

Out of the *Bazaar*, into the Club and Far Beyond with *Monsieur* Homi Bhabha

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A traveler, avoiding the lights and the shadows too,
returns to his sleepless bedroom.

—Faiz Ahmed Faiz¹

A Parsi-Anglian writer I used to read was Busybee, the humorist artist. His real name, Behram Contractor, was kept from children like a secret. His column, "Round and About," was printed on the last page of the *Evening News*, then *Midday*, and later appeared in the *Afternoon Dispatch and Courier* (Bombay, India), which he edited himself. The first paper was defunct, but the last two were sold from three to six o'clock in the evening at traffic-jams by urchins who darted in and out between Ambassadors and Fiats, holding neat stacks in their arms, shouting the names without understanding the meaning of either "midday" or "afternoon."² Busybee wrote in patient, detailed prose about inexhaustible "Maximum City: Bombay." His "Round and About" was the signature of all the papers I have mentioned, the distinctive scribble, which people grew to recognize of a particular personality. His writing did not reflect the tools of his trade. It brought out *his* Bombay with its odor of dried fish, food-stalls, cafés, merchants, bazaars, and "laughter clubs," in which people congregate in open spaces for periods of time, maniacally breaking into rehearsed merriment as a therapy for tension. His style was terse and laconic, but with a rhythm that created the impression of deadpan comedy. From time to time, he described his own community, and wrote lyrically of its cuisine: *patra-nu-machhi*, pomfret in coriander and

mint chutney steamed in leaves, *lagan-nu-castard*, or “wedding custard,” the dessert served at Parsi weddings.³ Of the many Bombays, it is Parsi Bombay that has lent itself to some of his particularly eloquent portrayals.

The Parsis, who emigrated to India from Persia in the tenth century to escape religious persecution, probably to preserve Zoroastrianism from Islam, have a palpable sense of community. Brought from Iran in the eighth century by people in flight from the conquering Muslims, the religion has lasted well, but in India’s population of a billion or so, Parsis amount to no more than a few thousand. They have held a generally respected place in society, and they have been especially admired for their equable manners and reliability. For a long time, banks preferred them as employees. They admire Western music and seem particularly attached to the violin (the Beethoven Violin Concerto is singled out for praise), an instrument that crops up with better than statistical frequency in *Family Matters* by Rohinton Mistry, himself a Parsi, where the characters are well aware of their minority status, but continue to regard their way of life as valuable. They habitually lament the decline in their numbers and are, perhaps understandably, keen that their children should not marry outside of the society, though Nariman Vakeel, the old man at the center of *Family Matters*, is haunted on his deathbed by the misery of his enforced marriage. Parsi men wear a belt called a *kusti* (italicized in the first book, later in roman, and henceforth treated as an English loan word). Taken off at prayer according to a precise set of rules, it becomes, symbolically, a weapon against evil.⁴

All this may sound pretty exotic, but the most spectacular Parsi rite is the disposal of the dead. The bodies are placed at the top of a Tower of Silence, where they are devoured by vultures. Mistry loses few opportunities for detailed description—which is one reason his novels are so long, or, better, have such solidity of specification—and he gives a particularly vivid account of a funeral. Once the body was deposited on the platform of the tower,

the mourners could see no more. But they knew what would happen inside; the *nassalers* would place the body on a *pavi*, on the outermost of the three concentric stone circles. Then, without touching Dinshawji's flesh, using their special hooked rods they would tear off the white cloth. Every stitch, till he was exposed to the creatures of the air, naked as the day he had entered the world.

Overhead the vultures were circling, flying lower and lower with each perfect circle they casually described. Now they started to alight on the stone wall of the Tower, and in the all trees around it. . . .

At the Tower, the chief *nassaler* clapped three times; the signal to start the prayer for Dinshawji's ascending soul. While they prayed, the vultures descended in great numbers, so graceful in flight but transforming into black hunched forms upon perching, grim and silent. The high stone wall was lined with them now, their serpent-like necks and bald heads rising incongruously from their plumage.⁵

One has to guess the meaning of the italicized words! The upshot is that in Mistry the Parsi family is firmly at the center of the action. The typical middle class Parsi colony, an almost self-contained enclave, is recalled in meticulous and loving detail in *Such a Long Journey*. The apartments his Parsis live in are dilapidated, with peeling walls. There is little privacy: the smell of *dhansak* and *dhandar-paatyo* pervade the air. The Parsi map has his little colony for its center point. The outside world impinges selectively: there is the ubiquitous Iranian restaurant across the road in an impoverished lane; the Parsi General Hospital, where the business of life—birth and death—is conducted. The children go to St. Xavier's Boys School with its ornate gates, perhaps later to St. Xavier's College.⁶

There is another sense in which the portrait Mistry draws of his people is important. Parsis, it seems, have a keen interest in cricket, an English game now more important in India than in its native land. Every Sunday morning there are visits to the Marine Drive Maiden to play cricket. The culturally inclined go to the Cawasji Framji Memorial Library and to Western classical music concerts at the Max Müller Society; for the simpler at heart, there is Chowpatty Beach nearby, with its crowded sands, fat pigeons,

and kerosene lamplit stalls selling a fiery *bhelpuri*. Visits to the Parsi Dairy Farm and Crawford Market are inevitable, in buses that meander “through narrow streets of squalor,” Mistry writes, “crawling painfully amidst the traffic of cars and people, handcarts and trucks.” Right in the heart of this bustle is the refuge of the marbled fire temple and its “sacred fire, burning in the huge, shining silver *afargaan* on its marble pedestal” (*Such* 34).⁷ Not only Busybee and Mistry but also Bapsi Sidhwa and Firdaus Kanga have recorded their memories of Parsi Bombay with an affectionate microscope, paying attention to realistic detail. Their Bombay is a concoction of *mirch-masala* that caters to what is probably the most pluralistic and diverse, multi-ethnic, multilingual, and multi-religious population group in the world. This is, however, symptomatic of a general ethnic condition, not just a compositional failing. Otherwise, why should ethnicity define itself in purely cultural style, a mode of production, an intellectual climate, an ethos of a community, say, the Berbers, or the way of a particular individual, say, Homi Bhabha? The answer to this question may be found in formulating yet another question: What is ethnicity and why are we so absorbed by the ethnic subject and why has it become a political force in ways of talking about (and criticizing) the study of literature and culture? What is ethnic writing?

Ethnic identity in the West, at least in its “good” form, became accessible only as groups became acculturated. Once the stigma of ethnic identity (however defined) was removed from any group, that group could begin to think of itself as ethnically distinct, but of course not too distinct. Is the label “ethnic” a valuable commodity? Is ethnic the same as authentic? What language does an ethnic writer write in? Does an Indo-Anglian writer need to write in Bombay *Bazaar* English or does he or she have to write in Westminster-Oxford-Waterloo English to be accepted by the mainstream? No one has delved into the complexity of these issues with more sensitivity and insight than Homi Bhabha, whose contribution shows the richness of the cultural, psychological, and social-psychological perspective for literary analysis of “ethnic hash,” in Patricia Williams’ formula.

If this is so, one can appreciate why this essay attempts to answer another set of originating questions. For what is at stake here is less an experience than a theoretical problem. On this view, I hope it is not simpleminded then to ask: What are the dialectics of recognition for Bhabha in the postmodern Superego of diversity? How (ir)removable is the strangeness of being Homi Bhabha? How does he dwell in and through his espousal of minority difference—as a relation to writing, as a responsibility for representing—when he is, as the phrase has it, *in* the thick of it or, we might say with a certain Geertzian twist, part of the thick description itself? How does the fragility of communal selfhood bear the weight of a life turning toward the futurity of difference? Finally, how far is Bhabha indebted to Jacques Lacan, a teacher, psychoanalyst, and textual analyst who could not fully escape the presumptions of phenomenology? These questions themselves point to a problem of interpretation—more specifically, what political status can be accorded the subversive strategies that Bhabha articulates? My task is one that requires what Judith Butler has acutely described as “speaking and exposing the alterity within the norm (the alterity without which the norm would not know itself) which exposes the failure of the norm to effect the universal. . . . This vulnerability marks the way that a postsovereign democratic demand makes itself felt in the contemporary scene of utterance” (368–69). In one sense, it is no wonder that a narrative that contains a representation of the “ethnic Other” should become a subject of inquiry. In another sense, since the same narrative speaks so subtly to some of our deepest fears and anxieties, it is not surprising at all.

The answers to the questions raised above are always in motion, in time, in place, in the form of all kinds of combinations moving about, sometimes against each other, variationally yet without one central theme: a form of freedom (of writing), I would like to think, even if I am far from being totally convinced that it is. In the meantime, the narrative hopes to achieve the formal revolution that Edward Said demands in contrapuntal reading, which is not itself narrative, but rather, as suggested by its musical meaning, a technique of themes and variations. Yet, counterpoint must

be established by different narratives, and if the narrative as a whole does not make a narratorial fragment, it makes a pattern of narrative challenged by the resistance of counter-narrative. Critical discourse, being by nature normative, or rather performative, serves to disguise what is in fact a bid to establish a monopoly of literary legitimacy as the analytical conclusions of the critic, by imposing a new definition of the writer-critic and of the essay form; in a phrase, “the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging” (Said, *Culture* xiii). So when Bhabha writes, *a propos* of Lady Diana or *A Passage to India*, for example, that a narrative technique implies a strategy (of reading), he sets up Bhabha, rather than Gayatri Spivak, as holding the monopoly of essayistic legitimacy, since he is its sole accredited strategist. These details are important as a way of explaining to oneself and to the reader how writing is tied up, not to a *fil conducteur*, but to plateaux as Deleuze understood the term in my writing on Bhabha. But it could be Spivak, at her absolute best, almost insolently postmodern and/or postcolonial best. He, more than any cultural critic I know, lends himself to this mode of reading against the grain.

Homi Bhabha and Parsi Culture

To the extent that it is important to know anything about a writer's life and ethnic background aside from his work, it probably is important to know about Homi Bhabha, who was born into a Parsi family in post-independence India. The tension between the local and the global is there in his very name. The Parsi community to which he belongs are descendants of the Persian migrants to India; they were the middle persons between various Indian communities and the British. “Around the mid 19th century,” Bhabha informs us, “they participated in the emergence of India's urbanization and helped in developing commercial, mercantile, and professional infrastructures in the metropolitan areas. They were captains of industry, medical moguls, and honest clerks” (qtd. in Mitchell 81). Parsis are neither Hindu nor Muslim and seem absolved from the

anxieties of modern India. Their lives, too, are marginal and emblematic. Each one of them reflects the other's customs, clothes, and manners. To others, they seem to convey an uneasy impression of what might be described as uneasy intimacy. Amit Chaudhuri explains:

The Parsis of Bombay are pale, sometimes hunched, but always with long noses. They have a posthumous look which is contradicted by an earthiness that makes them use local expletives from a very early age; and a bad temper which one takes to be the result of the incestuous intermarriages of a small community. The Parsi boys in my class had legendary Persian names like Jehangir and Kaikobad and Khusro. Their surnames, however, can be faintly ridiculous in their eloquence, like "Sodabottleopenerwalla." (19)

For his part, Bhabha jokes that "Parsis are Nietzscheans because they follow the prophet Zoroaster" (81). It is in this sense that the Parsis are said to have made it from myth to realism, just as they have climbed out of savagery into civility. What is, however, interesting about Parsis is that they see their identity as something that does not come from a multitudinous community, but from an alignment with specific religious and Western ideas. To be a Parsi in India is to be a kind of internal exile in one's own homeland, part of a besieged, defensive enclave who feel Parsi in India and Indo-Englian in the World. Parsis were remarkably successful under the Raj, but their success came at the cost of jettisoning their adopted Indian identity in favor of a Western one. As a defiantly native colonial élite, they were more Westernized than most other Indian communities, and as displaced Persians, they committed themselves thoroughly to a purely Western sensibility. Now they feel marginalized in postcolonial India, with an aching sense of a loss of status, of cultural genius, of their historical moment. "What is important in my background," Bhabha notes,

for some of the theoretical issues I'm involved in is that the question of identity has been negotiated and performed in the context of cultural transition. The *embourgeoisement* of large

sectors of the Parsi community should not be seen as minimizing this complex and difficult process of identification. To be relatively affluent as a minority is not to be free of cultural anxiety. (80)

Bhabha's transplanted identity shares in the wider insecurity of a people who, like some of the characters of *Earnest* in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, can never be quite sure who they are.⁸

The tragedy of Macaulay's plan to make Englishmen with brown skins was that it worked in part; while brown-skinned Englishmen have never been acknowledged by the English as English, everything in their cultural experience had taught them that their hope for goodness and power lay only in their Englishness. So Hanif Kureishi could write with irony, in the first sentence of his 1990 *The Buddha of Suburbia*, "My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, *almost*" (3; emphasis added). "*Almost*" because although his mother is white, his father comes from Pakistan, because the narrative of Englishness has not yet been reimagined to include him. He does not have the same relation to the English past as do the whites with whom he goes to school—a past in which people who look like them have defined themselves by conquering people who look like him. Ancestry matters more than learning to be English "in opinions, in morals, and in intellect," and so Anglicization finally stands, in Bhabha's words, as a reminder that one is "*almost the same but not quite . . . almost the same but not white*" (*Location* 86, 89). Elsewhere, Bhabha has written that to be Anglicized is "*emphatically* not to be English."⁹ Or, to put it differently, the colonial mimic man deploys the conventions of English narrative so flawlessly that it is hard not to feel that he is sending them up. Even so, the *value* of identity (What is it? What are identities for and what can they do?) is clear enough from Bhabha's resorting to that oldest of mythology—namely, the ritual of food and feasting to define his own identity:

