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## Conclusion:

Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity attempts to resist Eurocentrism and to tergiversate the traditional Manichean thinking. It downplays oppositionality and calls for an increasing intercultural dialogue and mutuality, preferring hybridity to a monolithic and exclusive culture. Indeed, binary opposition Self/Other, colonizer/colonized seem to collapse in the post-colonial context, which celebrate cultural hybridity and attempts to reconstruct the relationship between the Western and the non-Western cultures. Reading literary texts allows students to transgress the traditional dichotomies and deconstruct the myth of a pure and hermetic culture. The act of reading is a process of mixedness, interaction and interconnectedness of cultures. However, and despite the possibility of crossing cultural borders through literature, discrepancies and divergences should always be maintained. Hybridity should only promote intercultural dialogue but never lead to the effacement of difference or to the erosion one's essential cultural traits. Bhabha's theory encourages students to construct meaning in relation to their socio-cultural context and not just to parrot an authorial intention or some subjective critical readings that proffer erroneous attitudes and views, which students might imbibe without reflection. By adopting a strategy of 'writing back', students are impelled to criticize the imperial ideologies implied in the text, and to deconstruct its prejudices and stereotypes. They must distrust the text as a mimetic and representative of a fixed reality. Students are encouraged to fathom the real meaning and implications of the theories of hybridity themselves. Indeed, Bhabha's theory is pertinent to the 21st context in which the world is marked by globalization and conflicting cultures, whose struggle is ongoing for dominance. His insights are not restricted to the polarity colonizer/colonized. They can be extended to other polarities like White/Black, Master/Slave, Male/Female, West/East, Self/Other, The English speaking world/the Others and so on.

*brooks no disagreement and certainly no diversity. Uncompromising freedom of opinion and expression is the secular intellectual's main bastion: to abandon its defense or to tolerate tamperings with any of its foundations is in effect to betray the intellectual's calling. That is why the defense of Salman Rushdie's Satanic Verses has been so absolutely central an issue, both for its own sake and for the sake of every other infringement against the right to expression of journalists, novelists, essayists, poets, historians. 28*

Said considers Rushdie as a representative of any intellectual, who must strive to obliterate all barriers and attain the right of free expression.

Cultural hybridity in *The Satanic Verses* is viewed by Muslims as dissident. By misreading the Koran, Rushdie's book is not dissimilar to Western discourse, which denounces the sacred text, the Koran, which is one of the key components of culture. The reception of *The Satanic Verses* by Muslims as a blaspheme makes the West view Muslims as opponents of the freedom of opinion and the creative licence. Hence, Rushdie's book, which claims to celebrate hybridity, has, ironically, created new dichotomies. In fact, despite many of its merits, Bhabha's postcolonial theory of hybridity is vitiated by its focus on the semiotic and the performative levels of cultural interpretation. Hence, though the theory moves beyond the polarities of Self/Other, other binaries are paradoxically replicated in the process and moment of postcolonial reading.

Since there are multifarious theories of hybridity, which embody a dizzying sway of critical practices, students are encouraged to use Bhabha's theory of hybridity to read those theories of cultural hybridity. A positive form of hybridity is that which is based on selection rather than on blind imitation. During the intercultural encounter, one should select and integrate only some positive cultural traits and reject others. This hybridity is likely to enrich one's culture. Indeed, there are many postcolonial theories, and none of them is Gospel. So, one needs to be careful with all postcolonial theories. The problem is not with hybridity itself but with how it is defined.

***authorship and indeed the authority of the Koran, have been drawn upon. ("The Third Space" 211)***

For Bhabha, Rushdie epitomizes hybridity in his questioning of the authority of the Koran and its original meaning. Indeed, hybridity becomes a heresy and a blaspheme when it amounts to the violation of the sacred things. Edward Said, a staunch advocate of hybridity, who endorses Bhabha's view, has defended Rushdie against the outrage of the Islamic world following the publication of *The Satanic Verses*. Commenting on Rushdie's book, Said states that the book is "but a spur to go on struggling for democracy that has been denied us, and the courage not to stop. Rushdie is the Intifada of the imagination."<sup>27</sup> Said eulogizes Rushdie's novel as a daring attempt of any intellectual to strive for releasing his pent-up thoughts. He maintains that

***Rushdie is everyone who dares to speak out against power, to say that we are entitled to think and express forbidden thoughts, to argue for democracy and freedom of opinion. The time has come for those of us who come from this part of the world to say that we are against this fatwa and all fatwas that silence, beat, imprison, or intimidate people and ban, burn, or anathematize books. (Qtd in Youssef Yacoubi 204)***

