Hanif Kureishi's *The Last Word*: The Art of Fictional Biography

Hanif Kureishi'nin *Son Söz*'ü: Kurgusal Biyografi Sanatı

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Abstract
Hanif Kureishi's 2014 novel, *The Last Word* is a "roman à clef," which presents the literary biography of a world-renowned author of post-colonial literature -V.S. Naipaul- under the pseudonym of Mamoon Azam. This article traces the path of Kureishi, who assumes the role of the modern biographer as an artist engaged in the creative process, rather than an objective historian recording facts about an individual's life. In the novel, it is observed that Kureishi meticulously avoids being a mere chronicler of events that shape his subject's literary and private life; instead, Kureishi's intention is to project a truthful personality portrait of "a literary giant," that is, Mamoon Azam, the fictional counterpart of the factual V.S. Naipaul. Thus, the article particularly investigates such issues as Kureishi's preferred structural methods in treating his biography as a work of art rather than a dry, barely readable, informative account of a life story; the possible difficulties a modern life-writer may encounter; and the changing role of the modern biographer from craftsman to artist. A final discussion in the article is based on Kureishi's liminal status as a representative of the so-called ethnic authors living and producing in the West.
Keywords: Kureishi, roman à clef, biography, artist vs biographer.

Öz
Hanif Kureishi'nin 2014'te yayımlanan romanı *Son Söz* bir "anahtarlı roman" örneğidir. Kureishi bu eserinde postkolonyal edebiyatın dünyaca tanınmış bir yazarını, V.S. Naipaul'u, "Mamoon Azam" takma adı ile okuyucuya sunar. Bu makale modern biyografi yazarı rolünü üstlenen Kureishi'nin, bir bireyin yaşamı ile ilgili gerçekleri kaydederken, nesnel bir tarihçiden ziyade bir sanatçı olarak konuyu ele alış biçimini inceler. Kureishi, ana karakterinin edebiyatla olan ilişkisine ve özel yaşamına yön veren olayları doğrudan nakleden yazar olmaktan özenle kaçınır. Yazarın amacı Mamoon Azam olarak kurgulanan edebiyat ustasının gerçek hayattaki karşılığı olan V.S. Naipaul'un portresine ışık tutmaktır. Bu makale özellikle Kureishi'nin biyografi yazımında kullanmayı tercih ettiği yapısal metotları ve modern biyografi yazarının karşılaşabileceği olası zorlukları inceler. Yazar, yavan, güçlükle okunan sadece bilgilendirmeye dayanan bir yaşam öyküsü yazmak yerine konusuna bir sanatçı duyarlılığı ile yaklaşır ve böylece modern biyografi yazarının zanaatkârdan sanatçıya dönüşümünü aktarır. Makalenin son bölümü ise batıda yaşayıp üreten etnik yazarların bir temsilcisi olarak Kureishi'nin iki ayrı kültür arasındaki konumunu tartışır.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Kureishi, Anahtarlı Roman, biyografi, biyografi yazarına karşı sanatçı.

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Hanif Kureishi's 2014 novel, *The Last Word* presents a world-renowned author of post-colonial literature under the pseudonym of Mamoon Azam; despite the disclaimer on the cover as to the fictitiousness of the characters, Kureishi's novel is generally recognised as a "roman à clef," which is defined as "a novel in which actual persons are presented under the guise of fiction" (Harmon and Holman 450). Following the tradition dating back to as early as the seventeenth century, Kureishi names his central character "Mamoon Azam," yet keen readers instantly recognise that the factual figure standing behind Mamoon Azam is V.S. Naipaul. The article traces the path of Kureishi, who assumes the role of the modern biographer as an artist engaged in the creative process rather than an objective historian recording facts about an individual's life. In the novel, it is observed that Kureishi meticulously avoids being a mere chronicler of events that shape his subject's literary and private life; instead, Kureishi's intention is to project a truthful personality portrait of "a literary giant," that is Mamoon Azam, the fictional counterpart of the factual V.S. Naipaul whose literary significance is once more underlined in the last chapter of the novel with the following words: "There wasn't a decent bookshop in the world which didn't carry this man's work, nor a serious reader who had not heard his name" (285). Thus, the article particularly investigates such issues as Kureishi's preferred structural methods in treating his biography as a work of art rather than a dry, barely readable, informative account of a life story, and the changing role of the modern biographer from craftsman to artist.

