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Signifyin (g), according to Gates, is the process of saying two or more things at once. This act serves as "the rhetorical principle of African American vernacular discourse"(47).

Gates provides the readers with a good example for the application of *The Signifyin (g) Monkey Theory*. He presents the novel entitled *Their Eyes Were Watching God* written by Zora Neale Hurston to be a good example. Hurston as Gates illustrates, signifies on both: literary model that Virginia Wolf uses in *A Room of One's Own* for the Western feminist novel and the literary model that Frederick Douglass uses for the Afro-American slave narrative in *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass*. She uses both of these literary models with what Gates calls it "a difference"(90). In other words, one can say that Hurston signified on both the Western European and black traditions. What drives her to do so, according to Gates' point of view, is that she wants to signify on these two traditions with a difference to create her own desired effect.

Conclusion: Afro-American thinkers and theorists such as Gates believe in the change using peaceful means. Moreover, Gates puts this peaceful change into practice. He invited other critics to re-read the Afro-American heritage on rhetorical basis. According to him, they misread this heritage on political reasons or social bases. Gates uncovers a unique system for interpretation and a powerful vernacular tradition that black slaves brought with them to the New World. His critical approach relies on *The Signifyin (g) Monkey Tales* as it is the most popular figure in Afro-American folklore.

According to Gates, the Monkey has signified on the Lion because the Lion took the Monkey's words literally. The Lion does not understand that the Monkey is playing with him through language. The Monkey uses all his cleverness to talk his way out and return to the tree tops, whence the signifying never ends. *The Signifyin (g) Monkey* takes its title from what Gates argues is the central metaphor, "the trope of tropes" (45) in Afro-American literature. There is, as Gates says, an entire series of oral narrative poems about "*The Signifyin (g) monkey*" in the black tradition. The tale of the Monkey goes like this. The Monkey, fed up with the Lion's roaring, decides to do something about it. He insults the Lion and says that he is only repeating what the Elephant has been saying. Being too furious, the Lion goes out to challenge the Elephant, which fights the Lion aggressively. The Monkey gets away with his deception and succeeds in signifying. Gates' theory of signification offers a new way of reading which brings to readers' attention a literary device called signifying. In addition, Gates' theory of signification suggests intertextuality among Afro-American novels because it identifies one of the rich black traditions found in the Afro-American novels: the art of signifying. In Gates' earlier works, *Figures in Black, and Race, Writing, and Difference*, he theorizes about how Afro-American literature has been reduced to having a socio-political function. In a later book, *The Signifyin (g) Monkey*; Gates introduces his theory of signification which is based on the premise that "the art of signification is present in many forms in the African American novel"(86).

As Gates states in his book *The Signifyin (g) Monkey*, he uses the Afro-American term "Signifyin (g)" (45) to refer to the spectrum of devices that comprise the rhetorical approach of the monkey in the toast. The term is a homonym for the English language word "signifying"(45) and its etymology remains unclear (46). The act of

In *The Signifyin(g) Monkey Tales*; one finds another level of signification. In addition, the Monkey signifies on the Lion, tellers of the tale are also signifying on previous tales but in a different way by changing the language and the way that the Monkey tricks the Lion in the tale. These tales, as Gates mentions, were used as a rhetorical game. This is an example of the beginning of *The Signifying Monkey Tales*:

Deep down in the
jungle, so they say
There's a Signifying
Monkey down the way.
There hadn't been no
disturbin' in the Jungle.
For up jumped the
monkey in the tree one
day and laughed "I
guess I'll start some
shit"(55).

An example of a typical ending of a tale would be:

"Monkey", said the Lion,
Beat to his unbooted knees,
"You and your signifying
children
Better stay up in the trees".
Which is why today
Monkey does his signifying
A-way-up out of the way. (55)

The plot of the tale is usually as follows: The Monkey comes near the Lion and claims that he overheard the Elephant insulting the Lion. The Lion takes the Monkey's words or speech literally although what the Monkey is saying is not at all true and the lion goes off to in search for the Elephant. The Lion finds the Elephant and asks for an apology from him for something he did not do and instead of apologizing, the Elephant tramples on the Lion. Thus, the Lion comes back to punish the Monkey but the Monkey has escaped up the tree.

