

ISSN : 2225-8078

Praxis

**A Peer-Reviewed Journal of
The Department of English
University of Rajshahi**

Editor

Dr. Md. Sakhawat Hossain

Associate Editors

Dr. Mahbuba Hasina

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**VOLUME 15
December 2025**

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Published by

The Department of English, Rajshahi University

Printed by

The City Offset Printers
Talaimari, Rajshahi

Price: 300 Taka
10 US Dollars

Editorial Preface

Praxis: Journal of the Department of English, University of Rajshahi is committed to maintaining rigorous academic and ethical standards in the publication of scholarly research in the English language, linguistics, and literature. As a double-blind peer-reviewed journal, *Praxis* ensures that all submitted manuscripts undergo an impartial and thorough evaluation process, safeguarding both academic integrity and intellectual merit.

The journal adheres strictly to a policy of originality. Submissions are unpublished and not be under consideration for publication elsewhere. Any form of plagiarism, including self-plagiarism, is considered a serious breach of academic ethics and results in immediate rejection. Authors are responsible for ensuring the authenticity of their work and for properly acknowledging all sources in accordance with recognized citation standards.

To maintain disciplinary coherence while encouraging intellectual diversity, *Praxis* accepts contributions primarily within the fields of English studies, linguistics and English Language Teaching. Interdisciplinary work is welcomed, provided it demonstrates a clear and substantive engagement with these core areas. All manuscripts are written in English and follow either the MLA (9th edition) or the APA (7th edition) style, depending on the disciplinary orientation of the paper.

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The editorial board reserves the right to make necessary revisions for clarity, coherence, and consistency without altering the substantive argument of the work. Final decisions regarding publication rest solely with the editorial board, based on reviewers' recommendations and the journal's standards. Individual authors, and not the Editorial Board, are responsible for the views expressed in their writing.

Through these policies, *Praxis* seeks to uphold excellence, transparency, and fairness in academic publishing, fostering a scholarly environment that values critical inquiry, methodological rigor, and intellectual responsibility.

In Memoriam: Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed Md. Sakhawat Hossain

I had the privilege of being a direct student of Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed, and the memory of his classroom remains one of the most formative experiences of my intellectual life. He was not a teacher of abundance in number, but of precision and distinction; he took relatively few classes, yet each one bore the mark of rare excellence. His lectures were events that were often animated, lucid, and deeply engaging, without ever obscuring the depth of his scholarship.

What set him apart most strikingly was his method. He had the remarkable ability to render even the most extended and complex texts into something graspable without diminishing their intellectual weight. With a lightness of touch and a finely tuned sense of humour, he guided students into the depths of a text as if it were the most natural of movements. His wit was never ornamental; it was pedagogical and it was an instrument through which difficulty dissolved and insight emerged. Many of his students would testify that his classes were filled with mirth, yet never lost their seriousness of purpose.

In demeanour, he was at once formal and disarmingly intimate. His English was impeccable, measured, and refined, reflecting a deep command of language and tradition. Yet he was not bound by rigidity; at moments, he would slip into Bangla, often to delightful effect, using humour to draw students closer into the discussion. He had a characteristic habit of addressing students as “thou,” a gesture that seemed to collapse distance while invoking an older, almost Shakespearean intimacy. Standing before the class, he maintained an alert and penetrating gaze so that no student could afford inattentiveness, yet none felt excluded or disengaged. His presence commanded attention without coercion.

His intellectual range was formidable. He possessed a sharp and integrated knowledge of English literature, history, philosophy, and the broader Christian and Western intellectual traditions. Yet his scholarly vision was not confined within conventional disciplinary boundaries. His doctoral work on the literary techniques of *Surah Yasin* remains a landmark contribution that demonstrates his courageous attempt to bring Islamic textuality into the sphere of literary criticism. In doing so, he opened a space for dialogue between traditions that are too often kept apart.

Born on 31 December 1938, Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed completed his MA in English from the Department of English, University of Rajshahi, in 1960, and qualified in the then Special East Pakistan Civil Service (EPCS) examination. He joined the Department of English at the University of Rajshahi on 10 March 1973 and served there with distinction until his retirement as Professor on 30 December 2004. He passed away on 16 May 2022, leaving behind a legacy of intellectual brilliance, pedagogical excellence, and humane values.

Dedication



Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed
(31 December 1938-16 May 2022)

This Volume is dedicated to the cherished memory of Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed—a teacher of rare brilliance, a scholar of profound humanity.