In the opening of *The Last Word*, Harry Johnson is introduced to the reader as the promising young author who is commissioned to write the biography of a significant writer of post-colonial literature, "Indian-born Mamoon Azam, a novelist, essayist and playwright Harry had admired since he was […] a kid for whom writers were gods, heroes, rock stars" (2).[1] The distinguished writer whose life story is going to be recounted is a thin disguise for V.S. Naipaul who is presented under the pseudonym Mamoon Azam in the novel. Rob Deveraux, the "respected and innovative" editor and publisher, chooses Harry for the task due to his impressive reworking of Nehru's biography. What made Harry's first attempt in biography writing successful is his ability to make an already-known life story brand new by seasoning it "with interracial copulation, buggery, alcoholism and anorexia" (2). In other words, Harry turned the plain informative tone of the life account of a historical figure, based on the accumulation of objective documentation, into a fleshed-out, tangible personality portrait of a political leader-hence found innovative as well as pleasing by the reader. Likewise, in the case of Mamoon, Rob expects Harry to write an "extreme

[1] Here, the young Harry's admiration for novelists, which leads to his decision to become a writer, is reminiscent of Kureishi's. At the age of fourteen Kureishi was deeply influenced by the London of the1960s when, in his words, "everybody was free and everybody was Jimmy Hendrix, and above all, there was no racism." As a young member of the British-Pakistani community, Kureishi claimed that, he had two options to attain fame and wealth: becoming either a football player or a musician. Lacking the talent required for both, he opted into becoming a writer; and once that decision was made every new work that he produced led, again in his own words, to a reinvention of his artist self. ("The Last Word," Interview by Iqbal)

biography" which would publicise the scandalous liaisons of a nasty character, and thus achieve high sales rates. Prior to meeting with Mamoon and his second wife, Liana, Rob warns Harry about Mamoon's beastly nature: "'Listen up: that clever old sly fox Mamoon might seem dull and dead to you, and indeed to everyone, including his own family. […] 'He comes on like someone who has never knowingly given pleasure to a woman, someone who has never loved anyone more than himself. He has stolen a lot of enjoyment. He has been a dirty bastard, an adulterer, liar, thug, and, possibly a murderer" (7). Obviously, Rob's analysis of Mamoon's character is the exact opposite of the dignified figure who "ha[s] been much respected by the literary world" (3). The narrative implies that Mamoon owes this respect to his racial background and to his political views of colonial and postcolonial periods rendering the author a spokesman for western cultural imperialism. He has been favoured and supported by, particularly, right-wing nationalists due to his ideas about the western domination of the so-called "Third World": "He was, at least, a writer from the Indian subcontinent they could like, someone who thought domination, particularly by the educated, informed and intelligent-people, oddly, who resembled himself-was preferable to universal stupidity, or even democracy" (3). Now in his seventies, Mamoon falls into disfavour on account of his being "too cerebral, unyielding and harrowing to be widely read; Mamoon was becoming financially undone; despite the praise and the prizes, he was in fiscal turnaround" (5). Therefore, what brings Rob and Mamoon together is the idea of a "controversial biography" which would not only revive Mamoon's fading fame and solve his financial problems but would also serve Rob's commercial interests as the publisher of a best-selling biography; and the chosen writer of this biography, of which so much is expected, would be Harry: "The biography would be an 'event,' a 'big bang,' accompanied, of course, by a television documentary, interviews, a reading tour, and the reissuing of Mamoon's books in forty languages" (4).

On the way to Mamoon's country house at Taunton, Harry is overwhelmed by authorial anxieties concerning the structure of his work to be. He is also suspicious about the adequacy of his writing skill for this challenging task: "How, he wondered, with a shudder, did you begin to do that? Where would you start, and how would the story, which was still being lived, end? More importantly, was he, Harry, capable of such a task?" (1). Would this be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that would allow Harry to exhibit his creative skills as a modern biographer? Would he achieve his dream of becoming a famous writer? Would this attempt earn him a rightful reputation as an author? Such are the questions occupying Harry's mind at the beginning.