So, very much like Bhabha, Said considers Muslims' vitriolic criticism and abhorrence of Rushdie's book as a religious fundamentalism. In discussing the issue of modernity and its entry into the Islamic world, Said states that it is "indeed the battle...[because it raises] the whole question of what tradition is, and the Prophet said, and the Holy Book said, and what God said...There is a school of writers, poets, essayists, and intellectuals, who are fighting a battle for the right to be modern, because our history is governed by turath, or heritage" (Qtd in Youssef Yacoubi 205). In Said's view, which echoes that of Bhabha, modernity involves the blurring of the rigid boundaries between the sacred and the profane. The intellectual, he writes, must

***be involved in a lifelong dispute with all the guardians of sacred vision or text, whose depredations are legion and whose heavy hand***

Contrariwise, those, who view the book positively, are seen by Bhabha as moderns (The Location of Culture 225). In fact, the novel has triggered vigorous and unrelenting criticism and condemnation since its publication. The misrepresentation and misreading of the Koran, in the novel, makes Muslims simmer with rage. They have received the book as a blaspheme, and in responding to the book in such a way, Muslims have used the power of hybridity and the writing back strategy to read this hybrid text.

In defense of Rushdie, against Muslims' scathing indictment of him, Bhabha states:

*It is not that the 'content' of the Koran is directly disputed; rather, by revealing other enunciatory positions and possibilities within the framework of Koranic reading, Rushdie performs the subversion of its authenticity through the act of cultural translation—he relocates the Koran's 'intentionality' by repeating and reinscribing it in the locale of the novel of postwar cultural migration and diaspora (The Location of Culture 226).*

So, is not the deconstruction of Koran's authorial intentionality a misreading and a misinterpretation of its content? The problem with Bhabha's theory is that it does not revere the sacred. It considers the Koran as any other literary or cultural text, which is open to a variety of interpretations. According to Bhabha, hybridity

*puts together the traces of certain other meanings or discourses. It does not give them the authority of being prior in the sense of being original: they are prior only in the sense of being anterior. The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation. A good example would be the form of hybridity that The Satanic Verses represents, where clearly a number of controversies around the origin, the*



to Bill Ashcroft, “the process of reading itself is a continual process of contextualization and adjustment directly linked to the constitutive relations within the discursive event.”<sup>26</sup> However, Bhabha’s resistance to Western discourse is by no means a rejection of this discourse. In this regard, Bill Ashcroft states that “[r]esistance [...] need not necessarily mean rejection of dominant culture, the utter refusal to countenance any engagement with its forms and discourse [...] the colonized subject ‘interpolates’ the dominant discourse, and this word interpolate describes a wide range of resistant practices” (Post-colonial Transformation 47).

## **5-Writing back to Homi Bhabha’s theory of Hybridity:**

Applying Bhabha’s theory to his book *The Location of Culture*, one might discern the major limitation or problem raised by his model of cultural hybridity and its hazards. Bhabha considers Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* a glaring example of hybridity. In his discussion of Rushdie’s book, Bhabha admits that in the process of cultural hybridity, it is the foreign cultural elements, which enable the Other to enter modernity. As he puts it: “I am more engaged with the ‘foreign’ element that reveals the interstitial [...] that has to be engaged in creating the conditions through which ‘newness enters the world’ (*The Location of Culture* 227). Though Bhabha has a fervid desire for hybridity, his model seems to tilt the balance towards the foreign one. One ventures to say that such a model of hybridity runs the risk of making a foreign culture grow in the graveyard of the native one.

Bhabha sees Rushdie as a model for the Islamic world’s entry to ‘Modernity’. For any Muslim, Rushdie is blasphemous; using the Holy Koran as he did is unacceptable to any Muslim. For Bhabha, either you are like Salman Rushdie (and you are great), or you are a ‘Fundamentalist’. The question of Hybridity as theorized by Bhabha lies at the heart of all this: Rushdie is a hybrid; therefore, he is ‘modern’. The price of modernity is such hybridity- the rejection of the Koran (and blasphemy). One might ask if Bhabha’s theory is an ideal model for the ‘newness to enter to world’ or is the Islamic world free to define its own modernity?

In his reading of Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*, Bhabha describes as fundamentalists the Muslims, who have received the book as a blaspheme.

*its underlying assumptions (civilization, justice, aesthetics, sensibility, race) and reveals its (often unwitting) colonialist ideologies and processes (Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies 192).*

In his critical commentary on John Stuart Mill's On Liberalism, Bhabha suggests a model of how to read texts. In his words,

*Rereading Mill through the strategies of 'writing' I have suggested, reveals that one cannot passively follow the line of argument running through the logic of the opposing ideology. The textual process of political antagonism initiates a contradictory process of reading between the lines; the agent of the discourse becomes, in the same time of utterance, the inverted, projected object of argument, turned against itself" (The Location of Culture 24).*

In this sense, reading involves readers in an intellectual cogitation, which makes them approach texts with a critical and a suspicious stance to decipher their real meaning. The same language that might be used to undermine and devalue the Other/colonizer might be used as a weapon against the Self/colonized; this has become known in the post-colonial discourse as "Prospero-Caliban syndrome". During the intercultural dialogue through literature, "meanings and values are (mis)read [...] signs are misappropriated" (The Location of Culture 34).

