

Foreign Literary Studies and the Identity of the Postcolonial Subject¹

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At this most crucial time in our history which is marked by American hegemony in all arenas the moment has come for Arab universities and schools to rethink their bias in favor of English and American literature. With the constant onslaught of a globalized Western economic, educational, cultural and political hegemony, Arab identity and culture are in great danger of being placed under complete erasure. Indeed, Joseph Conrad predicted this twenty-first century fact of American hegemony in his fiction about a hundred years ago in *Nostromo* when the American industrialist Holyroyd announces:

We shall be giving the word for everything: industry, trade, law, journalism, art, politics, and religion . . . if anything worth taking hold of turns up at the North Pole. And then we shall have the leisure to take in hand the outlying islands and continents of the earth.

We shall run the world's business whether the world likes it or not. (94–95)

How painfully true these words resonate today. The global stage has been set for America to play its role, made seemingly inevitable as a result of its being the sole superpower in the world today.

The dangerous impact of globalization lies in its silent effect, penetrating any given society's institutions in such a subtle way as to become "natural." The difference between colonialism and globalization lies in the latter's lack of an openly confrontational stance. It pervades a society's dress codes, eating habits, language, music and many other forms of culture. Acceptance of Western and specifically American ideas and values becomes a matter of consent or "common sense" reality (Gramsci 423). Therefore, neutralizing the confrontational relationship between

the colonizer and colonized becomes the key equation in colonizing the minds of people. The most effective way to achieve a colonization of the mind is through education.

One should not overlook a very important historical fact: there is a clear link between colonial domination and the emphasis on teaching English literature as prescribed by British colonial policies. By means of education, colonial administrators hoped to encourage obedience by consent. Gauri Viswanathan gives us a case in point in her essay “The Beginnings of English Literary Study in British India.” Failing to secure the obedience of Indians by spreading the “authority of God” according to the teachings of the English missionaries, the British turned to advocating English moral law by means of the Charter Act of 1813 which allocated funds for the “survival and improvement of literature, and the encouragement of the learned natives of India” (qtd. in Viswanathan 432). Viswanathan provides further evidence of this close link between politics and literature, and specifically the importance of English and Western literatures and philosophies in maintaining colonial control. The “Parliamentary Papers” of 1852–1853 indicate that British material interests can be promoted “through representations of Western literary knowledge as objective, universal, and rational” (Viswanathan 434–435). Finding a strong “ally in English literature” (Viswanathan 434) to keep the Indian natives under “psychological” control, the British masters carefully selected English texts that would have a pacifying effect upon the Indian population and at the same time promote the values they wished to instill within the “inferior” colonized peoples. One of the most important goals, then, is to teach the natives about the noble, moral and democratic values of Western culture and history. Interestingly enough, these texts included Shakespeare by means of which “sound Protestant Bible principles” would be promoted, Addison’s *Spectator* papers would spread “serious piety,” Bacon and Locke would encourage “scriptural morality” and “noble Christian sentiments” would be promoted by Adam Smith’s *Moral Sentiments* (Viswanathan 435). Texts which might possibly elicit any form of resistance or dissent amongst the natives would be excluded for obvious reasons. Such education programs had the effect of softening the harsh contours of colonial author-

ity, supposedly erasing the image of the Englishman “as subjugator and alien ruler” (Viswanathan 437) and emphasizing his civilized, rational, moral and philosophical being.

A return to the historical archive reveals a telling example of British education policies in India in a famous speech by Lord Macaulay:

It may safely be said, that the literature now extant in that language [English] is of far greater value than all the literature which three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages of the world together. . . . the English tongue is that which would be the most useful to our native subjects. (428–429)

Not only is English literature of greater value than the literatures of other peoples, but any difference in the knowledges of other civilizations is, in the words of Macaulay, “for the worse” and the introduction of English curricula would result in “prejudices overthrown . . . knowledge diffused . . . taste purified . . . arts and sciences planted in countries which had recently been ignorant and barbarous” (429). Macaulay did not believe that the cultures and literatures of India would be suitable: “I doubt whether the Sanskrit literature be as valuable as that of our Saxon and Norman progenitors” (429). While these words may sound as if they belong to a dead colonial past, they are actually very much alive in the postcolonial policies of our present day.