Esu-Elegbara"(6). Esu-Elegbara is the greatest interpreter of the Ifa divination. The Ifa divination is made up of verses in which the myths of the origin of the universe are encoded. Esu interprets the Ifa and, therefore, represents interpretation. The text of the Ifa contains thousands of written verses. Gates illustrates that Esu gives people a lot of meaning and it is open to endless interpretation. Gates also mentions that the myth of Esu the power to give people many different interpretations from a single verse. They usually ask for the *babulowa's* help when they become a certain age or when they face a problem they cannot solve. The structure of the poem may stay the same; however, *the babulowa* will change and interpret the poem for each individual according to how *the babulowa* sees it fits (105).

The Afro-American *Signifyin (g) Monkey* is tales written during the Slavery era. It comes from the Esu-Elegbara Myths. In *The Signifyin (g) Monkey*, Gates sees that the Monkey and Esu both as trickster figures because they both represent storytelling and the use of language to produce a desired effect. If Esu-Elegbara, Gates argues, "stands as the central figure of the Ifa system of interpretation"(44), his "Afro-American relative, *The Signifyin (g) Monkey*, stands as the rhetorical principle in Afro-American vernacular discourse"(44). As it is mentioned before, Esu is always repeating the verses with a difference. Gates claims that the Monkey in *The Signifyin (g) Monkey* Tales, also repeats with a difference because in each tale the Monkey always fools or tricks the Lion with different rhetorical strategies. However, there are some constants, a sort of framework, which act as guidelines for the teller of the tale. Some of these constants are as follows: The characters are always the Monkey, the Lion, and the Elephant. The end and the beginning are similar while the outcome is not always the same.

In *The Signifyin (g) Monkey*, Gates explains signifying, from an Afro-American point of view, by giving a new meaning to the signifier. To signify is to change the common meaning of a word that exists in the formal language to create a new Afro-American meaning. For example, The Afro-American culture signifies on the word "bad" (iii). The word "bad"(iii) in Western formal language has a negative meaning. It means the opposite of "good"(iii). However, the word "bad" (iii) in the Afro-American community has been used with a different meaning. The word "bad"(iii) in the Afro-American community has a lot of positive meanings. It can refer to being cool, independent, good-looking, smooth or even good. For this reason, Gates refers to signification as "a repetition with a difference"(xi).The difference is what Gates would call the" black difference"(VI), which points to the black meaning or interpretation of language.

Gates says that signifying in the Afro-American community is similar to what Western theories would describe as a deconstructive act because both signifying and a deconstruction call into question the notion of assigning a fixed meaning of a word. Both theories advocate that the process of reading a text is open for a lot of meanings and interpretations. He also adds that signification in the Afro-American culture is a rhetorical strategy used during slavery as a weapon against oppression and as a means for the slave to prove their humanity and dignity. By using such language, slave could mock their masters and plan secret religious meetings or make escape plans without being understood outside of their own culture (101-2).

In *The Signifyin (g) Monkey*, Gates traces rhetorical signification back to the diverse trickster figure of African Yoruba Mythology: Esu-Elegbara from Nigeria (5). As Gates points out, "I see these individual tricksters as related parts of a larger, unified figure, I shall refer to them collectively as

white American discourses as well as the relationship which exists between the central texts which comprise the Afro-American literary tradition itself. Signifying takes many forms. Gates argues in *The Signifyin (g) Monkey* that black writers often repeat "another's structure by one of several means, including a fairly exact repetition of a given narrative or rhetorical structure "(103). For example, Fortune's poem "The Black Man's Burden" signifies upon Kipling's "The White Man's Burden". It is as Gates states before "repetition and difference"(105).

