

## BHABHA 3

### Suggested readings

1. Signs taken for Wonders, Bhabha
2. Routledge Critical Thinkers, Bhabha
3. [marxist.org](http://marxist.org)
4. Derrida's Basic Concepts
5. Lacan's Basic Concepts
6. Foucault's Basic concepts related to Discourse
7. Master Slave Dialectic - Hegel

### References

1. Signs taken for Wonders, Bhabha
2. Routledge Critical Thinkers, Bhabha
3. [marxist.org](http://marxist.org)
4. [medium.com](http://medium.com)
5. [lehigh.edu](http://lehigh.edu)
6. Rivkin and Rayan
7. Altexploit

\*The aforementioned list is for all the e-content on this topic.

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- Bhabha begins the essay by talking about “literature of empire”.
- He takes the reader to the moment of “fortuitous discovery of the English book”
- The discovery of the book is, at once, a moment of originality and authority, as well as a process of displacement that, paradoxically, makes the presence of the book wondrous to the extent to which it is repeated, translated, misread, displaced.
- This English book is an insignia of colonial authority and a signifier of colonial desire and discipline.
- Catechist - a teacher of the principles of Christian religion, especially one using a catechism.(by offering oral instructions)
- From the anecdote - The ignorance and simplicity of many are very striking, never having heard of a printed book before; and its very appearance was to them miraculous.
- From the anecdote- An indifference to the distinctions of Caste soon manifested itself: and the interference and tyrannical authority of the Brahmins became more offensive and contemptible. At last, it was determined to separate themselves from the rest of their Hindoo Brethren; and to establish a party of their own choosing, four or five. who could read the best. to be the public teachers from this newly-acquired Book .
- From the anecdote -We are willing to be baptized, but we will never take the Sacrament. To all the other customs of Christians we are willing to conform. but not to the Sacrament, because the Europeans eat cow's flesh, and this will never do for us.'

To this I answered, 'This WORD is of God, and not of men; and when HE makes your hearts to understand, then you will PROPERLY comprehend it.' They replied, 'If all our country will receive this Sacrament, then will we.' I then observed, 'The time is at hand, when all the countries will receive this WORD!' they replied, 'True!'

- Bhabha also quotes from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.
- Conrad's Marlowe, in search of some belief, stumbles to another English Book, Towson's (or Towser's) *Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship*.
- Then Bhabha offers Naipaul's reading of the same passage which Bhabha calls a vision of literature and a lesson of History.
- To Naipaul, the idea it offered was - "deeply felt: a kind of truth and half a consolation."
- Written as they are in the name of the father and the author, these texts of the civilizing mission immediately suggest the triumph of the colonialist moment in early English Evangelism and modern English literature.
- The discovery of the book installs the sign of appropriate representation: the word of God, truth, art creates the conditions for a beginning, a practice of history and narrative. But the institution of the Word in the wilds is also an *Entstellung*, a process of displacement, distortion, dislocation, repetition.
- Still the idea of the English book is presented as universally adequate: like the "metaphoric writing of the West," it communicates "the immediate vision of the thing, freed from the discourse that accompanied it, or even encumbered it."
- Bhabha quotes another passage from Conrad indicating towards Fetishization.
- The immediate vision of the book figures those ideological correlatives of the Western sign-empiricism, idealism, mimeticism, monoculturalism (to use Edward Said's term)- that sustain a tradition of English "national" authority.
- It is, significantly, a normalizing myth whose organics and revisionary narrative is also the history of 'that nationalist discipline of Commonwealth history and its equally expansionist epigone, Commonwealth literature. Their versions of traditional, academic wisdom moralize the conflictual moment of colonialist intervention into that constitutive chain of exemplum and imitation...'
- Anund Messeh's riposte to the natives who refuse the sacrament- "the time is at hand when all countries will receive this WORD" (my emphasis)-is both firmly and timely spoken in 1817. For it represents a shift away from the "orientalist" educational practice of, say, Warren Hastings and the much more interventionist and "interpellative" ambition of Charles Grant for a culturally and linguistically homogeneous English India. It was with Grant's election to the board of the East India Company in 1794 and to Parliament in 1802, and through his energetic espousal of the Evangelical ideals of the Clapham sect, that the East India Company reintroduced a "pious clause" into its charter for 1813. By 1817 the Church Missionary Society ran sixty-one schools, and in 1818 it commissioned the Burdwan Plan, a central plan of education for instruction in the English language. The aim of the plan anticipates, almost to the word, Thomas Macaulay's infamous 1835 "Minute on Education": "to form a body of well instructed

labourers, competent in their proficiency in English to act as Teachers, Translators, and Compilers of useful works for the masses of the people.”