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Colonial Intelligibility and the Politics of Literacy: Language, Power, and the Making of the “Other” in *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe*

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Abstract

The portrayals of Friday and Caliban in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* have both been extensively analysed through the lens of postcolonialism, especially in terms of colonial power, slavery and identity. However, this study shifts the attention to a less explored but equally important dimension, the strategic denial to acknowledge their intellectual agency and literacy as a means of imposing colonial authority. Both texts illustrate how colonial subjugation is established not through physical domination, but through epistemic violence— silencing and misrepresenting the knowledge of the “Other” as unintelligible within the colonial discourses. In *The Tempest*, Prospero seizes authority by appropriating the island, displacing Sycorax and reducing Caliban to a symbol of savagery, despite his faculty for language and resistance. In *Robinson Crusoe*, Crusoe emphasises his dominion over Friday by refusing to engage with his indigenous identity or knowledge, deliberately framing him as innately inferior. This paper aims to expose that such eliminations are nothing but deliberate instruments of imperial politics, where only the coloniser's language, reason and literacy are validated. This study, through a postcolonial interpretation, discloses how the construction of colonial intelligibility operates to dehumanise and intellectually reject the colonised subject in canonical English literature.

Keywords: Postcolonialism; Colonial Intelligibility; Epistemic Violence; Orality; Colonial Discourse.

Introduction

Over the course of human history, imperial powers have imposed their languages, values, and systems of knowledge upon the colonised peoples as a strategy of domination. Such imposition is often justified as a ‘civilising mission,’ specifically in the domain of literacy and education, which serves not only to control but also to delegitimise the intellectual capacities of the colonised. The West has long constructed its identity as the sole custodian of reason, literacy, and knowledge, portraying the colonised 'Other' as irrational, illiterate, and inferior. As Edward Said argues in his text, *Orientalism*, that “Orientalism is—and does not simply represent—a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our' world” (12). In other words, colonial representations of the Other are less about the reality of colonised people than about the ideological needs of the colonisers themselves. Studying from this point of view, it becomes clear that early modern and Enlightenment literature often reflects these same power dynamics, even when presented as mere storytelling. Precisely in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610–11) and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) offer valuable insights and engage with important ideological strategies that reflect their respective historical contexts.

William Shakespeare in *The Tempest* narrates the story of Prospero, an exiled Duke of Milan, who takes shelter on a remote island with his daughter. Through the strategic use of knowledge, he takes over control of the island, which was ruled by the witch Sycorax and inhabited by her son, Caliban. Even though Prospero gains his magical knowledge from Sycorax, he frames Caliban, son of Sycorax, as an uncivilised and intellectually deficient native, who is unworthy of education or autonomy. Similarly, in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Crusoe rescues the native Friday but reduces him to a mere servant, refusing to acknowledge his orality or cultural knowledge. Instead, Crusoe imposes a limited form of communication intended to reinforce his own superiority.

This paper intends to study how *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* use ideological strategies by stripping their non-European figures—Caliban and Friday—of intellectual recognition. Each character, in different ways, demonstrates the consequences of colonial domination, especially through the obligation of European literacy and cultural frameworks. In *The Tempest*, Prospero, the exiled Duke of Milan, seizes control of the island once ruled by Sycorax, while simultaneously portraying her son Caliban as a savage, incapable of reason or autonomy. Even though Prospero relies on the residual power and knowledge expropriated from Sycorax's, he renders Caliban as inherently unfit for education, reducing his voice and cultural identity under the language of civilisation. A parallel dynamic is at work in *Robinson Crusoe*: Crusoe rescues Friday, but the gesture of salvation quickly turns into an act of silencing. Rather than valuing Friday's oral traditions or cultural knowledge, Crusoe confines him to servitude and introduces a limited vocabulary that keeps him permanently in a subordinate position, reinforcing the hierarchy of European superiority.

By examining these texts through the lens of Orientalism and postcolonial theory, this study argues that the denial of indigenous literacy and intellectual capacity manoeuvres as a fundamental mechanism of colonial subjugation. Both texts reveal how colonial intelligibility—what can and cannot be recognised as “knowledge”—is strategically constructed to maintain imperial authority. This authorises the empire's freedom to act however it wishes, free from worrying about being judged or critiqued by the rest of the world. In doing so, *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* contribute to an established literary tradition that reflects, reinforces, and rationalises the epistemic hierarchies of empire.