In *The Signifyin (g) Monkey*, Gates first explores the relationship between the African vernacular traditions of rhetorical signification and literary tradition in the Afro-American literary tradition. As Gates points out in his introduction: "This book attempts to identify a theory of criticism that is inscribed within the black vernacular tradition and that in turn informs the shape of the African American literary tradition "(ix). He thinks that it is the concept of *Signifyin (g)* that explains "what we might think as the discrete black difference " (10) in literature written by blacks. Signifying is both a rhetorical strategy and a principle of Afro-American literary history. Later writers can be seen to have signified on earlier writers. The later writers have imitated the earlier writers but with a reversal of their strategy. Gates believes that literary signification stems from rhetorical signification which stems from two major sources: *African Trickster Myths* and African American *Signifying Monkey Tales*. In order to understand how literary signification works, one must understand how rhetorical or oral signification works. Oral signification in the Afro-American culture means a play on words. In *The Signifyin (g) Monkey*, Gates traces "the roots of African American signifying to the rhetorical tropes for a shared trickster figure prevalent in the folklore of Nigeria, Benin, Cuba, Haiti, South American and the USA "(4).

that literary signification as a literary technique has existed in Afro-American literature since its early attempts. Moreover, Signification Theory offers a good opportunity to re-read Afro-American literature in a new light. Black writers, as Gates points out in his famous book *The Signifyin (g) Monkey*, are not comfortable with views of Western philosophers like Kant and Hume. They denied literary originality to black writers and described them as "black parrots" (113). According to them, Black writers were "generally thought to lack originality"(113).

Gates' theory of Signification offers a new way of reading Afro-American texts in terms of how Afro-American authors inscribe tradition into their works by signifying on each other. Gates thinks that the Afro-American literature needs to be read on new bases. According to Gates, in *The Signifyin (g) Monkey*, signification should be recognized as literary style occurs in the Afro-American literary tradition. It means to repeat certain literary themes, techniques, or devices of a certain novel. However, it is not an exact way of repetition. It is "a repetition with a difference"(105). To repeat with difference means to repeat for a different effect from preceding authors. Afro-American authors usually signify on two traditions: the Western European novel, and the Afro-American novel. In his theory of signification, Gates maintains that "to signify" (103) is both a rhetorical and literary technique that emerges from the African vernacular and Afro-American traditions. For Gates, the phenomenon he terms Signifyin (g) manifests itself in Afro-American literature in many ways (105).

Gates gives many examples of the way in which signifying is represented in many Afro-American texts. He uses the term to describe the intertextual relationship which exists between the earliest examples of Afro-American literature and

Gates, in his book *Figures in Black*, mentions that he uses these modern theories to enable him to analyze the language of a black text in an endeavor to "respect the integrity, the tradition, of the black work of art" (11), and to "produce richer structures of meaning than are possible otherwise"(xi). To put it in simple words, Gates summarized this general endeavor in the following quotation:

This is the challenge of the critic of Afro-American literature: not to shy away from literary theory, but rather to translate it into the black idiom, renaming principles of criticism where appropriate, but especially naming indigenous black principles of criticism and applying these to explicate our own text. (xi)

Gates' *Theory of Signification*, found in his most celebrated book *The Signifying Monkey* offers a new way of reading which brings to readers' attention a literary device called *Signifyin (g)*. Gates chooses to write it in this way without (g) to show the readers how Afro-Americans would pronounce it. The act of distinguishing the black vernacular from the dominant one through the adoption of the term is itself an act of Signifyin (g), a revision of "formal language and its conventions, conventions established, at least officially, by middle class people"(76).

In other words, what this paper seeks to provide is an exploration of signification, a clarified definition of the term, and an application to an Afro-American text, Zora Neal Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). In this application the importance of Gates' *Theory of Signification* is evident. Gates' theory proves that Afro-American authors have been signifying on preceding literary traditions all along and, therefore, have been using traditions into their works. His theory also proves

lies at the root of the philosophical tradition of the Afro-American culture"(7).

