



The Tragedy of Cultural Hybrids: On John in *Youth* and Mustafa/the Narrator in *Season of Migration to the North*

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Abstract

The principal concern in this essay is with the problem of Homi K. Bhabha's romanticized notion of cultural hybridity. To be more specific, the major concern is to demonstrate the tragedy of cultural hybrids as a response to Bhabha's hybridity in J. M. Coetzee's *Youth* and Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*. Both set in a postcolonial context, *Youth* and *Season* address the issue of cultural hybrid(ity) through exploring postcolonial intellectual's struggle to find their way in the world.

Key words: Hybridity; Cultural hybrids; Tragedy

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INTRODUCTION

In this essay, the author mainly aims at offering answers to the following questions: How to read John in *Youth* and Mustafa/the Narrator in *Season of Migration to the North* as tragic figures; to what extent can both texts be seen as tragedies (instead of romances); and what is the implication of these tragedies.

1. FRAMING BHABHA'S HYBRIDITY

For a long time hybridity has been a prominent notion in cultural and postcolonial studies. Among those well-

known scholars who have done wonderful researches on hybridity (like Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Ulf Hannerz, Garcia Canclini, to name a few), Homi K. Bhabha is perhaps the first and most outstanding one to conceptualize and theorize the idea of hybridity. Considered by some "the father of hybrid theory" (Yazdih, 2010), Bhabha gives an insightful analysis of cultural hybridity in his renowned work *The Location of Culture* (1994). In this book, he famously suggests that there is a "Third Space of Enunciation", which "challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People." (Bhabha, 1994) Furthermore, he highlights the productive capacities of this "Third Space":

The theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualise an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity. It is the in-between space that carries the burden of the meaning of culture, and by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves. (pp.38-9)

To him, the intervention of this third space of enunciation introduces ambivalence in the act of interpretation, brings empowerment of the colonized, and then displaces the Western narrative. Therefore, hybridity should be seen as a critical strategy for subversion and salvation:

Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. (p.112)

In this passage, Bhabha displays the subversive power of hybridity and foregrounds the agency of the hybrids of resisting or overcoming the negative colonial effects.

To him, the power of the hybrids lies in their ability to negotiate in this in-between space, returning the colonizer's gaze. This celebratory perspective reflects Bhabha's optimistic take on hybridity.

The problem, however, of this perspective is that Bhabha romanticizes and idealizes the results of cultural hybrid(ity), which is the same problem faced and the same thing done by the protagonists in *Youth* and *Season* who yet only find themselves tragedies. In the following sections, based on close reading of the two texts, the author will examine what is wrong with this romantic perception of cultural hybrid(ity), and see how this hybridity turn out to be a tragedy.

2. JOHN: PURSUIT AND DISILLUSIONMENT OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

Youth is widely accepted as a fictionalized autobiography of J. M. Coetzee. It remarkably portrays the struggle of John, a young white South African like Coetzee himself. In postcolonial period, descendants of former colonists living in South Africa are often thrown into an awkward place: they may feel superior to the native South Africans, but are rejected as a typical European in the West, thus belonging to both and to neither, and being "the Other" in both cultures. This ambiguity, uncertainty and confusion of self-identity are also what John faces, which is largely the cause of his pursuit of culture identity.

As a man of Afrikaner descent, "Introverted, feeling keenly his isolation from home and country" (Moore, 2005), John at first desperately, and blindly as well, yearns for Western recognition and wants to be accepted as a European instead of "a provincial bumpkin" (p.25).¹ In his eyes, "Civilization since the eighteenth century has been an Anglo-French affair." (Ibid.) Thus he turns himself into a cultist of Western elite-culture, fancying that he can gain recognition on the level of culture: he becomes a faithful follower of Ezra Pound and Eliot; he ambitiously reads Pope, Swift, Chaucer and Flaubert and "everything worth reading" (Ibid.) — that no doubt refers to "Anglo-French" works; he tries to imitate the style of Henry James in his own writing, etc.. This strong admiration and yearning for Western civilization make him believe that "There are two, perhaps three places in the world where life can be lived at its fullest intensity: London, Paris, perhaps Vienna." (p.41) Urged by the impulse to experience life to its full intensity and turn it into art, John has long been plotting an escape from South Africa: learning mathematics, studying poetry and saving money. Moreover, with an attempt to fully disencumber himself of the South African self, he shows obvious dislike for his native country — "He does not