I would say that Parsis come together most communally over the dining table. Our cuisine is important to us—as you know

from the hours I spend in my kitchen. Certain kinds of secular, liberal ideas of honor, civility, professional expertise, professional integrity—these too are important community ideals. (qtd. in Mitchell 80)

Even where other resources of pre-colonial society are unevenly shared, culture tends to suggest a comparatively evenhanded distribution or—perhaps more simply—mass appropriation. This may help explain why it is always a primary target of assault by an invading force, say, the British in India or the French in Algeria.¹⁰ As an instrument of self-definition, its destruction of successful attrition reaches into the reserves of ethnic/national will on a comprehensive scale. Conversely, the commencement of resistance and self-preservation by the subordinate people is not infrequently linked with the survival strategies of key cultural patterns, manifested through various forms. Take the concept of purity, which was refigured from holiness into racial superiority (also very much a Hindu sacred idea) and the case will be clear enough. The major rituals—the *yasna* ceremony, other solemn practices like *navjote* and marriage or rites of birth and death—accomplish the task of carefully creating an enclosed, purified space within which certain actions are done, purifying a body to enable it to function effectively in the world (Boyce 76). “And then,” Bhabha adds,

many Parsis affirm their sense of solidarity on high days and holidays by attending splendid theatricals, which are often riffs on certain kinds of Broadway plays or British theater infused with Parsi jokes and customs. It always used to amuse me that on high days, Hindus would go to temples and then, maybe, to these edifying religious dramas, while we would visit the fire temple and then celebrate ironic or satiric representations of ourselves in these Broadway-type farces. (80)

Granted. However, the most important point to be made about Parsi culture is that in many ways—in dress, in aesthetic and intellectual aspiration, in the Westernized clubs and drinks and

food, in torn loyalties to Western and Eastern style, and in embarrassed ambivalence about the virtues of modern India—Parsis merely highlight the dilemmas and paradoxes of modern, élitist, educated Indians.

The history of Parsi culture in the colonial as well as postcolonial periods largely reveals itself as a history of cultural borrowing and survival. Confronted by the hostility of both Muslim and Hindu values, in addition to the destructive imperatives of colonialism, it has continued until today to vitalize contemporary cultural forms both in the tradition of “folk festivals” and in the works of those writers like Homi Bhabha commonly regarded as “Westernized.”¹¹ We must not lose sight, however, of the fact that Parsi culture, like any other minority culture—the Berber one in Algeria comes instantly to mind—is created and executed within a specific physical environment. It naturally interacts with that environment, is influenced by it, influences that environment in turn, and acts together with the environment in the larger and far more complex history of society. The history of Parsi culture, with its insistence on purity of the blood, for example, is therefore very much the history of its success and even happiness. Or is it? “Bhabha attempts an answer:

No, there is no conversion amongst Parsis. In fact orthodox Parsis referring increasingly to ancient scriptures which say that anybody who marries out of the Parsi faith cannot bring up his or her children as Parsis in the fullest sense of the word. (This, by the way, is now being claimed by those same conservatives as the secret of our happy existence over centuries in India—that we never sought converts.) So it’s being set up as a sort of orthodox principle of minority life that you maintain your separateness by returning to ancient customs and codes. (qtd. in Mitchell 80)

What strikes us, above all, is when we consider a minority culture such as the Parsi one from the point of view of survival strategies, how the dynamics of cultural interaction with society become even more aesthetically challenging and fulfilling. We discover, for instance, that under certain conditions some art forms of that very

same minority culture are transformed into others—simply to ensure the survival of the threatened forms. Drama may give way to poetry and song in order to disseminate indigenous sentiments under the watchful eye of the oppressor, be it Hindu, Muslim or Christian, the latter forms being more easily communicable.

If the Parsis are *outsiders* in their own country, they have nevertheless produced, as if in guilt-stricken compensation for their minority status, a distinguished line of cultural luminaries, from Zubin Mehta, Asti Debo, Rohinton Cama, Phiroze Dastoor, Sooni Taraporevala, Pervez Meherwanji, Gieve Patel, Cyrus Mistry, Vera Mehta, Adil Jussalawalla, Boman Desai, Keki Daruwalla to Farrokh Dhondy, to mention only a few of the better known names. Bhabha belongs in a modest way to this august company. The division in his personality, then, between Parsi and Indo-Anglian, has deep roots in his cultural background. Like many a literary *émigré* to the West's shores—Salman Rushdie and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak spring to mind—he set about the task of becoming more English than the English, taking their codes, styles, and literary forms and demonstrating that he can deploy them even more dexterously than the natives. But it is never quite clear whether this is flattering imitation or mocking parody, or whether parody is the sincerest form of flattery in that however effortlessly the immigrant outshines the natives at their own game, there will always be some element of insecurity in his project; and it is not hard to detect this sense of guilt, anxiety, and ambivalence in the Bhabhaian *oeuvre*.

Bhabha and the Discourse of Ambivalence

Bhabha knows himself to be a cultural amphibian—a provincial, an *émigré*, a foreigner, mounting to the center for his assault on the capital as ill-equipped as Wilde himself, since he has only his talent to declare. Along the way, he does not hesitate to display a wise benevolence, an ability to see both the *inside* and *outside* of culture—any culture, including his own—as hybrid, heteroge-

neous, mongrel; and this insight burnishes his stance with the warm, soft glow of redemption. W.J.T. Mitchell puts it succinctly when he speaks of the “translator translated” and his cultural identity:

[Bhabha's] . . . concept of ambivalence and hybridity have made it clear that cultures must be understood as complex intersections of multiple places, historical temporalities, and subject positions. When it appeared that liberal notions of “diversity” and poststructuralist homilies about “difference” might provide final vocabularies for adjudicating cultural conflict, Bhabha raised profound questions about the adequacy of pluralist models of tolerance and “civility” to narrate histories of ferocious intolerance and *incivility*. . . . He has told people exactly what they didn't want to hear, at the moments they didn't want to hear it, in a way that has been impossible to ignore. His message to the art world is likely to be just as disconcerting. (80)

While the difficulty of Bhabha's argument can largely be attributed to the fact that his elliptical writing style, garnished with baroque excess, engenders the very perplexities it evokes, what seems to be at issue in his elaborate account of a postcolonial agency is, indeed, the very “performative nature” of cultural (textual) differences as they contingently and indeterminately constitute and undo identities. Thus, in “How Newness Enters the World,” Bhabha contends that it is in the act of translation that the very “staging of cultural differences” as the emergence of a good office, is most fully revealed (*Location* 199). It is an approach constantly at war with attempts at political and historical analysis. On that account, a theory built around ambivalence and “splitting” is also oddly Manichean and essentialist. First, monolithic, ahistorical, collective subjects are set up—the colonizer and the colonized—and *then* their relations are argued to be shifting and equivocal through the deployment of deconstructive techniques and psychoanalytical procedures. Given all this, it is often not clear why the phenomena described are thought of as particularly doubled colonial ones, apart from Bhabha's repeated nods to Frantz Fanon and his rather

undeveloped invocations of the categories of “race,” which he addresses only briefly in “Halfway House” and “The White Stuff.” It is a thesis that leaves us with a problem: if character is destiny in the sense that one cannot be false to oneself, what *value* is there in being true?

There are reasons rather closer to home for this disturbingly dual selfhood. If Bhabha is “doubled” in his sense of a negotiated cultural identity, as both Parsi and Indo-Anglian, he is also Janus-faced in his nationality. The result is a rich, commodious narrative that sets out to show that all life and culture are a matter of parody, that there is no such thing as “authentic” selfhood, that all cultures are intertwined, and that all identity is passing and provisional. In this way he would turn his own ethnic doubleness to artistic advantage. The *outsider*, who can never name himself with any assurance, will become a fifth columnist within the enemy camp, showing up their own supposedly assured identity for the fiction it is. For Bhabha, reality is just the play of mirror upon mirror, word upon word; and if the Western audiences delight in this breezy iconoclasm, the postcolonial Establishment is rattled enough by it in the end to cast him out as too soft, too difficult, too compromising, too apolitical, not *engagé* enough; in fine, a timid voice. Benita Parry writes,

The matter of [Bhabha's] impacted style is not one on which I will dwell, other than to observe that an enchantment with troping, punning and riddling all too often sends the signifier into free-fall, rendering arbitrary the link between word and signified. To mean what you say is not the same as to say what you mean. (7)

Here, Parry speaks not only for herself but for a majority of readers insofar as the problem with Bhabha lies on the micro-level, in untangling the allusion, compression, and seemingly arbitrary transitions in each of his sentences. A somewhat harsher estimate of the implications of this style is offered by Arif Dirlik, who finds Bhabha to be “a master of political mystification and theoretical obfuscation,” observing that while the same tendencies are appar-

ent in much postcolonial writing, these are rarely evident “with the same virtuosity (and incomprehensibility) that he brings to it” (333).

What Parry and Dirlik seem to neglect, however, is that critics like Bhabha aspire to offer some hint at a social and cultural history over the last quarter of a century, and they take as their model one of the most monumental works of world literature, nothing less than *Culture and Imperialism*, by Edward Said, postcolonial theory’s revered father figure. There can thus be few more important critics of our age than the likes of Said, Bhabha, and Spivak, even if two of that trio can be impenetrably opaque. Unlike one of the two Calvary thieves being saved, this is hardly a success.¹² But there are creditable reasons for the speedy surfacing of postcolonialism, and Bhabha offers a version of the postcolonial as sacred history, a battle between God and the Devil, sexuality and technology (the dynamo, the virgin and Goddess of sex and reproduction in Adam’s version). The power of these forces is measured, as in many of his essays, by their effect on the reader.

Not only Parry and Dirlik but also Bart Moore-Gilbert and E. San Juan, Jr. accuse Bhabha of writing in a pointlessly obscure and convoluted style. They maintain that he deals in sweeping and gnomic generalizations about entities he calls the “postcolonial situation,” the “postcolonial subject,” the “postcolonial space,” in ways utterly divorced from any serious inquiry into the real histories, politics, and economics of colonialism or its successors. They think that Bhabha’s hunt for the colonial or postcolonial subject begins to resemble

Milne’s picture of Winnie-the-Pooh and Piglet circling a tree, tracking footprints in the snow that they believe as those of a Woozle—then two Woozles—then “either Two Woozles and one, as it might be, Wizzle, or two, as it might be, Wizzles and one, if so it is, Woozle”—and so on. In fact he is, as the alert semiotician will have realized, following his own tracks from previous circuits of the tree. (Howe 3)

Both Parry and Moore-Gilbert conclude by pointing out that Bhabha seems to subscribe to an inflated idea of the political importance

of academic cultural criticism. In their view, he scorns “Enlightenment” values while remaining maddeningly vague about what to put in their place.¹³

I would argue, however, that there is more to Bhabha than what Parry, San Juan, Dirlik, and Moore-Gilbert have said. Indebted to Walter Benjamin’s poetic notion of the “foreignness of languages” from his 1923 essay “The Task of the Translator,” Bhabha suggests that the “undecidability” inherent within the act of literary translation—centered on the uncertainty of what he calls “that nucleus of the untranslatable” existing between any two languages—opens up a new cultural space where the very “negotiation of incommensurable differences” creates a tension akin to the actual experience of hybrid existences (*Location* 163, 218). Although unrepresentable itself, Bhabha’s postcolonial agency, as an amorphous hybrid identity, is thus located within the shifting space and time of an ongoing process of cultural negotiation and translation. To Bhabha the self is never singular but always intrinsically plural, always “two or three or fifteen,” for the migrant has chosen to translate one identity into another and, in doing so, has “set out to make himself up” in a way that forces his identity into fluidity, however much he clings to tradition or however much he tries to shed it. And if by force of circumstances one cannot be whole, then one should make that lack of wholeness a virtue and turn one’s very fragments into strength. A self-conscious mimicry therefore becomes a way to shuttle between Bombay and London and Chicago and Cambridge as well as between the hybrid selves of the postcolonial condition; and in doing so, it allows one to acknowledge that one lives between two if not three worlds.

So it is with Rushdie’s Saladin Chamcha in *The Satanic Verses*, whose pursuit of Englishness is quite consciously chosen—this voice, rather than any of the many others he can mimic. It is an act of will, a means toward the creation of a Self; an act not all that different from, for example, Naipaul’s own invention of himself, the Trinidad Hindu who became a great British novelist. But what exactly is the status of hybridity within Bhabha’s overall endeavor? “What changes when you write from the middle of difference, when

you inscribe that intermediary area that invites the ambiguous gamble with the historical necessities of race, class, gender, generation, region, religion?" (Bhabha, "Editor's" 435). Hovering mysteriously over his *oeuvre* is a self awaiting to become. And if ambivalence (as Bhabha claims) produces hybridity, then does this not suggest that the operation of colonial discourse is itself, to quote from Derrida's *Writing and Difference*, "an event or structure subsequent to the unity of an original presence" (197)? Bhabha gives only half an answer to the question raised by Derrida in that he seems to presuppose a pure and autonomous continuum of *Otherness* (crucial for his overly historicist notion of a hybrid postcolonial agency) prior to its discriminatory demarcation and colonial domination. Yet, to what extent, I would ask, is any cultural milieu ever "originary" or "undivided"?

