translation—building a bridge of meaning that traverses languages between colonizer and colonized, between European, Native American, and African persons—but the scene of encounter highlights the extent to which translation is always shot through with operations of power and violence. Translation, at this original moment, involves the creation of shared meaning but it simultaneously generates silence and erasure in its wake. And what of these erasures, these silences? How do they linger, or *remain* as foundational in the creole culture that is American?

### Embodied Remains

The word *lagniappe*, used today primarily in the vicinity of New Orleans in the creole Louisiana dialect, derives from the Spanish phrase, “la ñapa” which means “something added” or a gift. In vernacular usage, it refers to a tip or extra bonus that exceeds the fixed terms of a sales transaction, like the thirteenth doughnut in a baker’s dozen. It is a little something extra, added on the side—something beyond the calculus of contract and the cash nexus of capitalism. In his book *Creoles of Louisiana* (1884), George Washington

Cable gives an account of the etymology of this word—an etymology that involves a history of translation and imperialism as well as bodily remains. Cable writes,

The Spanish occupation [of New Orleans] never became more than a conquest. The Spanish tongue, enforced in the courts and principal public offices, never superseded the French in the mouths of the people, and left but a few words naturalized in the corrupt French of the slaves . . . [T]he terrors of the calabozos, with its chains and whips and branding irons, were condensed into the French tri-syllabic *calaboose*; while the pleasant institution of *ñapa*—the petty gratuity added, by the retailer, to anything bought—grew the pleasanter, drawn out into Gallicized *lagniappe*” (Cable 1884, 114).

According to this account, a number of translations are embedded within the etymology of the word *lagniappe*—translations from French to Spanish, and from the mouths of colonizers to the mouths of colonized African slaves. But the linguistic colonization of Spanish is incomplete—it does not ever fully take hold, Cable tells us—and, in any case, the Spanish depart from Louisiana, making way for other waves upon waves of colonization, by the French, again, and later by U.S. Anglophone culture. What is left behind—“in the mouths of the people”—to use Cable’s wonderful phrase, are a few leftover words: *calaboose*, *lagniappe*. The very word *lagniappe* is thus itself something of an embodied remainder, a little something extra left over from acts of colonial translation, a material remnant left on the tongues of those inhabiting the colony when the colonizers depart. As Cable’s etymology of *lagniappe* points out, translation is not just a matter of passing words from one language to another, but also involves the power to determine whose words, and whose language will be the bearer of legitimate meaning. The etymology of the word *lagniappe* thus speaks to the way in which translation is a matter of power—a matter of speaking in the place of something (say, another language) or in the place of someone else. And yet, the remnants of such imposed substitutions and erasures do not wholly disappear; the violence of colonial translation generates its own particular embodied remains.

In this essay, I turn to the scene of colonial encounter as a scene of translation. And notably, I am as interested in the degree to which colonial en-

counter is a *scene*—an embodied performance—as the extent to which this encounter concerns translation, linguistic force, and erasure. More specifically, I sketch a New World genealogy of theatricalized colonial encounters, beginning with Prospero and Caliban’s encounter in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1611), and following its permutations in John Dryden and William Davenant’s *The Enchanted Island* (1667), through Daniel Defoe’s scene of encounter between Robinson Crusoe and Friday in *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), and Richard Sheridan’s theatricalized version of the same—*Harlequin Friday or Robinson Crusoe* (1781).<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, I analyze each of these texts in relation to a central scene of colonial encounter that, in every case, is also a scene of translation and/or language instruction. On the other hand, I also aim to consider the way in which this genealogy of texts is itself marked by translation—Dryden and Davenant translate Shakespeare; Sheridan translates Defoe. And finally, I focus in particular on one historical locus of these multiple translations—namely, the performance history of *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* in the theaters of Charleston, S.C. in the 1790s. This performance history, occurring at a time when the theater had enormous culture currency, underscores the significance of the *geographical* translation of English texts to American stages and points, as I ultimately want to argue, to the importance of the embodied public—the embodied scene of encounter with its attendant remains—in the creole culture of America.