In the reading process, students are urged to reinterpret and reconstruct their identity/history. This reconstruction of identity and rewriting of history imply a reversal and displacement of hierarchical binary oppositions and a redefinition of otherness. The critic D. Emily Hicks states: "If writing is always a rereading, is not reading always a rewriting? Such a question points up the context in which border writing must be approached as a process of negotiation."<sup>25</sup> Reading or interpreting the Other is very subjective, and it is not based on plausible or cogent arguments. Hence, history is 'his' story.

Readers are encouraged to dispel the western chauvinistic and stereotypical claims of cultural superiority. They have to create new worlds, new histories, from the words and the inscriptions found in the colonial discourse. According

literary critic and the English teacher, who claims to be able to interpret for his readers or students the real meaning of the text. The critical book is not the centre which offers the official or the correct interpretation.

#### **4- The ‘Writing Back’ Strategy:**

Bhabha’s theory, which is a kind of counter-discourse, aspires to reconstruct meaning, identity, and history using a ‘writing back’ strategy. The term ‘write back’ is first coined by Salman Rushdie, and it is canvassed in Ashcroft et.al’s *The Empire Writes Back*. Chinua Achebe, for instance, in his novel *Things Fall Apart*, writes back to Joseph Conrad’s *The Heart of Darkness*, which depicts Africans as dehumanized subjects, primitive, without any civilization or history. It silenced Africans and portrays them as savages and cannibals. So, in his novel, Achebe restores dignity to the Africans by evincing that they have a rich culture and a great tradition, which they should be proud of. In his critical essays, he also expresses his violent diatribe on Conrad whom he considers as a “thoroughgoing racist.”<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, ‘Writing back’ is not confined to writing. It also calls for the ardent commitment and engagement of the reader. Bhabha suggests that “the critic must attempt to fully realize, and take responsibility for, the unspoken, unrepresented pasts that haunts the historical present” (*The Location of Culture*12). So, if writing is a negation, reading is a negotiation or a restoration of what has been repressed and negated. Bhabha’s theory aims at restoring voice to the silenced and the subaltern. It requires readers to be recalcitrant and enables them to circumvent the colonial and imperial power. Like Achebe, African readers are liable to interpret the novel as an account of the Europeans’ greedy and heartless accumulation of ivory in the Congo. It demonstrates the West’s fervid desire for imperialism and colonialism, nay it reveals the erroneous ‘civilizing’ mission in Africa.

In responding to literary texts, students should deconstruct all the stereotypes and correct what has been misrepresented. They are enticed to rewrite the text or interpret it in accordance with their socio-historical reality. A post-colonial reading, according to Ashcroft et.al, is

*a form of deconstructive reading most usually applied to works emanating from the colonizers (but may be applied to works by the colonized) which demonstrates the extent to which the text contradicts*

the authority of Western discourse. It upturns the colonizer's meaning and renders the text open to diverse possibilities of interpretation. To put it more succinctly, meaning is constructed during the palimpsestic process of inscription and erasure.

In the reading process, which opens a dialogue or an interaction between cultures to negotiate meaning, the reader is asked to be a hybrid one. According to Bhabha,

*by allowing ourselves to become hybrid readers, we can enter into dialogue with the texts and their political implications. We can understand what it means to be both inside and outside varied cultural contexts, and experience the different kinds of spaces and insularities that those contexts permit. In other words, we allow ourselves to be transformed and translated culturally, entering into dialogue with the work, its implicit readers, and the power relationships between them (The Location of Culture 208).*

Since the individual's identity is hybrid due to the hybrid nature of culture, and since the language in which literature is composed is also unstable; it follows that meaning is also fluid and hybrid.

The meaning of a text is always located in the in-between since it is read by a social group, which differs from that of the author. Bhabha states that "the very language of the novel, its form and rhetoric, must be open to meanings that are ambivalent, doubling and dissembling" ("The Third Space" 212). Interpretation, in this view, is a process of dislocation, displacement, and distortion. It is an act of misreading in which words are detached from their original or fixed meanings and imbued with new shades of ambivalent meanings. Signs always mean more than what they say because language is marked by conflicting and contradictory interpretations. In Bhabha's view, textual liminality entails "a contradictory process of reading between the lines" (The Location of Culture 250). Thus, Bhabha's theory calls into question the truth of literary interpretation and the authority of Western discourse. Unfortunately, students' interpretation of texts is always uncritical; it mimics those of the Western critics. Bhabha's approach breaks the author as a logos, and more radically, it deconstructs the very authority of both the

Bhabha calls into radical question the view of language as a means of expressing a fixed meaning, which is inscribed in the words. The foreign language is remoulded and adopted to new usages when used by non-native speakers, who decenter its words from their original meanings. Hence, reading is not a reproduction of a pre-existing authorial meaning or intention; it is a productive process of constructing and reconstructing meaning.