Orientalism and Beyond

Edward W. Said's seminal work *Orientalism* (1978) critically examines how Western discourse has constructed a biased and distorted image of the Orient through the lens of print media and literature. Said has termed the East as the “Orient” and the West as the “Occident” in his writing. His writing tends to criticise how Western representation of the East in their literature always undermines the intellectual appreciation of the “Other”. Said argues that, by relying on biased accounts, travelogues and other scholarly works, Western media is always trying to demonstrate the “Other” as backward, exotic and inferior in comparison to the “We”. By doing so, they are taking advantage of dominating the “Orient” in the name of civilisation: “The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (Said 01). The oral traditions of many Eastern societies, which were prevalent, were often dismissed due to the focus on the written print culture of the West. Said criticises the Western emphasis on such literacy as a marker of civilisation and progress. Such a one-sided perception exhibits the Orient as inferior, both culturally and intellectually. Said notes, “The nexus of knowledge and power creating ‘the oriental’

and in a sense obliterating him as a human being is therefore not for me an exclusively academic matter. Yet it is an intellectual matter of some very obvious importance" (27).

Devaluation of the indigenous knowledge or education system suggests how Westerners determine the "Other" as primitive and permissible to rule over. The oral tradition, local languages and cultural practices of the "Other" were either repressed or changed to conform to Western educational frameworks, which expedited the decline of conventional cultures and languages. Said points out the fact that these efforts were not to enlighten them but to control them: "the goal of Orientalizing the Orient again and again is to be avoided, with consequences that cannot help but refine knowledge and reduce the scholar's conceit" (328). Said's work allows us to examine how Western Literature constructs the colonised "Other" as an intellectually inferior and culturally illegible. He challenges that Orientalism is not merely a body of knowledge, but a political tool of domination, supporting the central argument of this paper.

On the contrary, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of "epistemic violence" (Spivak), which refers to how knowledge of the subalterns is rendered below a certain scientific standard, illuminates that the voices of the East have been systematically silenced by the empire in order to legitimise its own, highlighting the complexities of the colonial identity formation. In this way, colonial discourse not only silenced but also actively distorted the subjectivities of colonised peoples, resulting in what Spivak describes as the impossibility of the subaltern "speaking" on their own terms.

Such theoretical insights hone our understanding of colonial texts like *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe*, reinforcing a hierarchy of understanding that serves to legitimise imperial power. Both works contribute to what Edward Said refers to as the discursive construction of the Orient. By illustrating Caliban and Friday as cultural stereotypes, they highlight the need to challenge and rethink the hierarchy that often prioritises European norms and knowledge. This interpretation invites a deeper exploration of identity and perspective, encouraging a more nuanced understanding of post-colonial narratives and the diverse experiences they encompass. At the same time, denying their agency and autonomy highlights the epistemic violence that Spivak critiques, where indigenous voices are represented through the authority of Prospero and Crusoe. This interpretation underscores how canonical works emphasise cultural domination, making the empire's influence seem natural, inevitable, and even benevolent.

Literature Review

Postcolonial criticism has long investigated the ideological foundations of European literary canons, revealing how texts such as *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* underpin colonial hierarchies through language, education, and representation. This critique strongly highlights the colonial construction of the "Other" as linguistically and intellectually inferior, an approach that justifies imperial domination in the guise of civilisation.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* has garnered sustained attention from postcolonial scholars as a quintessential narrative of linguistic domination, embodying the strategies by which colonial authority is imposed and normalised. In postcolonial analyses of *The Tempest*, Caliban is frequently studied as representing the colonised "Other." Scholars have extensively examined the play's narrative through the lens of colonial ideologies, focusing particularly on how language and literacy serve as tools for control and dominance. Stephen Greenblatt, in *Learning to Curse: Aspects of Linguistic Colonialism in the Sixteenth Century*, identifies Prospero's imposition of language upon Caliban as an act of epistemic colonisation, where the gift of speech becomes a mechanism of control. His examination of "linguistic colonialism" connects the two texts by

depicting language as a medium of coercive education. In *Learning to Curse*, Greenblatt characterises Caliban's compelled literacy as "a dramatization of the European will to dominate through discourse" (21). He applies this notion to Friday, contending that Crusoe's teaching of restricted English serves as "an epistemological quarantine," allowing only statements that affirm Crusoe's superiority (27).

Building upon Greenblatt, Ania Loomba, in her book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, extends the discussion by linking literacy to the colonial ideology of civility, suggesting that the denial of the colonised subject's linguistic autonomy maintains a racial and cultural hierarchy. She claims that Caliban and Friday are literary progeny of a singular colonial lineage. Loomba notes that both characters are deprived of subjectivity due to the imposition of European rationality and belief. For her, "Prospero and Crusoe are not merely individuals but embodiments of an entire epistemological order that equates civilization with domination" (118). She also points out that education and religion, which are supposed to be used to make people more moral, are rather utilised as ways to make sure people follow the rules. Loomba's reading shows how the language of kindness hides systemic erasure by putting both texts in what she terms the "moral economy of empire. Such readings interpret Caliban's resistance — encapsulated in his declaration, "You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is, I know how to curse" (I.ii.364–65) — as a linguistic rebellion that exposes the limits of colonial intelligibility. The colonial ideology that equates literacy and intellect with the coloniser is emphasised by this distinction, which portrays the colonised as inherently inferior either because of their illiteracy or their resistance to the coloniser's language.

