

BHABHA

- Since it appeared in 1985, Homi Bhabha's "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817" has become a locus classicus for postcolonial studies.
- A central document in today's postcolonial archive, it was republished as a chapter in *The Location of Culture* in 1994, in numerous subsequent editions, and is a text that has been recycled and repeated in several languages and in countless anthologies and secondary works.
- It constitutes a discourse whose key coinages—"hybridity," "sly civility," "mimicry"—have passed into such common usage in the past twenty-five years that they have come to colonize the postcolonial imagination with an imaginative power rare within the rarefied world of cultural theory.
- In "Signs Taken For Wonders," Homi K. Bhabha examines several moments in postcolonial literature that depict the "sudden, fortuitous discovery of the English book."
- The European book, in other words, is a "sign taken for wonders" that "figures those ideological correlatives of the Western sign--empiricism, idealism, mimeticism, monoculturalism (to use Edward Said's term) that sustain a tradition of English 'cultural rule'". It would seem, Bhabha argues, that the English book points toward the fixity of Colonial power, along with its discursive capacity to "narrate" and subsequently disseminate a European cultural heritage.
- Bhabha's central argument is that the English book -- a fetishized sign that glorifies the epistemological centrality and permanence of European dominance -- paradoxically is an emblem of "colonial ambivalence" that suggests the weakness of colonial discourse and its susceptibility to "mimetic" subversion.
- Bhabha's *Nation and Narration* (1990) is primarily an intervention into "essentialist" readings of nationality that attempt to define and naturalize Third World "nations" by means of the supposedly homogenous, innate, and historically continuous traditions that falsely define and ensure their subordinate status.

- Nations, in other words, are "narrative" constructions that arise from the "hybrid" interaction of contending cultural constituencies.
- In **The Location of Culture**, utilizing a complex criteria of semiotics and psychoanalysis, Bhabha examines the "ambivalence of colonial rule" and suggests that it enables a capacity for resistance in the performative "mimicry" of the "English book."
- Discussing artists such as Toni Morrison and Nadine Gordimer, Bhabha seeks to find the "location of culture" in the marginal, "haunting," "unhomely" spaces between dominant social formations.
- Defoe represents Crusoe as being the ultimate incarnation of an Englishman: industrious, self-determining, and ready to colonize natives.
- Crusoe encounters a native and he names him Friday, teaches him English, the words of God, and slowly "civilizes" the dark-skinned native.
- Crusoe encounters a native and he names him Friday, teaches him English, the words of God, and slowly "civilizes" the dark-skinned native.
- The simple presence of the colonized Other within the textual structure is enough evidence of the ambivalence of the colonial text, an ambivalence that destabilizes its claim for absolute authority or unquestionable authenticity.
- Bhabha recognizes then that colonial power carefully establishes highly-sophisticated strategies of control and dominance; that is, while it is aware of its ephemerality, it is also anxious to create the means that guarantee its economic, political and cultural endurance, through the conception, in Macaulay's words in his "Minute on Indian Education" (1835), "of a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect" – that is through the reformation of that category of people referred to by Frantz Fanon in the phrase, "black skin/white masks," or as "mimic men" by V.S. Naipaul. Friday could be one of these mimic men; but as we have already seen, the process of colonial mimicry is both a product of and produces ambivalence and hybridity.

- Metonymy - the substitution of the name of an attribute or adjunct for that of the thing meant, for example *suit* for *business executive*, or *the turf* for *horse racing*.
- Hybridity can thus be seen, in Bhabha's interpretation, as a counter-narrative, a critique of the canon and its exclusion of other narratives.
- In other words, the hybridity adherents want to suggest first, that the colonialist discourse's ambivalence is a conspicuous illustration of its uncertainty; and second, that the migration of yesterday's "savages" from their peripheral spaces to the homes of their "masters" underlies a blessing invasion that, by "Third-Worlding" the center, creates "fissures" within the very structures that sustain it.

References

1. ScholarBlog
2. Museproject
3. The Location of Culture
4. Nation and Narration
5. The Capital