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## Towards a Mestizaj Identity: A Post-colonial Reading of Isabel Allende's *Zorro*

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### Abstract

*Zorro*, a novel of quasi-romance structure, has been written by Chilean writer Isabel Allende in 2005. She is a cousin of Salvador Allende, Chile's first socialist president who was assassinated during the 1973 military coup d'état. Being mostly analyzed within the framework of Feminism, gender-related issues, or socio-political approaches, Isabel Allende, therefore, has been regarded by literary critics as a politically exiled woman writer who seeks to portray a range of female characters who are caught inside a patriarchal socio-cultural context, seek to free themselves, and search for self-recognition. Within the postcolonial context, however, her fiction can be interpreted from quiet different perspectives. Elaborating on certain critical concepts from post-colonialism, particularly Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity and the transculturation proposed by Fernando Ortiz and Angel Rama, the present article explores the process by which Allende creeps through the mist of clashing voices and opposing means of representation to form her ideal model both in character and in writing mode: a transcultural phenomena that ends at a negating negotiability in its especial form of characterization.

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## 1. Introduction

The last quarter of the twentieth century is a unique age of various *posts* in cultural and literary criticism. Their increasing emergence casts doubt on the trustworthiness of the elder categories and suggests them to be not the comprehensible measure for approaching the related realms any more. Under the weight of the *post* critiques, the assumed hegemony of western thought has been de-stabilized and forced to re-think itself. However, some of the *post* thinkers realize that the elder categories cannot be simply wiped out. In fact, certain thinkers like Homi Bhabha point to the transitivity of cultural approaches and in this way issue a number of controversial challenges. As a matter of fact, the inventive method of in-betweenness and liminality in dealing with contemporary cultures is strongly correlated with their corollary openness. In other words, it is the in-between analysis of colonial methods and discourses that has opened a way towards postcolonial thinking.

The existence of opposing forces is the prevailing image of postcolonial literary texts that causes them to enter the process of hybridization. Colonial subjects appropriate the colonizers' tools and create new objects which belong to none of the sides of the binary opposition, neither the colonizer nor the colonized. They do it not just for a simple mimicry of those in power; rather, they do it in order to form a new subversive medium for self-representation. Consequently, a postcolonial text is actually a transcultural whole heading to a negotiable goal that paves the way for a dialogue among contradictory voices.

## 2. Methodology

The theoretical framework I have drawn up for the present study focuses on Homi Bhabha's theories, in particular his theory of hybridity, in tandem with the Latin American concept of transculturation. The reason I insist on using Latin American theorists is the fact that the literary corpus of my study is written by a Latin American writer, therefore such a framework can do more justice to a critical reading of her novel.

In order to apply the aforementioned theories to Allende's novel, the conceptual tools selected include the concept of mestizo which is a cultural concept and a character type. Zorro will be analysed in the light of the mestizo and the mestizaje identity. In analyzing Zorro, I focus my attention on the characters as well as the places or settings, and show how both the environment and the people exhibit the same formative features. In Zorro, place is prominent. In other words, places and characters commingle to such a point as to represent each other. As the characters move towards hybridization, so do the lands. In other words, the settings have the potential to be labelled as mestizo. Throughout the novel, characters that are the symbols of various social groups come together. At first, they have an inversive strategy toward each other: being located within the contact zone of California, they enter a dialogue and the process of hybridization occurs. Zorro is not merely a national hero, who belongs only to a particular cultural zone and defends only particular nationalistic aims, rather, as a character of a mestizaje identity, he goes beyond predetermined borders to form a transcultural character. Also, I aim to show that the hero is not just one person, but the coming together of three characters, an American Indian, a European and a hybrid. The soul of the hero is reincarnated in all three, and the triangle of Zorro is thus formed, to comprise certain qualities from each of the three characters. Again, I aim to demonstrate that the cultural formation in this case is not a negating process. No culture is pure and authentic. The heterogeneity of cultural phenomena can be shown in the gradual formation of a transcultural Zorro with a mestizaje identity.

## 3. Theories

### 3.1 Hybridity

Bhabha's most significant essays are collected in his book entitled *The Location of Culture* (1994). In this book he undermines the concept of the polarized world, erodes the dichotomy between self and other, and ultimately introduces some controversial concepts such as the hybridity of cultures. Hybridity as such denotes the impurity of

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