need to be reminded of South Africa. If a tidal wave were to sweep in from the Atlantic tomorrow and wash away the southern tip of the African continent, he will not shed a tear." (p.62) — and deliberate indifference to his mother — "All his life she has wanted to coddle him; all his life he has been resisting." (p.18) It seems to John that deliberately keeping a distance with South Africa would make him more like a European, which is of course naïve and romanticized. Because readers may find later that John's wish to completely get rid of South Africa sadly fails. Acknowledge it or not, he still has certain links with South Africa even after he arrives in London: the story he composes is "set in South Africa (p.62); "Each week a letter arrives from his mother in South Africa" (p.98), and when "he finds himself too exhausted or bored to write any more, he allows himself the luxury of dipping into books about the South Africa of the old days" (pp.136-7), etc.. These instances clearly indicate that it is impossible for cultural hybrids to entirely give up their connections to the old culture however hard they try.

Moreover, not only does John's wish to completely get rid of his South African self fail, his effort to be accepted into Western world fails too. Towards the life in London, John has a romantic vision before he arrives there. In his claim, why he goes to London is "to be rid of his old self and revealed in his new, true, passionate self" (p.111). He sees London as a place where he can live a life to its full intensity and transform himself into an artist. Despite difficulties and sufferings foreseen, he still optimistically believes that "he will be an artist, that has long been settled. If for the time being he must be obscure and ridiculous, that is because it is the lot of the artist to suffer obscurity and ridicule until the day when he is revealed in his true powers and the scoffers and mockers fall silent" (p.3). In other words, he believes there is a possibility of compensation for the sufferings he may go through. However, what awaits him in London is neither art nor romance, neither recognition nor acceptance. So to speak, there are no such compensations. On the contrary, he meets rejection and coldness of all sorts in London, proofs of which are numerous in the book: "from certain of their silences he knows he is not wanted in their country" (p.104); "Summing him up in a glance, Miklos found him lacking in gaiety, style and romance, and rejected him" (p.96); "This is a European house, her eyes say: we don't need a graceless colonial here, and a Boer to boot" (p.86); "The language resists him, excludes him; he cannot find a way in" (p.75); and so on and so forth. What is worse, the impact this rejection and coldness impose upon him is devastating. Although arriving in London as an artist-to-be, John finds himself "trapped, lonely, miserable" (p.59) and infertile: He cannot write poetry for lack of passion and emotion; he is "driven from poetry to prose" because prose "does not demand emotion" (p.61), but he still fails on it for lack of sensibility; he has nothing new to say about Ford even though he tries to finish a thesis about his

¹ Quoted from J. M. Coetzee's *Youth*. Published by Vintage, 2003. Hereafter, only the page numbers is indicated.

works. Frustrated, he indulges himself in random, loveless affairs, which unfortunately offer no relief to him. Instead, he discovers that “amatory relations devour his time, exhaust him, and cripple his work.” (p.78) Unproductive pursuit of art and dishonored relations with women make John confess that, “he has not mastered London. If there is any mastering going on, it is London mastering him.” (p.63)

The fact that the pulling force from South Africa and the pushing force in London work together on John sharply contrasts with his wish to push aside South Africa and squeeze into London, which largely results in his sense of uncertainty, self-doubt, nihilism and nonexistence. In the process of pursuit of cultural identity, John is trapped in this in-between space, dangling between his romantic illusion and the harsh reality. As a result, disillusionment arises from the conflict between them, and John finally realizes that

He belongs to two worlds tightly sealed from each other. In the world of South Africa, he is no more than a ghost, a wisp of smoke fast dwindling away, soon to have vanished for good. As for London, he is as good as unknown here. (pp.130-1)

Although he tries to negotiate with these two different worlds and the two different cultures, he can neither shake off the conflict between civilizations and accept the cruel reality, nor gain Western recognition and live his idealized life. He ceases to believe there is certain compensation for his suffering but begins to question: “Will there be a reward for us in one day?” (p.55); “whether he can go on being a poet while doing the right thing?” (p.165) However, even towards the end of the book, Coetzee gives no clear answer to these tough questions; instead the narrative points downward in the direction of misery and even destruction: “One of these days the ambulance men will call at Ganapathy’s flat and bring him out on a stretcher with a sheet over his face. When they have fetched Ganapathy they might as well come and fetch him too.” (p.169)

3. MUSTAFA/THE NARRATOR: TRAGIC DOUBLINGNESS

As a classic post-colonial Sudanese novel, *Season* has been favorably reviewed since its publication. As Roger Allen puts it, *Season* is “the most accomplished among several works in modern Arabic literature” (1995). Its success, to a large extent, lies in Salih’s ingenious characterization of Mustafa Sa’eed and the unnamed Narrator, who can be seen as two sides of one character. To put it another way, these two protagonists are the “alter ego” (Geesey, 1997) to each other. Both Mustafa and the Narrator have accepted Western education in Europe, and returned to their home country of Sudan. These similar experiences enable them to see the mirror image of themselves in one another.