Gates also uses certain principles of Deconstruction in his work *The Signifyin (g) Monkey*. He says that when one deconstructs texts, one finds a tension in them by observing and identifying binary structures at work in these texts. Gates deconstructs the way Afro-American texts have been read in the past by proposing "a new binarism" (8) which Gates advocates as a rhetorical strategy for the reader. He's asking the readers and critics to look at these texts structurally, with the heritage of African continent and the Afro-American culture in mind.

Gates in his book *Figures in Black* mentions that he has used Western theories as Formalism and Structuralism and Poststructuralism in order to "defamiliarize the black text"(xiv). He wished to see the text as "a structure of literature" (xiv) rather than as a simple reflection of black experience. Gates suggests that the connection between the development of Afro-American criticism and contemporary literary theory can be illustrated in four stages to his own development: the first was the phase of the "Black Aesthetic", the second was a phase of "Repetition and Imitation"; the third, "Repetition and Difference" and, finally, "Synthesis"(xv). The Black Aesthetic theorists of the first stage attempted both to revive the lost black texts and to formulate a genuinely black aesthetic. Thus, Gates' engagement with Formalism and Structuralism led to the second phase of his development, that of "Repetition and Imitation" (xv). Gates believes that the third and the fourth stage can be achieved through hard work and a lot of great writers' efforts. These two stages as it is obviously noticed mean a wonderful thing to all the black writers. Eventually, they are able to create genuine literary works.

I had at last located within the African and Afro-American traditions a system of rhetoric and interpretation that could be drawn upon both as figures for a genuinely 'black' criticism and as frames through which I could interpret, or 'read' theories of contemporary literary criticism.

(ix)

While Gates has stressed the need for a greater recognition of black literature and black culture, he does not advocate a separatist black canon. On the contrary, he works for a greater recognition of black works and their integration into a larger, pluralistic canon (x). He has affirmed the value of the Western tradition in his book entitled *Colored People: A memoir* as follows:

Every black American text must confess to a complex ancestry, one high and low (that is, literary and vernacular) but also one doubt that white texts inform and influence black texts (and vice versa), so that a thoroughly integrated canon of American literature is not only politically sound, it is intellectually sound as well. (21)

In his book *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, Gates uses certain principles of Western European theories in his own works. For example, the Western European literary theory called Structuralism helps readers to examine the texts' structure, "with the urge for clarity and reason that lies at the root of the philosophical tradition of the country "(2). In the same way, Gates advocates that critics of Afro-American Literature read the literature, "with the urge of clarity and reason that

use. I decided to analyze the nature and functioning of Signifyin (g) precisely because it is repetition and revision, or repetition with a signal difference. Whatever is black about black American literature is to be found in the identifiable black Signifyin (g) difference.

(xiv)

Gates believes that the Afro-American culture is a separate culture within a dominant white culture. He also believes that all Afro-American literature is two-toned or double voiced, because it echoes both the Afro-American culture and the Western European culture. This is clearly noticed in what Gates writes in his book *The Signifyin (g) Monkey* about the common traditions between black and Western traditions:

In the case of the writer of African descent, her or his texts occupy spaces in at least two traditions: a European or American Literary tradition, and one of the several related but distinct black traditions. The heritage of each black text written in a western language is, then, a double heritage, two-toned, as it was. (4)

In short, Gates' interest is how to find out what is black about the text; that which is influenced by African and Afro-American traditions. Gates feels that theory can be used to analyze the text to find out what the black difference is. These traditions, as Gates claims, are exclusive to Afro-American culture. Western influence is important, but Gates believes that the black traditions give Afro-American Literature its own real identity. Passages of *The Signifyin (g) Monkey* speak strongly to this hypothesis. As Gates states in the preface to his work:

understood by the dominant white culture. In his book *Black Literature in White America*, Gates maintains that Afro-American oral signification originated during slavery. This form of signification was a form of expression that manipulated language for managing or dealing with social oppression. Most slaves did not have the opportunity to learn how to read or write so they had to use this form of oral tradition. Gates also suggests that since the time of slavery signification has been a part of the African American's formal education. Black children are taught to signify when they are young because signifying is a part of the oral culture passed down from the African and the Afro-American Tradition. Signification is used in black people's culture as a means of communication (30).