I should like to point out here that my discussion of English literary studies most accurately describes the situation of English departments in former British colonies, and even more specifically in Arab countries such as Jordan and Egypt. It is quite ironic, in fact, that English studies programs in England and North America are increasingly moving in the direction of cultural studies and are becoming progressively less exclusive with reference to the English literary canon as discussed in Robert Con Davis’ and Ronald Schleifer’s book *Criticism and Culture* (222), while English departments at Middle Eastern universities (remnants of a colonial past) still thrive on their strictly exclusive English and American literature curricula in the same way the Leavisite tradition dominated (and in some cases still dominates) English literature departments in England in the mid-twentieth century (Eagleton 31). The rise of English studies

as described by Terry Eagleton in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is deeply entwined with the “era of high imperialism” in England (28), that is, with a time when the Englishman could be proud of his “essential Englishness,” a fact that makes this emphasis on the *Englishness* of the literary canon all the more questionable in former British colonies that have supposedly entered a “postcolonial” stage.

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin rightly point out that education is “perhaps the most insidious and in some ways the most cryptic of colonialist survivals, older systems now passing sometimes imperceptibly, into neo-colonialist configurations” (*The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* 425). It would be of some benefit here to try to understand what postcolonialism is before we proceed. According to John Docker, postcolonialism is “the imposition of the metropolitan power’s dominant cultural values” (445). Philip G.A. Altbach gives a more measured definition using the word “impact” instead of imposition. Altbach’s definition is in itself interesting: “the impact of advanced nations on developing areas, in this case with special reference to their educational systems and intellectual life” (452). It is obvious that this definition carries with it a tone of inevitability which almost justifies the “impact” of the “advanced” over the still “developing,” making it sound like a natural development. Altbach goes on to give a practical example of this foreign cultural “impact” which includes the distribution of foreign textbooks in schools, the use of foreign technical advisors, curriculum, administration models and expatriate teachers in secondary schools and universities. Expatriate teachers, as Altbach believes, regardless of their sympathetic opinions “cannot but include Western values and views in the schools” (452–453).

In fact, the orientation of education in most postcolonial nations nowadays, Jordan being one example, is Anglo-centric. The names of Jordan’s most prestigious private schools testify to this fact: New English School, Modern American School, Cambridge, Oxford, and so on. Our universities are equally metropolitan-oriented in their literature curricula. In order to be “respectable” and “distinguished,” a rigorous American and English literary canon is religiously followed. Our literature departments dwell upon the origins of English and American history, values, and democracy as background information to the “valuable” literatures

of these civilizations. Not only do we have English literature departments (to the exclusion of any other kind of literature department at some private Jordanian universities) at the B.A. level, but also American studies departments at the M.A. level. Many professors reject prospective theses and dissertations based on their assumption that the chosen topics do not deal with the literary canon, by which they mean literature from England. A quick glimpse at some course descriptions of the literary studies program at a private Jordanian university provides a good example of this Anglocentricism. Of the sixteen literature courses described as part of its literature program, only two do not claim to trace the origins of English or American literature or to analyze the modern developments of these core literatures. One of these two courses is "World Literature in English," which, ironically, emphasizes the literature of the European culture with names like Flaubert, Proust, Camus, Pirandello, and Chekhov making up most of its syllabus. The description of the second course "Comparative Literature" almost defensively states that "the focus is on Arabic and English literature in modern times" (Al Zaytoonah 13).

Arab universities, in general, are lagging behind educational institutions in different parts of the world which have strong departments in post-colonial studies and world literature in English. The shift nowadays, as Stephanie Newell points out, is "away from the belief in a nation-centred 'canon' of literature" (754), a logical change especially at a time when Anglo-American culture is drowning other voices, cultures and identities, not only by means of neo-colonial globalization, but also through old-style direct colonial control as we are witnessing today in the Arab world. Can we afford to participate in the indoctrination process and therefore finalize the complete erasure of Arab history and identity? Should we make good on Thomas Macaulay's proposition on Indian education during the period of the colonization of India: that what is needed is "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (430)? A rather important point to keep in mind is, as Viswanathan concludes in "The Beginnings of English Literary Study in British India," is "the fact that English literary study had its beginnings as a strategy of containment" (437).