For the last two decades, critics have largely turned to the model of the print public sphere to understand cultural production in early America. In turning to the theater, rather than to print, I aim to unearth a different story of cultural production—one that is attentive to a different set of signifiers and a different constellation of social actors than those that have received attention in the print public sphere. The model of the print public sphere, following the work of Jürgen Habermas, associates early national republicanism and liberal democracy with the protocols of unimpeded rational communication. This model of the print public sphere has been enormously generative in the scholarship of early American studies, yet two persistent critiques have attended the concept of an inclusive, liberal print public sphere: the first critique concerns the outside of this sphere of unimpeded communication and the second concerns the inside. First, critics have asked, who is left outside of the sphere of public communication and who is granted access to its interior? Second, critics have challenged

the notion that communication occurs rationally and seamlessly within the realm of the print public sphere.<sup>2</sup> The issue of translation touches upon both critiques: the notion of a shared realm of communication presumes (in advance) a shared, common language. Those speaking another tongue are necessarily relegated to the outside of this shared public sphere. Presumably translation (into English), would offer access to the public sphere and yet a translated text introduces a certain sense of uneven ground (buried origins, say, or impeded/constructed/complex modes of passage) within the realm of communicative rationality itself. As the work of Colleen Boggs (2007) has demonstrated, colonial North America and the early U.S. were culturally and linguistically polyglot; as such, translation was embedded in cultural production at multiple levels from the moment of colonial encounter forward.<sup>3</sup> In focusing on the scene of encounter as foundational for U.S. culture, I aim to suggest that translation is not simply a contingent aspect of the U.S. public sphere (not one to be addressed, for instance, by simply supplementing the picture of the public sphere with an account of additional non-English counter-public spheres) but should be understood as a central aspect of a U.S. culture that is, at its historical core, creole. The scene of performance—the embodied public sphere—does a far better job of making visible the actors who are erased from the print public sphere by protocols that limit access to those who are literate in English. It is for this reason, then, that I turn to theatricalized moments—to scenes—rather than merely scripts that concern the colonial encounter in order to consider foundational translations and their remains within U.S. culture.

### The Ontic and the Mimetic

Any performance of the *scene* of encounter exceeds the script/print account insofar as it must stage the presence of the very bodies that colonial translation habitually aims to erase and render silent. As such, the *staging* of colonial encounter (when, for instance, Robinson Crusoe meets Friday) opens up moments of re-encounter—moments of *epistemic* re-encounter—that print will tend to foreclose. Indeed, as Diana Taylor persuasively argues, the restaging of a culturally resonant scene (such as the colonial encounter) is better understood as a scenario than a narrative, insofar as a scenario in-

volves the performative, embodied, and ontic (nonmimetic) dimensions of certain forms of cultural practice. According to Taylor,

A scenario is not necessarily, or even primarily, mimetic. Although the paradigm allows for a continuity of cultural myths and assumptions, it usually works through reactivation rather than duplication. Scenarios conjure up past situations, at times so profoundly internalized by a society that no one remembers the precedence . . . By considering scenarios as well as narratives, we expand our ability to rigorously analyze the live and the scripted, the citational practices that characterize both, how traditions get constituted and contested, the various trajectories and influences that might appear in one but not in the other. (Taylor 2003, 32–33)

As Taylor points out, the *reactivation* of a scenario involves not only the repetition of an existing script, but a renewal of this scene in the present: this reactivation, in turn, enables a new set of meanings to be generated by the bodies that are present at the moment of staging. The bodily translation that is involved in theatrical performance thus opens a new register of meaning that exceeds mimesis and the printed script.<sup>4</sup>

It is worth underscoring, then, that theater, by its very nature, conveys meaning by operating at the intersection of embodiment and representation —by coupling physical presence and mimetic reference. As the critic Bert O. States argues, “there is a sense in which signs [in the theater] . . . achieve their vitality . . . not simply by signifying the world but by being of it” (States 1985, 20). In other words, the signifying economy of the theater operates in two registers: one that is *ontic* (thingly, material, resolutely present) and one that is *mimetic* (referential, immaterial, gesturing toward a scene located elsewhere). In general, one might expect the ontic to become the vehicle for the mimetic: when the body of a particular actor is transformed into a representation of, say, Caliban or Prospero, the ontic disappears, to a large extent, behind the mimetic and we thus “see” Caliban or Prospero rather than the actors who are performing the characters. But, as States argues, this is not always the case; the power of the sign is not “exhausted . . . by . . . its referential character” in the theater. In an evocative example, States explains, “In theater, image and object, pretense and

pretender, sign-vehicle and content draw unusually close . . . [On stage] a chair is a chair pretending to be another chair” (States 1985, 20).<sup>5</sup> In the theater, then, unlike the pages of a book, the *material* character of the sign retains particular presence and force, precisely because the sign is not solely linguistic in nature (not just the words spoken by an actor, for instance) but is also embedded within the physical movements or presence of a body or object on stage. Indeed, in something of a reversal, the thingly quality of the materiality of the theatrical sign can begin to unwind mimesis—can offer a challenge to the very script that is being performed, or, at the very least, begin to send a script in an entirely new and unexpected direction.<sup>6</sup> Both Shakespeare’s *Tempest* and Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* concern Europeans who are shipwrecked on the shores of the New World and who encounter and enslave native peoples there. But translated from the stages of London to those of the New World—specifically, in this case, to the stages of Charleston, South Carolina—these scripts acquire new meanings that involve the physical remnants of colonial translation and the ontic force of performance by the very bodies that are habitually erased and excluded from the print public sphere.