Since language does not exist in a vacuum, its meaning is earmarked by idiosyncratic traits; it is to be sought in its (non)native speaker's intention and his context. Michael Bakhtin points out that

*[L]anguage, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other peoples' mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own. 22*

When decontextualized, words cease to possess or attain any sense. Language is not a straightforward communication of meaning, and it does not express its native speakers' worldview when read or used in a different context. The meaning of the text and the meaning of its culture are not inherent in the author or in his culture. They are rather constructed by the reader who shapes meaning to fit his socio-historical and cultural matrix.

For Bhabha, the individual has a double vision or consciousness. The construction of meaning, which is liminal, requires a passage through a 'Third Space'. The latter "represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot in itself be conscious. What this unconscious relation introduces is an ambivalence in the act of interpretation." 23 The concept of liminality, which is riven with the notion of ambivalence, questions

***their intentions. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way round. 19***

Thus, the writer and the reader of the same community are prone to infuse a text with the same meaning since they have a set of shared rules and attitudes. Interpretative communities, according to Fish, explain “the stability of interpretation among different readers (they belong to the same community) [...] Of course this stability is always temporary (unlike the longed for and timeless stability of the text) Interpretative communities grow and decline”(“Interpreting the Variorum” 304). So, even in the same interpretative community, meaning varies with time and circumstances. Due to the effect of *différance*<sup>20</sup>, meaning remains in a perpetual change.

Like Derrida, Bhabha focuses on the semantic slippage within the text. He emphasizes “how signification is affected by particular sites and contexts of enunciation and address” (The Location of Culture 119). The slippage of the colonial discourse occurs when the text is read in another context, where words, signs, and symbols acquire different meanings. When depicting a socio-cultural context other than its native speakers’, language becomes liminal, unable to convey a stable or exact meaning. As Bhabha maintains, the “ill-fitting robe of language alienates content in the sense that it deprives it of an immediate access to a stable or holistic reference ‘outside’ itself” (The Location of Culture 164). The same text, in the same language, is open to a multiplicity of meanings when read by different readers, who belong to different cultures. In A Portrait of the Artist, Stephen Dedalus avows that a foreign language acquires a different meaning when spoken by non-native speakers. He says:

***The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words home, Christ, ale, master, on his lips and mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language. 21***

the process of reading must be a counter-rewriting and rectifying act. For Bhabha, the colonial discourse, which has long empowered the colonizers, can disempower them. Hence, hybridity means the “the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal [...] It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power” (The Location of Culture 112).

Due to the difference of writing itself, the utterance attains different ramifications of meaning. According to Bhabha,

*[t]he reason a cultural text or a system of meaning cannot be sufficient unto itself is that the act of cultural enunciation-the place of utterance-is crossed by the difference of writing. This has less to do with what anthropologists might describe as varying attitudes to symbolic systems within different cultures than with the structure of symbolic representation itself-not the content of the symbol or its social function, but the structure of symbolization. It is this difference in the process of language that is crucial to the production of meaning and ensures, at the same time, that meaning is never simply mimetic or transparent (The location of Culture 36).*

So, the text is open to a wide range of interpretations because of the difference of writing across societies and communities. In the act of writing, the author unconsciously employs a set of strategies, rules and assumptions, which are embedded in his community. Hence, within the same community, the author’s intention and the reader’s interpretation are likely to dovetail with each other. Of utmost significance, the same work is received differently by different societies. According to Bhabha, the “transfer of meaning can never be total between systems of meaning” (The Location of Culture 163). This view collides head on with that of Stanley Fish, who coins the term ‘interpretative communities’. He writes:

*Interpretative communities are made up of those who share interpretative strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning*

hybridity of language and meaning. According to him, "the who of agency bears no mimetic immediacy or adequacy of representation. It can only be signified outside the sentence" (The Location of Culture 271). So, instead of representing a fixed reality, the text has a multiplicity of meanings, which differ in accordance with the reader's socio-cultural context. Challenging the mimetic view of language, Bhabha sees the literary text itself as a site of hybridity. He writes: "When the words of the master become the site of hybridity-the warlike sign of the native-then we may not only read between the lines, but also seek to change the often coercive reality that they so lucidly contain" (The Location of Culture 121).