Our English Departments have become such a natural part of our education systems that certain ideological thought patterns are to many undisputable truths about literature, especially those issues concerning “universal” texts, readings and interpretations. In “Ideology in the Classroom,” Mukherjee describes how her Canadian university students were able successfully to ignore her political interpretation of Margaret Laurence’s short story “The Perfume Sea” and to generalize their readings of this story, emphasizing human emotions which made it possible for them to “efface the differences between British bureaucrats and British traders, between colonizing whites and colonized blacks, and between rich blacks and poor blacks” (449). Universalizing the interpretation of a text of this nature, which Mukherjee believes is very clearly about the economic and cultural domination of “Third World” countries by colonial regimes, serves the purpose of “erasing the ambiguities and the unpleasant truths that lie in the crevices” (450). Instead of dealing directly with the political realities of the short story, Mukherjee’s students used “rhetorical subterfuges,” such as “the anxiety and hope of humanity,” “the universal we,” “the human condition,” “the plight of modern man,” and “absurd man” (450). This kind of “universal” vocabulary has the effect of flushing out historical, cultural and social conflict, leaving us with the “feelings and experiences of individual characters” (450). These kinds of readings, argues Mukherjee, are ideological at the core, and the origin of this ideology is obviously the metropolitan West.

I experienced a similar disappointment with my Jordanian university students in my “World Literature” course. Two of the novels on the syllabus, *The Outsider* by Albert Camus and *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, were considered with reference to their existential and postcolonial philosophies respectively. Although I presented my students with a reading suggesting the lack of feasibility of the Western model as represented by Camus’ existentialist hero Meursault, they displayed an avid interest in his indifferent, sensuous existence in sharp contrast to their rather cool reception of Achebe’s novel. I gave my students what I thought to be a useful postcolonial background to the second novel and asked them to pay careful attention to Achebe’s presentation of the demise of traditional African culture as a result of

colonialism and to apply what they have learned to their own post-colonial situations.

Although it was obvious that my students had more to share with the plight of Okonkwo's dying African society than they did with Meursault's sensual existential world, many found Meursault's "familiar" world to be more comprehensible than Okonkwo's "strange" African world. Ironically, they did not view the "killing of the Arab" in the novel as having any political overtones whatsoever (one student even said the man Meursault killed was an Arab is of no significance). Some even accepted the justification that Meursault gave for killing the Arab. When asked to consider why the Arab characters in the novel were unnamed, they responded that the focus should be on Meursault's feelings, emotions, actions and reactions. Some students were unwilling to see how Camus' treatment of Arab characters is an intentional marginalization of Arabs and Algeria as a whole, and the parallel foregrounding of a European man's feelings which they, ironically, understood. Any attempt at a subversive reading of the novel on my part was neutralized in the students' essays which concentrated on Meursault's feelings. Most students wrote about how Meursault deserves our sympathy because he is an honest man in an "absurd universe."

This view of literature is, as I believe, due to their literary training which lays great emphasis on a rigid program of classical English literature where traditional novels such as *Jane Eyre* are still preferred reading, to the total exclusion of other kinds of literatures and voices. Therefore, a sudden introduction of a socio-political dimension where it does not belong (as the students believed) comes up against their "universalistic" conceptions of people and places in literature. Differences between people seem to dissolve easily, allowing Arab students in Jordan, not only to sympathize with Meursault's existential world, but to be more familiar with it than they are with the conflictual world of the almost non-existent Arabs in the background. And why not? These students may, in fact, be more familiar with Western culture which they see on their televisions and in the cinemas, hear on their radios, explore on the internet, buy in their supermarkets, and study at their universities. This cultural, economic, and educational onslaught of Western and es-

pecially American postcolonialism has the effect of making Arabs outsiders to their own identities, cultures and histories. If we try to better understand our “global” world, it should not come as a surprise when a student reading Achebe’s novel says, “so what? Okonkwo kills himself, what does that mean?” The implications of the student’s comments, however, is of great significance. It means that Arab students are becoming ideologically blinded and stripped of their identities by Western-perpetuated universalistic arguments which are dangerously mimicked by assimilated “natives.”