### Staging the Colonial Encounter

In Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, Caliban and Prospero meet during the first act of the play in a scene of language instruction. This is not, in narrative terms, the first time the two have met, but when the play is performed, it is the first time the two meet in front of the audience: it is their first ontic encounter. And of particular note in this scene of encounter is the extent to which Prospero exerts narrative energy to construct and manage the ontic force of the colonial encounter. The opening scenes of Shakespeare’s play—following the scene of shipwreck—are largely dominated by lines uttered by Prospero, and specifically by Prospero’s efforts to supply origin stories for each of the key characters that he (and the audience) encounter at the outset of the play: Prospero tells Miranda the story of her infancy and their mutual flight to the island after he was deposed from his dukedom in Milan; Prospero tells Ariel the story of his imprisonment by Sycorax and his release by way of Prospero’s magic; and Prospero tells Caliban the story of his enslavement, which, he states, followed on the heels of the sexual attentions Cali-



ban directed at Miranda. The bodily encounter of Caliban and Miranda is one that has apparently generated both sexual desire (in Caliban, at least) and a certain kind of political desire as well: Caliban states that if he had had sexual access to Miranda (“would it had been done”), he would have “people[d] this isle with Calibans.” Prospero’s origin stories, however, decisively separate Miranda’s narrative from Caliban’s, and thus serve to control and erase the bodily connection that is necessarily at issue in the colonial encounter. Accordingly, Prospero’s highly linguistic and narrative (mimetic) efforts in the first scene can be understood as evidence of the *labor* required to reign in and direct the ontic force of the colonial encounter.

Notably, in *The Tempest*, the passage in which Caliban professes his thwarted wish to people the isle with his offspring is directly followed by the well-known passage in which Miranda recounts her kindness to Caliban in teaching him to speak English and his incivility in refusing to appreciate her efforts:

Abhorred slave,  
Which any print of goodness wilt not take,  
Being capable of all ill! I pitied thee,  
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour  
One thing or other: when thou didst not, savage,  
Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like  
A thing most brutish, I endow’d thy purposes  
With words that made them known. But thy vile race,  
Though thou didst learn, had that in’t which good natures  
Could not abide to be with; therefore wast thou  
Deservedly confined into this rock,  
Who hadst deserved more than a prison.

(1.2.354–65)

Caliban’s famous response to Miranda’s language lessons—“You taught me language; and my profit on’t / Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you / For learning me your language!” (1.2.366–68)—expresses his rejection of both the language lesson and the narrative that Prospero enjoins upon him concerning his essentially servile and base nature. It seems worth underscoring, then, that the scene of language instruction (and its rejection) is embedded within a larger scene of origin-story instruction and that these

origin stories, in turn, will determine whose offspring will (and will not) populate the island, and whose purposes will (and will not) be endowed with meaning. Thus the question as to who will populate the isle and the question as to whose linguistic acts will have force and meaning are proximate within the play: more broadly, matters of epistemic force (language) and physical occupation (bodily reproduction) are the elements of power that the colonial relation must control. In the origin story Prospero constructs for him, Caliban is rendered an enslaved colonial laborer—fit only to be confined in a rock, wracked with pains, and relied upon for manual labor. Miranda, on the other hand, receives an origin story that indicates her royal status, and thus her suitability for marriage to another royal, namely, Ferdinand. The marriage of Miranda and Ferdinand will, in turn, ultimately serve to secure peace among the warring dukedoms of Europe. Seemingly separate narratives, the two stories nonetheless threaten to become visibly entangled at the moment when Caliban proposes intercourse with Miranda. And indeed, the exhaustive work performed by Prospero (with the help of Ariel) to keep the two stories moving forward on separate tracks indicates the extent to which they are not intrinsically separate but are only forcibly divagated by managerial labor. If Caliban's desire to propagate with Miranda points to the physical entanglement of European and non-European bodies in the New World, Prospero's linguistic and narrative labors point to an effort to locate European and non-European bodies in separate epistemic registers despite their physical proximity. The colonial relation that Prospero sets forth in this scene thus relies upon the construction of two separate narratives that spring forth from the same set of physical circumstances. Narrative—the language of mimesis—becomes the means by which Caliban is rendered abject and Miranda is rendered socially reproductive—the daughter whose marriage will inaugurate a new political order among the warring dukes of Europe.