In *Biographies and the Art of Biography*, Ulick O'Connor refers to James L. Clifford's views on what the new biographer should be:

> What, really, is a biographer? Is he merely a superior kind of journalist, or must he be an artist? Is writing a life a narrow branch of history or a form of literature? OR may it be something in between, a strange

> amalgam of science and art? The difference between a craftsman and an artist is obvious. The one knows exactly what his product will be. He works with specific materials and uses traditional techniques. His skill comes as a result of serious study and long practice. The other works intuitively, evolving each move that he makes, and not certain until the end just what his work will be. Originality and genius are more important than practice. Is the life-writer one or the other, or both? (Clifford qtd. in O'Connor 11)

Clifford's definition of the biographer as the artist affirms Harry's doubts about how he should approach his subject. Yet, Clifford's distinction between the craftsman and the artist appears to be debatable; it has a twofold weakness: the first one is that it is very rare for anyone to become a fully-fledged artist without "serious study and long practice" (ix); and secondly, originality, intuition and genius are not exclusive to artists alone; they can be found in a craftsman as well. In brief, the distinction between the two categories is far from being easy to draw. O'Connor further carries the discussion related to the distinction between the biographer as the craftsman and as the artist back to Thomas Acquinas' distinction between the good and the beautiful. To Acquinas, the mind is fully satisfied only when the cognitive process is accompanied by the sense of the beautiful, that is to say the perceived aesthetic object should be informative, useful as well as pleasing. Relying on Acquinas' idea of the good and the beautiful, O'Connor suggests that the modern biographer should be a blend of scientist and artist.

As is known, one of the major problems a life-writer confronts is the selection and arrangement of factual information about her/his subject's life. In this phase, the inclusion and exclusion of materials related to the subject's life is very important because a biography which is devoid of imagination and is "stuffed with truth" will likely to have little or no artistic value; and, undoubtedly, the result will be a dull work. For O'Connor, "The guiding principle should be, does the material further illustrate the personality of the biographer's subject? If so it should not be left out; but neither should it be allowed to assume proportions unrelated to the central purpose of the book" (51). O'Connor also claims that what makes a biography a true work of art is the transmission of the subject's mind on page. It is understood that the selected amount, relevance and the arrangement of the material to be included matter much to the biographer.

A life-writer may also encounter various other constraints, such as self-censorship due to deference to the subject's sensibilities, or the fear of offending the person whose life story is going to be recounted. Since the subject's life will be narrated against a historical background, the biographer's freedom of speech may be limited or totally censored by various authorities. For instance, Virginia Woolf defends the modern biographer's freedom of speech on the way to become an artist as follows: "In any case, he preserves his freedom and his right to independent judgement… Raised upon a little eminence which his independence has made for him, he sees his subject spread about him. He

chooses; he synthesizes; in short, he has ceased to be the chronicler; he has become an artist" (qtd. in O'Connor 51).