When it comes to Mustafa’s life experience, a strong sense of exile can be perceived. Brought up as a fatherless child in Khartoum, Mustafa has a distant relationship with his mother, who for him is like “some stranger on the road” (p.19).² The absence of parental love throws Mustafa into a state of exile in psychological sense. Although his mind is like a sharp knife, which makes him learn things with little effort and gains him “a helping hand at every stage” (p.23), his heart is as cold as snow: “I (Mustafa) wasn’t affected by anything” (p.20); “you’re not a human being” but “a heartless machine” (p.28) — a comment about him made by his fellow student. In a large sense, this psychological exile greatly contributes to Mustafa’s real exile, which is made possible through the acceptance of Western education. He pursues it from a local school in Sudan, to a secondary school in Cairo, and finally to a university in England. During his confession to the Narrator, Mustafa compares this experience to a journey:

I thought of the town I had left behind me; it was like some mountain on which I had pitched my tent and in the morning I had taken up the pegs, saddled my camel and continued my travels. While we were in Wadi Halfa I thought about Cairo, my brain picturing it as another mountain, larger in size, on which I would spend a night or two, after which I would continue the journey to yet another destination. (p.24)

My sole concern was to reach London, another mountain, larger than Cairo, where I knew not how many nights I would stay. (p.26)

In these two passages, the metaphorical use of “mountain” and reference to “travel” are highly indicative of Mustafa’s rootlessness and seeking. It seems to Mustafa that there is no fixed sense of home and belonging, which, together with the absorption of Western culture, brings him extreme uncertainty and profound confusion about his own identity.

With high level of English language proficiency, Mustafa is nicknamed “the black Englishman” (p.53). In a sense, this expression perfectly illuminates Mustafa’s doubling self and in-betweenness. On the one hand, he seemingly gets a key into the Western world and makes himself a darling of the English: he is “the first Sudanese to be sent on a scholarship abroad” (p.52); he is “the first Sudanese to marry an Englishwoman” (p.55); he is “appointed a lecturer in economics at London University at the age of twenty-four” (p.24); and he “played such an important role...during the late thirties” (p.56). On the other hand, being nicknamed “the black Englishman” does not necessarily mean or guarantee he *is* an Englishman, because for him there is always a modifier—the “black”. To a large extent, his attraction for European women comes from his oriental/Arabic flavor, which is in turn

² Quoted from Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North*, translated by Denys Johnson-Davies and published by Penguin, 2003. Hereafter, only the page numbers is indicated.

used by him as a tool of seduction and a weapon for revenge. Therefore, readers can easily find that Mustafa in England hides his real identity, and seduces different women with different names—like “Hassan and Charles and Amin and Mustafa and Richard” (p.35). Before his marriage, Mustafa drives three women into despair and suicide, for which he shows no regret or guilt. In his claim, “I’ll liberate Africa with my penis” (p.120). In other words, these European women are only “prey” (p.30) to him, and conquering them is only for revenge and liberation. However, he does not realize that using his oriental identity as a weapon for revenge actually in turn makes him fall into the trap of “the great Orientalist myth-fantasy” (Makdisi, 1992), which fundamentally deepens and aggravates his distortion, both psychologically and behaviorally. Most of all, his distortion is brought to the extreme in his violent and grotesque relationship with Jean Morris. Unlike other easy-prey-women, Jean Morris noticeably shows her aversion and contempt to Mustafa, which drives Mustafa crazy and swears he “would one day make her pay for that” (p.30). Motivated by this, Mustafa pursues Jean Morris for three years and finally marries her. The marriage, nevertheless, turns out to be a bigger humiliation instead of another victory for Mustafa:

My bedroom became a threat of war; my bed a patch of hell. When I grasped her it was like grasping at clouds, like bedding a shooting-star, like mounting the back of a Prussian military march. That bitter smile was continually on her mouth. I would stay awake all night warring with bow and sword and spear and arrows, and in the morning I would see the smile unchanged and would know that once again I had lost the combat. (pp.33-4)

Like Bhabha in his discussion of cultural hybrid(ity), Makdisi sees Mustafa’s actions in London as “his campaign to throw colonialism back on the colonizers” (1992). However, Jean Morris’s existence proves, vividly reflected in the above passage, that this campaign is only a joke and an illusion, and that Mustafa is a loser instead of an “invader” (p.95) as he claims. As a result, their marriage ends up with Mustafa’s killing Jean Morris while having sexual intercourse with her.