Yet, as McDonald (2005) argues, the denial of the intelligibility of the others is indicative of the difficulties associated with articulation. Within such a volatile political environment, employing a sardonic and elliptical perspective in characterisation and representation can serve as a subversive strategy of understatement. Recent studies, such as Chisty's (2023), reconsider Caliban's colonial education and the traumatic experience of being colonised, worked as a catalyst to uphold the intelligibility of Caliban and proved him to be intellectual enough to counter Prospero's authority. Inspiring rebellion against socio-semiotic violence and linguistic manipulation, the character Caliban ultimately asserts that the sole method of escaping colonialism is using colonial education (77). These interpretations shift from portraying Caliban as a victim to acknowledging him as a subject negotiating linguistic agency within coercive structures.

Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) provides a critical foundation for understanding the psychological and epistemological violence embedded in colonial education. For Fanon, colonial education forcibly removes colonised people from their native learning systems and pulls them toward those of the colonisers. Colonial education plays a critical role here as it dictates the others and deprives them of their own insight and intellectual growth. Similarly, found in Orgel, Caliban's colonial education had a detrimental effect on him, and contrary to Prospero's expectations, it backfired in numerous ways. Prospero's endeavours to educate and civilise him have only succeeded in corrupting him (23). Paul Brown (1985) furthers this political perspective, arguing that *The Tempest* "reproduces and mystifies colonial authority" through its dramaturgical form, which presents insurrection as chaos and capitulation as natural order (59). Brown's Marxist perspective elucidates how the play's conclusion—where Caliban is seemingly pardoned yet remains unfree—symbolically constrains subaltern agency. This interpretation diverges from other humanist analyses that perceived Prospero's rejection of magic as a form of moral enlightenment; Brown elucidates it instead as an act of narrative closure that silences the colonial subject.

This dynamic locates a compelling echo in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, where linguistic tutelage becomes a means of domination. Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism*, vividly identifies *Robinson Crusoe* as "a work whose protagonist is the founder of a new world, which he rules and reclaims for Christianity and England" (70). It is a well-known fact that British success is measured by its trading reputation, and for that, the English people took the opportunity to expand their rule to those remote places where their so-called "civilisation" had not yet reached. And it helped them in promoting their colonial education to take over the culture of the "Other" and subjugate them. Gliserman (1990) and McInnelly (2003) both note that Defoe's narrative transforms colonial expansion into a personal adventure narrative, normalising the exploitation of the "Other" as a form of self-fulfilment. According to Martin Gliserman, "*Robinson Crusoe* sets up a new male hero, one that develops at the edge of the industrial period of capitalism and colonial expansion" (Gliserman 198). Gliserman further criticises Defoe for introducing such an arrogant character who celebrates his injustice to Friday as success and takes the audacity to justify such autonomous efforts. And as Brett C. McInnelly shares, "In *Robinson Crusoe*, Defoe transforms colonialism through the power of fictional representation into the adventures of a single man who masters an island, his native companion, and himself. His formal realism works to enfold the myths of psychological and economic self-sufficiency in a texture of convincing detail" (03). This fictional adventure reminds us of the colonial expedition of the British Empire to expand its sphere of influence and establish its authoritative dominance over the harmonious non-Europeans. *Robinson Crusoe*, the fictitious British hero, individually represents the remarkable features of colonial liberty.

Critical studies, including Afri Meldam (2009) and Ghaforian and Gholi (2015), exhibit how both of the texts contribute to the constructions of the "Other" through the orientalist discourse, sustaining a binary opposition of civilisation and savagery. Afri Meldam, in his discourse, "Primitiveness of the Caribbean as an Orientalism Discourse: A Post-Colonial Study on Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*," characterises *Crusoe* as follows,

Crusoe wants to tell the reader that the people who lived in the Caribbean island were cannibals, very primitive and uncivilized people. *Crusoe*, the major character who is also an Englishman, feels to have responsibility to civilize the people there. As the time passes, he succeeded in civilizing some of the cannibals. He taught them English and Christian beliefs. (05)

It is apparent that colonisers also used a similar strategy. They approached the East with the same mindset, and their acts were rationalised with their illustrated extreme disbelief in the world. Such post-truth arrogance permitted them to conduct their inhuman business and defend it. Ghaforian and Gholi (2015) further argue that expansionism, exploration, and settlement are inextricably linked with European knowledge of the East. The "Other" is constructed and represented through the binary opposition, positioning the Orient in contrast to the Occident. In this epistemic framework, the Orient is often perceived as the Occident's cultural counterpart by European values, assumptions, and cultural codes. This is how the Occident perceives the Orient through the lens of its own culturally determined segment, which restricts its historical knowledge and education.

Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) provides a compelling comparative framework, especially in examining linguistic adjustment as an indicator of colonial oppression. Fanon asserts that "to speak is to assume a culture" (17), clarifying both Caliban's coerced acquisition of Prospero's language and Friday's tutelage under *Crusoe*. In every instance, language dependency parallels psychological dependency, diminishing the colonised to a mere reflection of

the coloniser's authority. Fanon's approach elucidates the common psychological violence that underpins the silence of both characters—a violence executed not through the whip but through language. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) also offers a postcolonial perspective by promoting linguistic decolonisation. He sees people like Caliban and Friday as "victims of linguistic expropriation," whose languages are taken over long before their lands (12). According to Ngũgĩ (14), Caliban's cursing and Friday's silence are both acts of defiance—forms of "linguistic resistance that signal the refusal to be fully absorbed into the master's speech." His theory reframes these figures not only as victims but as early prototypes of postcolonial resistance, recovering the subversive force inherent in language itself.

Critics such as John Thieme (2001) and Ashcroft et al. (2002) have built upon this comparative tradition by arguing that Caliban and Friday remain important figures in postcolonial literature, serving as symbols of cultural hybridity and resistance. Thieme asserts that "Caliban's rage and Friday's silence converge in a shared refusal of European intelligibility" (29), whereas Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002) indicate that both have been reinterpreted by Caribbean, African, and South Asian authors as instruments of linguistic reclamation rather than oppression.

Crusoe's paternalistic tutelage toward Friday and Prospero's domination over Caliban indicate the broader colonial assumption that the European subject alone holds the right to define humanity, knowledge, and morality. Though extensive study has examined Caliban and Friday, comparative inquiries into their linguistic subjugation and resistance within a shared framework of colonial intelligibility remain underexplored. Most of the existing criticism deals with *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* in isolation, overlooking how both texts expose the Enlightenment's epistemological drive to transforming the colonised into governable subjects.

This study intervenes in this critical gap by re-examining *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* together through the intersecting lenses of postcolonial linguistics and epistemic domination. It explores how both texts dramatise the colonial tendency to legitimise injustice by disguising domination as a civilising mission, thereby producing the "Other" as both an object of pedagogy and a threat to intelligibility.

Silencing Caliban: Literacy and Power in *The Tempest*

William Shakespeare in *The Tempest* constructs an intricate dynamic of colonial supremacy through the relationship of Prospero and Caliban, foregrounding a discursive struggle over language, identity and epistemic recognition. The systematic cancellation of Caliban's voice and the invalidation of his orality and cultural heritage reveal the larger prospect of colonial domination. Prospero's treatment of Caliban directly aligns with Edward Said's "Orientalistic" logic, where Prospero, as a representation of the West, deliberately neglects Caliban's indigenous existence and frames him as an uncivilised "Other", in need of reintegration or domestication.

From the onset of this play, instead of portraying Caliban as a native inhabitant of this island, he is portrayed as someone who is robbed of his rightful sovereignty by Prospero, an exiled Duke of Milan, who arrives seeking shelter and imposes his rule. Although Caliban recurrently tries to protest and claim his rightful possession over the island, proclaiming, "This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother, / Which thou takest from me" (Shakespeare 1.2.331-32), Prospero strategically dismisses his assertions, positioning him as an incoherent savage. Such acts of linguistic suppression and false implications align with Spivak's discussion of how colonised subjects are denied recognition of their knowledge systems.

Prospero's hatred for Caliban is not only visible through his political authority but through his cultural and linguistic hegemony as well. Prospero's statement regarding Caliban, "a born devil,

on whose nature / Nurture can never stick” (Shakespeare 4.1.188-89), justifies the colonial belief that he comprises in himself towards Caliban. This reinforces the inherent inferiority and supposed incivility that Prospero seeks to affirm in Caliban through his assumed supremacy of Western knowledge. Such heinous acts empower him to usurp the land and impose the values and language of the coloniser. Instead of acting as a means of communication, language is used as an instrument of control and domination here.