For Gates, the present and the future job of literary critics as he states in his book, *The Signifyin (g) Monkey*, is to give a close reading of Afro-American texts that is needed to bring to the forefront the literary tradition that authors are operating from and to show how these authors inscribe tradition in their works by identifying and naming these traditions. The strategy Gates proposes is for critics to use concepts or principles but with "a difference" (xiv). This difference should focus on what is black or Afro-American about the text in contrast with what is Western European. One should notice that the idea of "black difference" comes from Jacques Derrida's theory of "Difference" (xiv). This clearly shows how Gates was influenced by Western critics as mentioned before in the introduction. Gates states this in the preface of *The Signifyin (g) Monkey* that the "premise of this book" (xiv) is:

Repetition and revision are
fundamental black artistic
forms, from painting and
sculpture to music and language

that Afro-Americans cannot produce great forms of Art. They are autobiographical tales. They are tales written by enslaved black American people. These tales were mainly interested in describing the blacks' experiences in slavery and their attempts to escape from bondage in the South to freedom in the North. Slave narratives, such as *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845), attempted to show their bad conditions as slaves. Such publications put an end to the old claim that Afro-Americans are inferior to white Americans.

The writing and publication of slave narratives proved that these claims were wrong. They displayed the intellectual and artistic abilities of the black people. Slave narratives according to Gates in his book *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars* put an end to the myth that slaves were "content" (13) with their conditions. These writings were used as a political tool to try to bring an end to slavery. These writings were also used as a proof of Afro-American slaves' humanity. Moreover, the content of the narratives revealed the miserable conditions that slaves suffered from at the hands of their white masters. These writings were used as a proof of the inhumanity of slavery. Gates also suggests that Afro-American writing "arose as a response to allegations of its absence"(13). The need to record an authentic black voice as proof of the blacks' humanity was so "central...to birth of the black literary tradition"(15).

As stated earlier, oral signification that occurred during slavery was used for managing social oppression. Modern rhetorical signification has the same relationship to the signification that occurred during slavery. In a sense, modern rhetorical signification is still used by the Afro-American culture to manage social oppression because it creates a coded dialect that cannot be

Meanwhile, he does not totally refuse the socio-political reading but he wants to say that this way of reading caused a great harm to black or what are called Afro-American texts rather than a benefit. This paper tries to show how Gates' attempts to identify a theory of criticism that is inscribed within the black vernacular traditions and that in turn informs the shape of the Afro-American literary tradition"(xi).He also argues, in his book *Figures in Black*, that an analysis of the connection between a black text and its "critical field" (x) constitutes implicitly what Gates calls it "a theory of the origins and nature of Afro-American literature"(xi).

Gates, as many other Afro-American critics, believes black writers have to show white men good reality of black people. They have to show the dominant white men that they cannot be ignored anymore. They have the same right to live, and the same right to create their own art and literature. Moreover, Gates in his book *Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars* goes on saying:

This is the challenge of the critic of black literature in the 1980s: not to shy away from literary theory; rather, to translate it into the black idiom, *renaming* principles of criticism where appropriate, but especially *naming* indigenous black principles of criticism and applying these to explicate our own texts. (72)

In his book *The Signifyin (g) Monkey*, Gates mentioned that Afro-American texts have been used as political tools to fight white men's oppression. This traditional view used to treat them as "subhuman" (73). According to Gates, this is the primary reason why these texts have been read in this socio-political light. For example, slave narratives were published in response to the claim

the right to showing to their
uttermost ability the
opportunities and the privileges
of modern civilization. (65)