Analyzing the conceptual structures that inform a variety of literary, historical, and theoretical texts from the archives of Indian Independence to the writings of Toni Morrison, Salman Rushdie, Frantz Fanon, and Fredric Jameson, to name but a few, Bhabha examines the way in which this ambivalence at the heart of colonial and neocolonial discourses both structures and problematizes legitimating claims to authority and singular or determinate meaning. Although refined and adjusted throughout *The Location of Culture*, this argument is most clearly developed in "The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism."¹⁴ Here, shattering simplified notions that the construction of stereotypical representations of others is a one-sided affair of discriminatory domination, Bhabha suggests an understanding of the colonial stereotype as a "complex and contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive," based on an oppositional model analogous to psychoanalytic theories of the split structure of the mind as it is manifest in Freud's formula of *Fort! Da!* (70).

For Bhabha, what we need to understand is that the interlacing of language and morality brings us back to the Lacanian concept of desire, since the "moment in which desire becomes human is also that in which the child is born into language" (Lacan, *Écrits*

319). When biological need is articulated as demand, what is left over constitutes desire, and, desire is thus made dependent upon language for its existence, even though it is precisely that which cannot be adequately expressed in language. When Freud's grandson begins to play the game of alternating phonemes—*Fort! Da!*—“his action thus negates the field of forces of desire [*Elle négative ainsi le champ de forces du désir*] in order to become its own object to itself” (320). The toy, which the little boy would make disappear over the edge of his bed, was taking the place of his mother, and the act of making it disappear was a kind of destruction of her. In the place of the mother—constituting a presence in her absence—the boy puts the sound, “*Fort!*,” a sound picked up from the family. In doing this, the “child begins to become engaged in the system of the concrete discourse of the environment” (321). Thus, the child's first utterances are both private objects for his own manipulation and cultural legacies, so that Lacan can write: “*Fort! Da!* It is precisely in his solitude that the desire of the little child has already become the desire of another, of an alter ego who dominates him and whose object of desire is henceforth his own affliction” (319). This is an affliction that psychoanalysis comes to “cure,” or at least relieve, and Lacan suggests that Freud's therapeutic technique is able to accomplish this aim only because of the intimation of morality at the heart of language itself.

Bhabha redefines the *Fort! Da!* concept as a “suture” or “seam” by way of conveying the contradictory nature of an authority which, in order to guarantee its representational function, is dependent upon both the continual fixing of discriminatory identifications along with a fetishized process of “fantasy/denial” (*Location* 81).¹⁵ The stereotype of the *Other* in its most resilient opacity is, then, “a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place,’ already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated” (66). Bhabha claims that the purported mastery of colonial typecasting is itself split by an inherent instability (*ambivalence as anxiety*) that opens up an important gap between a given ideological intention and its actual operation as a regime of power/knowledge. Speaking of Gates' *Thirteen Ways of Looking at*

a Black Man, Bhabha sums up the way in which he understood the dichotomy of the *Fort! Da!*:

What emerges most forcefully for the reader from his portraits of black men bearing the “burden of representation” (including James Baldwin, Albert Murray, Anatole Broyard and others) is the stark confrontation between the “social fantasy” of race or masculinity that projects them into the public sphere—*fort!*—and the eerie awareness that a sense of “agency,” any deliberative or subversive action, must be derived from working, at once, within and without those very mechanisms of “representation,” or strategies of regulation and discrimination—*da!* It is as if home is territory of both disorientation and relocation, with all the fragility and fecundity implied by such a double take. (“Halfway” 12)

What we find in this passage is a uniquely Bhabhaian fusion of Freud and Lacan. What Bhabha particularly emphasizes is the fact that a rudimentary use of language—“*Fort! Da!*”—is implicated in the subaltern’s quest for speaking or what Michel Foucault calls “énoncé” (uttering). Utterance is governed by rules of syntax which are difficult to learn, yet impossible to evade; nevertheless, what Foucault called discourse—which is the regulated production, exchange, and circulation of utterances (what his English translators render as *statement*)—takes on and acquires the appearance of a social authority so complete as to legislate the practice of saying what there is to say, exactly and fully. What Freud describes as “instinctual renunciation” is accomplished by substituting an inherently linguistic game over which he has full control for an interpersonal situation within which the child and/or subaltern is largely powerless. Thus, it is Freud who allows us to see the play of presence and absence at the heart of language, although it turns out to be Hegel, whom Bhabha neglects, who will allow us to understand the special importance of absence in language.¹⁶

Following the structuralist understanding of language as a system, what distinguishes mere symbols from words is that, while both are material objects, each of my words is an absence as well as a material presence. More specifically, each of my words is what

it is (a word and, as such, an element of my language) because of its preexistent relations with all the other possible words of my language. My word “mouse” is what it is because of the particular ways in which it resembles and yet differs from “house” or “louse,” both phonologically and semantically, and because of the particular syntactic contexts within which it can be used.¹⁷ Nevertheless, these linguistic relations are not present in my words, although my words are what they are because of these absent but effective relations. I shall return to Lacan and his influence on Bhabha. For now, I want to address the question of the hybrid not only as double-voiced and double-accented but also as “double-linguaged” as Bakhtin would have it.

The Question of Hybridity

If the Indo-Anglian tradition bred some notable Cricketers, it also supplied “English” literature with some of its most prominent, imperishable names. One has only to contemplate how diminished the English literary canon would be if one stripped it of the names of Salman Rushdie, Saadat Hasan Manto, G.V. Desani, Nirad C. Chaudhuri, Kamala Markandaya, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Ved Mehta, Anita Desai, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Bapsi Sidhwa, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Abdul Jan Mohamed, Sara Suleri, Amit Chaudhuri, Amitav Gosh, Gita Mehta, Vikram Seth, Vikram Chandra, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Ranajit Guha, Iqbal Ahmad, Hanif Kureichi, Michael Ondaatje, and the list goes on. As Pico Lyer quips, “[W]hen a traditional English name takes the prize—i.e. the Booker—A.S. Byatt, say, or Kingsley Amis—it seems almost anomalous.” Lyer attributes this eclecticism to the internationalization of English literature. A new “frontierless” writing has emerged, he notes, “wherever cultures jungle” (“Empire” 48). English Literature is no longer English: it speaks in many tongues, from many different points of view. Within this Indo-Anglian contribution to English writing, however, one particular genre stands out as a well-nigh Indo-Anglian monopoly, and that

is the narrative form. Indeed it is a well-attested truth that the major “English” literature of the modern period is the product of exiles and expatriates—of writers whose art takes root in the crevices between different cultures. On this view, Bhabha and the rest of the tribe write out of a tension between “centrality” and “marginality” that can be observed equally in the works of Conrad, Nabokov, Joyce, Derrida, Cixous, and Said, among others. Their work stands as an “archaeology of the future,” to borrow a formula from Jameson, in both the literature and historical process of decolonization; they take what Bhabha describes as that “separation from origins and essences” as their starting point (*Location* 120).

Even so, present-day Indo-Anglian writers from Rushdie to Roy are notable for their rhetoric and verbal panache, for the brio and exuberance of their linguistic imagination, for the verve and chutzpah of their artistic daring. What we learn from Bhabha in the end is simply “*écrire dans le plaisir*,” in Barthes’ phrase, as one eloquent sentence generates another in a kind of permanent hemorrhage of wit as it is finely mined in the following passage:

The importance of . . . retroaction lies in its ability to reinscribe the past, reactivate it, relocate it, *resignify it*. More significant, it commits our understanding of the past, and our interpretation of the future, to an ethics of “survival” that allows us to *work through the present*. And such a working through, or working out, frees us from the determinism of historical inevitability—repetition *without a difference*. It makes it possible for us to confront that difficult borderline, the interstitial experience, between what we take to be the image of the past and what is in fact involved in the passing of time and the passage of meaning. (“Culture’s” 214)

But even this dazzling verbal inventiveness has its darker side, in the particular conditions of Indian society. For one thing, the Indo-Anglian authors have not been writing in the tongue of their homeland, whether it be Gujarati, Hindi, Urdu, or Bengali. That native speech has been gagged by colonial rule, even if, like Bhabha, Spivak, and Rushdie, to name only a handful, one could not speak Hindi or Gujarati or English or Bengali oneself, this

history seems bound to force the Indo-Anglian writer into a particular linguistic self-consciousness, in a society where language itself has always been a political minefield. The postmodernist movement in literature shares this self-consciousness, regarding language less as some taken-for-granted medium than as a deeply problematical issue; and it is thus not surprising that Indian authors writing in English should have contributed so signally to it. Rushdie's narrator, a photographer called Umeed Merchant, in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, makes the point:

Not only in English. Because it was only me, she could prattle on in Bombay's garbage argot, *Mumbai ki kachrapati baatcheeet*, in which a sentence could begin in one language, swoop through a second and even a third and then swing back round to the first. Our acronymic name for it was *Hug-me*. Hindi Urdu Gujarati Marathi English. Bombayites like me were people who spoke five languages badly and no language well. (7)

But it may also be true that Indo-Anglian writers like Rushdie, Bhabha, Spivak and others are such virtuosi of language because the colonial history of their homeland has left them with little else.

The sense of elegy that haunts their work, their contempt for the self-importance of public life, their assumption of a certain social prestige, their compassion and their visual precision all reflect the example of the postcolonial critic as exiled intelligence. In addition, like many a *début-de-siècle* critic, Bhabha seems to have a profound contempt for action: he is devoted to Being rather than Doing, and shows an Arnoldian contempt for the philistine English cult of fact and practicality. This is, of course, an attitude typical of the privileged Parsi tribe with whom he identifies; but it might also reflect something of an Indian history in which creative action is usually doomed to ignominious failure. In this vein, Bhabha reminds one of Gilbert in Oscar Wilde's *The Critic as Artist*, who says, "When man acts he is a puppet. When he describes he is a poet" (29). Wilde's well-nigh religious devotion to the word is his way of rising above all that dreary, determining history, cel-

ebating in language a freedom and creativity that were not, for the Irish, available in actual life. Wit and fantasy are for him—and for Bhabha, one might add—the edge humanity has over its merely biological existence; and reality is something they are in full flight from, as clichéd, prosaic, predictable.

The Location of Culture is one of Bhabha's most deliberately scandalous statements of this theme—a brilliant, brittle flight of sheer creative wit and eloquence, which takes the standard postcolonial shibboleths about culture and explodes them one by one with deadly precision. A sample:

When the Mohammedan is forced to deny the logical demonstration of geographical fact and the Hindu turns away from the evidence of his eyes, we witness a form of ambivalence, a mode of enunciation, a coercion of the native subject in which no truth can exist. It is not simply a question of the absence of rationality or morality: it leads through such historical and philosophical distinctions of cultural differences, to rest in that precariously empty discursive space where the question of the human capacity of culture lies. To put it a little grandly, the problem now is of the question of culture itself as it comes to be represented and contested in the colonial imitation—not identity—of man. As before, the question occurs in culture's archaic undecidability. (*Location* 135)¹⁸

Apart from "Mohammedan," the usage of which has a colonial ring, for Bhabha, culture is self-conscious, not spontaneous; it exists to shield us from sordid reality, not to reflect it; it is partisan rather than disinterested, and its meanings are quite independent of whatever its author intended. Criticism is at least as creative as culture itself, and the work of art is merely a starting-point or convenient occasion for its own subjective explorations. There is no final, correct interpretation of the artefact, and the more personally biased an interpretation is, the truer it becomes. Little of this is unfamiliar to contemporary theory, a body of work Bhabha strikingly consolidates; but it is certainly disturbing to the average reader of his day.

The Location of Culture is an exercise in that mischievous anti-genre known as the essay, and there is much about its hybridity, its flippant, hard-boiled dismissal of the routine world in which most of us have to live, that comes through as offensively privileged and élitist. What saves the Bhabhaian essay, as with much of Said's work, say, is its evident self-irony—the sense that Bhabha simply does not know how serious he means to be. In the end, he proves impossible to read. He writes a prose of formidable complexity, allusiveness, and abstraction, relying heavily on psychoanalytical theory. Bhabha regrets the fact that his work is not open. Asked about what criticism he takes to heart as to the reception of his labor of love, he replies,

I take the question of accessibility very seriously. That a book should be impaired by a lack of clarity, so that people cannot respond to it and meditate on it and use it, must be a major indictment of anybody who wants to do serious work. But I also feel that the more difficult bits of my work are in many cases the places where I am trying to think hardest, and in a futuristic kind of way. (qtd. in Mitchell 80)

It would be less perilous to take Bhabha's other essays as the sheer negative underside of *The Location of Culture*, an agonized statement of what that essay pointedly does not say, and so as a damning indictment of its author's glib insouciance. "How Newness Enters the World," "Black and White and Read All Over," "Dance this Diss Around," "Queen's English," "Designer Creations," "The White Stuff," "Halfway House," "On the Irremovable Strangeness of Being Different," do indeed represent, in Freud's terms, the "return of the repressed"—a ghastly, uncannily powerful exposure of the dangers of globalism. Additionally, these essays allude variously to Derek Walcott, W.E. B. Du Bois, James Baldwin, and C.L.R. James, suggesting Bhabha's increasing recognition of alternative methodological resources to those offered by the European theory that so dominates his early work.