Said’s colonial logic becomes much clearer and explicit in the statement, where Prospero, in his attempt to teach Caliban the language of his own claims, “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” (1.2.354-58). Here, Prospero places himself as a civilising force, assuming the paternalistic duty of spreading his education to figures like Caliban, as though it were a divine mandate, only to deny Caliban’s pre-existing linguistic agency. Such acts are not acts of benevolence, but rather strategic manoeuvres aimed at consolidating dominance through cultural assimilation. The coloniser’s instruction thereby becomes a tool for eroding the indigenous epistemologies.

Although Prospero maintains a domineering posture, Caliban consistently responds and resists his imposed authority. Caliban’s defiant remark, “You taught me language, and my profit on’t / Is, I know how to curse” (Shakespeare 1.2.363-64), signifies a moment of linguistic subversion. With this, he defies the imposed authority and turns the tool of colonial instruction against the coloniser. The act of defiant speech challenges the ideological foundations of colonial authority and reflects Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of “mimicry”, where the colonised subject reappropriates the coloniser’s discourse in a manner that subverts its intended influence.

Despite Caliban’s continuous resistance, Prospero remains indifferent to his suffering, embodying the colonial leaning to dehumanise and silence native voices. As Ryan notes, this indifference reflects the clear colonial mindset of Prospero, where he refuses to acknowledge the indigenous side of Caliban (43). Hulme observes that Prospero’s dominance over Caliban is not limited to the mere intention of territorial conquest; it involves epistemological control as well (93). Prospero’s treatment of Caliban, as dramatised in *The Tempest*, marked by epistemic violence, narrates how imperial power focuses on silencing the indigenous identity as part of its civilising mission.

Denying Friday’s Voice: Colonial Intelligibility in *Robinson Crusoe*

Daniel Defoe in *Robinson Crusoe* constructs a subtle yet pervasive narrative of colonial subjugation through the protagonist Crusoe, who is being exhibited, both as a Christian civiliser and a benevolent master. While Crusoe persistently presents himself as a humble Westerner, his treatment of Friday, however, describes a different story. Crusoe’s so-called “rescue” of the native Friday and educating him under his supervision reveal a greater structure of ideological and linguistic domination. By asserting an assumed right to cultural and epistemological superiority—rooted in race, religion and language—Crusoe claims authority over Friday, representing him as the racialised “Other.” Although Crusoe attempts to portray himself as the quintessential Englishman throughout his journey, *Robinson Crusoe* subtly reveals his failure to embody this identity completely. The opening lines of the novel already hint at Crusoe’s ambiguous identity and his underlying desire for self-representation,

I was born in the year 1632, in the city of York, of a good family, though not of that country, my father being a Foreigner of Bremen who settled first at Hull... he had married my mother, whose relations were named Robinson, a very good Family in that country, and from whom I was called

Robinson Kreutznaer; but by the usual corruption of words in England we are now called, nay, we call ourselves and write our name Crusoe, and so my companions always called me. (Defoe 13)

The struggle over naming reflects a deeper colonial impulse of this novel—the urge to rename or redefine indicates the means of altering identity. Here, Crusoe’s own reflections on identity formation reveal his urge to redefine others based on their native origins. Thereby, it justifies his colonial authoritative mindset to establish his dominance over them.

The naming process, devoid of consent, functions as an affirmation of imperial imposition. The process of naming or speaking on behalf of the colonised is a form of epistemic violence, wherein the colonised subject is denied and silenced from his or her self-representation. Crusoe’s remark, “I made him know his name should be Friday, which was the day I saved his life. I also taught him to say Master, and then let him know that was to be my name; I likewise taught him to say Yes and No, and to know the meaning of them (Defoe 277),” reflects his colonial dynamic through his selection of linguistic instruction. The reflection illustrates how Crusoe suppresses Friday’s linguistic capacity in order to maintain his authority over him.

