Cultural Hybridity In Waiting For The Barbarians And Season Of Migration To The North

Season of Migration to the North fully locates Mustafa and the narrator's tale in a liminal space of mediation between cultures, that denies coercive assimilation into either side of the East/West binary. Upon departing Mustafa's hidden room, the narrator says of aspect of his narrative: "I left him talking and went out. I did not let him complete the story" (166). Albeit an incomplete one, the narrator's full acknowledgement of this hybrid space surfaces as the point of origin for his own tale: the reader's portal to his revised thread of oral tradition. Like the Magistrate, Salih's narrator becomes suspended in a geographical recreation of hybrid space in the middle of the Nile, as the text performs a hermeneutical circle at the novel's denouement. "Half-way between north and south…unable to continue, unable to return", the drowning man must continue the story-telling chain in order to rationalise this dangerous, chaotic territory by coding it for the reader's perception (167). Mustafa's narrative propels the narrator into his own cultural awakening as a hybrid subject, but alone he is unable to transcend this space. The waters swirling ebb and flow between current systems and shorelines embody the narrator's plea for his listeners to scrutinise the gaps mediating between definable presences. In Saree Makdisi's analysis of the novel, she concludes that "While Mustafa Sa'eed's story is dedicated to readers who do not yet exist, Season of Migration to the North is dedicated to readers who do not yet exist" (820). Like the Magistrate, Mustafa's narrative conjures a space for the potential to eventually reveal itself in the actual, but for now, Salih's anonymous narrator can only summon the reader, enticing him to plunge into that space to continue to strengthen the narrative chain for which Mustafa laid the foundation.

In her debate surrounding the social implications of story-telling, Sheila Hughes argues: "The authority of any speaker-in any discourse across power lines of race, class, culture or gender lies…in the relational ties such speech draws upon, sustains, and seeks to create: the kind of community such rhetoric relies upon and (re) produces." (88)

In both Season of Migration to the North and Waiting for the Barbarians, cultural hybridity becomes a space of confusion, dislocation and epistemological uncertainty, dissolving concrete meanings and identities into a postmodern depiction that is simultaneously inclusive, fluid and adaptive. The poly-vocality and multiplicity of narrative forms in Salih's prose, paired with Coetzee's reappropriation of colonial discursive models, crafts a shared point of origin, connecting chains of dialogue, or "relational ties" as Hughes posits, as a part of a continued cultural construction (88). Salih and Coetzee acknowledge the extent to which cultural hybridity relies on manufactured stories, but they interrogate the point at which these mythologies become myopic and operate on a fundamental principle of exclusion and categorisation. The then transformed, hybrid individual, who cannot recognise the pre-existing narrative as one that he or she can unequivocally identity with, surrenders their status within a single community. The fractured condition yields Bhabha's accurate unpacking of hybridity as "irresolvable": one must either eschew attempts to homogenise the history of the present and embrace a hybrid identity, or perpetually cling to the delusion of having located a system of translatability.