If accepting western education is a turning point for Mustafa—enables him to go from the East to the West, murdering Jean Morris is, another turning point—forces him to return from the West to the East. However, even living in a tranquil Sudanese village and having wife and children there, Mustafa still cannot avoid the fate of living as a lie and then becoming a lie. He never tells any villager about his past; he tries to convince himself that “Life in this village is simple and gracious. The people are good and easy to get along with” (p.9) — he says this to the Narrator, but more likely to himself; he deliberately keeps a distance from others through “excessive politeness” (p.7). However, all his pretence and hidden nostalgia for England are betrayed by his drunken recital of an English poem and the locked room in his house discovered later by the Narrator.

In his confession to the Narrator, Mustafa mentions more than once that he is an “illusion”, a “lie”. Actually, he creates two rooms which symbolize and exaggerate this illusionary state of his existence: one is his oriental fantasy bedroom in England highly characterized by its rich Oriental flavor: it “was heavy with the smell of burning sandalwood and incense, and in the bathroom were pungent Eastern perfumes, lotions, unguents, powers, and pills” (p.31). The other is his English library room in the Sudanese village where there are English books, English fireplace, oil portrait, and other things Mustafa had in England. So to speak, this room is “a preserve for Mustafa’s British self” (Makdisi, 1992). However, in the Narrator’s eyes, it is “A graveyard. A mausoleum. An insane idea. A prison. A huge joke. A treasure chamber” (pp.137-8). Performing the Oriental reincarnation in London and remaining nostalgic about his British past in Sudan forms a sharp contrast, which clearly manifests the sad fact that Mustafa is alienated from both cultures and countries, and ends up being marginalized and destroyed. As Geesey points out, although Mustafa tries to manipulate his in-between space, his “self-empowerment through the doubling effect of hybridity...prove(s) to be destructive and reactive for him, rather than enabling Sa’eed to transcend the negative effects”. (1997)

Like Mustafa, the Narrator is also greatly destroyed by the negative effects of cultural hybridity, the process of which is perhaps less violent and less prominent than Mustafa’s, but is as tragic as his.

Having spent seven years in Europe studying poetry, the Narrator returns to his home country. His description of this return is heavily characteristic of his attempts to repeatedly reassure himself that his overseas experience has not influenced or shaken his “continuous and integral” (p.5) sense of identity: “I felt not like a storm-swept feather but like that palm tree, a being with a background, with roots, with a purpose.” (p.2) At the same time, he tries to strengthen his “sense of stability” (p.5) through constant visits to his grandfather who seems immutable to changes. This childish act of clinging to his old Sudanese identity actually reflects the Narrator’s refusal to acknowledge the influence imperialism and colonialism have imposed upon him. To put it another way, this constant reassurance subtly reveals the Narrator’s underlying and unwillingly-acknowledged fear that he may become, or is, a rootless and distorted hybrid. In this sense, the story of the Narrator is generally about his illusion and disillusionment of having a singular and pure cultural identity and avoiding a same tragic fate as Mustafa’s.

As the story shows, Mustafa’s confession of his life story and a series of unexpected revelations about Mustafa made known to the Narrator after Mustafa’s disappearance enable the Narrator to piece the fragments of Mustafa’s life together. During this process, the Narrator gets