Not only does Crusoe name Friday, but he also begins stating his dominance by introducing himself as Friday’s “Master.” Friday’s limited access to knowledge implies Crusoe’s underlying fear of being challenged or overthrown by Friday in the future. The minimal knowledge is sufficient in order to sustain Crusoe’s ascendancy. The act of naming a native man and prescribing him the language of a different culture effectively denies his individuality and his fundamental existence. Many scholars argue that Crusoe’s considering of Friday as a son-like figure to him permits him to justify his authoritative behaviour. However, examining the dynamics of language teaching and learning between them, this parental framing falls short. As Pearlman in his essay notes that “Crusoe thinks of himself as a kind of all-powerful father... for Friday is dealt with not as a child, but as an infant. Crusoe strips him of all personality; he is a zero, a cipher, and the characteristics attributed to him merely projections of Crusoe's own needs” (43). Crusoe interprets his act of rescuing Friday as a justification, granting him absolute authority to control and subordinate Friday. Though Crusoe occasionally defines the relationship as parental, his remarks on Friday’s affections are, “like those of a child to a father” (Defoe 280). This analogy is deeply flawed. As Pearlman has explained in his essay, the “all-powerful father”, Crusoe, never appreciated Friday as he would have dealt with his own kind but denied Friday’s orality and cultural existence by treating him as an infant. The metaphor of fatherhood allows Crusoe to strategically obscure the fundamentally exploitative nature of his relationship with Friday. Even though Friday never shows any signs of resistance towards Crusoe, Crusoe remains unwilling to grant him any opportunity to do so. The fear is evident in the way Crusoe educates him, restricting his instruction to only such an extent as to maintain the necessary communication between them. Mostly to understand Crusoe’s commands and requirements. The first word Friday learns after being renamed is “Master” and not “Father”, portraying Crusoe’s colonial mindset and his attempt to rationalise his domination. Throughout the novel, Friday’s limited access to and use of the English language signify his position of subjugation. He is taught only to the extent of understanding Crusoe’s commands, but not enough to get engaged in meaningful conversations. His obedience exemplifies the language-based power hierarchy rooted in their relationship. As observed in Crusoe’s description, “my man Friday accompanying me very honestly in all these ramblings, and proving a most faithful servant upon all occasions” (370).

This hierarchy extends to religious instruction. Crusoe’s Orientalist attitude is evident in his imposition of Christianity on Friday, convincing him to adopt the religion without any effort to

understand his cultural background. Crusoe describes his effort: “I began to instruct him in the knowledge of the true God... He listened with great attention, and received with pleasure the notion of Jesus Christ being sent to redeem us, and of the manner of making our prayers to God” (290). Here, the idea aligns with Edward Said’s observation in *Orientalism* that “To colonize meant at first the identification-indeed, the creation-of interests; these could be commercial, communicational, religious, military, cultural” (100). Crusoe’s attempt to convert Friday to Christianity represents an extension of his colonial behaviour. While Crusoe claims to be civilising Friday through Western thoughts and education, the act serves more to secure his dominance. Friday’s eventual acceptance of Crusoe’s religious belief reinforces Crusoe’s authority under the guise of spiritual salvation.

The language barrier between Crusoe and Friday, ensuring Friday’s dependence on Crusoe in terms of communication with the wider world, underpins Crusoe’s sense of superiority. Similar to many historical tyrants such as Joseph Stalin and Joseph Goebbels, Defoe’s hero, Robinson Crusoe, supports the ideology that those who control language wield power over others. Like Orwell’s *1984*, Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* also suggests that the voice and agency of an individual are innately linked to his or her linguistic freedom. By keeping Friday as his subordinate, Crusoe consolidates his authority through language and religion as tools of control. Such has been possible due to Friday’s limited grasp of English, since it is not his native language to begin with, allowing Crusoe to establish his mastery. While Friday’s inner thoughts remain inaccessible due to his fictional status, it is possible to interpret how Defoe constructs his character. Friday’s representation is completely filtered through Crusoe’s perspective, as he remarks: “He was the aptest Scholar that ever was; and particularly was so merry, so constantly diligent, and so pleased when he could but understand me, or make me understand him, that it was very pleasant to me to talk to him” (Defoe 282). This description presents Friday as an obedient and keen subject, ideally suited to Crusoe’s performance of mastery.

In *Robinson Crusoe*, there is no indication that Friday attempts to introduce any of his indigenous cultural principles, let alone his orality. The absence of Friday’s voice implies that Defoe is hardly concerned about legitimising Friday’s identity or the voice of the “Other.” Defoe’s sole intention is to promote the colonial authority through the illusion of Crusoe’s benevolence and superiority. It is typical of Western scholars, who often write or speak on behalf of the “Other”, overlook their lived realities, treating them more as symbols than as individuals with voices of their own. They often play the roles of passive subjects in their narratives. The linguistic and communication gap between Crusoe and Friday enables Crusoe to exploit histories unfamiliar to Friday, presenting them in altered and self-serving form. Due to Friday’s limited understanding of English, he remains dependent on Crusoe for interpreting the world. Crusoe’s declaration, “and thus, by degrees, I opened his eyes” (Defoe 290), exemplifies the Orientalist impulse to dominate the “Other” under the mask of enlightenment. Crusoe’s manipulation on Friday in the name of civilisation through the process of naming, linguistic instruction, religious conversion and cultural subjugation turns out to be a systemic denial of Friday’s subjectivity.