And yet, the version of Shakespeare's *Tempest* most often performed during the eighteenth century in both England and America (and that performed in Charleston in the 1790s, as we will see) was not Shakespeare's script but the significantly revised version of the same by John Dryden and William Davenant, *The Tempest or The Enchanted Island*. Dryden and Davenant's play first appeared on stage in 1667 and is far more masque-like than Shakespeare's *Tempest* in its emphasis on the transporting effects of

scenery and musical interlude. The dialogue is significantly reduced from Shakespeare's script in favor of a plot that turns upon crucial acts of sight or vision: most specifically, the revised plot takes as its focal point the fact that Miranda is said to have never before seen a man prior to laying eyes on Ferdinand. In order to make the most of this conceit, Dryden and Davenant supply Miranda with a sister, Dorinda, who has also never before seen a man and further supplement the cast with the character of Hippolyto, a man (originally cast by Dryden and Davenant as a woman in drag) who has never before seen a woman, having been brought to the island as an infant by Prospero, and raised there in isolation. To further underscore the significance of coupling as a primary plot device, both Ariel and Caliban have also been supplied with sexual partners (Milcha and Sycorax—the latter a sister of Caliban named after their mother) who are not present in Shakespeare's original play. The additional characters, together with the emphasis on the visible revelation of sexual difference, change the overall meaning of the play considerably: at its heart, *The Enchanted Island* is a play concerned with sexual reproduction in the New World, or, one might say, the play is concerned with the transportation to and regeneration of society in the New World at the most basic, biological level—that is, at the level of bodily production. Significantly, Dryden and Davenant's play appears in print in 1670, following on the heels of efforts by King Charles II to encourage the peopling of the isle of Jamaica with Englishmen (Long 1774, I: 9). In the years that intervened between Shakespeare's *Tempest* and Dryden and Davenant's *Enchanted Island*, English colonial efforts in the New World had developed considerably such that by 1667, the English had serious colonial ambitions and imperial ideals had become increasingly important to metropolitan understandings of Englishness.<sup>7</sup> Thus, whereas Shakespeare's *Tempest* might be seen as largely *restorative* with respect to European social order in the New World—all of the European characters plan to return to Europe at the close of the play—Dryden and Davenant's play might better be described as *generative* with respect to the European population of the New World. In contrast to Shakespeare's *Tempest*, the European characters in *The Enchanted Island* do not plan to leave the island at the close of the play; rather, they plan to go to bed and procreate. In its emphasis on physicality—both in terms of its form and its content—*The Enchanted Island* revises *The Tempest* in a direction that is seemingly more oriented toward the

exigencies of settler colonialism—toward the material occupation of the colonial isle.

In their revision of Shakespeare's play, Davenant and Dryden thus turn toward the realm of physical bodies—toward the ontic—in a way that is distinct from Shakespeare's interest in using language and mimesis to manage the relation of bodies to one another. Specifically, Dryden and Davenant manage bodies in the colony by portraying a version of the colonial relation in which sexual reproduction between white Europeans is wholly natural and that of non-Europeans is unnatural. Thus, for instance, in *The Enchanted Island*, the sight of the young men, Ferdinand and Hippolyto, is enough to lead Dorinda and Miranda into over-heated, mock-innocent protestations of desire evincing a sort of hyper-naturalness that attends their sexual coupling in the play: Dorinda and Miranda clearly want to do it, even when they have no idea what "it" is. And as the play throws up and then disentangles impediments to the future intercourse of the two happy couples, it also disqualifies Caliban for reproduction, placing him in an incestuous relation with his sister, Sycorax: in other words, Caliban's sexual desire is shown as just the opposite of Miranda and Dorinda's—as wholly unnatural. The play concludes as the couples are sorted into reproductive pairs by Prospero: "For you, *Miranda*, must with *Ferdinand*, And you, *Dorinda*, with *Hippolyto* lie in One Bed hereafter." Dorinda happily concludes that the sisters have finally overcome their ignorance as to the provenance of children: "we meant like fools / To look'em in the fields, and they, it seems, / Are only found in Beds." While Dorinda and Miranda secure sexual partners, Sycorax (Caliban's sister) loses hers: she has been allied with both Trinculo and Stephano—the low, comedic characters in the play—but Trinculo announces that she is disqualified for union with both of them because he has seen her having sex with Caliban: "I found her an hour ago under an Elder-tree, upon a sweet Bed of Nettles, singing Tory, Rory, and Ranthum, Scanthum, with her own Natural Brother." Dryden and Davenant's play thus seeks to reinvent the social order by means of naturalizing a set of rules for the exchange of women in the space of the colony—rules that will form the basis of a colonial social structure that will people the isle with Europeans and not with Calibans.