Bhabha is not out to promote the claims of egoism, but to unmask what he sees as the specious altruism of Western soci-

ety—an altruism that is hand-in-glove with a sentimental paternalism toward the subaltern, and thus the enemy of the kind of radical social change that would really benefit them. Like William Blake, Bhabha knew that pity and dutiful self-sacrifice are merely the other faces of exploitation; and he insists instead, in his creed of individuation, that those who do not strive to become rich, fully rounded human beings in their own right are unlikely to be of much use to others. He expounds: “As a result of its own splitting in the time-lag of signification, the moment of the subject of individuation emerges as an effect of the intersubjective—as the return of the subject as agent” (*Location* 185). When he steers clear of this circuit for long enough to reflect on familiar entities, Bhabha can still ask questions that show the force of a genuine scholar:

Do we best cope with the reality of “Being contemporary”—its conflicts and crises, its losses and lacerations—by endowing history with a long memory that we *then* interrupt, or startle, with our own amnesia? How did we allow ourselves to forget, we say to ourselves, that the nationalist violence between Hindus and Muslims lies just under the skin of India’s secular modernity? Should we not have “remembered” that the old Balkan tribes would form again? (“Culture’s” 214)

It is a sustaining and provocatively disturbing thought, and would make a subject for a different book than any he has written yet, a work of social criticism and moral psychology. And there is also a certain fluidity about Bhabha’s terms of analysis: the fact that a point of view is developed with great conviction in one chapter does not necessarily mean that it will survive into the next. But then his topic is less a topic than a mercury-slitther of ingenuities, aspirations, and phobias; and he has done well to capture as much of it as he has. This richly speculative narrative sends one back to postmodern writing and postmodernist performances with goat-glanded enthusiasm and awareness.

A truth in art, Oscar Wilde once remarked, is one whose contradiction is also true; and much the same could be said of Bhabha’s titanic tryst with theory, which crowns a career devoted

to exploring the ideology of difference. Bhabha is, in fact, one of the most formidably brilliant exponents of postcolonial theory, indeed of cultural theory in general, to have emerged recently. The fact that he hails from a former British colony is probably not accidental in this respect, since there was always a certain market for English literature in its former possessions (see Loomba). If the British occupiers do not take kindly to talk of political resistance, you can always recode it as deconstructing totalities, subverting “S1, the master-signifier,” in Lacan’s lapidary formula, opening up the *Other*. Derrida had a following in post-Soviet Poland and was arrested for trading on the philosophical black market in former Czechoslovakia. Beijing today boasts an Institute of postmodern theory, where you can talk of difference and desire without unduly alarming the authorities. Bhabha himself is a member of the high-powered “colony club,” as Stephen Howe dubs it, a man with active postcolonial and/or postmodern interests in the “glocal” jungle.¹⁹

Like Wilde, we think of Bhabha as much for what he is as for what he writes; the English love a faithful old servant as they love a lord, and if Bhabha is certainly the one, he also makes a fair stab at passing himself off as *the Ethnic Other* par excellence. But he, in fact, is deeply contradictory. If he is the flamboyantly cultural critic and new heir apparent to postcolonial theory who took London, Chicago, and now Cambridge by storm, he is also one of a distinguished lineage of scholars of Indian stock. Bhabha hailed from the city that his literary friend and quasi-compatriot Salman Rushdie spells as “Mumbai and Wombay,” and everything about him is doubled, hybrid, ambivalent. He is the Pandora of both postmodernism and postcolonialism, upper-class and underdog inhabiting the center and the fringe. As a highbrow *auteur*, Bhabha lives out a conflict between his public identity and his private self; and this fissure between the two is interestingly typical of the age. The *début-de-siècle* is haunted by the birth of new meanings like 9/11, the invasion of Iraq, the untimely death of public figures like Edward Said and Jacques Derrida—by the sense of some future terrorist, anarchic force subversively at work beneath the sedate

surfaces of respectable society. If it is the epoch of fetish art for fetish art's sake, it is also a time in which the artist goes slumming, plunging like Wilde's Dorian Gray into that Nether World of squalor and sensationalism that polite society represses.

We ought to remind ourselves of the last *début-de-siècle*; it is perhaps not accidental that the same period was the one in which Sigmund Freud began to uncover that concealed place of guilt, crime, and fantasy to which he gave the name "the unconscious." The 1990s were an era of subcultures and under-worlds, of social experiments and exotic sensations; walls were erected in the name of peace and elections highjacked in the name of democracy; cults of the bizarre, deviant, and fantastic began to flourish, while new currents of sexual emancipation, religious mysticism, and political revolution started to stir.²⁰ Fragmentation, a sense of space shrunken and time accelerated, giddy technological advance, the crumbling of moral certitudes, the rise of the faceless masses, the human individual as fractured, estranged, disoriented—all this is now as drearily familiar a discourse as the Elizabethan world picture, if somewhat more accurate. In this sense, our *début-de-siècle* strangely mimics the 1960s as an epoch of defiant hedonism and utopian vision even if our postmodern confused, secular, reflexive society, which seems permissive, is actually saturated with regulations that are intended to serve our well-being: restrictions on smoking and eating, rules against sexual harassment, and orders for telling the *Other*.

Like many other Indo-Anglian writers, Bhabha lives abroad, in America. Like most postcolonial writers writing in English, he is something of an accident, the fortuitous meeting-place of a local responsiveness and a foreign language. He is a writer who sings of his culture but has no mother tongue with which to sing of it, a kind of displaced but strangely native sensibility that could not have evolved outside of the unrepeatably and extraordinary Galapagos conditions of the colonial experience. "Returning this winter to Chicago from Bombay with the sweet singsong of my native Bombay Bazaar English still sounding in my ears," Bhabha wrote in 1997,

I'm confronted with the latest American cultural brouhaha—the Ebonic plague. Like my friend . . . Mr. Rushdie, I am now quite convinced that writing about something can actually make it happen—to you. *So there I am, Ms. Respected Reader, Dear Madam, as we are politely saying always in Bombay. So I'm trying too too hard to speak without mistake, sounding totally like polite, proper BBC English, not Yankee crude, "ya" this, "gonna" that, always opening bigmouth and talking through nose. No, I'm trying for pure Westminster-Oxford-Waterloo English.* (25)

Bhabha's testimony to his acculturation chimes with Derrida's as an Algerian Jew with respect to language acquisition, schooling, citizenship, and even the dynamics of cultural-political exclusion and inclusion. Derrida explains:

This appeal to come [*appel venir*] gathers language together in advance. It welcomes it, not in its identity or unity, not even in its identity, but in the uniqueness or singularity of a gathering together of its difference to itself: in difference *with itself* [*avec soi*] rather than difference *from itself* [*d'avec soi*]. It is not possible to speak outside this promise that gives a language, the uniqueness of the idiom, but only by promising to give it. There can be no question of getting out of this *uniqueness without unity*. It is not to be opposed to the other, nor even distinguished from the other. It is the monolanguage of the other. The *of* signifies not so much property as provenance: language is for the other, coming from the other, *the coming of the other.* (*Le Monolinguisme* 68)

Such a writer—Cixous and Spivak also come to mind—must always live in between, alien not only at home but also abroad. There is something strongly mythologizing in being "*assis entre deux chaises*," as Derrida used to say, of course, and Bhabha is very frank about it. His argument about split identity reminds one of the journalist in John Ford's film *The Man who Shot Liberty Valence*, that when the legend becomes the truth, one should print the legend.

This background of the postcolonial writer as monolingual *Other* is also perhaps relevant to Bhabha's passion for the Real.

For Bhabha, Lacan is not a poststructuralist in the popular, packaged sense of the word (“spaghetti structuralism,” as Žižek scornfully labels it), which means dissolving everything into discourse.²¹ On the contrary, the whole point of the Real is to give language the slip, block it from the inside, bend the signifier out of true discourse. For Lacan, language is forced up against the wall of the Real and made to turn out its empty pockets. Bhabha, who enjoys finding arcane meanings in bits of cliché, would doubtless bark “Get Real!” to those for whom language is all there is. But this concern for what defeats totality, for the way desire gets thwarted, for how a colonial authority sadistically enjoins us to enjoy that condition—all of this can surely be read against the background of that mass blockage of desire, along with a cynical invitation to the masses to hug their claims, which was ruthless colonialism. There is a parallel here with that other displaced heretic, Milan Kundera. In *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Kundera speaks of a contrast between the “angelic” and the “demonic,” the former signifying too much meaning and the latter too little (212–14). Colonial states, too, are angelic, fearful of obscurity, dragging everything into luminous significance and against legibility; the demonic, by contrast, is marked by a cynical cackle that revolts against the tidy sense-making of tyranny by reveling in the brute meaninglessness of things. It is not hard to spot Lacan’s Symbolic Order in the former and his Real in the latter, or to understand why the sheer contingency of the Real, its trick of disrupting closed symbolic systems with a reminder of unsatisfied desire, should have an appeal to an off-the-edge Indo-Anglian intellectual like Bhabha. What one might call Lacan’s ethical imperative—his injunction to the patient not to give up on his desire even while acknowledging its impossibility—sounds rather like the position of Indian resistance in its darkest days.

Indeed, for Lacan, the psychoanalytic cure is a little like the achievement of political independence. Bhabha explains his attachment to his *maitre-à-penser*:

Lacan’s excellent, if cryptic, suggestion that “the *Other* is a dual entry matrix” should be understood as the partial era-

sure of the *depth perspective* of the symbolic sign; through the circulation of the signifier in its doubling and displacing, the signifier permits the sign no reciprocal, binary division of form/content, superstructure/infrastructure, self/other. It is only by understanding the ambivalence and the antagonism of the desire of the *Other* that we can avoid the increasingly facile adoption of the notion of a homogenized *Other*, for a celebratory, oppositional politics of the margins or minorities. (*Location 52*; emphasis added)

What troubles us most deeply in Lacan's view, however, is the fact that, though our desire is always the desire of the *Other* (drawn from the *Other*, as well as directed to it), we can never be entirely sure what it is that the *Other* is demanding of us, since any demand has to be interpreted, and so to be garbled by the duplicitous signifier. "What do they want from me, what am I expected to be?" is the insistent query that for Lacan hollows our being into desire. The cured patient is the one who has given up on this unanswerable question, acknowledged that his desire is entirely self-grounding, embraced the utter contingency of his own being and relinquished the futile quest of having it confirmed from the outside. If this has a faint resemblance to getting out from under a colonial oppressor—say, the British in India at the turn of the nineteenth century, or the French in Algeria as late as the 1950s—it also, as Bhabha reminds us, has more than a smack of the saint:

The place of the *Other* must not be imaged, as Fanon sometimes suggests, as a fixed phenomenological point opposed to the self, that represents a culturally alien consciousness. The *Other* must be seen as the necessary negation of a primordial identity—cultural or psychic—that introduces the system of differentiation which enables the cultural to be signified as a linguistic, symbolic, historic reality. If, as I have suggested, the subject of desire is never simply a *Myself*, then the *Other* is never simply an *It-self*, a front of identity, truth or misrecognition. (52)

The image of the cured patient, one might claim, is Samuel Richardson's raped Clarissa, who by the end of his novel has

turned her face to the wall, renounced the claims of others and embraced her death by withdrawing her body from libidinal circulation and exchange. To be cured of your psychic ailments, you really need to be a saint, which is perhaps one reason why psychoanalysis is such a lengthy, precarious affair.²²

There is another sense in which Bhabha's background as an *émigré* critic is relevant. No acolyte of Lacan from Paris or Prague would have anything like Bhabha's political following, a faculty you develop spontaneously in a place where the political is the color of everyday life. Lacan himself, who advances an essentially tragic philosophy of life, had a lofty contempt for politics, indeed for history as such; whereas Bhabha, who fails for the most part to comment on his mentor's dandyish megalomania, is a postcolonial theorist who applies historiographic, psychoanalytic and/or deconstructive insights to colonialism, racism, nationalism, high fashion, fundamentalism, the commodity form. Insisting that the modern cultures of Western nations must be entirely relocated from a postcolonial perspective, one usurped by the project of a new cultural politics of difference, Bhabha has proposed an emergent body of critical knowledge issuing predominantly from the ranks of the subaltern and the displaced. *The Location of Culture* aims to map out within a psychoanalytic/deconstructive framework the very "conceptual imperative" and "political consistency" necessary for such a project. *The Location of Culture* seeks to map out what Bhabha calls the "Third Space of enunciation," the in-between" of Derrida's *écriture*, of translation and interstitial negotiation, the "discontinuous intertextual temporality of cultural difference" (208).