In the novel, Harry starts living and working with the Azam family, seemingly without any constraint, except for his authorial concerns about how he would compose his work. Harry's sensitive approach towards his work might be interpreted with reference to Ann Oakley's statement about the ultimate outcome of biography writing: "The text of a written biography is the product of two biographies – that of the writer and the person written about" ("The Social Science of Biographical Life-writing" 431). Hence, Harry opines, the biography should not only transmit the essence of Mamoon Azam but also fortify his name as an established life-writer. After Liana emphatically reminds Harry of the purpose of his residence with the family, that is "to show the world what an artist is" (30), Harry delves into the half-abandoned barn which contains "unwanted books, boxes full of drafts of novels, and, most valuably, Mamoon's first wife Peggy's diaries in a wooden crate. Then he scrubbed down a table, found an unbroken chair, fixed up a light, and plunged in" (23). Kureishi's depiction of Harry at work exactly fits P.R. Backscheider's definition of biographers' working habits: "Biographers live with their subjects as parasites and barnacles, attempt to follow them day by day, study their relationships with everyone, pore over their letters and diaries, pounce upon all descriptions of them, if possible sit in their chairs and handle their crockery" (*Reflections on Biography* 108). In fact, Harry's most valuable material is Mamoon himself. He is standing right in front of Harry, in flesh and blood. Nevertheless, since he is definitely unwilling to give an interview, Harry starts collecting data through reading Peggy's eleven-volume diaries which include detailed information about the couple's turbulent relationship and the history of young Mamoon's writing career: "the callow scholarship-winning Indian, down from Cambridge and living in London; […] The writer begins to make his name with an amusing and well-observed novel about his father and the old man's scoundrel poker-playing friends" (24). Presumably, Kureishi is referring to Naipaul's first novel, *A House for Mr Biswas* that achieved worldwide acclaim with its publication in 1961. Harry finds Peggy's memoirs as self-pitying, masochistic, alarming, and at the same time, illuminating for his task of drawing a truthful personality portrait, in Rob's words, of "the Great Literary Satan" (8). It is seen that Mamoon's rapid rise in his literary career commences with his marriage: "he and Peggy marry and travel; he and Peggy settle down in the house, where Mamoon begins to write long family novels set in colonial India that he would be remembered for, as well as sharp essays about power and empire, along with extensive profiles and interviews with dictators and the Third-World crazies created at the collapse of colonialism" (24-25).

Mamoon's appearance on the literary stage as a budding postcolonial author coincides with the decolonisation process that reached its peak especially in the second half of the twentieth century. Harry believes that Peggy's diaries would provide him with the necessary historical context that would help him to

understand the period's impact on his subject's motives both as an individual and as an author. Harry's decision echoes Robert K. Massie's idea of the biographer being "at least something of a historian before he begins his work… [for] the biographer places his subject in the historical context and makes clear the extent to which that context influenced the subject's life" ("Narrating the Past: History or Biography" 103). Actually, Kureishi's Peggy is the fictional counterpart of Patricia Ann Hale, Naipaul's first wife and devoted editor, who never lost faith in the author's creative skill in the art of writing. As Patrick French states in *The World is What It is: The Authorised Biography of V.S. Naipaul*, "Naipaul incorporated Patricia into the process of literary creation. He relied on her guidance and support even while he harried her; he said he could not imagine working without her" (486). Possibly, without Patricia, Naipaul could not have become a writer of such merit at all. Nearly throughout their marriage, Naipaul cheated on Patricia with plenty of prostitutes, and for twenty-four years, with an Anglo-Argentine mistress, Margaret Gooding. In *The Last Word*, the Colombian lover, Marion, stands for Margaret. Although Patricia Hale never mentions the factual Margaret by name in her diaries, the fictional Peggy openly expresses her abhorrence of Marion and other unnamed women all of whom had affairs with Mamoon: "he disappeared on a book tour, where he meets only sycophants and pussy, as he puts it. Now he is sleeping with one of the women - Marion- on another continent" (25-26). Patricia simply ignored Naipaul's prolonged affair with Margaret; however, what devastated her was Naipaul's revelation to *The New Yorker* that he had sex with prostitutes. Despite all his agonising infidelities, Patricia kept counselling Naipaul even on her deathbed. In Patrick French's *Biography*, Naipaul admits his literary dependence on Patricia: "Even at the end when she was dying, I [told her] these are the notes about Indonesia, let me read them to you. I read them for too long. She was in great pain. She cried and then I stopped. I asked her opinion about certain things and she gave it. She always gave good advice, literary advice. A few days before her death she was able to judge it" (French 489). Despite all the suffering Naipaul had caused, Patricia never gave up her role of being the author's primary and highly reliable literary advisor until her death in 1996.