Expectation vs Reality

Revisiting *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* through the lens of colonial discourse reveals an alternative critical perspective for analysing the way early modern and Enlightenment literature promotes imperialist ideologies. The fictional islands presented in both texts, along with their self-fashioned European heroes—Prospero and Crusoe—mirror the logic of colonial expansion, in the guise of progress and civilisation. Both characters, taking refuge in unfamiliar territories, feel entitled to establish their authority, promoting their dominance as a noble

endeavour undertaken in the name of enlightenment. This self-authorised domination is presented not as a subjugation, but as the burden of civilisational duty. However, the outcomes for the indigenous figures like Caliban and Friday are silencing and subjugation, and not empowerment. Both Prospero and Crusoe narrate their control as acts of benevolence and necessity. In both narratives, power is disguised as benevolence: Prospero justifies linguistic control, and Crusoe narrates mastery as necessity. The supposed path toward civilisation never truly arrives for the colonised.

Daniel Defoe's writings outside of *Robinson Crusoe*, particularly in *The Complete English Tradesman*, openly celebrate British colonial expansion through trade and settlement, legitimising it as a patriotic gesture in support of national growth. He writes,

It is owing to trade, that new discoveries have been made in lands unknown, and new settlements and plantations made, new colonies planted, and new governments formed... and those plantings and settlements have again enlarged and increased the trade, and thereby the wealth and power of the nation by whom they were discovered and planted... and, excepting the negroes, which we transport from Africa to America, as slaves to work in the sugar and tobacco plantations, all our colonies, as well in the islands... the natives having either removed further up into the country, or, by their own folly and treachery raising war against us, been destroyed and cut off. (Defoe 249-250)

Such statements show the predominant mercantile mindset of the Occident, where colonial expansion was portrayed as a purely economic enterprise, relying on the moral justification based on the alleged failure of indigenous populations. In this light, neither Prospero nor Crusoe can be regarded as genuine agents of enlightenment. Their imposition of language, religion, and other structures on Caliban and Friday serves solely as tools of subjugation and not a gesture of liberation. The invocation of terms like 'civilisation,' 'enlightenment,' and 'development' serves within a broader colonial discourse that hides such manipulations beneath the mask of generosity.

The islands themselves operate almost as laboratories of imperial modernity. For Prospero, the control of knowledge and magic mirrors the disciplinary structures of early modern Europe; for Crusoe, the careful ordering of labour and language reproduces the mercantile logic of colonial capitalism. The colonies are spaces where power is reorganised and normalised through language, education, and religion. The Enlightenment promise of universal improvement, loudly proclaimed in Europe, proves to be selectively applied, leaving colonised peoples outside the category of the fully human.

Ultimately, *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* do not offer examples of cultural exchange, but rather the study of the strategic denial of native agency. When re-examined in the light of postcolonial theory, the veneer of progress gives way to a troubling reality: empire thrived as much on stories, symbols, and literary imagination as on material conquest. Literature, then, is never innocent. It can legitimise empire, but it can also, when revisited critically, expose the fault lines of colonial ideology and point toward spaces of resistance, hybridity, and reimagined identities.

Conclusion

In light of the Orientalist theory, *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* embody the way Western colonial discourses employ cultural and intellectual domination to dehumanise, silence, and regulate the "Other." Both texts establish the structure of colonial power through linguistic suppression, the imposition of Western norms, and the expurgation of indigenous identity.

Prospero's coercive control over Caliban's orality and originality epitomises the epistemic violence Edward Said identifies in *Orientalism*, where knowledge functions as a device of empire. Correspondingly, Crusoe's treatment of Friday as a silent subject who must adopt the master's language, religion, and servitude highlights the systematic denial of native agency and intellectual recognition.

These works are not isolated narratives but rather part of a larger literary tradition that standardised imperial ideologies and justified colonial authority. Postcolonial theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o emphasise that language, hybridity, and cultural negotiation are essential to both the edifice of colonial subjectivities and the possibilities of resistance. In this context, Caliban and Friday transcend their roles as subjugated subjects, serving as symbolic loci for exploring cultural displacement, identity, and the politics of representation.

In the end, both texts interpret how literature has historically served as a vehicle for imperial power while simultaneously providing critical spaces for reimagining and resisting domination. Recognising the persistence of these dynamics highlights the ongoing importance of engaging with canonical works. They keep reminding us that the struggle over language, representation, and identity is central to understanding the legacies of colonialism in both literature and contemporary cultural discourse.

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