Yet despite its focus on white colonial reproduction, the pantomime-oriented (ontic rather than mimetic, visual and scenic rather than linguis-

tic) form of the play opens *The Enchanted Island* to a wide community of spectators and thus to a wide possibility of readings and performances. As John O'Brien writes, pantomime as a theatrical form has long been associated with the threat of undisciplined audiences and transgressive physicality precisely because of its a-linguistic form: "In its reliance on spectacle, scenic effects, and the kinetic bodies of performers, pantomime awakened traditional ambivalences about the materiality of the stage as it promised—as least to some—a means of bypassing the barriers of linguistic competence or expense that had limited the potential audience for the theater" (O'Brien 1998, 503). While Dryden and Davenant's pantomime of sexual reproduction seeks to rely upon the force of plain sight—a man sees a woman, a woman sees a man—to represent the naturalness of sexual desire, it also unhinges, to some extent, the force of Prospero's intensive linguistic labor in producing and imposing origin stories for each of the characters on the island—origin stories that decisively separate the diverse bodies that inhabit the island. The bodily force of sexual desire, which is meant to secure English possession of the colony by reproducing English bodies in Dryden and Davenant's play, also contains the possibility of less well-policed physical relations (the ontic force of theater) which evade the control of linguistic stabilization.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, while the emphasis on bodies, and on bodily reproduction, might seem to be enabling of colonial domination of the colonized, the force of bodies, in the absence of language, also opens up possibilities around the bodies of colonizer and colonized and their rearticulation (or "reactivation" to return to Diana Taylor's account of the scenario).

### Staging the Colonial Encounter in Charleston

The version of *The Tempest* that was repeatedly staged in Charleston in the 1790s was that by Davenant and Dryden, not Shakespeare: indeed, newspaper advertisements for the play tend to emphasize the scenic and spectacular nature of the play rather than its Shakespearean origins. The emphasis on spectacle over language, and the turn to the ontically oriented Dryden and Davenant version rather than Shakespeare's script of the play both serve to "bypass barriers of linguistic competence" in order to allow the play to appeal to a broad range of spectators. And indeed, many audience members in Charleston in the 1790s were not literate in English nor were they English

speakers. Theater had been a longstanding and important component of public life in Charleston from the early eighteenth century forward. In fact, simple numbers are telling: in 1793 Charleston had a population of 12,000 residents and a theater that seated 1,400 audience members, which means that more than a tenth of the population might be in the theater on any given night, and that if a play ran for several nights, a sizeable percentage of the population would view the play.<sup>9</sup> While some historians have assumed that such audiences were entirely white because existing laws forbade blacks from attending the theater, I have found substantial evidence that such laws were routinely flouted and that blacks did, indeed, regularly attend the theater in significant numbers. In 1796, for example, a letter appeared in the *South Carolina Gazette*, complaining that blacks were regularly attending the theater in defiance of the ordinance passed the year before prohibiting blacks from attending the theater: the author of the letter complains, “My pleasures [at the theater] were marred . . . from the view of 65 blacks and people of color, situated in the gallery, whom I myself enumerated (a part of which I could only see, so that it may reasonably be concluded there were many more) as from the continual noise which proceeded from the gallery, and which myself among others, observed to be made by these people.”<sup>10</sup> In addition, the 1790s saw an enormous influx into Charleston of French colonial white and black refugees who were fleeing the Haitian Revolution; most of these refugees, including the white planters among them, did not speak or understand English. And indeed, in 1794, a group of refugees from colonial St. Domingue opened a new theatrical venue in Charleston, the French Theater, which began to compete with the existing English-speaking theater. The French actors from St. Domingue who performed at the French Theater in Charleston did not speak English, and accordingly shaped their repertoire in a fashion that emphasized the physical and the visual rather than linguistic modes of communication and entertainment. Hence the offerings of the French Theater in Charleston consisted largely of pantomime, opera, acrobatics, and music. The French Theater thus aimed to perform for an audience that included those who were not literate in French—most particularly, the English-speaking population of Charleston—but in eschewing English scripts (because of their own actors’ inability to speak English) and French scripts (because of the audience’s inability to understand French)—the French Theater turned to a world of

meaning generated primarily through gesture and music. Most of the free and enslaved blacks who attended the French Theater would surely have understood English (save for the refugees from St. Domingue), but many of them would not have been able to read and write English, in part because of a South Carolina law that made it illegal to teach blacks to write.<sup>11</sup> Thus the audience members and actors at the French Theater constituted an embodied public sphere that included a variety of individuals who did not have access to the print public sphere. The French Theater, then, convoked a Charleston public in the mid-1790s in which those who were normatively forced to the margins of English literacy were full citizens—a world that, in some sense, reproduced the scene of New World colonial encounter in which no shared language united the participants in a given exchange.

