



A cross-cultural perspective in literary studies: Cultural hybridity, identity, and diasporic experience

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Abstract

In an increasingly globalized world, the cross-cultural perspective provides an essential framework for comprehending how cultural exchanges impact human identity, literary expression, and social experience. Literature emerges as a crucial area for exploring the difficulties of cultural interaction and transformation as civilizations become more intertwined due to migration, colonial history, and transnational exchanges. Using Homi K. Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity as well as psychological and cultural comparative models, this paper explores cross-cultural theory as an analytical tool in literary studies. The document explores how individuals and communities interpret meaning within intersecting cultural systems, particularly through literary works like Anita Desai's "Bye-Bye, Blackbird" and V.S. Naipaul's "A House for Mr. Biswas." It highlights how the protagonists navigate liminal spaces where traditional values meet modern Western influences, leading to hybrid identities that challenge static notions of belonging. Literature is portrayed as a medium to convey the psychological and emotional dimensions of cross-cultural interactions. The paper argues that cross-cultural perspectives enhance understanding of multicultural coexistence by addressing issues of power, adaptability, and resistance, thereby illuminating the complexities of cultural interaction in postcolonial and migrant literature, essential for contemporary literary research.

Keywords: Cross-cultural perspective, cultural hybridity, diaspora, identity, multiculturalism, postcolonial literature

Introduction

Cultures consist of shared constructions that emerge through social interactions among individuals inhabiting overlapping social and physical spaces. Cultural coherence, rather than being fixed, operates as an emergent property that may exist to varying degrees across different societies and historical trajectories. In literary studies, this fluidity of culture necessitates analytical frameworks capable of addressing cultural diversity, hybridity, and interaction.

The cross-cultural perspective provides such a framework by enabling comparative analysis of cultural systems, identities, and narratives. In a world shaped by globalization, where migration and cultural encounters are increasingly common, this perspective becomes particularly relevant. Literature, as a reflection of human experience, serves as a rich site for examining how individuals negotiate cultural boundaries and construct meaning across cultures.

Theoretical Framework: Cross-Cultural Thinking and Cultural Hybridity

There is no single prevailing theory governing cross-cultural comparative studies in literary comprehension. However, the cultural comparative thinking model offers a foundational basis for assumption-building. This model can be effectively integrated with psychological theories of cultural thinking systems, which emphasize how cultural environments shape cognition, values, and interpretation.

Within this context, Homi K. Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity plays a central role. Bhabha conceptualizes culture not as a fixed entity but as a dynamic process of negotiation occurring in what he terms the "third space." This space allows for the emergence of hybrid identities formed through the interaction of multiple cultural traditions. Diasporic literature frequently inhabits this space,

portraying characters who reconcile ancestral heritage with the demands of new cultural environments.

Multiculturalism and Cross-Cultural Perspectives

Multiculturalism implies the coexistence of multiple distinct cultures within a shared social space without demanding uniformity or cultural assimilation. It rejects discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, language, or race, recognizing that such practices can irreparably harm social cohesion. From a cross-cultural perspective, multicultural societies are not merely collections of diverse groups but complex systems of interaction where cultural boundaries are continuously negotiated.

In literary studies, this perspective allows scholars to critically analyze themes such as migration, exile, diaspora, and cultural hybridity. Rather than treating cultural difference as static, cross-cultural analysis foregrounds transformation, adaptation, and resistance within cultural encounters.

Cross-Cultural Perspectives in Literary Texts

V.S. Naipaul: A House for Mr. Biswas (1961)

V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas* explores the diasporic experience of Indo-Caribbean communities in Trinidad. The protagonist, Mr. Biswas, struggles with cultural displacement and the desire for individuality within a colonial and culturally hybrid society. His longing for a house symbolizes a quest for identity, autonomy, and belonging in a world shaped by borrowed traditions and imposed cultural frameworks.

As Naipaul writes

"How terrible it would have been, at this time, to be without it; to have died among all the borrowed things that

surrounded him, borrowed clothes, borrowed books, borrowed thoughts.” This passage encapsulates the psychological toll of cultural dependency and the search for selfhood within a cross-cultural environment.

Anita Desai: Bye-Bye, Blackbird (1971)

Anita Desai’s *Bye-Bye, Blackbird* examines the emotional and cultural struggles of Indian immigrants in England. The novel highlights themes of alienation, identity crisis, and the impossibility of fully belonging to either the homeland or the host country. The characters experience cultural liminality, caught between nostalgia for India and disillusionment with life in England.

Desai poignantly observes

“It was no use — neither he nor Adit could ever have a real home anywhere. India was a mirage, a myth, a lost hope. England was a prison, a stinking drain in which they were caught and held and drained.”

This depiction reinforces the cross-cultural dilemma of diaspora, where cultural belonging remains fragmented and unresolved.

Interdisciplinary Dimensions of Cross-Cultural Studies

The development of cross-cultural perspectives spans disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, postcolonial studies, and comparative literature. Cross-cultural psychology, in particular, contributes methodological rigor by examining cultural differences through experimental and field-based research. As noted by Bochner, Brislin, and Lonner (1975)

“Cross-cultural psychologists explore the various substantive areas of psychology, from various theoretical standpoints, using both experiments and survey methods, in the laboratory or in the field, with a variety of measuring instruments and devices.” This interdisciplinary foundation strengthens cross-cultural literary analysis by grounding textual interpretation in broader understandings of cultural cognition and social behavior.

Conclusion

The cross-cultural perspective is an indispensable analytical tool for understanding how cultural interactions shape identities, narratives, and social realities. Through theories such as cultural hybridity and comparative cultural thinking, scholars can uncover the complex negotiations that define diasporic and postcolonial literature. By examining texts like *A House for Mr. Biswas* and *Bye-Bye, Blackbird*, this study demonstrates how literature reflects the tensions, adaptations, and creative possibilities arising from cross-cultural encounters. In an interconnected global landscape, cross-cultural perspectives remain central to contemporary literary and cultural studies.

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