While exploring the limits of Peggy's patience, Harry pounces upon Mamoon's illegitimate affairs since, as Oakley states "the nature of a subject's sexuality is a common theme in modern biography" (433). For Kureishi, the reason for Peggy's endless tolerance is Mamoon's artistic genius. Indeed, Harry knows well that unethical behaviours, debauchery, or perversion of various sorts are found condemnable for ordinary people; whereas, artists are tolerated, even forgiven, when they commit questionable acts because "[t]he artist was the proxy, the brave one, the one who spoke, was thanked, and who paid the price" (36). From another perspective, the "real" artist's unique ability to create attaches her/him a God-like status; the artist becomes a competitor against God, a rival "trying even to surpass him. It was God, with his insistence on being worshipped and admired, who made the argument of art necessary, keeping the fire of dissent alive in men and women" (171). Hence, the artist is dissident by nature, the one who dares to speak, act and create contrary to existing norms, rules, paradigms

and laws. The artist is the one who takes the risk of being ostracised, exiled, vilified, punished, tortured, imprisoned, and, in some cases, killed. Kureishi also draws attention to the ever-present idea of the dangers of having "an artist around making mischief, stirring things up with the spoon of truth and intoxicant of fantasy and magic" (171). Reflecting upon the material Harry finds in the barn, he makes a list of literary figures who are said to have been involved in numerous immoral, perverse and/or criminal activities, ranging from paedophilia, incest and bestiality to torture, murder attempts or causing suicides. Both Kureishi and Harry, his fictional biographer, are fully aware of the devastating difficulties of creating works of art with words. Harry believes that "literature was a killing field; no decent person had ever picked up a pen" (37). Obviously for Harry, decency does not match with artistic genius. So, just like Peggy, Harry would love, honour and respect Mamoon for the sake of the undeniable artistic merit of his works. Harry's words justifying the element of aberration often found in artistic temperaments read as follows: "Mamoon might have been mean, drunken and dirty at times, as all men and women were, but it was important that prurience didn't distract him, or his readers, from the increasingly important lesson that great art, the best words and good sentences, mattered [...] in a degraded censorious world... [because] Words were the bridge to reality; without them there was only chaos" (37). The conclusion Harry draws is that writers are the only ones to show reality in all its transparency; thus, his scope of forgiveness becomes nation-wide: "People admired Britain only because of its literature; the pretty little sinking island was a storehouse of genius, where the best words were kept, made and remade" (37). In Harry's eyes, what made Britain an admirable country is its rich repository of writers whose contribution to the world literature is immune to the corrosive effects of time.

After getting Mamoon's permission to interview Marion in New York, Harry pays a visit to India to further investigate his subject's childhood and adolescence, his relationship with his acquaintances, friends, family members and with his father in particular. Mamoon's father sent his son to "the hated mother country" (152) for education and betterment. However, at the end Mamoon deeply disappointed his father by not returning to India. Mamoon turned out to be his father's unfulfilled dream for he chose "to join the larger or complete" (152) civilisation. Indeed, his fellow countrymen, including his family members, friends and allies accused him of betrayal, of becoming "white." The father died of grief because the son whom he expected to be his "prop, his mirror, his *chamcha*" (150) that would share his loneliness refused to come back. Mamoon's success as a writer received contradictory criticisms and reactions in the two distinct camps of the world; while western readers highly appreciated and admired his works, and found them original and revolutionary, the rest of the world expressed profound resentment towards his work as well as his personality: "Those he left behind said he had made a pact with the devil and violated his forbears and family" (151); they believed Mamoon was a traitor to

his origins and indigenous culture. Yet all these bitter criticisms enable Harry to understand what makes Mamoon a unique postcolonial writer of such questionable fame or even notoriety:

> Harry learned what determination and strength Mamoon showed, not only in remaining in inhospitable Britain to earn money by his pen, but to make himself into an original writer, one not seen before, speaking from the position of a colonial subject or subaltern, but one without hatred, and with fascination if not identification with the colonisers' culture, Eschewing temporary causes and attitudes, Mamoon fashioned himself into a considerable and successful artist from a background which had enabled few before. (150-51)

To Harry, a man of lesser determination, intellect and skill would not have become the man he is now.