In a heady attempt to displace traditional analyses of cultural differences, commonly structured in terms of either essential ethnicity or homogenizing pluralism, Bhabha argues that all such binary constructions (identity/difference, same/other, male/female, black/white) are inhabited by an "interstitial" intimacy undermining the hierarchical and autonomous divisions by which they are opposed. Although unrepresentable in itself, this intimacy (defined as a "third space enunciation") introduces what Bhabha sees as a

profound “ambivalence” into the act of cultural interpretation. It is the presence and intervention of this ambivalence that Bhabha designates as the precondition for the possible articulation of cultural differences differently (*Location* 37). It is hardly surprising that a psychoanalytic-deconstructionist theorist of such virtuosity should have emerged from a former British colony, just as Europe’s previous most fruitful encounter between Marx and Freud was the product of a Frankfurt School on the run from Nazi anti-Semitism.²³

Colonialism, racism, nationalism, fundamentalism are where the abstruse categories of psychoanalysis are brought home to everyday political life. And Bhabha, who was born in the aftermath of India’s independence, has a sense of the Realpolitik of the psyche quite foreign to the gentrified, consumerist, post-ideological Western world for which he has such proper contempt. If he is more unabashedly theoretical than the typical Anglo-Saxon intellectual, say, Robert Young, he is also a lot more practical. He is even getting a little restive these days with his own postmodernism, chiding its neglect of the political and/or economic in traditional modernist style. He explains: “In the dislocations of postmodern media, the idea of historical culture and of ethnic affiliation must be conceptualized through a problematic break in the link between ‘the ontological value of *present-being*—the political subject or cultural citizen—and its situation in a stable and presentable determination of a locality, the topos of territory, native soil, city” (“White” 34). Here Bhabha joins his Indo-Anglian colleague Aijaz Ahmad’s scorching assault on metropolitan postcolonial theory,²⁴ and describes his project as more nuanced with the aim to dislodge subjectivity and properly locate it into the debate over class, ethnicity, and gender. According to Bhabha the ambivalence inherent within colonial power and its contradictory articulations of cultural knowledge do not just problematize legitimating claims to its authority and determine meaning. On the contrary, he adopts the theoretical insight of Michel Foucault—that forces of intervention are always and already bound up within structures of domination—in order to suggest that the discursive conditions of colonialism can in fact be seen to authorize a type of critical intervention

that transforms the very strategies of subjugation into grounds for political action (*Location* 29–30, 195–96). The two most important and rewarding examples here are his analyses of colonial mimicry and hybridity. He quotes Bakhtin as saying:

The . . . hybrid is not only double-voiced and double-accented . . . but is also double-linguaged; for in it there are not only (and not even so much) two individual consciousnesses, two voices, two accents, as there are [doublings of] socio-linguistic consciousnesses, two epochs . . . that come together and consciously fight it out on the territory of the utterance. . . . It is the collision between differing points of view on the world that are embedded in these forms. . . . Such unconscious hybrids have been at the same time profoundly productive historically: they are pregnant with potential for new world views, with new “internal forms” for perceiving the world in words. (212)

Indeed Bakhtin emphasizes a space of enunciation where the negotiation of discursive doubleness—by which he does not mean duality or binarism—engenders a new speech act. “In my work,” Bhabha goes on to add,

I have developed the concept of hybridity to describe the construction of cultural authority within conditions of political antagonism or inequity. Strategies of hybridization reveal an estranging movement in the “authoritative,” even authoritarian inscription of the cultural sign. At the point at which the precept attempts to objectify itself as a generalized knowledge or a normalizing, hegemonic practice, the hybrid strategy or discourse opens up a space of negotiation where power is unequal but its articulation may be equivocal. Such negotiation is neither assimilation nor collaboration. It makes possible the emergence of an “interstitial” agency that refuses the binary representation of social antagonism. Hybrid agencies find their voice in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty. They deploy the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of community, and version of historic memory, that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy: the outside of the inside; the part in the whole. (212)

At this point in *The Location of Culture*, however, the problem of the very “subject” of such critical intervention raises its head. As a consequence, Bhabha begins to shift the focus of his argument away from historical examples of “nativist” resistance embedded within obscure colonial archives, toward an examination of more contemporary theoretical and literary texts in an attempt to formulate an understanding of what he calls a “postcolonial agency.” After discussing the opposition to the ontology of the white world as defined by Fanon: “You come too late, much too late, there will always be a world—a white world between you and us,” Bhabha concludes his argument by telling us that Fanon “too speaks from the signifying time-lag of cultural difference that I have been attempting to develop as a structure for the representation of subaltern and postcolonial agency” (237).

Bhabha’s complex but fiercely political ambition here is, of course, the development of a general locus of subaltern political empowerment. In “The Postcolonial and the Postmodern: The Question of Agency,” Bhabha returns to his earlier textual analysis of a “third space of enunciation” in an attempt to locate and articulate this subaltern subject position of critical intervention under the aegis of what he now calls “a space beyond theory” (179). Yet, in order to evoke this rather old theoretical conjunction, perhaps not surprisingly he turns to an examination of Roland Barthes’ *The Pleasure of the Text*, of a space “*outside the sentence*” (180). This minor and often overlooked phrase in Barthes’ text reveals, according to Bhabha, a “disjunctive temporality of discourse” suggesting an interpretive strategy for the formulation of a postcolonial agency (180–81). Concealed in a rhetoric that at times appears expressly designed to frustrate, Bhabha’s purpose is evidently to problematize a traditional binary understanding of agency as either intentionality or instrumentality, opening up the possibility of an *other*, multiple and varying, site of cultural inscription and political intervention. Here, Bhabha is startlingly casual—indeed, for such a profoundly sophisticated thinker, almost naive—in the way that he moves so directly from the psychoanalytic to the political, a frontier along which many a fellow theorist has preferred

to pussyfoot. Fetishism, scapegoating, splitting, foreclosure, disavowal, idealizing, projection—if these are the familiar mechanisms of the Freudian psyche, they are also mass movements, political strategies, military campaigns.²⁵

Bhabha is especially deft when it comes to dismantling the opposition between the universal and the particular. Crucial to this claim is the fact that for both Lacan and Bhabha the identity of universal and particular is something that is achieved only within language and only within the “primary language” of desire that psychoanalysis teaches the analysand to speak. Lacan expounds:

In order to free the subject's speech, we introduce him into the language of his desire, that is to say, into the primary language in which, beyond what he tells us of himself, he is already talking to us unknown to himself, and, in the first place, in the symbols of the symptom.

In the symbolism brought to light in analysis, it is certainly a question of a language. This language . . . has the universal character of a language that would be understood in all other languages, but, at the same time, since it is the language that seizes desire at the very moment in which it is humanized by making itself recognized, it is absolutely particular to the subject. (*Écrits* 293–94)

The universal, Lacan points out and Bhabha agrees, must exclude particularity, and so cannot really be as universal as it supposes. We have access to universals only because we are situated within a specific culture, a point that both rationalists and relativists might do well to ponder. Cultural relativism, Bhabha notes, is much vexed by our supposed inability to gain access to the *Other*, but what if this *Other* were inherently incomplete, and so in any case unknowable as a whole? What if what I share most deeply with the *Other* is just the fact that I, too, am never self-transparent, never complete, never wholly bound to my own cultural context but always to some degree out of joint with it? What I and the *Other* have in common is the fact that there is always something that eludes our grasp (Lacan's “Big Other”), and it is in the overlapping of these twin absences that we can meet. It is when we are able to discern the

blindspot of another culture, its point of failure, that we are most at one with it, since it is just such an internal limit that constitutes our forms of life, too.

Schopenhauer saw us all as permanently pregnant with monsters, bearing at the very core of our being something implacably alien to it. He called this the Will, which was the stuff out of which we were made and yet was utterly indifferent to us, lending us an illusion of purpose but itself aimless and senseless (45–46). Freud, who was much taken with Schopenhauer, offered us a non-metaphysical version of this monstrosity in the notion of desire, a profoundly inhuman process that is deaf to meaning, that has its own sweet way with us and secretly cares for nothing but itself. Desire is nothing personal: it is an affliction that was lying in wait for us from the outset, a perversion in which we get involuntarily swept up, a refractory medium into which we are plunged at birth. For Freud, what makes us human subjects is this foreign body lodged inside us, which invades our flesh like a lethal virus and yet, like the Almighty for Thomas Aquinas, is closer to us than we are to ourselves.²⁶ This “Thing” as Lacan calls it, with horror movies archly in mind, is otherwise known as the Real, in the Lacanian Holy Trinity: the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic.²⁷ It is also the chief protagonist of the work of Bhabha, who by drawing our attention to this most underprivileged of Lacan’s three categories, challenges his fashionable image as a “poststructuralist” thinker. Bhabha’s Lacan is not the philosopher of the floating signifier but a much tougher, alarming, uncanny sort of theorist altogether, who teaches that the Real that makes us what we are is not only traumatic and impenetrable but cruel, obscene, vacuous, meaningless, and horrifically orgasmic. Bhabha observes:

Lacan’s location of the signifier of desire, on the cusp of language and the law allows the elaboration of a form of social representation that is alive to the ambivalent structure of subjectivity and sociability. Foucault’s archaeology of the emergence of the modern Western man as a problem of finitude, inextricable from its afterbirth, its Other, enables the linear, progressivist claims of the social sciences—the major

imperializing discourses—to be confronted by their own historicist limitations. These arguments and modes of analysis can be dismissed as internal squabbles around Hegelian causality, psychic representation or sociological theory. Alternatively, they can be subjected to a translation, a transformation of value as part of the questioning the project of modernity in the great, revolutionary tradition of C.L.R. James—*contra* Trotsky or Fanon, *contra* phenomenology and existentialist psychoanalysis. (*Location* 31–32)

As the passage above shows, Bhabha himself is both dauntingly prolific and dazzlingly versatile, able to leap in a paragraph from Lacan to Foucault to *différance*, evil eye to Freud; but just as Lacan's fantasy-ridden world of everyday reality conceals an immutable kernel of the Real, so Bhabha's flamboyant parade of topics recircles, in essay after essay, to this very same subject. The most cosmic versatility of his interests masks a compulsive repetition of the same. His essays, in Freud's notion of the uncanny, are both familiar and unfamiliar, breathtakingly innovative yet *déjà lu*, crammed with original insights and yet perpetual recyclings of one another. If he reads Lacan as a succession of attempts to seize the same persistent traumatic kernel, much the same can be said of his own writing, which continually bursts out anew with Derrida or Kristeva or Rushdie or *la haute couture* but never shifts its gaze from the same fearful, fascinating psychical scene.

As Bhabha sees it, the Real for Lacan is almost the opposite of reality, reality being for Lacan just a low-grade place of fantasy in which we shelter from the terrors of the Real, a Soho of the psyche. The natural state of the human animal is to live a phantasmal lie. Fantasy is not the opposite of reality: it is what plugs the void in our being so that the set of fictions we call reality are able to emerge. The Real is rather the primordial wound we incurred by our fall from the pre-Oedipal Eden, the gash in our being where we were torn loose from Nature, and from which desire flows unstaunchably. Though we repress this trauma, it persists within us as the hard core of the Self. Something is missing inside us that makes us what we are, a muteness that resists being signified but that shows up negatively as the outer limit of our discourse, the point at which our

representations crumble and fail. For the colonial subject, Bhabha writes, "These interpositions, indeed collaborations of political and psychic violence *within* civic virtue, alienation within identity, drive Fanon to describe the splitting of the colonial space of consciousness and society as marked by a 'Manichaeian delirium'" (43).²⁸

Lacan's infamous "transcendental signifier" is just the signifier that represents this failure of representation, rather as the phallus for psychoanalysis represents the fact that it can always be cut off. The Real is what cannot be included within any of our symbolic systems, whose very absence skews them out of shape, as a kind of vortex around which they are bent out of true. It is the factor that ensures that as human subjects we never quite add up, which throws us subtly out of kilter so that we can never be identical with ourselves.²⁹ It is a version of Kant's unknowable thing-in-itself, and what is ultimately unknowable is Man himself. The Real is desire, "nevrose," but for Lacan, so Bhabha argues, more specifically *jouissance*, or "obscene pleasure."³⁰ This pleasure, which sounds rather less suburban in French, is a sublimely terrifying affair. It is the lethal pleasure of what Freud calls primary masochism, in which we reap delight from the way that the Law or superego unleashes its demented sadism on us. *Kāmasūtra* (*la science des jouissances du langage*), Lacan maintains, is the only substance that psychoanalysis recognizes, and it is also Bhabha's unwavering obsession. Like Schopenhauer's Will, it is a brute, self-serving affair, as devoid of meaning as the American waiter's mechanical injunction: "Enjoy!"³¹ Like the waiter, the Law instructs us to take pleasure, but it does so in curiously intransitive mood: we are just to reap gratification for its own sake from the superego's crazed, pointless dictates. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek sees ideological power as resting finally on the way we hug our chains rather than the way we entertain beliefs (170). At the root of meaning, for Freud, Lacan, Žižek, and Bhabha, too, there is always a sustaining residue of non-sense.