A great disparity is created between curriculum and reality, especially at times of great sensitivity and conflict when events force themselves into the lecture halls of our universities’ English Departments where only Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, Hemingway and other canonized authors are allowed to reside. The teacher and student are torn by a curriculum which becomes irrelevant and inadequate because it forces them into roles that do not belong to their history and culture. They move in a space of ambivalence and neutrality. Traditional pedagogy holds that “proper” literary education entails training students to think in “universalistic” terms, which means they are not to be affiliated or connected in any way with the extremely important events which are unfolding around them. We expect our students to close their eyes to the political realities of the world they inhabit by forcing them to negotiate an understanding of life (supposedly a “universal” one) from inside the confines of a Western text ultimately to distance them from their Arab identities, which must be placed under erasure if they are to properly mimic Western readings, culture and values in order to “safely” navigate their way ashore. The only way the Arab student can swim in such stormy seas is by disposing of an Arab identity and taking on a Western identity which is more suitable for such waters.

Why are Western concerns “universal” and postcolonial concerns of identity, culture, history, and so on parochial? Chinua Achebe’s important essay “Colonialist Criticism” addresses the problem of universality. Achebe points out that pressure is placed on non-Western writers to achieve the quality of “universality” in their work which presumably already informs the work of a Western writer. Therefore, in order to

achieve “excellence,” the non-Western writer, critic, scholar must adopt Western assumptions in order to be recognized. Achebe provides an example of what he terms “colonialist criticism” in this review by Philip M. Allen of Yambo Ouloguem’s *Bound to Violence*:

[. . .] He gives us an Africa cured of the pathetic obsession with racial and cultural confrontation and freed from invidious tradition-mongering [. . .] His book knows no easy antithesis between white and black, western and indigenous, modern and traditional. Its conflicts are those of the universe, not accidents of history [. . .] Ouologuem does not accept Fanon’s idea of liberation, and he calls African unity a theory of dreamers. (275)

According to Allen, in order to reach the realm of the “universal” one would have to disregard culture, tradition, race and identity because these are mere “accidents of history.” One must try to overcome these petty concerns, such as the differences between white and black and Western and native. Allen and many other Western critics would have us believe that we should be more sophisticated and intellectual in our literatures and critical writings and rise above such petty parochial interests and concern ourselves with the conflicts of the universe (what those may be are rather obscure here). Words like Fanon’s “liberation” and African or Arab unity are for dreamers and such topics should not have a place in literature which aspires to be universal. For how would a Western reader, for example, relate to the parochial concern of a Palestinian homeland or African unity? But how non-Western readers could relate to Camus’ Meursault, Hemingway’s indifferent characters, the postmodernism of Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* is a question that is not worthy of consideration because these Western concerns are “universal.” In any case the education systems and literature education programs at universities in many postcolonial nations are making it easier for students to relate to this brand of universality by inculcating Western values and history to the point of making these foreign values more familiar than the students’ own culture.

It is important to underscore that Allen’s critical views are not outdated (being about thirty years old now), but are very much alive in

what can be called modern day postcolonialist criticism. Paul Cantor's essay, ironically entitled "A Welcome for Postcolonial Literature," is a good example of similar assumptions. Strangely enough, Cantor, posing as a champion of postcolonial literature and criticism, seems to be concerned about the sorry state of postcolonial scholarship. Cantor misleadingly writes, "it is hard not to form the impression that many critics are turning to non-Western literature just to get away from Western" (22). This line of thinking assumes that an interest in non-Western cultures can have no motivation other than to "get away from Western." He goes on to say that "this brand of scholarship often seems linked to politically correct developments in the curriculum, such as the imposition of non-Western culture requirements at colleges and universities" (22). It is interesting here to note how "non-Western culture" is described as an "imposition," suggesting that it is something unacceptable because it is unnatural. Cantor then takes an accusatory stance saying that postcolonial scholarship has turned into "a branch of Oppression Studies, the dominant mode of radical academics today" (23). Scholars who analyze Western colonial exploitation of the "Third World" in postcolonial literature are labeled "radical academics," with "a simple and single-minded anti-Western view" (23). However, Cantor can overlook such "problems" in postcolonial criticism because, as he goes on to argue, "[postcolonialism] does not have to be automatically and unthinkingly anti-Western. And just because the majority of practitioners in the field are currently misguided does not mean that the field itself is illegitimate" (24).