In *The Signifyin (g) Monkey*, Gates traces the roots of the African-American Signifyin (g) to the rhetorical tropes of a shared trickster figure prevalent in the folklore of Nigeria, Benin, Cuba, Haiti, South America and the USA(4). He refers to the figure by its Yoruba name, Esu-Elegbara. If Esu-Elegbara, Gates argues, "stands as the central figure of the Ifa system of interpretation"(44), his Afro-American relative, the *Signifyin(g) Monkey*, stands as the rhetorical principle in Afro-American vernacular discourse"(44). In other words, Gates is interested in finding out what is "black" (44) in the text; that which is influenced by African and Afro-American tradition. He feels that theory can be used to explicate the text to find out what the "black difference is" (44). The African tradition in Afro-American literature is a literary creation that embodies many different ways in which the Afro-American writer explores what Africa is, what it means to him or her, and what it means to the world. This tradition appears in varied forms in poetry and prose and is transmitted from one generation to another. For example, in the 18th and 19th centuries, Africa was viewed in Afro-American songs as a lost homeland. In the twentieth centuries, however, Africa is regained.

Henry Louis Gates is considered, by a great number of American critics, to be the voice of Afro-American people. Gates states that what Afro-American people really need is to persuade white men to change their way of reading black texts. They used to read these texts only on socio-political bases. The new way of reading should not be as simple as the previous one. It should be a comprehensive and intensive way. According to Gates, black texts should also be read on artistic and aesthetic bases.

about a monkey that could use his linguistic abilities to beat a lion.

In *The Signifying Monkey*, Gates analyzes some rhetorical forms of Black English as part of an investigation of the forms of experience and interaction embodied in black speech and writing. Gates' work on Black English, built on earlier research by sociolinguists, extends rhetorical analysis to an area of communication that attracted little attention before the twentieth century. Moreover, Gates' discussion has important implications for the development of rhetorical theory because it suggests that Black English is a fertile field for studying rhetoric, in general. It is important to say that Black English comes from the melding of several African languages and English. Thus, although it is clearly English, the black dialect retains some lexical, grammatical, and syntactic features of African languages (110).

Similar to any colonized people, the Afro-Americans suffer from oppression, inferiority and degrading economic conditions. There are a lot of similarities between the Afro-American culture and the postcolonial studies. The Afro-American society is an internal colony within the wider white American society. The Afro-Americans have been struggling for centuries to prove their distinctive identity. W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) in his book *The Souls of the Black Folk* declared that the problem of black people in America is one of colour as he states:

The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line, the question as to how far differences of race, which show themselves chiefly in the color of the skin and texture of the hair, will hereafter be made the basis to denying to over half the world

Gates thinks, it is necessary to analyze or interpret it through structures that came from black and African cultures. He offers a culturally distinctive "theory of reading" (iii); one that might "allow the black tradition to speak for itself about its nature and various functions"(iii).

He points out that there is a big difference between black speech and white speech or language. In these tales, the monkey is said to be mocking the lion through language. It misleads the lion to fight the elephant. Gates says that to be able to interpret black literature properly, one must look for meaning not only in what is directly stated but also, and more importantly, in what is not said; what is implied. Consequently, a reader must pay a close attention to the way in which words are presented rather than in their literal meaning. This forms a clear relationship between identity and difference. In other words, if one wants to understand the black identity well, it is located in black speech.