The Real is the "irruption" of that nonsense into our signifying systems, and so a much crasser affair than language. But because it can never be signified, seen head-on, it is also a sort of nothing,

detectable only through its effects, constructed backward after the event. We know it only from the way it acts as a drag on our discourse, as astronomers may identify a heavenly body only because of its warping effect on the space around it. For the Real to take on tangible embodiment, to crop up in the shape of voices or visions, is for us to become psychotic. "It was Fanon," Bhabha reminds us, "who suggested that an oppositional, differential reading of Lacan's Other might be more relevant for the colonial condition than the Marxist reading of the master-slave dialectic" (31). Or, to put it differently, the Real is the McGuffin, the little joker in the pack, the sign that means nothing but itself. We may want to put this another way by saying that every signifying system, so Bhabha claims, contains a kind of super-signifier whose function is just to indicate the system's point of internal fracture, marking the space where it does not quite gel. But this absence is what organizes the whole system and so is also a kind of presence within it. You can call this constitutive lack the human subject itself, which is necessary for any set of signs to work, yet which can never be fully encapsulated by them. But this, for Lacan, is also the function of the Real, whose very absence from consciousness is the cause of our continuing to try to signify and always failing. If we failed to keep failing and trying again, if the repressive was lifted and the Real burst to the surface, history would instantly cease. In this sense, the sheer impossibility of desire, the fact that we can only ever plug our lack with one poor fantasy object after another, is also what keeps us up and running. That fissure or hindrance in our being which is the Real is also what props up our identity.³² This, one might claim, is a classically poststructuralist sort of doctrine. Poststructuralists have almost patented the paradox that what makes something impossible is also what makes it possible. As every first-year student in English studies now knows, what makes a sign a sign is its difference from other signs; but this means that the difference that lends a sign its identity also makes it impossible for a sign to be complete in itself. Difference, as Derrida playfully puts it, both "broaches and breaches" meaning (*Le Monolinguisme* 34).

Or take the idea, much touted by Bhabha, that blindness is the condition of insight, truth the upshot of misrecognition. For Nietzsche, it is only a blessed state of amnesia that enables us to act, since otherwise we would simply be paralyzed by the nightmare of history. For Freud, we are shaped into human subjects only by a shattering repression of much that went into our making.³³ It is this crippling forgetfulness that allows us to thrive. The roots of our conscious life must be absent from it if we are to function as subjects at all—rather, as the law, if it is to maintain its august authority, it must erase the fact that it was originally imposed by an arbitrary act of violence. The law cannot have been established legally, since there was no law before the law. Hegel, whom Bhabha sweeps aside, can also be used to illustrate this paradox. For Hegel, truth is not so much the opposite of error as the result of it. The cunning of Reason lies in the fact that our blunders and oversights, did we but know it, have already been taken into account by truth itself, as the very process by which it is achieved.³⁴ Truth looks like an end-product but turns out to encompass the whole process of trial and error that led up to it. When we are able to look back and understand that those misrecognitions were essential to the whole enterprise, that is the moment of truth or Absolute Idea. Similarly, when the analysand is able to free him or herself from the illusion that there is some truth quite separate from the business of transference, some transcendental knowledge of which the analyst has possession, then for the Lacanians (including Bhabha) he or she is *en route* to a cure.³⁵

The Politics of Difference

There is another sense in which ethnicity is used as a cultural concept pulling ahead of race and class. Bulmer defines it as follows: “a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared past, and cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements which define the group’s identity, such as kinship, religion, language, shared territory,

nationality or physical appearance" (54). Class, one might add, the most fluid of all of these categories, cuts across all the variables; but in this thick definition there is also a negative yearning for ambiguity that arises from the fear that definition leads to the loss of freedom and possibility: it is not the desire to embrace multiple positions, but the fear of embracing any, lest the impossibility of holding it should lead to self-destruction. This unwelcome uncertainty is at the heart of the ambivalence that Bhabha diagnoses for the colonized subject, for (to restate) the colonial subject identifies with the colonizer and yet cannot be the colonizer. If the colonial subject distinguishes his nativeness, he confronts his own condemnation; if the colonial subject associates with the West, he has to face his own alienation. "The taking up of any one position, within a specific discursive form in a particular historical conjecture, is then always problematic" (qtd. in Ferguson et al.).³⁶ The trope of the ethnic is most famously elaborated in his account of the ambivalence of nationalism: the postcolonial cannot find peace in nationalist identity because of the unhappy dualism of colonial identifications. Through this politics of difference, which Bhabha says is the condition of modernity, the concept of nation becomes a fantasy of certainty (powerfully depicted by Benedict Anderson) disrupted by the panicked denial of fixity. It is in "On the Irremovable Strangeness of Being Different" that Bhabha turns to the study of double displacement of both colonial subject and community. His argument revolves around the detailing of his ethnicity while demonstrating how he, as a displaced Indo-Anglian, is learning to cope with the challenge(s) of his adoptive home (the U.S.) and how he is coming to terms with his new life in the West. He locates himself between two white women and a Jew.³⁷

Here, ethnicity is certainly a lens through which literature can be read. Bhabha expresses its importance best in a reading of Forster's *A Passage to India* where he identifies himself as an ethnic who developed political and academic consciousness while living and working in the West. He uses that sense of self and a particular cultural perspective to provide a counter reading of a text from early on in the century: "I take my lesson from *A Passage to*

India, perhaps the greatest of all novels about the complications between oriental bazaars and English clubs." Bhabha then goes on to quote Forster and concludes with this remark: "Between bazaar and club, the fear tree casts each site of difference as incomplete and therefore makes possible the colonial dialectic of mastery and misrecognition, sexuality and power that creates the narrative" ("Irremovable" 37). Such readings do not block the ability to see the world in other, more universal contexts, but they exemplify the power of ethnicity as an analytic category for both the writer and the reader. And like Edward Said's pioneering work in the field, Bhabha's is fashioned in the form of alternative narrative fragments. His way of telling challenges the elitist master narrative (if only halfway), privileges the marginal, and provides resistance to Western hegemony. It also resists the totalization of the dominant Hindu and/or Muslim culture within India itself to allow for a room with a view on the Parsi ethos.

Bhabha is among the most anguished of contemporary postcolonial writers because he mercilessly refuses to transcend the psychological vise of the colonial position, although it is clear that the recognition of this split-subject position causes him anger and embarrassment. Indeed, his famed obscurity may arise from the willful resistance to see what he finds so clearly before him: that he cannot control his subjecthood; that he is constructed to react against the dominant culture—whether Hindu, Muslim, or Christian but hardly ever Jewish; that he maneuvers betwixt and between an array of subject positions whose rigidity he finds appalling but that he cannot transcend. This is the problem of hybridity, the multiply defined Self that both reiterates colonial categories and ultimately subverts them, but through echoes and not direct opposition. And it is to him both terrifying and liberating. Bhabha shows us that postcolonial subjects, marginal subjects—in fine, subalterns—are those who feel that their capacity for self-declaration has been taken away again and again, through a long history in which they have been forced to conform to the dominant culture's prejudices and biases. Their demanding refusal to be identified with others, which mainstream observers of postcolonial discourse view with

frustration and perplexity, must be seen as a fear of suffocation. Miss Pushpa's uprooting from India to the West to better herself exemplifies this anxiety:

Her "low" economic status has kept her from an improving, Westernized "convent" education. Her cute and creaky English has been picked up at a deeply disciplinary state school through the rote repetition of clichés, commonplace idioms, and readings out of Victorian-style "self-help" primers. Infantilized and exploited both at home and work, she is poised to escape this pervasive patriarchy, to better her prospects, by being "diasporized," going "to foreign" where, as a Non-Resident Indian in the United States or the Gulf States, she will, of course, be the good daughter and continue obediently to support her family back home. Miss Pushpa T.S. [nineteen, of Laburnum Buildings, Hanuman Vihar, Bombay] is "internal sweetness itself!" in Bombay Bazaar English—as the poet says, "Pushpa Miss is never saying no." ("Queen's" 25–26)

In cases like Miss Pushpa's, affiliation becomes possible only through acknowledging difference, because these politics are as much about selfhood as about political economy. Aijaz Ahmad draws attention to the possible theoretical kinship and/or tension between postcolonial theory and the postcolonial lives that theory tries to describe. He is most careful to point out that ostensibly "[m]ost migrants tend to be poor and experience displacement not as cultural plenitude but as torment. . . . Postcoloniality is . . . like most things, a matter of class" ("Politics" 16). And so the hope of transcendental ambiguity arises through the pain of illegitimacy, the migrant subject caught within multiple subject-positions, and through the fear that grasping one identity will deprive the subject of any at all. A literary critic calls the modern fascination with ambiguity and fragmentation a "late imperial romance," and claims that the literary vision of this romance is not one of cultural despair but of transformation: of a curiously isolated, asocial, transforming merger with the infinite and not with a fellow human.

Just as Freud unmasks the bourgeois family as a cockpit of lusts and loathings, so Bhabha turns that sacrosanct community

into a nightmare of greed and lethal antagonism. He writes in a *début-de-siècle* when postmodern horror belongs to an epoch in which horror itself has become conventional, as witness the events of 9/11 and the invasion of Iraq, and so must be suitably self-ionizing. It is the culture of an era too calloused and streetwise to be shocked, and so reaps its wry humor from the pointlessness of any such attempt. One does not need to stray too far beyond the domestic hearth to find murderous violence. Thus, in a moving passage, Bhabha informs us of the untimely death of his friend, the Italian designer Gianni Versace, which gripped a global audience with much tenacity, highlighted by the designer's role as a universal icon chased by an image trail of Versace *vérité*:

A phone call from a friend in Milan brought the news that Gianni Versace had been shot in Miami. On Lake Como, where we spent some weeks this summer, an hour away from the Versace estate near Cernobbio and the resting place for his ashes, his tragic death was at once an incessant and evanescent item in the international news, and at the same time, a very local affair.

"Gay-boom-boom," said Franca, the perfumed and petite woman who cuts my hair, the next day, acting out the curbside assassination, horrified and hungry to talk.

"A beautiful son of the lakes," I said piously and provocatively, testing the waters in this vacation idyll where the Lega Nord propagates the secession of the North from what it considers the degenerate and impoverished South.

"Yes, *si, una sensibilita italiana* . . . but he liked a different kind of life, *una vita americana*, all mixed together . . . gay, drugs, black, white, who knows what else? ("Designer" 11)

We are dealing here with an imaginary cartography, which projects onto the real landscape its own shadowy ideological antagonism, in the same way that the conversion-symptoms in the hysterical subject in Freud project onto the physical body the map of another, imaginary anatomy. Much of this projection is violent. There is a reflexive politically incorrect xenophobia in the hairdresser's reply: "*una vita americana*, all mixed up . . . gay, drugs, black, white, who

knows what else?" The multicultural perception of the U.S. by Europe as a site of horror and impurity, of brutal hordes of outlaws, as opposed to the refined, sophisticated genteel Western Europe is made clear here. For Franca, America lacks Europe's purity and finesse. Her idea of American culture brings to mind the phrase: "When I hear the word 'culture,' I reach for my gun," as Goebbels is supposed to have said. "When I hear the word 'culture,' I reach for my cheque-book," says the cynical producer in Godard's *Le Mépris*.³⁸ A leftist's slogan inverts Goebbels' statement: "When I hear the word 'gun,' I reach for culture."³⁹ Culture, according to that slogan, can serve as an effective answer to the gun that killed Versace and Lennon before him: an outburst of violence is a *passage l'acte* rooted in the subject's ignorance. But the notion is undermined by the rise of what might be called "Europocentric xenophobia," the surprising characteristic of that is its insensitivity to reflection—a neo-Nazi skinhead who beats up black people or a LePeniste who stabs and throws an Arab in the Seine knows what he is doing, but does it anyway.⁴⁰

The death of Versace followed shortly afterward by that of Lady Diana develops a macabre significance when we realize that, once, images were a reflection of substance, a focus of faith. Then came film, television, advertising, the Internet, the decline of religion in the West—and, most recently, the evolution of the notion of fame. Now, from rock stars to soap stars to politicians, celebrity is beginning to overshadow ability or achievement. But that may well be what we want. The game of being a name. (Think of Joe the millionaire.) Bhabha rightly argues that it was not the twentieth century that invented the cult of celebrity. The idea of the charismatic hero or heroine is as old as history itself, and has been marked by a continuous succession of assorted strong-men, women, gurus, poets, saints, kings, queens, generals, artists, actors, and actresses, all celebrated in song, saga, and tapestry. But this certainly is the century in which fame has been turned into an industrial process, an all-purpose lubricant for the wheels of commerce, as well as of politics, handed on from weather girl to bit-part TV commercial performers, and in which fame has become an

abstraction, losing almost all contact with actual achievement. Bhabha elucidates:

“The Talk Show,” for instance, which produces a hallucinatory moment of reciprocity between the interviewee’s celebrity and the audience’s anonymity, is a case in point. For the gap of social division—between self and other—is concealed not by the illusion of homogeneity or totality but by an incitement to participate, to dialogue, to talk, to question: the “subject” is invited to incorporate the terms of every opposition. . . . At the same time he is lodged in the group—an imaginary group in the sense that individuals are deprived of the power to grasp the actual movement of the institution *by taking part in it*. . . . It installs within mass society the limits of a “little world” where everything happens as if each person were already turned towards the other. It provokes hallucination of *nearness* which abolishes a sense of distance, strangeness, imperceptibility . . . of otherness (“Designer” 130; emphasis added)

The transformation has something to do with the mechanisms involved. Mass media, photography, film, television—which magnify and manipulate the ticks and quirks of individuals, and broadcast them around the globe—have served to make the images of fame more ubiquitous than they have ever been before. But it is also the product of a world in which the more of us there are, the more that most of us turn into spectators, content to be living our lives through others. Otherwise, “Why,” Bhabha asks and answers with equal aplomb, “has Diana’s life and death, and to a lesser extent, that of Versace, left us with moving images that dwarf others from this year?” Her “voice was as socially mediated (and media oriented) as any other; her ‘image’ as much a piece of statecraft as any public persona” (“Designer”).