Bhabha questions the ability of language to convey a stable and correct meaning, which might be taken for granted as the gospel truth. Very much like the post-structuralists and the deconstructionists, he postulates that writing, as a system of arbitrary signification, cannot capture or incarnate a stable meaning, because there is no essential link between the signifier and the signified. The ambiguity, unreliability and slipperiness of language makes it impossible to reach or embody any veracity or verity. Bhabha shares Derrida's view of the intrinsically ambivalent and metaphorical nature of language and its inability to convey a clear meaning or an absolute truth.

Bhabha's post-colonial theory, which borrows from post-structuralism, deconstructs all authoritative centres to which one might refer for a correct and valid interpretation. Indeed, eurocentrism has been deconstructed since Frederick Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God. Nietzsche's famous dictum, "There are no facts, there are only interpretations", remains a rallying cry for Bhabha whose theory is also based on skepticism and uncertainty. Bhabha's theory of cultural interpretation collides head on with that of Jacques Derrida, who asserts that meaning is infinitely interpretable and perpetually deferred. Thus, whenever one tries to find a centre, he/she ends in an aporia. In Derrida's dictum, meaning is 'always already postponed'.

Concerning the post-colonial linguistic situation, Bhabha maintains that discourse is not entirely within the control of Western writers, who often put the Other into a passive voice or scant presence. He believes that the colonized, who have always been objectified by the colonized, finally become subjects capable of destabilizing the colonial authority. Therefore, students should take an active role by questioning the veracity of the stories conveyed in colonial discourse and by asserting their voice in literary interpretation. In other words,



process of border-crossing between antinomies in the 'Third Space', which knows no boundaries.

Bhabha's theory is often misunderstood as an attempt to create a universal culture, a leveling and an elimination of divergences in a world marked by difference and Otherness. However, hybridity implies a recognition of difference despite cultural mixedness and impurity. It entails a moderate coalition of cultures that would preserve their distinctiveness. Despite cultural border crossing, separatedness and difference are invincible. According to Ngugi, knowing the Other might enlighten us, but one should never forsake his own culture. In his words, "[w]hat has been in the colonial context is that the act of interpreting the Other culture that is far from us, has instead of clarifying real connections and each culture thereby illuminating the other, ended by making us captives of the foreign culture and alienating us from our own" ("Borders and Bridges" 119). The quote illustrates the fact that despite hybridity, separatedness and difference are maintained.

### **3-Literary Interpretation and the Liminality of Meaning:**

Given the fact that literature is a signifier of the author's national and cultural identity, students, to decrypt the text's meaning, often resort to the author's culture and his social-historical context where they believe the meaning of the text lies. They take the author's intention as the only possible meaning and correct interpretation for the text. Edward Said evinces the danger of this method of reading literary texts. He states that « stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world; they also become the method the colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history » (Culture and Imperialism Xiii).

Colonial discourse, according to Bhabha, is considered as a form of realism, because it claims to depict the real history of the people it writes about. Hence, he dismisses realism, which "resembles a form of narrative whereby the productivity and circulation of subjects and signs are bound in a reformed and recognizable totality. It employs a system of representation, a regime of truth that is structurally similar to realism" (The Location of Culture 71). So, Bhabha repudiates the purely mimetic view of language. He considers realism and historicism as historically and culturally specific. Bhabha insists on the arbitrariness of signification and emphasizes the open-endedness and

thinking and break the rigidly established barriers between the colonizer and the colonized. It is a daring attempt to find a common space or a contact zone where cultures meet. The critic Peter Brooker develops further this idea, pointing out that the meanings of the term hybridity refer to “the mixed or hyphenated identities of persons or ethnic communities, or of texts which express and explore these conditions.” (16)

Following the path of post-structuralism, the theory of hybridity has purged the world from the traditional Manichean thinking which has long been rife in the West. This Manichean thinking divides the world into binary oppositions like the colonizer/the colonized, Self/Other, Man/Woman. It privileges the first polarity and undermines the second. Those polarities or binaries, to use a Derridean jargon, undergo a process of deconstruction in the post-colonial discourse. In fact, opposites are already united; they depend on each other integrally.

Since borders are fluid and cultures are not hermetic and self-sufficient, the Self is defined and constructed in relation to an Other. As the critic Milica Zivkovic states, “[t]here can be no fixed or true identity, no origin or original [...] There is no ultimate knowledge, representation is no longer a matter of veracity or accuracy but merely of competing.”<sup>17</sup> In this view, national identities are inclusive rather than exclusive. Hybridity shakes the verity of an authentic culture or a fixed reality. Borders, which are thought to be divisive, might be uniting. This view goes along the line of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's discussion of borders. In “Borders and Bridges”, he writes:

*[I]f a border marks the outer edge of one region, it also marks the beginning of the next region. As the marker of an end, it also functions as the marker of a beginning. Without the end of one region, there can be no beginning of another. Depending on our starting point, the border is both the beginning and the outer edge. Each space is beyond the boundary of the other. It is thus at once a boundary and a shared space. (18)*

So, when dealing with alterity, one must accept to cross the border into the third space of interpretation, the realm of the in-between where ambivalence reigns. In dealing with Otherness, the whole interest lies in the incessant

*not only because there are other cultures which contradict its authority, but also because its own symbol-forming activity, its own interpellation in the process of representation, language, signification and meaning-making, always underscores the claim to an ordinary, holistic, organic identity (Bhabha, "The Third Space" 210).*

Bhabha refers to post-colonial religious situation in order to illustrate his theory of hybridity. Some natives of the colonized lands, who have never owned a book, view the Bible as "signs taken for wonders-as an insignia of colonial authority and a signifier of colonial desire and discipline" (The Location of Culture 102). Despite these people's attraction to the new religion, they did not imitate its ideas slavishly; they rather took a repulsive attitude towards it by "using the powers of hybridity to resist baptism and to put the project of conversion in an impossible position" (The Location of Culture 118).

In tracing the origin of the term hybridity, the critics Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin state that

*[o]ne of the most employed and most disputed terms in post-colonial theory, hybridity commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization. As used in horticulture, the term refers to the cross-breeding of two species by grafting or cross-pollination to form a third, 'hybrid' species. Hybridization takes many forms: linguistic, cultural, political, [or] racial" (Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies 118).*

In this sense, hybridity is used in post-colonial theory to refer to a linguistic and intercultural space, a zone of in-betweenness. It implies a direct contact between Self and Other or their fusion in a single, mixed and impure culture. This view collides head on with that of Said, one of the early theorists of cultural hybridity, who asserts that "[f]ar from being unitary or monolithic or autonomous things, cultures actually assume more 'foreign' elements, alterities, differences, than they consciously exclude." (Culture and Imperialism 15) Hence, hybridity is likely to reduce the sharp dualistic

[...]-that carries the burden of the meaning of culture” (The Location of Culture 38).

Bhabha's main thesis is that any cultural identity is located in the in-between. He denies cultural essentialism, stating that “[t]here is no ‘in itself’ and ‘for itself’ within cultures.”<sup>15</sup> Bhabha asserts that binary oppositions like Self/Other, colonizer/colonized, undergo a process of deconstruction, which results in the emergence of a hybrid space between them, which he also calls a “third space”, a “liminal space”, or an “interstice”. Bhabha discusses the danger of “the fixity and fetishism of identities” (The Location of Culture 9). He challenges the view that cultures have fixed, pure, and original traits. He rather ascertains the fluidity of cultures as follows:

*The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation [...] challenges our sense of historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People [...] It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricised and read anew (The Location of Culture 37).*

Between the Self and the Other, there is always an in-betweenness, a third space, which is, for Bhabha, a place of negotiation. The liminal space, a term coined by Bhabha, also refers to the borderlines of cultures. This liminality undermines the claim of an authentic culture. Bhabha's theory deconstructs the view of Western civilization as unique and superior. He emphasizes the mixedness of cultures, arguing that cultures are impure and inauthentic. This cultural impurity is the result of cultures' contact across history. Hence, cultural hybridity is a dynamic movement, a space of negotiation where identities are not stable but in constant change and construction. In his staunch criticism of the view of culture as a pure, monolithic, and exclusive entity, Bhabha states:

*Meaning is constructed across the bar of difference and separation between the signifier and the signified. So it follows that no culture is full unto itself, no culture is plainly plenitudinous,*

Deleuze and Guattari. According to them, a rhizome is

***[a] botanical term for a root system that spreads across the ground (as in bamboo) rather than downwards, and grows from several points rather than a single taproot[...] in post-colonial theory it has been used to contest the binary centre/margin view of reality that is maintained by colonial discourse. The key value of the term is to demonstrate that the repressive structures of imperial power themselves operate rhizomically rather than monolithically.13***

To explain the impurity of cultures in the postcolonial context, Ashcroft et.al use the very interesting image of the “palimpsest”, which is an old document whose writing is partially or completely erased to be replaced by another. In their words, “previous ‘inscriptions’ are erased and overwritten, yet remain as traces within present consciousness. This confirms the dynamic, contestatory and dialogic nature of linguistic, geographic, and cultural space as it emerges in post-colonial experience” (Key Concepts 176). This cultural and linguistic impurity is also highlighted by the American anthropologist James Clifford who asserts that everyone’s identity is a hybrid one and that there is no pure race, language or religion. In his words, “it becomes increasingly difficult to attach human identity and meaning to a coherent ‘culture’ or ‘language.’”<sup>14</sup> What Clifford implies is that cultural hybridity is an inevitable fate because no culture can survive and thrive apart from the other cultures; otherwise, it will perish and fade away in the mist of time.