This is an interesting statement to say the least, since it labels illegitimate any critic who attacks the West for its blind quest for power and wealth, in the words of Conrad, in those "outlying islands and continents of the earth" (94). Any attempt to highlight such exploitation is, according to Cantor, "anti-Western" and therefore "unthinking." In order to win the confidence of the postcolonial audience, he praises Salman Rushdie, for example, whose writings "demonstrate a complex understanding of how Western culture has contributed to non-Western" (26). The encounters between East and West in Rushdie's fiction create a "hybrid culture" which is "richer and more complex than any one

nation could have produced on its own” (26). To these neo-colonialist critics, a postcolonial writer who appreciates the West is more legitimate and distinguished than one who attacks it.

Chinua Achebe is praised by Cantor for his indictment of the “corruption and cynicism of dictatorial governments in Africa” and his lack of “condemnation of Western culture” in his novel *Anthills of the Savannah* (26). This simplistic attitude of a Western criticism towards the non-Western world is both misguided and misinformed. Cantor overlooks the fact that the corrupt dictatorial regime in “Kangan,” indicted by Achebe, is Western-trained and Western-installed. Kangan’s government, a symbol of postcolonial dependency and incompetence, is simply an extension of the colonial system, which pulled out without *really* pulling out. Achebe understands that postcolonial nations like Kangan do not have true independence. He rightly criticizes these colonially-installed regimes that represent nothing more than white souls in black masks, if I may alter Fanon’s phrase a little.

The struggle for an identity free of colonial control entails a deep understanding of the postcolonial situation. The president of Kangan is British-trained and is protected by the West, and in turn, protects and promotes Western interests. Although the historical era is postcolonial, Kangan, like many postcolonial nations today, is not decolonized. Cantor, in fact, reflects the Western project of turning the non-Westerner into a Westerner with the first step being to make the postcolonial subject “appreciate the value of Western culture” (28).

Perhaps a look at an example of the “universalizing” trend in criticism by Arab scholars will highlight the dangers of this tendency in scholarship in the Arab world. In a book review of *Returning to Haifa and Other Stories*, a collection of selected stories by Ghassan Kanafani translated by Barbara Harlow and Karen Riley, Saad A. Al-Bazei underscores the importance of this book on “universal and artistic levels.” Al-Bazei writes:

. . . for him [Kanafani], Palestine changed from a cause in itself into a symbol for all misery in the world. It is a movement from the narrowly realistic to the universally symbolic that one finds

also in the work of the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish.
(186)

Al-Bazei's words have the effect of erasing specific histories and diffusing concrete identities by trivializing the Palestinian cause as a "narrowly realistic" concern. A good writer, Al-Bazei seems to be suggesting, should be able to move away from narrow parochial concerns by highlighting common humanity. Instead of dwelling upon what Al-Bazei claims to be the limited and narrow interest of Palestinian identity, Kanafani's "Returning to Haifa" supposedly raises us to more significant "philosophical questions," such as the "identity of man" (186).

According to such argumentation, the Palestinian people's continuing struggle becomes a petty concern compared with more important philosophical issues which impact "man" in general. Therefore, as Al Bazei suggests, a distinguished scholar finds value in the universal, not in the local. Al Bazei is impressed by Kanafani's "generous imagination, which remained fair despite an overpowering love for a seized homeland and a suffering nation" (187). Of course, in order to be *fair*, according to Al Bazei, one would have to present a "human image of the Jew in Arabic Literature" (186). This means that the Arab writer needs to be more "objective" in his literature, which ironically can only record the subjective experience of man. Instead of telling an Arab story, the Arab writer should aspire to tell a more objective universal tale. The "universalizing trend" of which Al Bazei is fond has the effect of de-emphasizing any "immediate political or humane circumstances" which we should supposedly "go[. . .] beyond" (186).