Bhabha fails, however, to articulate that the process of the blessings and curses of fame began in the earliest days of the cinema. It was the star system that propelled the new medium, as it quickly became the close-up that pulled in the audiences, rather than the director’s name, or even the storyline. Anonymous actors

were projected instantly into worldwide celebrity. Their image was burnished by carefully-posed photographs showing them in the right clothes, against the right background—yachts, dogs, and cocktail bars were always useful props—and in the right company. Of course, certain actual characteristics needed to be airbrushed away in the interest of maximizing appeal to every conceivable audience. In this sense, Bhabha is right to intone that what

is fascinating about the movielike narratives of these celebrity lives, however, is not simply the commodification of wealth, rank, and beauty or the fetishism of style and power. Such frames of reference are too conceptually distant, too Film Studies 101. To understand the efficacy of popular images in such terms tends to normalize the extravagances and excesses, the passions and interests, provoked by public fantasies staged around the spectacle of unreachable figures who turn into iconic "intimates." How do we grasp the nearness of these events, the proximity that lurks in their very presence? ("Designer").

Homosexuality, for example, was out of the question, which accounts for the troupe of carefully selected spouses drafted in as camouflage. But it was totalitarian regimes that perfected so many of the Hollywood techniques that have become identified with the industrialization of fame. Hitler and Stalin are the real models. They were the leaders who established their grip on the levers of power by conjuring up an apparently intimate relationship with their subjects. Their portraits became ubiquitous, their smiles loomed over entire nations, their effigies were inescapable. Both posed extensively with children to underscore their not-so-subtle claims to be the fathers of their respective nations, even as they slaughtered their own citizens. Luc de Heusch offers an insightful analysis of this state of affairs in *Why Marry Her?* Inscribed in the political order and in colonial culture, the father figure (whose domination of the practical symbolic order is manifest in myriad ways, including sexual rights over women, a sort of feudal *droit de cuissage* reducing the desire of the "son" to a reproductive instinct) continues to haunt postcolonial societies as the sole figure of authority.⁴¹

This phenomenon is particularly evident in political culture; almost all Arab sultans, kings, and dictators depict themselves as the fathers of their nations, thus culturally emphasizing murder and rape as a means of liberation. The situation very much resembles that portrayed by Gabriel García Márquez in *The Autumn of the Patriarch*. The man scarcely knows the difference between reality and illusion, and were it not for the cruelty with which he treats his dependent cronies and hangers-on, the picture would be comic.⁴² And until recently, Saddam Hussein, in his Alpine hat and Riviera playboy blazer, was still playing the same game. But then, so was Michael Jackson, who has not limited himself to props and costumes. Surgery and skin-lightening are all part of the repertoire now—hardly surprising then, that, when Andy Warhol got into the act, so many of the images that he chose to manipulate in order to describe his view of the world in which everybody would be famous for fifteen minutes turned out to be based on totalitarians. First, it was Mao Zedong, then Imelda Marcos. But toward the end of Warhol's reign as the most famous artist of the last quarter of the twentieth century, it worked the other way round. He had given up exploring the imagery of power, and was playing his part in using fame as an economic weapon, from his album covers for the Rolling Stones to his commercials for Absolut Vodka. And it is marketing that the cult of fame has really come down to. We live in an anonymous world of mass production and globocracy, in which every car, every shirt, every refrigerator looks just like every other car, shirt or refrigerator. So it is that fame has become an essential aspect of the armory of the marketeer. The car we want to drive, if we are Japanese salarymen, is not just the Toyota, but Alain Delon Toyota. We buy not a generic polo-shirt, but the Armani polo-shirt, not any running shoe but an Air Jordan.⁴³

In the end, because what we lack is confidence in our own taste, we turn ourselves into the expression of somebody else's, demonstrated at its most extreme by the curious habit of tattooing ourselves over every conceivable surface with the word "Hilfiger." Fame needs an arena of some kind in which to flourish; that is why sport and fashion have become such potent focuses. Fashion now

has the edge over film and sport, a phenomenon that shows in the shifting balance of power between the designer and the model. A case in point is a set of Princess Diana postage stamps issued by *La République du Togo* before her death in 1997—an ensemble of nine stamps picturing her in the gowns she donated to a charitable auction held at Christie's, New York.⁴⁴ The most commercially valuable images of fame are those that are never subverted by time. The reality of Brigitte Bardot at seventy devalues the image of her at twenty, but James Dean lives forever as the rebel in a leather jacket, while the Princess of Wales, who became a talented player of the fame game, will always be Lady Di, the beautiful martyr—perhaps the late twentieth century's most potent icon. Diana was no less concerned with her “market” than Versace was with his. One difference, however, separates the “people's princess” from the insolently global best (designer). “In defining a role for herself,” Bhabha perceptively writes, “Diana had to create a constituency, and appeal to a sector of the nation's ‘imagined community’—a people—who, like her, were struggling to find a representative and representational image for themselves, a ‘sign’ of public belonging, as well as an insignia of authority” (“Designer” 12).

For Bhabha, fame is never static. We create heroes and heroines to destroy them. Look at our ambiguous relationship with icons, from the Spice Girls to Britney Spears. We idolize them but reserve the right to put them in their place whenever it suits us. Celebrities are examples of liberty; we punish them by tearing them down. In this sense, they may be said to resemble the golden bough. You get to be its keeper until somebody comes to kill you, and then he is the new keeper until somebody comes to kill him. In the end, mere possession of the golden bough becomes life threatening. This “‘little world’ of the *entre-nous*, then,” Bhabha goes on to add, “is the stage on which the transindividual becomes both a familiar presence and a phantasmic icon—at one moment, as common as the grainy picture in the daily papers, at another, as strange as the same face caught in the bleached, harsh light of the tragic news flash . . . one day, suddenly, *boom boom, just like in the*

movies. . . ." ("Designer" 130). The transindividual—a chimerical mixture of Madonna and (in death) Princess Diana, with other bits added on (a sting in the tail from Germaine Greer)—is a vessel for the spirit of our age because these celebrities are *Colossi* bestriding nations and cultures; these "moral" authorities of the free world stand for the power of almost unmediated direct action. That is why people loved the Princess of Wales, we are told. Or, to put it differently, celebrities are in a sense like Greek gods, and the religious impulse seems largely transmuted into celebrity worship.

Bhabha shrewdly varies the angle of critique in "Halfway House," where he discusses the borderline conditions of split subjects, discursive regimes, concepts under erasure, and accounts of interactive and performative social agency. For him, since we ultimately "are" the stories we tell ourselves, the solution to a psychic deadlock resides in a positive rewriting of the narrative of our lives as displaced entities. What he has in mind is not only the standard cognitive therapy of changing negative "false beliefs" about oneself into an assurance that one is loved by others and capable of creative achievements, but a more "radical," pseudo-Freudian procedure of regressing back to the scene of the primordial traumatic wound. Bhabha accepts the psychoanalytic notion of an early childhood traumatic experience that forever marks the subject's further development, but he gives it a different spin.

What he proposes is that after regressing to, and thus confronting, his primal traumatic scene, the subject should, under the analyst's guidance, "rewrite" this scene, this ultimate violent framework of subjectivity, as part of a more benign and productive narrative. It may seem a ridiculous thing to do, but there is a widely accepted, politically correct version of this procedure in which ethnic, sexual, and racial minorities rewrite their past in a more positive, self-assertive vein (African-Americans claiming that long before European modernity, ancient African empires had a sophisticated understanding of science and technology). In the end, Bhabha submits that

the disjunctive locations and displaced temporalities that formally structure the world of the work—*people come and go*—enable us to envisage the picture plane as inscribed in a movement that shifts the perceptual and evaluative balance between the canonical and the hybrid, peripheral and central, refusing to settle the question one way or another. The anxiety of belonging encourages us to choose to live in a house whose shifting walls require that stranger and neighbor recognize their side-by-sidedness, their lateral living because “This house is strange. / Its shadows lie. / Say, tell me, why does its lock fit my key?” (“Halfway” 125)

Bhabha’s idiosyncratic wit and the dry prose style he has developed to carry it are both on display here. But the wit slices deeper when one happens to know that Bhabha does, in fact, demonstrate the power of a secular creativity that appears when culture is viewed as the intersection for articulating different landscapes, histories, genres, styles of perception, and performance. Hybridity becomes a gesture of translation that holds open the question of what it is to be black in America, Indian in Great Britain, arab in France, chicano in San Ysidro, Palestinian in Israel, pacifist in Kosovo, an artist without gallery or portfolio, a housewife alone on Saturday night in any neighborhood in any city.⁴⁵ Even so, Bhabha goes further than most other postcolonial critics of his generation in investigating the dialectic of recognition and rejection in contemporary cultures of diversity. He maintains that in the narrow passage between rootedness and displacement, cultural difference or ethnic location accedes to a social and psychic anxiety at the core of identification and its locutions. He asserts that this passage opens an unsettling space that adjudicates among differences and builds epistemological boundaries between cultures (“Black”). As a result, anxiety reveals a negotiation with the “irremovable strangeness” of cultural difference within colonial space and historical temporality.

To elucidate his point, he gives the example of two competing narratives—the one describing the Rockefeller Foundation’s International Study Center, “venue of many cosmopolitan conversations between thinkers, journalists, and policy makers from the

world community”; the other dealing with a different kind of cultural conversation:

There are strangers in the village [of Valbrona], not the usual strangers from Milan (a whole hour or so away) who come to spend August at the lake, but *stranieri* from Africa. Some are students, here via schools in the south of France; others are immigrants and refugees. All of them hang around outside supermarkets or bars, selling anything from socks to cassettes to vaguely African *objets*.

There is no overt racial animosity in Valbrona. The vendors may receive a passing joke or a greeting, but always as a way of polite avoidance and escape. Yet this kind of pat on the head reveals the anxious vacancy surrounding the precarious figure of the lone black man standing in an elegant lake resort, selling things that no one seems to want. (“Black” 16)

The view from the Real has shifted; it is admittedly no more horrible than that for which Anglican vicars are not noted: their political radicalism. Just as human existence for Lacan is the fantasy by which we plug the terrifying void of the Real, so Bhabha’s chirpy wit and anecdotal relish serve in part to mask the obscene vision of humanity he offers: the *stranieri* from Africa remind us of the question Baldwin posed a little over half a century ago when children followed him down the street in a Swiss spa town only a few hours’ drive from Valbrona shouting *Neger! Neger!* “Can [anyone] be liked whose human weight and complexity cannot be or has not been admitted?” A question that has no easy answer for despite the children’s charm and playfulness, Baldwin was treated as a genuine wonder. “There was,” he perceptively wrote, “yet no suggestion that I was human” (81). The phrase contains other, more sinister shades of irony, too. One is the moral anguish. And, Bhabha adds, the “other is the invisible torrent of emotions growing ever denser with each step forward,” as if the atmosphere had been set vibrating by a volcano.

The Polymath Theorist

If the only topic psychoanalysis recognizes is *plaisir/jouissance*, the same might finally be said of Homi Bhabha the writer-critic. His books and essays have an enviable knack of making fetishism or Jameson sound riotously exciting; his writing bristles with difficulties but never serves up a turgid sentence. The demotic companionability of his style is an implicit rebuke to the high-minded textual harassment of so much theory. Lacan may insist that the analyst is an empty signifier, that he holds no secret key to the patient's unhappiness, but this posturing rhetoric belies any such disavowal. "*Prendre plaisir écrire*" is Bhabha's implicit injunction to the reader, as he shifts within a single chapter from Mozart to time travel, hysteria to Hinduism, Marx to Marlboro ads, while managing somehow to sustain a coherent argument. In the process, form and content are subtly at variance. The mercurial sparkle of his work is at odds with its bleak, mechanically recurrent content, for which "l'espace de la jouissance . . . , la possibilité d'une dialectique du désir, d'une *imprévision* de la jouissance," in the Real, is where we encounter the least delectable truths of all (Barthes, *Plaisir* 10–11). The felicitous upshot is that the striking feature of Bhabha's use of popular culture is its lack of coyness. Unlike his wilfully hermetic Parisian *maître* (Lacan) or *maîtresse* (Kristeva), his writing is splendidly crisp and lucid, even if his books and essays can be fearsomely difficult. The difficulties belong to the ideas, not to the expression as Parry, Dirlík, Moore-Gilbert, E. San Juan, Jr., Young, and others contend, a distinction between signified and signifier at which the wilder kind of poststructuralist would doubtless balk. There is no sense that he is strenuously popularizing—or of some contrived postmodern pastiche; soap operas, and Disney cartoons are just part of his intellectual furniture, objects of his promiscuous inquiries as familiar as God, Morrison, Forster, consumerism, or high fashion. His style is deep and light simultaneously, shot through with an intense cultural seriousness but never at all portentous. His prose resonates with the feel of a markedly idiosyncratic personality, but is curiously

without self-display. The fact that he is so compulsively obsessional about both Lacan and Fanon is a kind of tacit running joke, something so embarrassingly obtrusive that it would be boring for either author or reader even to mention it. The following example captures something of his characteristic style:

The erasure of content in the invisible but insistent structure of linguistic difference does not lead us to some general, formal acknowledgment of the function of the sign. 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. It suggests that social significations are themselves being constituted in the very act of enunciation, in the disjunctive, non-equivalent split of *énoncé* and *enunciation*, thereby undermining the division of social meaning into an inside and outside. (*Nation* 164)

This is not a parody, but Bhabha's own words. There are much odder passages to be found in his work. The problem with a polymath theorist like Bhabha is that he is apt to forge a dozen links or "diagonal moves," in Jameson's formula, for every step of the way on which any single reader could vouch for his competence. One follows three or four of these moves, raises an eyebrow about one or two, and wonders if the doubts really matter.