It is striking, then, that a play staging the colonial encounter—namely, the pantomime *Robinson Crusoe or Harlequin Friday*—was one of the first and most successful plays staged by the French Theater. Indeed, the performance was so successful that the English-speaking theater countered within two weeks, mounting its own production of the Robinson Crusoe pantomime. Interestingly, the staging of *Robinson Crusoe*—a drama concerning shipwreck in the New World, and the reinvention of European identity in relation to the territory and peoples of the New World—became the subject of a war for theatrical patronage between the Franco-colonial and Anglo-colonial theaters in Charleston. The “Crusoe wars” between the French and English theaters in Charleston embody a series of translations: first, the pantomime of *Robinson Crusoe* serves to revise and translate Defoe’s novel onto the stage, into an ontic register. In addition, the pantomime of *Crusoe* rewrites prior dramatic representations of the colonial encounter, including, most pointedly, Shakespeare’s famous drama of New World shipwreck and encounter, *The Tempest* and Dryden and Davenant’s popular revision of the same play. Moreover, this genealogy (from *Tempest* to *Crusoe*) is highlighted by the fact that the Charleston Theater performed *The Enchanted Island* in the midst of the Crusoe wars, sandwiched between performances of *Robinson Crusoe*. And finally, this genealogy—from *Tempest* to *Crusoe*—enacts a geographical translation of English texts concerning the colonial relation from the stages of England to those of America.

The pantomime *Robinson Crusoe or Harlequin Friday* was written by Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and it first appeared in London in 1781. The first



act of Sheridan's pantomime is a serious rendition of Crusoe's life on the island, including his encounter with the "savages," his rescue and seemingly benevolent enslavement of Friday, and his return to Spain; in the second act, Friday becomes Harlequin and a new plot ensues: as the libretto states, "The Story being no longer pursued in the remainder of the representation, it is only necessary to add, that Friday being invested with the powers of Harlequin, after many fanciful distresses, and the usual pantomimical revolutions, receives his final reward in the hand of Columbine" (Sheridan 1781, 20). While Sheridan's written version of the pantomime suggests only the most tenuous link between the figure of Friday and that of Harlequin, it is nonetheless the first harlequinade in which the serious and comic plots are linked (in the character of Friday/Harlequin), rather than merely juxtaposed (Mates 1962, 159). What is most significant about the script, then, is the fact that it weds Defoe's novel and the figure of Friday with the stock figure of Harlequin and genre of the harlequinade, a genre that was extremely popular in the early eighteenth century on British stages and the stages of the Atlantic colonial world.

The harlequin tradition derives from the Italian Commedia, but it is decisively transformed in the British tradition, most notably by the fact that the Anglophone harlequinade is a pantomime, unlike the Italian harlequinade from which it derives. The English harlequinade relies on a stock set of comic characters, with a loose plot that involves Harlequin's pursuit of his beloved, Columbine, and the efforts of Columbine's father, Pantaloon, to prevent that union. Typically, the plot of the harlequinade is nonnarrative and depends primarily on the transformative nature of Harlequin as an embodied figure, rather than on the unfolding of a series of causally linked events. Harlequin is an intensely physical character, but he also defies physical laws insofar as he can transform himself into other characters and other beings, including animals, and even inanimate objects such as clocks, or pieces of furniture: because of this transformative capacity, Harlequin is always able to escape Pantaloon's patriarchal prohibition to unite with Columbine. Another defining characteristic of Harlequin is that he always wears a black mask: Harlequin is black, Columbine is white, and Harlequin always unites with Columbine at the close of the spectacle. As such, then, the harlequinade almost literally reverses the plot of *The Tempest* in which Prospero successfully forbids Caliban's access to Miranda.



The meaning of Harlequin's blackness is certainly something of a shifting signifier within the long tradition of the harlequinade, but on stage in 1794 in Charleston, the racial signification of Harlequin's blackness could not be clearer given that Harlequin is specifically named as Friday with the *Crusoe* pantomime. Furthermore, the meaning of a "black" body on stage was clearly significant for a mixed-race audience and in a city with a majority black population: Harlequin Friday's blackness is thus reactivated in Charleston, in ontic terms that assume a different meaning from the same blackness on stage in London.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, the geographical translation of the colonial encounter to the New World, and to the embodied public sphere of Charleston, enables a new set of meanings to evolve—a set of meanings that reactivate the remnants of a colonial translation (seen, for instance, in Shakespeare's *Tempest* and Defoe's *Crusoe*) that was designed to enjoin silence upon colonial bodies.