But if the immediate concern of Palestine is not the issue, of what significance is a universe in which the Arab does not have a place or a role to play? It is Henry David Thoreau who said that "there is no such thing as pure objective observation. Your observation to be interesting i.e. to be significant must be subjective. . . . [one should] tell the soul of his love" (142). The danger of Western criticism is in its influence on Arab critics who mimic and repeat a Western refrain in imitation of that mighty orchestra in which a hybrid voice is easily drowned in a vast sea of the dominant.

The point to be raised here is whether or not hybridity is the appropriate stance to take in the postcolonial situation. The hybrid's attempt at negotiating an identity while entrapped in an imbalanced relationship of colonizer/colonized or "globalizer/globalized" becomes an ambivalent process at best. Homi Bhabha's proposition of discovering a hybrid identity in the "in-between" space, which he believes can be a space of resistance to colonial control, (*Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* 119) is flawed since this relationship is, at the core, imbalanced and the only way the mimic man can survive is by taking on the identity of the superior, not in mockery as Bhabha hopes, but in imperfect and inferior mimicry.

Some critics, in fact, feel that postcolonialism has "suffered serious ideological reverses" (Williams 821) due to a belief in hybridization as a strategy for survival in the wake of globalization. Adebayo Williams believes that post-colonialism should redirect its efforts "against the hegemonic ideology of our time: the phenomenon variously known as late capitalism, globalism and their 'end of history' mutations" (822). The champions of hybridity represent a new class of exiled intellectuals who, in the words of Williams, engage themselves in a "dialogue of elegant futility" which has the effect of emphasizing the identity crisis because these intellectuals belong neither to their homelands nor to their adoptive countries. They are rather imprisoned in a "volcanic crucible of postmodernist alienation, of existential longing and not belonging" (Williams 828). In this hybridized understanding of a globalized world, differences between people are "liquidated" and the heterogeneous world becomes "homogenized" (Williams 829).

Since one of the main tenets of hybridization is that the mimic becomes Anglicized or Americanized, it is obvious that the main benefactor of these homogenizing projects is the hegemonic culture. Anwar Majid also argues that hybridity is an inadequate concept for the postcolonial subject. In an essay entitled, "The Failure of Postcolonial Theory After 9/11," he suggests that September 11 proves there cannot be a successful "blending of populations and economies, and the dissolution of cultural and religious identities" (B11). In a world where people are denied their identities and lands while others dominate and oppress

other nations, “national and cultural mixings” do not represent liberation but a “serious global problem” (B11). Majid rightly argues that instead of parroting the Western-generated praises of hybridity and globalization, postcolonial critics should focus on how globalization denies many peoples’ quest for true liberation (B12). Policies undertaken in the name of globalization seem to be geared towards erasing and uprooting the most essential beliefs of the “Other.” Successful cross-cultural exchange can only take place, not as Bhabha claims, in an “in-between” space but in an independent one which will allow the post-colonial subject to develop a unique culture and identity or, as Majid believes, “good will among cultures” can flower if and when the colonized and formerly colonized “are securely in place” (B12).

What, then, is the aim behind Departments of English and American studies’ centers? Why must Arab academics concern themselves with American studies? Philip G. Altbach, writing about similar projects in India, believes that such programs which have “no basic relevance to India’s modernization” aim at “produc[ing] over the long run a group of Indian professors favorable to the American cause, and perhaps professionally tied to it” (456). The carriers of this “global” culture are, in most cases, natives. Jacob Fuchs, quoting Kwame Anthony Appiah, calls such natives “comprador intelligentsia,” those who are “indoctrinated in the culture of the colonizing power, particularly in the portable form of its literature” (30).