Since its appearance in the 1990s, Homi Bhabha’s post-colonial theory of hybridity has had a great influence on postcolonial studies. The theory of hybridity itself is hybrid since it borrows from a cluster of theories like that of Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Antonio Gramsci, and Mikhail Bakhtin. Bhabha, who is one of the pillars of the holy trinity of hybridity, which also includes Edward Said and Guayatri Spivak, suggests that the best term to describe cultural relations is intercultural dialogue rather than cultural antagonism. Bhabha states that it is “the ‘inter’-the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between

*which are stereotypical but antithetically evaluated. The objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction. 11*

Hence, Western discourse reinforces the view of the Self as highly civilized, intelligent, pure, and stigmatizes the Other as inferior, uncivilized and impure. It fixes stereotypes and relegates the East to a zero degree.

Many students are hypnotized and mesmerized by the deluding Western culture, which they take as an ideal world to ape without reflection. Literary texts play a pivotal role in manipulating students' minds and in shaping their views about their own culture and history, which might be misrepresented in Western literature. Literature, if not read critically, is likely to lead to self-relegation and even to self-hatred, especially that students tend to view authors as purveyors of the truth or the right judgment. Colonial meanings are conveyed not just via literary texts but also reinforced by Western literary critics whose critical views most of the time tally with that of the author.

## **2- Homi Bhabha's Post-Colonial Theory of Hybridity**

Post-colonialism calls into question a series of concepts like authority, centre, authenticity, truth, and so on. It is a daring attempt to give voice to the Other who is always silent and absent in Western discourse. According to Shaobo Xie, postcolonialism is "an act of rethinking the history of the world against the inadequacy of the terms and conceptual frames invented by the West."<sup>12</sup> Hence, post-colonialism is a counter-discourse, which aims at deconstructing logocentrism, which perpetuates a rigid distinction between the centre and the margin. It opens a dialogue between the centre and the margin and frees the Other from being bound by any fixed truth or origin. Post-colonialism is an attempt to reassess the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, and revises binaries which have been located eurocentrically.

Postcolonial theory has tergiversated the view of the rootedness of cultural identity. The latter is believed to be formed via rhizomatic intercultural relations. To describe cultural identity in the post-colonial context, Bill Ashcroft et.al use the image of the rhizome, a metaphor first employed by

being” (Moving the Centre 145). So, colonial discourse purveys colonial knowledge and power, and it reinforces the West’s domination and hegemony. Very much like Ngugi, Ayo Kehinde states that the “English novel is the ‘terra firma’ where the self-consolidating project of the West is launched.”<sup>8</sup>

Literature has been used as a means to confirm and consolidate Western hegemony and culture by internalizing Western knowledge and ideology in the readers’ minds. Edward Said makes interesting connections between the novel and imperialism. He considers the novel as “immensely important in the formation of imperial attitudes, references, and experiences.”<sup>9</sup> Writing is used as a means to exercise power and erase others’ cultural identity. The novel, in particular, helps reinforce colonial views and stereotypes and form a culture steeped in colonial ideologies.

The metaphor of nations as narrations has been employed to vindicate the very important position of the novel in the history of the empire. According to Said, the “power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them” (Culture and Imperialism xiii). Reading literature in a foreign language might lead to the appropriation of the Other as Self. It might lead to the effacement of cultural differences and to the readers’ identification with another culture.

Elleke Boehmer voices Said’s view that imperialism and colonialism might be experienced textually through the novel. He states that “On a specifically literary level, the study of literature was advocated throughout the British Empire as a means of inculcating a sense of imperial loyalty in the colonized.”<sup>10</sup> Speaking another language makes the non-native speakers absorbers of the imperial worldview. Through literary texts, the colonizers have tried to make their culture regnant over all and to make the colonized subjects inferior copies of themselves.

Colonial discourse represents and vindicates the apotheosis of the West and its culture. In his definition of Western discourse, Homi Bhabha states that it

*is an apparatus that turns on the recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences. [...] It seeks authorization for its strategies by the production of knowledge of colonizer and colonized*

*Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' become established. 4*

According to the “Sapir-Whorf hypothesis”, every language expresses the specific worldview of its native speakers and constructs their reality. For the linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf, human beings “dissect nature along lines laid down by [their] native languages.”<sup>5</sup> So, people who speak the same language are prone to have the same worldview. In line with this view, Ngugi asserts that “language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people’s experience in history. Culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, banking, articulation and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next”(“The Language” 289). According to this view, no other borrowed language can replace the native one in expressing its worldview. Frantz Fanon also finds cultural authenticity very difficult to preserve in a borrowed language. He considers that speaking the language of the oppressors implies the acceptance of their culture, because to speak “means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization [...] A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language.”<sup>6</sup> In this view, speaking a foreign language makes non-native speakers prey to the danger of discarding their authentic cultural identity. In other words, identity would consequently be at stake in the use of a foreign language. The colonizers have tried to depersonalize and alienate the colonized subjects by means of language. The latter not only alienates one from his/her cultural roots, but also perpetuates Western culture and its myth of supremacy. Paul de Man, in turn, asserts that language is not devoid of the stains of ideology. According to him, literariness and ideology are by no means mutually exclusive: “What we call ideology is precisely the confusion of linguistic with natural reality [...] it follows that, more than any other mode of inquiry, including economics, the linguistic literariness is a powerful and indispensable tool in the unmasking of ideological aberrations.”<sup>7</sup>

A cluster of thinkers consider literary texts the best means to deploy power since the author is the antennae of his race and the spokesman of his cultural identity. In Ngugi’s words, “[l]iterature, and particularly imaginative literature, is one of the most subtle and most effective ways by which a given ideology is passed on and received as the norm in the daily practices of our



Bhabha's theory puts into radical question the mimetic view of language. Since the text is not immune from the taints of its author's ideology and his cultural demarcations, students' role is to resist imperial/colonial representations by correcting and dispelling many Western texts' stereotypes. Rather than slavishly imitating the author's intention or assimilating the target culture, they are enticed to appropriate the literary signs they read and to dislocate the text from its original context. As the paper evinces, the postcolonial strategy of 'writing back' would constitute great gains if applied in the literature class.

## **1- Language, the novel, and imperialism**

Which language to speak has been a topic of great controversy among those who have tried to redefine cultural identity in the post-colonial context. The famous Kenyan writer and theorist Ngugi Wa Thingo' maintains that language is "the most important vehicle through which [...] power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of spiritual subjugation."<sup>1</sup> Ngugi assumes that speaking a foreign language makes the non-native speakers prey to the danger of assimilation, losing their authentic culture. He believes that Western language and culture are "taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds" ("The Language" 288). So, the West attempts to dominate and spread its culture by means of language because "[a]n oppressor language inevitably carries racist and negative images of the conquered nation, particularly in its literature, and English is no exception."<sup>2</sup> Ngugi, like many other post-colonial writers, is inspired by Michel Foucault's belief that discourse reinforces power relations, because those who have power spread their knowledge in the way they wish. In his study of the nexus between power and knowledge, Foucault asserts that power "reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourse, learning processes and everyday lives."<sup>3</sup> Believing that control over language is one of the main instruments of imperial oppression, Ashcroft et al also ascertain that

*[colonial education] installs a 'standard' version of the metropolitan language as a norm, and marginalizes all 'variants' as impurities [...]*

### ***Abstract:***

The present paper aspires to vindicate Homi Bhabha's theorization of cultural hybridity and its implications in reading Western literary texts, which are not immune from imperialism and hegemony. The act of reading is a process of cultural hybridity in which the student's negotiation of meaning transcends the Manichean polarities us/them, Self/Other, colonizer/Colonized. The text itself is a hybrid, nomadic, and rhizomatic world where meaning is generated out of the transaction between the student's culture and that of the author. The intercultural encounter results in a liminal space, which is also dubbed Third Space or interstice, which prevails over dichotomies. The student's cultural identity and the text's meaning are both located in the in-between. Of utmost significance, the paper evinces the threat of cultural assimilation when reading the theories of cultural hybridity.

## الحوار الثقافي عبر الأدب أثار نظرية الهجنة الثقافية عند هومي باب

### ملخص:

يدرس المقال نظرية الهجنة الثقافية لهومي بابا وأثارها في قراءة النصوص الأدبية الغربية التي لا تخلو من الإمبريالية والهيمنة. إن عملية القراءة تتضمن نوعاً من هذه الهجنة الثقافية، حيث إن استخلاص القارئ للمعنى يتجاوز الثنائيات المتضادة نحن/هم، والأنا/الآخر، والمستعمر/المستعمر. النص في حد ذاته عالم هجين وفسيفسائي ومتعدد المشارب. إن معناه يُستنبط من خلال التداخل بين ثقافة الطالب و ثقافة الأديب. إن هذا الالتقاء بين الثقافات ينتج عنه عالم «الما بين» الذي يسمى بالفضاء الثالث، والذي يتجاوز الثنائيات. إن الهوية الثقافية للطالب ومعنى النص الأدبي كلاهما يتموقع في «الما بين»، ويوضح هذا المقال خاصة خطر التبعية الثقافية العمياء عند قراءة نظريات الهجنة الثقافية.

# **Cultural Dialogue Through literature: The Implications of Homi Bhabha's Theory of Hybridity in the Literature Class \***

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