How, then, does the pantomime of *Robinson Crusoe* translate Defoe's novel and Friday's racial identity to the stage? At the center of the Crusoe-Friday relationship in Defoe's novel is a scene that performs the colonial encounter, much as we have seen it staged in *The Tempest*. In the novel, however, this scene of encounter is explicitly narrated as an act of pantomime that transpires between Crusoe and Friday. According to Crusoe, Friday uses a set of performative gestures to indicate his desire to become Crusoe's slave. Crusoe describes this performance as follows: "At last [Friday] lays his Head flat upon the Ground, close to my Foot, and sets my other Foot upon his head, as he had done before; after this made all the Signs to me of Subjection, Servitude, and Submission imaginable, to let me know, how he would serve me as long as he liv'd" (Defoe 1965, 209). What, precisely, one might ask, are "all the Signs . . . of Subjection, Servitude, and Submission" used by Friday? And how does one signal, without language, a commitment to *lifelong* servitude? The certainty with which Crusoe interprets the gestural language of Friday might give one pause. Yet the novel secures the colonial relation with a scene of language instruction by Crusoe that follows directly upon Friday's performance of submission: Crusoe names Friday after the day of the week on which Crusoe encountered him, and he teaches Friday to call him "Master." In the pantomime version of *Crusoe*, however, no language is provided to secure the epistemology of Crusoe's relation to Friday—no days of the week are at hand, and no nomination

occurs in which Friday's subjugation is inscribed. Crusoe does not provide any narration: instead, we simply find bodies, present to one another, on stage, operating without narrative and indeed, operating within the genre of the harlequinade which eschews narrative in favor of physicality.

Without an official transcript in place, then, other possible readings of Friday's performance emerge. In other words, a gap opens between the novel's assertion of Friday's desire to be a slave for life and the staged performance of Friday's submission. Indeed, the pantomime seems organized around exploring precisely this gap—thus we might note that, in the pantomime version, Friday does not remain Crusoe's slave forever: rather, in the second half of the pantomime, Friday becomes his own master, and becomes master, as well, of an a-linguistic capacity for endless transformation and transmutation—a capacity that seems to be the antithesis of any enduring state of being, including lifelong submission. The pantomime thus opens the possibility that Friday's gesture of servitude is but a posture—one among a number of such postures that change and evolve, in a series of surprising transformations. Harlequin Friday, one might say, is Caliban brought back to the stage after he has foresworn to speak: if Caliban's profit on acquiring knowledge of Prospero's language was learning to curse, in the guise of Harlequin Friday, he has given up language altogether in favor of a new vocabulary of stunning activity or “pantomimical revolution.” Harlequin Friday, I would suggest, is thus the physical remnant of the colonial translation, brought back to life with ontic and antic force. He remains outside of language, at the edge of meaning, yet at the center of the stage for a creole public gathered in Charleston in the mid-1790s.

Consider, on May 4, 1796, the advertisement for the performance of the French Theater's pantomime of *Robinson Crusoe*, with a new second act, described as follows: “The arrival of Robinson Crusoe in Spain, the meeting of the captain and his wife, the affectionate parting of Friday and Robinson Crusoe, who returns home. Friday is turned out of doors, and his whimsical transformation ‘to HARLEQUIN’ after which will be introduced a number of Surprising Tricks and Changes, Which the limits of an advertisement will not permit us to enumerate, particularly the change of the SEDAN CHAIR into a BRIDGE and BOAT, in which Harlequin and Columbine make their escape, &c. &c.” What is it, we might ask, that “the limits of an advertisement” prohibit from being enumerated? What kind of play occurs on this stage

that involves the translation of the vocabulary of colonialism into a new language—a language that might profit the non-subjects—the objects—of colonial power? The unspeakable sexual union of Caliban and Miranda, foreclosed by Prospero’s colonial translation, appears here as the remnant or remainder of failed translation—as the bodily remains of theatrical performance and pantomime. Here, indeed, we find Calibans or Fridays or Harlequins who are populating the colonial isle or at least asserting their material possession of space in the public sphere. The transformative effect of the theater lies in its ability to speak the unspeakable—to transform the object into the subject, for instance, or to produce a new creole account of the colonial relation in its paradoxical nature. The genealogy that I have begun to trace here from Caliban to Friday to Harlequin is one that I would argue could continue to be traced forward to Jim Crow, as well as, for instance, to a blues tradition of African American culture—a tradition in which, to quote Toni Morrison, we find the signifying presence of “unspeakable things unspoken” (Morrison 1989, 1). In this tradition—one that *reactivates* and translates the colonial encounter—we find an excess, a remnant, a bodily remainder of the acts of translation that form the creole culture of the Americas. And this remainder, I would posit, does not lie outside of translation or outside of the public sphere, but constitutes a central scene that American culture plays out, again and again, in old and new terms.

## NOTES

1. The first recorded performance of William Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest* occurred in 1611; the script of the play was printed in the First Folio edition in 1623. John Dryden and William Davenant’s play, *The Tempest or the Enchanted Island* first appeared on stage in London 1667 and appeared in print in 1670. Daniel Defoe’s novel *Robinson Crusoe* was first published in 1719. Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s harlequinade *Robinson Crusoe or Harlequin Friday* appeared on stage and in print in 1781.