So it is with something like relief that one turns to a Bhabha exegesis that is not a rhapsody on a theme some people have used and some have not, and not a collage of quotations from disparate works that no one else has cited along quite his tangent, but a meditation on an experience common enough to be shared by almost everyone. Here is an explanation, in "On the Irremovable Strangeness of Being Different," of the constantly changing duality of the postcolonial "I":

As a postcolonial native who learned his morals in an Indian bazaar and picked up literature in what some (too hastily) consider an English gentleman's club (Oxford), I see the relation between bazaar and club as more agonistic and ambivalent. Between them lies the anxious passage—"over-

lap without equivalence: *fort:da*”—to be traversed in the search for truth residing in the encounter between the ontological cultural impulse and the memory of the displacements that make national cultures possible. (36)

It is an ingenious finding and wholly compatible with a premise of lesser postmodernist and/or postcolonialist theorists—the universal substitution of representation of reality, of montage for narrative and sample of whole. The truth is that Bhabha's resources are vast and confusing even to his most staunch partisans. In a sense, he has become a theorist so prolific of suggestions and so abortive of distinctions as almost to defeat commentary. His mind is a first-rate reservoir, always freshly stocked with ideas, with an unfaked erudition drawn from French and Indian sources as well as English—full of reminders, on-the-run paraphrases, speculations or *aperçus*, which are tantalizing in exact proportion to their ambiguous pertinence.

We may want to put the argument differently by saying that what one ought rather to admire in Bhabha is the cultural skill with which he wages his particular discursive struggle against typecasting of any kind, and sees that a fundamental strategic intervention is available in consolidating the role played by the great revolution led by women and minorities in the Western *imaginaire*. It is an astute and ideological gambit. His works juxtapose possibilities, without concluding. In a world that has always been interconnected but is now swept up and partitioned by even more powerful technoeconomic forces, how will people give shape to their communities? Will differences be negotiated through intricate relational networks or measured against rigid templates of development and nationhood? Bhabha's pessimism of the intellect inclines him to the latter possibility, his optimism of the will keeps the former alive. His own work is evidence, perhaps, that the traditions of tolerance and diversity he celebrates can be reclaimed. It is a worthy quest that aims at giving us lots of (already shaped) history and culture, and subjecting that history and culture to acts of shaping that are most characteristically his own. The deep fantasy lies not in the phantom or the terror or the happiness but in the diction and rhythms of the

sentences. Living to tell the tale by some other way means turning life into cadences. The shit of colonialism has its malodorous day, but the site of memory is never soiled.

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Notes

1. I owe a great debt to all those who influenced the writing of this essay, either directly or indirectly. They include Terry Eagleton, Slavoj Žižek, Fredric Jameson, and Homi Bhabha himself. My heartfelt thanks go to all of them for helping me formulate some of the issues I deal with. I also want to thank Patrick McGee and Fran Devlin, dear friends and sharp commentators, for reading the essay in its entirety. Their remarks untangled many of its plaits.

2. Behram Contractor was one of the popular figures in Indian journalism. The father of a column he called "Eating Out," he died in 2001 from a heart attack. He was awarded the Padma Shri in 1990, and the Goenka Award for Excellence in journalism in 1996. In 1998, he published *From Bombay to Mumbai*, a collection of the best of Busybee's columns from 1996 and 1997. For more on the subject, see Mehta 45–46.

3. D.F. Karaka writes, "Descended originally from an enterprising, courageous, industrious and self-sacrificing people, who at one time were masters of a great empire, they did not absolutely lose those characteristic qualities of their race, although adverse circumstances forced upon them a life of inactivity for more than 1000 years. The old fire of their ancestors continued to burn, however faintly, in their breasts, and it only required at least encouragement to revive. . . . It will thus be seen that the Parsis were the first to bring prosperity to Bombay, which prosperity, as times went on, supported and fostered by British power and the enterprise of British merchants, has raised Bombay at this day to the proud position of second city of the British Empire" (243; 245–46). The "first city" in the British Empire was London.

4. See Mehta 56.

5. The point is made many times by Mistry, notably in *Family Matters*. One example is on page 56.

6. For a compelling ethnography of one of the world's most industrious communities, see Luhrmann's *The Good Parsi*, which gives emotional density and psychological weight to the term "postcolonial subject" in a way seldom seen.

7. For another no less impressive novelist who deals with Parsi family matters, see Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*, a novel that tells in a polyphonic way of the many voices one finds in India.

8. Wilde's origin, as Lady Bracknell remarks of Jack Worthing in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, is a kind of terminus; he was born into a dying breed (359).

9. See *Location* 87; "Representation" 114–19.

10. The Berbers are a good example of what I have in mind.

11. It is perhaps at this juncture that we can appreciate Aijaz Ahmad's *In Theory* as a salutary polemical intervention, clarifying in its exposition of the historical background the ambiguities and ironies of the new counterhegemonic trend. Problematizing the ethos of its adherents, Ahmad attacks the poststructuralist skepticism of postcolonial theorists like Bhabha, their avant-gardist stance of irony, and their rhetoric of migrancy.

12. For a discussion of this, see Eagleton, *Figures* 159. I owe a great debt to Eagleton in the formulation of some of the ideas I develop in this section.

13. For examples of criticism, see Moore-Gilbert, "Homi"; Parry; Young 141–57.

14. Bhabha treats this question in *Location* 34–66.

15. Under the rubric of "suture," this basic notion of the viewing subject's being himself presupposed by the structure of the visual work of art has emerged as perhaps the dominant concept of contemporary film theory. Influenced by Jacques-Alain Miller more directly than by Lacan, Stephen Heath sketches the key concept as follows: "The major emphasis in all this is that the articulation of the signifying chain of images, the chain of images as signifying, works not from image to image but from image to image through the absence that the [viewing] subject constitutes" (58).

16. In Lacan's psychoanalysis, the Other is the site in which the subject finds confirmation; the Other's response of recognition establishes the location of the "I." Echoing Hegel, Lacan states that the discourse of the Other is ascribed to the unconscious "in order to indicate the beyond in which the recognition of desire is bound up with the desire of recognition. . . . This other is the Other that even my lie invokes as a guarantor of the truth in which it subsists" (*Ecrits* 172). In a symptomatic reading, we grasp the Other as "the locus from which the question of [the subject's] existence may be presented" (194). Acquisition of language by the child, in Lacan's epistemology, leads to its separation from the undifferentiated world of objects and precipitates the discovery that desired objects are not gone (*fort*) but have only gone somewhere else

(*da*)—as per Freud's commentary on the *fort/da* game in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Of enormous significance to the subject are Lacan, *Écrits*; Hegel; and Freud, *Reader*. For an excellent overview, see Žižek, *Tarrying*.

17. There is, of course, a vast literature on this. Barthes has studied this problem, especially with regard to the nature and practice of language. See *New* 56–59.

18. That Bhabha should refer to Islam as "Mohammedan" smacks of ignorance, not to say fear.

19. The colony club, according to Howe, includes Gayatri Spivak, Robert Young, and of course Homi Bhabha among others. They are the Gurus of postcolonial theory and practice.

20. "Consider the Balkans," Žižek writes. "They are portrayed in the liberal Western media as a vortex of ethnic passion—a multiculturalist dream turned into a nightmare. The standard reaction of a Slovene (I am one myself) is to say: 'yes, this is how it is in the Balkans, but Slovenia is not part of the Balkans; it is part of Mittleuropa; the Balkans begin in Croatia or in Bosnia; we Slovenes are the last bulwark of European civilization against the Balkan madness.' If you ask, 'Where do the Balkans begin? You will always be told that they begin *down there*, towards the south-east. For Serbs, they begin in Kosovo or Bosnia where Serbia is trying to defend civilized Christian Europe against the encroachments of this Other. For Croats, the Balkans begin in Orthodox, despotic and Byzantine Serbia, against which Croatia safeguards Western democratic values. For many Italians and Austrians, they begin in Slovenia, the Western outposts of the Slavic hordes. For many Germans, Austria is tainted with Balkan corruption and inefficiency; for many Northern Germans, catholic Bavaria is not free of Balkan contamination. Many arrogant Frenchmen associate Germany with Eastern Balkan brutality—it lacks French finesse. Finally, to some British opponents of the European Union, Continental Europe is a new version of the Turkish Empire with Brussels as the new Istanbul—a voracious despotism threatening British freedom and sovereignty" ("You May!" 3). This view may well be related to the fact that, having served and being active in the upper reaches of the government, Žižek is "responsible" within the political calculus in ways that few academic cultural critics can be.

21. When it uses the Lacanian explanatory model to understand the law, its consequences and its scope, Žižek's work remains an exception to the hermeneutic circle described in the text. See *Tarrying*.

22. In the discussion of Lacan and Schopenhauer that follows, I am much indebted to Eagleton, *Figures* 56–89. See also, Žižek, *Parallax*, chapter 3 in particular.

23. For the most lucid discussion of this point, see Eagleton, "Subjects." For a useful influence on my work, I cite not only Eagleton and Said but also Bhabha himself.

24. For the attack on Said, see Ahmad, *Theory* 34–76.

25. As witnessed by the torment in Kosovo. See Kadare.

26. In this context, I refer the reader to Freud, *Beyond* and Žižek, *Sublime* 123–30. If Freud set the tone for institutionalizing the reading of narrative as ethical instantiation, Žižek's use of Lacan offers readings of narrative as political instantiation, minimizing the usual problem of reading plot summary as unmediated representation of the psychoanalytic morphology.

27. For a perspicacious study of Lacan's trinity, see Lee.

28. This notion is explored with extraordinary subtlety in Eagleton, *Figures* 56–78.

29. For an interesting, eccentric view of this argument, see Eagleton, *Figures* 78–80.

30. "On n'est pas ici dans la perversion, mais dans la demande" (Barthes, *Plaisir* 12).

31. I owe this concept to Žižek and Daly (78).

32. See Eagleton, *Figures* 111–45; Žižek, *Parallax* 34–66. In my discussion, I have relied heavily on Eagleton's thesis. He has my gratitude.

33. In the Freudian paradigm proper, the fetish is actually a metonymic displacement: the fixation on an object that was once strongly desired (the mother's penis) is transferred to a "reverence for a woman's foot or shoe" (Freud, *Reader* 461). The fetish here is a substitute that simultaneously affirms castration (what is absent) and disavows it. See Freud, *Psychopathology* 239–79. For an important contemporary appraisal of psychoanalysis along these lines, see Grünbaum, who predictably dismisses Lacan's work without addressing Lacan's real interest in rethinking the nature of science (65).

34. That call is often given in the name of a critique of "positivism," which is seen here as identical with "essentialism." Yet, for Hegel, the modern inauguration of "the work of the negative," was not a stranger to the notion of essences.

35. For a view of this argument, see Eagleton, *Criticism* 23–50.

36. This is an eccentric, if interesting, interpretation.

37. The "Four Views on Ethnicity" (*PMLA* Jan. 1998) are dismissed as "ethnicity lite," to use a phrase from Vincent Cheng. Gilman writes that they (Linda Hutcheon, Daniel Boyarin, Sabine I. Götz) are indeed "'ethnicity light': too white, too European and therefore not quite ethnic enough" (19). Linda Hutcheon may have been "ethnic" once, but no longer. She is as

"white" as they come. Today, she writes out of egocentricity and a guilty conscience since she stood up for the cause of ethnicity only late in life.

38. See Godard, *Godard* 23; Goebbels 21.

39. The whole of *Out There* is taken up with this problematic (West).

40. This is a key point in Žižek's argument, made emphatically in *Parallax* 46–50.

41. See Heusch 45–47.

42. For a brilliant account of how dictators are blinded by their own insights, see Márquez.

43. See Friedman; Marrouchi.

44. A reproduction of these stamps figures in Bhabha, "Designer" 12.

45. Adapted from San Juan 19. He thinks Bhabha's approach reduces the social to the semiotic: "Postcolonial theory acquires its most doctrinaire instigator in Homi Bhabha" (25).

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