deeply involved in Mustafa's life, and finds that "Mustafa Sa'eed has, against my will, become a part of my world, a thought in my brain, a phantom that does not want to take itself off." (p.50) It is this constantly emerging phantom of Mustafa—so much so that the Narrator is once mistaken by others for Mustafa's son—that haunts the Narrator and forces him to re-examine his own identity. The Narrator asks himself: "Was it likely that what had happened to Mustafa Sa'eed could have happened to me? He had said that he was a lie, so was I also a lie?" (p.49) Facing this question, he sadly finds that "I had lived with them (the villager) superficially, neither loving nor hating them." (Ibid.) Like Mustafa, the Narrator is neither the person he claims to be, nor he can really fit into the unprogressive life in Sudan again. This self-interrogation and self-probing indicate that the Narrator has moved from earlier romanticized certainty about his singular Sudanese self to self-doubt and confusion, which largely paralyzes him and contributes to his indecisiveness in action. A case in point is that the Narrator's early dream of making contributions to his hometown—"I want to give lavishly, I want love to flow from my heart, to ripen and bear fruit" (p.5) —finally crumbles into dust. After his return, the Narrator gradually becomes a teacher, then an administrator, and finally a high-level bureaucrat in the government. Despite official position becoming higher and higher, readers can barely see any changes brought about by the Narrator. Even facing his life-long friend Mahjoub's question and rebuke—"And you, what are you doing in Khartoum? What's the use of our having one of us in the government when you're not doing anything?" (p.118), the Narrator only says, "Civil servant like me can't change anything" (p.121).

Moreover, the Narrator's indecisiveness and inaction also reflect in his dealing with Mustafa's widow, Hosna Bint Mahmoud. When Mahjoub and the Narrator discuss Wad Rayyes's attempt to marry Hosna, Mahjoub's suggestion that the Narrator should marry Hosna to protect her from Wad Rayyes throws the Narrator out of control. This suggestion, on the one hand, makes the Narrator realize that he falls in love with Hosna; on the other hand, forces him to wonder whether he is, like Mustafa and Wad Rayyes, "not immune from the germ of contagion that oozes from the body of the universe" (p.104). According to Davidson's interpretation, this is "a direct reference to the defense at Mustafa's trial" (1989). However, the Narrator knows Mustafa's story quite well, the thought and the meaning that he may resemble Mustafa scares him. That is to say, "the possibility that Hosna would become his (albeit very different) Jean Morris immobilizes him." (Ibid.) Therefore, he does nothing, which, in a sense, directly results in the succeeding tragedy—Hosna kills Wad Rayyes, then commits suicide, which humiliates everybody in the village. Feeling that "The world has turned suddenly upside down" (p.134), the Narrator finally opens the

door of Mustafa's hidden room. It is here that the Narrator mistakes the reflection of his own image in the mirror for that of Mustafa, which subtly indicates that the Narrator and Mustafa are one character. However hard the Narrator wants to deny his hybridity and avoid the fate of Mustafa, he just cannot run away from it. With the aim of "dispel(ling) my rage by swimming" (p.166), the Narrator dives into the Nile. At a point "half-way between north and south," he finds himself "unable to continue, unable to return" (p.167). Actually, this description is highly symbolic. It represents that the Narrator is trapped, like Mustafa, in the in-between space, and is struggling with the cultural conflicts between the West and the East, between north and south. As to the final ending, the Narrator gives readers subtle hint:

I was conscious of the river's destructive forces pulling me downwards and of the current pushing me to the southern shore in a curving angle. I would not be able to keep thus poised for long; sooner or later the river's forces would pull me down into its depths. (p.168)

In this passage, if one reads the pulling force and pushing force as the power of north and that of south, he/she may find that the Narrator here actually indicates that he now recognizes the negative effect or destructive influence imperialism and colonialism have imposed on him. As a cultural hybrid, he fails in negotiating a union or a balance of cultural differences, which bring his doom. Although the Narrator cries for help at the very end of the novel, he does not give readers clear or definite answer whether he will be rescued. That is to say, there is still a potential hint of death and destruction. As Makdisi (1992) claims, "The novel ends with darkness engulfing the narrator. Trapped between north and south and east and west, his screams for help are absorbed by the immensity of the Nile."

Looking back at the life stories of Mustafa and the Narrator, one may perceive the prevailing tragic feature now. If the life Mustafa chooses heads towards negative and violent action, then the one the Narrator lives go towards passive and harmful inaction. Nevertheless, it seems that no matter what they do, or just do nothing, they are doomed to failure. Then, what on earth results in their irreversible tragedy?