- Father John’s mission.
- Caught as he (Marlowe) is-between the madness of "pre- historic" Africa and the unconscious desire to repeat the traumatic intervention of modern colonialism within the compass of a seaman's yarn- Towson's manual provides Marlowe with a singleness of intention. It is the book of work that turns delirium into the discourse of civil address.
- For the ethic of work, as Conrad was to exemplify in "Tradition" (1918), provides a sense of right conduct and honour achievable only through the acceptance of those “customary norms which are the signs of culturally cohesive “civil communities. These aims of the civilizing mission, endorsed in the "idea" of British imperialism and enacted on the red sections of the map, speak with a peculiarly English authority based upon the customary practice on which both English common law and the English national language rely for their effectivity and appeal.
- It is the ideal of English civil discourse that permits Conrad to entertain the ideological ambivalences that riddle his narratives. It is under its watchful eye that he allows the fraught text of late nineteenth-century imperialism to implode within the practices of early modernism. The devastating effects of such an encounter are not only contained in an (un)common yarn; they are concealed in the propriety of a civil "lie"told to the Intended (the complicity of the customary?): "The horror! The horror!" must not be repeated in the drawing-rooms of Europe.
- The discovery of the English book establishes both a measure of mimesis and a mode of civil authority and order. If these scenes, as I've narrated them, suggest the triumph of the writ of colonialist power, then it must be conceded that the wily letter of the law inscribes a much more ambivalent text of authority. For it is in between the edict of Englishness and the assault of the dark unruly spaces of the earth, through an act of repetition, that the colonial text emerges uncertainly.
- What we witness is neither an untroubled, innocent dream of England nor a "secondary revision" of the nightmare of India, Africa, the Caribbean. What is "English" in these discourses of colonial power cannot be represented as a plenitude or a "full" presence; it is determined by its belatedness.
- Consequently, the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference .
- It is this ambivalence that makes the boundaries of colonial “positionality” -the division of self/other- and the question of colonial power- the differentiation of colonizer/ colonized- different from both the Hegelian master/slave dialectic or the phenomenological projection of Otherness.
- Master Slave Dialectic - One of the important and famous ideas introduced by Hegel in his The Phenomenology of Spirit is the idea of master-slave dialectic, relationship or dynamics. The issue at hand is self-consciousness and the way it is formed through meeting the other. The master is the one in the interaction who succeeds in obtaining recognition from the other in the sense that he imposes himself as the slave’s value.

The slave is the one who sees his own true self in the other (master).

- It is a difference produced within the act of enunciation as a specifically colonial articulation of those two disproportionate sites of colonial discourse and power: the colonial scene as the invention of historicity, mastery, mimesis or as the "other scene" of *Entstellung*, displacement, fantasy, psychic defence, and an "open" textuality.
- Bhabha wants to ask the following questions -  
the question of the effects of power,  
the inscription of strategies of individuation and domination in those "dividing practices" which construct the colonial space.
- This should happen in relation to Derrida's acknowledgment of the problem of "presence."
- It is precisely such a strategy of address-the immediate presence of the English- that engages the questions of authority that I want to raise.
- When the ocular metaphors of presence refer to the process by which content is fixed as an "effect of the present," we encounter not plenitude(abundance) but the structured gaze of power whose objective is authority, whose "subjects" are historical.
- Transparency is the action of the distribution and arrangement of differential spaces, positions, knowledges in relation to each other, relative to a differential, not inherent, sense of order. This effects a regulation of spaces and places that is authoritatively assigned; it puts the addressee into the proper frame or condition for some action or result. ( as done by the coloniser)
- Such a mode of governance addresses itself to a form of conduct that is achieved through a reality effect that equivocates between the sense of disposal, as the bestowal of a frame of reference, and disposition, as mental inclination, a frame of mind.
- It is precisely to intervene in such a battle for the status of the truth that it becomes crucial to examine the presence of the English book. For it is this surface that stabilizes the agonistic ( having a doubtful or non-committal attitude towards something.) colonial space; it is its appearance that regulates the ambivalence between origin and *Entstellung*, discipline and desire, mimesis and repetition.
- Despite appearances, the text of transparency inscribes a double vision: the field of the "true" emerges as a visible effect of knowledge<sup>1</sup> power only after the regulatory and displacing division of the true and the false.
- "In the doubly inscribed space of colonial representation where the presence of authority-the English book-is also a question of its repetition and displacement..."
- Resistance is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, nor is it the simple negation or exclusion of the "content" of an other culture, as a difference once perceived. It is the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural difference and reimplicate them within the deferential relations of colonial power- hierarchy, normalization , marginalization, and so forth.

For domination is achieved through a process of disavowal (the denial of any responsibility) that denies the difference of colonialist power—the chaos of its intervention as *Entstellung*, its dislocatory presence—in order to preserve the authority of its identity in the universalist narrative of nineteenth-century historical and political evolutionism.

- The exercise of colonialist authority, however, requires the production of differentiations, individuations, identity effects through which discriminatory practices can map out subject populations that are tarred with the visible and transparent mark of power.