What is being asked of us now, or rather forced upon us, is to neutralize, de-politicize, hybridize and globalize. In a demonstration in Amman before the Anglo-American war on Iraq, a protester’s slogan of “This war is unjust!” was reported in a Jordanian daily as “War is unjust!” The point is to blur boundaries, mix identities, erase histories and pretend to share a common cause with all of humanity in a globalized world, which can only speak one language. The great danger here is that in this “global” world, which is really a macrocosm of America, de Crevecoeur’s melting pot theory is successfully at play because rather than sharing and exchanging ideas and cultures on equal terms, *we melt into them*. The endgame, then, is that we become one culture, one history serving a broad common interest, the American interest.

Thus the emphasis on the Western text taught in the classical British and American traditions cannot be a fruitful endeavor at Arab universities in the wake of globalization. The text cannot be extricated from its context since it is *more* than a “verbal icon.” Our professors need to concentrate their efforts on interrogating the Western text and encouraging their students to understand what these texts say between the lines. Concentration on a “canonized” Anglo-American literary tradition is detrimental to any effort aimed at forging a true understanding of Arab identity.

Paying lip service to postcolonial texts is a form of appropriation and has the effect of marginalizing these texts and their concerns. When studied in this fashion, the postcolonial text is not being treated as serious literature; it is given very little time in comparison to the canonized literature of the West, which supposedly deserves all of our attention. This is part of the intentional slighting process which Neil Lazarus discusses in his review of Barbara Harlow’s book *Resistance Literature*: “most departments of literature in the United States remain squarely Western-centered in their presumptions and pedagogy. To the extent that works of African or Caribbean or Southeast Asian literature are examined at all, they tend . . . to be examined in the light of appendages to the Western canon” (318). The resistance of the post-colonial text is “sanitized” and neutralized by “dominant Western critical modalities” whose main thrust is to play down “historical referencing” and emphasize the formalistic side of this verbal icon (Lazarus 320).

This is why critical theory in the colonized and oppressed world is and should be more than a mere academic activity. According to Barbara Christian, theory and literature for “people of color,” by whom she means those outside the dominant Western critical tradition, is “not an occasion for discourse among critics but is necessary nourishment for their people and one way by which they come to understand their lives better” (458). It is obvious that the concerns of “people of color” are different from those of Nick Adams, Mersault, Godot or Hamlet. Literature is not only a text, but a context, a lived experience. Concentrating on a Western canon emphasizes the idea of a Western center in which the “Other” can only inhabit the periphery. One of the main aims of a lit-

erary education should be to help our students learn about and better understand themselves and to make a place for themselves in this world. This can be successfully achieved by recognizing the truth of our predicament.

In order to counter this Western (and specifically American) hegemony which is aimed at erasing post-colonial identity, a serious rethinking of our literature programs is of the utmost necessity since it is our survival which is at stake. In place of our “English Departments” and “American Studies Departments,” why not have a “World Literature in English Department” or a “Post Colonial Literature Department”? This does not mean, however, that the Western text should be excluded from postcolonial syllabi. Western literature and critical paradigms must be analyzed, scrutinized and interrogated from the “Other’s” scope of vision. In fact, this “interrogative phase,” if I may term it such, should be viewed as a rite of passage by means of which postcolonial identity can be successfully negotiated and understood.

This most important paradigm shift can only be achieved with the acceleration of postcolonial translation studies. A changing of the guard entails intensive efforts in this direction. Translation allows for an intercultural exchange of experiences amongst postcolonial nations, thus encouraging a “calling into question the politics of canonization and moving resolutely away from ideas of universal literary greatness” (2) as Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi write in the introduction to their book *Post-Colonial Translation*. Translation, a tool that was used to spread and secure the power of the colonialist, can be used as a counterdiscourse by changing the rules of the game. It is time to loosen the grip of the Anglo-American “canon” and allow for the flow of some new educational ammunition in order to revitalize the postcolonial struggle towards a true de-colonization of the mind. In the wake of globalization, we either have so much to lose or so much to gain.

Note

- 1 This paper was presented at the APETAU (Association of Professors of English and Translation at Arab Universities) Second International Conference held in Amman, Jordan on August 26–28, 2003.

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