2. For discussion of the print public sphere in early America as well as the limitations of this theoretical model, see Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990); Robert A. Gross, “Print and the Public Sphere in Early America,” in *The State of U.S. History*, ed. Melvyn Stokes (New York: Berg, 2002): 245–64; Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions*

of *Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770–1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). For a relatively recent assessment of public sphere theory in early America see “Forum: Alternative Histories of the Public Sphere,” with articles by Christopher Looby, Eric Slauter, Joanna Brooks, Bryan Waterman, Ruth Bloch, and John L. Brooke in *The William and Mary Quarterly* 62.1 (Jan. 2005): 3–112.

3. Excellent work on the colonial encounter as a foundational moment includes the essays collected in *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and Other People in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Stuart B. Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), and those in *American Encounters: Natives and Newcomers from European Contact to Indian Removal, 1500–1850*, ed. Peter C. Mancall and James H. Merrell (New York: Routledge, 1999). My interest in the scene of encounter in this essay concerns less the actuality of encounter than its cultural repetition and performance over time.

4. An important related concept—that of “surrogation” is explored in Joseph Roach’s influential work on performance in the Atlantic world, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). Roach specifies and traces a process of cultural substitution, in which that which is missing (that which is lost to the past, to violence or erasure) is supplied through memory, mimesis, and re-enactment, engendering “performance genealogies” in the Atlantic world. The activities of repetition, renewal, and revision at work in surrogation speak to the ontic and mimetic dimensions of performance—particularly when performances circulate across time and space, as Roach’s work demonstrates. My thoughts on the performance genealogy of the colonial encounter in this essay are indebted to Roach’s foundational work in this area.

5. Note that States is here citing the work of Peter Handke who writes “In the theater light is brightness pretending to be other brightness, a chair pretending to be a chair and so on” from Handke, *Kaspar and Other Plays*, trans. Michael Roloff (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1969), 10.

6. For a particularly compelling account of the thingly character of theatrical meaning, see Andrew Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

7. For useful accounts of the development of English new world empire and ideas of imperialism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries see Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), and David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

8. Thus, as Michael Dobson reports, revivals of the “panto” version of Dryden

and Davenant's play took an increasingly carnivalesque turn in the eighteenth century as they highlighted the "original transvestite casting of Hippolito and Sycorax—and frequently compound[ed] these disruptive aspects . . . by casting an actress as Ariel (so that at the play's conclusion Prospero appears to sanction the pairings of women.)" (Dobson, "Remember/First To Possess His Books': The Appropriation of *The Tempest*, 1700–1800," *The Tempest: Critical Essays*, ed. Patrick M. Murphy [New York and London: Routledge, 2001]: 247–48). Thus the women's bodies, even while performing as male bodies, still have the status of being female and cause a kind of disruptive meaning to emerge.

9. The Charleston Theater on Broad Street, built by Thomas Wade West and John Bignall, was opened on Feb. 11, 1793. According to Julia Curtis, "The boxes, side and back, accommodated about 1000, or the major portion of the audience, while the pit and gallery could seat up to 400 patrons, if they squeezed together" (Curtis, "The Architecture and Appearance of the Charleston Theatre: 1793–1833," *Educational Theatre Journal* 23.1 [Mar. 1971]: 4). Curtis reports that in 1804, the manager of the Charleston Theater, Gilbert, boasted that 1800 patrons were in the house when President James Monroe visited on April 28, 1819, but "Gilbert was known to embellish the truth" (Curtis, 5).

10. *South Carolina Gazette and Timothy and Mason's Daily Advertiser* May 11, 1796. I have located additional newspaper articles commenting on theater attendance by blacks from 1795, 1797, 1801, and 1803—evidence that indicates the regularity with which blacks comprised a portion of the audience during this time period.

11. The Negro Act of 1740 made it a criminal act to teach slaves to write: "Whereas, the having slaves taught to write, or suffering them to be employed in writing may be attended with great inconveniences: Be it therefore enacted . . . That all and every person and persons whatsoever, who shall hereafter teach, or cause any slave or slaves to be taught, to write, or shall use or employ any slave as a scribe in any manner of writing whatsoever, . . . shall, . . . forfeit the sum of one hundred pounds current money" (*The Statutes at Large of South Carolina: Edited Under Authority of the Legislature* by David J. McCord, vol. 7 [Columbia, S.C.: A. S. Johnston, 1840], 413).

12. To be clear, the figure of Harlequin Friday would in all likelihood have been performed in Charleston by a white actor wearing a black mask.

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