4. THINKING TRAGEDY IN POSTCOLONIAL CONTEXT

Let us come back to Bhabha's celebratory notion on cultural hybridity. For Bhabha (1994), hybridity may be used as strategy of "subversion that turn(s) the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power", and the power of cultural hybrids lies in their capacity to negotiate and manipulate the Third space. In Bhabha's notion, there is a sense of reversal, and assurance of "progressive

overcoming and ultimate victory” (Scott, 2004) over the negative effects of cultural hybridity, which reflects Bhabha’s romantic anti-colonial impulse. In this sense, Bhabha narrates cultural hybridity as romance—as “a story of overcoming and vindication, of salvation and redemption” (back cover text of Scott’s book). Actually, both *Youth* and *Season* have romanced about themselves. As to *Youth*, the romance largely lies in John’s early idea about life in London, which was mentioned before. Although John knows he may encounter difficulties or sufferings, he still believes that London will turn him into an artist. And potential sufferings are just “part of a purgatory he must pass through in order to emerge, one day, into the light: the light of love, the light of art” (p.3). As for Mustafa in *Season*, the sense of romance to a certain degree is more obvious: Mustafa sees his exile as a way of “being free” — “that there was not a human being, by father or mother, to tie me down as a tent peg to a particular spot, a particular domain” (p.19); he claims that “I, over and above everything else, am a colonizer, I am the intruder whose fate must be decided” (p.94); and he tells himself that the small Sudanese village is his final destination. For the Narrator, the sense of romance is reflected in his naïve dream of being a seed to ripen and bear fruit in his home country. By and large, all of them have romanticized their lives somewhere in a broad sense. However, taking their predicaments and final tragic endings—all involve, explicitly or implicitly, death and destruction—into consideration, their romanticized postcolonial future are highly problematic.

In *Poetic*, Aristotle puts forward the idea of “tragic hero”, a man must be neither a villain nor a virtuous man but “the person intermediate between these. Such a person is one who neither is superior [to us] in virtue and justice, nor undergoes a change to misfortune because of vice and wickedness, but because of some error” (Leitch et al., 2009). That is to say, tragedy results not from people’s viciousness but from their error, something that resembles ignorance, and the basic human frailty of reasoning and confusion. Perhaps the stories of John and Mustafa/the Narrator are not tragedies in the classic sense, but the protagonists are indeed tragic heroes. As cultural hybrids, all of them are trapped between cultures, which make them greatly uncertain and confused about their own identities and situations. As a result, their romanticized ideas often confront and conflict with the cruel reality, which either immobilizes them and results in their indecisiveness, like the story of John and the Narrator, or empowers them but results in negative action, like the story of Mustafa. It seems that no matter what they do, things may go wrong will go wrong. In this sense, the root of their tragedy lies in their hybridity, which can be regarded as their tragic flow and which contributes to their error and results in their downfall.

In *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (2004), David Scott subtly proves that the problem of the anti-colonial imagining as romance is that it idealizes and romanticizes the final results or goals, which emphasizes “the negative structure of colonialism’s power and with demonstrating the colonized’s agency in resisting or overcoming these conditions” (p.6), and makes it impossible to recast the problems about postcolonial future. As a result, he argues that tragedy may be a more useful narrative frame than romance. This view magnificently coincides with the ideas reflected in Coetzee’s and Salih’s works. Borrowing Scott’s words, narrating *Youth* and *Season* as tragedies instead of romances is:

not to dismiss out of hand the claims of reason, but to honor the contingent, the ambiguous, the paradoxical, and the unyielding in human affairs in such a way as to complicate our most cherished notion about the relation between identity and difference, reason and unreason, blindness and insight, action and responsibility, guilt and innocence. (p.13)

In postcolonial present, using the narrative, or strategy, of tragedy is of highly significance.

From the above analysis, it is perhaps safe to say that John and Mustafa/the Narrator are the very embodiments of the cultural conflicts between East and West, old and new, the Third world and the First world, etc. Moreover, due to the protagonists’ special identity, both *Youth* by Coetzee and *Season* by Salih reveal not only personal tragedies, but the tragedy of cultural hybrids/intellectuals and the postcolonial society. Narrated as tragedies, both *Youth* and *Season* can be regarded as a counter response to Bhabha’s romanticized notion of hybridity. Indisputably, cultural hybridity has positive effects, but it is important—perhaps more important—to know that hybridity may impose potentially negative effect upon the postcolonial individuals. Sometimes the effect is so negatively strong that it only brings downfall and destruction, which is perhaps a big problem in postcolonial present and future as well. According to Aristotle, tragedy is “accomplished by means of pity and terror the catharsis of such emotions” (Leitch et al., 2009). That is to say, the most important function of tragedy lies in its power of catharsis, which means both “purgation” and “clarification”. Thus the author hopes that interpreting *Youth* and *Season* as tragedies can shed useful light on postcolonial thinking at present, and help people hold a more cautious attitude towards hybridity, through evoking in the readers a sense of pity or fear, so as to avoid similar failures.

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