As Gates, himself, mentions in the introduction to his book: "The challenge of my project, if not to invent a black theory, was to locate and identify how the black tradition had theorized about itself"(ix). This sentence taken from the preface of Gates' book *The Signifyin (g) Monkey* is the first indication to the reader that Gates' theory of African-American literary criticism is rooted in the old texts of Afro-American literature. According to Professor Gates, the old critics read the Afro-American literature on only social and political bases however they neglected, to be fair enough, much not all of the rhetorical aspects of the older black texts. These texts, written throughout the Afro-American literary heritage, are too many. Thus, Gates has only chosen six texts of the entire Afro-American heritage and applied his own theory and ideas to these texts. His theory of African-American literature is firmly rooted in these texts themselves. He also uses an old tale which is so popular in the Afro-American heritage

As Gates writes in *The Signifyin (g) Monkey*: Black writers learn to write by reading literature, especially the canonical text of the texts of the Western tradition. Consequently, black texts resemble other, Western texts (xii). He goes on saying that the black texts "employ many of the conventions of literary form that comprise the Western texts" (xii). Then he mentions his own idea of the theory of "Signification" (xi) in very simple words, when he says: Black literature shares much with, far more than it differs from, the Western textual tradition...But black formal repetition always repeats with a difference, a black difference that manifests itself in specific language use. (xiii)

The Signifyin (g) Monkey is a famous text in Afro-American literary theory. It establishes the idea of black vernacular as a framework through which white people can measure, analyze and read African American literature. Henry Louis Gates argues that there is a distinct black vernacular voice located in Afro-American folk traditions and in tales derived from West African cultural origins. As he states in the introduction:

The Signifyin (g) Monkey explores the relation of the black tradition to the Afro-American literary tradition. The book attempts to identify a theory of criticism that is inscribed within the black vernacular tradition and that in turn informs the shape of the Afro-American literary tradition. (iii)

He states that The Signifying Monkey, who is considered to be a trickster, is the central figure of the Afro-American signifying monkey tales that date back to slavery. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this book is to create a theory of Afro-American criticism. To derive meaning from a black text,

The post-colonial literature and theory investigate what happens when two cultures clash and one of them considers itself superior to other. The writers of *The Empire Writes Back* use the term post-colonial "to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (2). Post-colonialism marks the end of colonialism by giving the indigenous people the necessary authority or in other terms political and cultural freedom to take their place and gain independence by overcoming political and cultural imperialism.

The Afro-American society is a colony of unique circumstances. It is a society whose people were taken from their homeland to be colonized on a foreign country that is long away from their home. It is a call for a distinguished culture and identity, the struggle of Afro-Americans undertook the hard task of decolonizing itself from the social, political, and economic hegemony of the white people. Their struggle is best defined from a postcolonial perspective. Similar to any colonized people, the Afro-Americans suffer from oppression, inferiority and degrading economic conditions. There are a lot of similarities between the Afro-American culture and the postcolonial studies. The Afro-Americans have been struggling for centuries to prove their distinctive identity.

Among the best attempts to analyze the Afro-American literary tradition are *The Signifyin (g) Monkey*, by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Houston Baker's *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature*. Gates attempts to chart Afro-American literary history as a history of relationships among literary texts. He argues that black texts "talk"(ii) about one another: for example, by copying, altering, or parodying one another's literary devices. This may exactly happen in the same way that black men talk about one another when they engage in the Afro-American folk practice called "*Signifying*" (ii).

Henry Louis Gates.: Towards an Afro-American Critical Theory¹

Abstract:

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. explores the relationship between the African and the Afro-American vernacular traditions and black literature. He elaborates a new critical approach located within this tradition that allows the black voice to speak for itself. He examines the ancient poetry and myth found in African, Latin American, and Caribbean culture, and particularly the Yoruba trickster figure of Esu-Elegbara and *The Signifyin (g) Monkey* whose myths help construct the literary theory of black tradition. Gates uncovers a unique system for interpretation and a powerful vernacular tradition that black slaves brought with them to the New World. His critical approach relies on *The Signifyin (g) Monkey Tales* as it is the most popular figure in Afro-American folklore.

Key Words: *Henry Louis Gates Jr., Afro-American folklore-Signifying.*

¹ Wael Mohamed Abdel Baky-PHD researcher- Faculty of Arts - Aswan University

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