Harry's New York journey to interview Marion introduces the reader to a third role the modern biographer assumes other than that of the scientist and the artist: the detective. In her article, "Life Writing," Laura Marcus emphasises the changing role of the relationship between the biographer and the subject through a comparison of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries with the recent decades. For Marcus, recently, the relationship between the biographer and the subject "has been framed much more substantially in terms of quest, haunting and detection" (156). Thus, chasing after clues and facts about the secrets of Mamoon's private life, Harry goes to New York like a literary detective. Harry's meeting with the heartbroken Marion strengthened the bond between Harry and his subject. According to Oakley, "the familiar folklore of biography is that biographers [not always, but mostly] have an affinity for their subjects: they like them, identify with them, have interests in common" (430). In Harry's case, his admiration for Mamoon turns out to be love. After a few days of chatting with Marion and learning about the former lovers' sex life, the details of which were both complicated and astonishing, Harry's admiration for Mamoon deepens on seeing the author's striking photograph taken by "Richard Avedon" on top of Marion's bed:

> Mamoon must have been in his mid-forties, dark-haired, black-eyed, anguished, a man with the strength to endure, with a poet's soul, an Asian Camus. In time, Mamoon, the radical transgressor-for whom accurate language was always revolutionary-would argue and fall out with fellow writers; he would be banned from various countries for political or religious opinions, pick up a clutch of fatwas, and numerous prizes and awards, at which he would chuckle; and he would write good books. (170)

The photograph enables Harry to understand why he admires Mamoon that much. Whatever the cost is, Mamoon never abstains from telling what he considers to be true. It is the writer's courage, his being the daring man who says what has never been said before. To Harry, the photograph lays bare the personality of the artist who is "the tough-guy, hard-living artist who looked into

the dark without flinching, and spoke what he saw, putting truth and authenticity before safety. [… it is] the picture of pride, self-knowledge and glamour…" (171). Following inquiries and tape-recordings, Harry convinces Marion to see Mamoon's letters in order to confirm Marion's claims about Mamoon's prurience nearing perversion in the course of the author's exploration of his own sexuality. Having found nothing to confirm Marion's claims in the letters, Harry returns to Britain with a ready plan for the book in his mind, even though he has not written anything on page yet. The materials Harry has collected so far are Peggy's letters and diaries, Mamoon's notebooks that Julia gave to Harry (Ruth, her daughter, Julia, and son, Scott, are the staff of Mamoon's country house. Prior to Mamoon's marriage to Liana, Ruth and her children were a sort of family for Mamoon; however, after Liana, they returned to their servant status immediately. Julia and Harry have a brief and secret affair while Harry stays at Mamoon's); his visits to India and the US; his five-week residence with the Azam family, and his close observation of the couple's private life, their relationships with their staff, friends and acquaintances; the tape recordings and notes of the conversations he held with Mamoon; and undoubtedly, Harry's keen readings of Mamoon's literary output would help him fill in the gaps in the background materials and interpret them in a creative way. Thus, Harry appears to overcome his concerns about the structure of his work. Indeed, since he is supposed to write the biography of a factual person, he would not need an invented plot like a novelist. As C.D. Bowen suggests, "Compared to novelists, biographers supposedly have an easy time, because they have ready-made plots: birth, education, marriage, career, death" (*Biography: The craft and the calling* 3).

Rob's assessment of Harry's conduct throughout his sojourn at the Prospect's House is significant in several ways: "You behaved like a beast in his house […] you were baiting him, cunt-teasing and provoking his wife. You even turned her against him. You screwed his staff while consuming large amounts of his booze, eating his wife's food, stealing his notebooks, slapping him around the head, and accusing him of being a sadomasochist" (241). It is interesting that Rob's comments on Harry's behaviour are, with Kureishi's characteristic playfulness, emblematising Harry's ongoing progress on the way to become a literary artist, while, at the same time, they signal his transformation from literary observer to literary subject-the subject of Mamoon's last novel, one who is just as easily misunderstood and/or harshly criticised as Mamoon has been throughout his career. This evident and increasing resemblance between the personalities of Mamoon and Harry may also be interpreted in the light of Oakley's characterisation of biographers as "guide, companion, interpreter," but most importantly, as "aggressive competitor" (428) with the chosen subject. Indeed, in the last sections of the novel, Harry sets out to write his first work of fiction, and Mamoon his last novel, "*A Last Passion*," which he composes as a series of "conversations between generations, an older and a younger person" (250); not surprisingly, both of the said persons are writers. Thus, this fluid switching of

roles constitutes Kureishi's final judgement on life-writing as both art and craft, and beyond that, on all fictional writing as a form of life-writing, this possibly being the reason why he lets the literary artist-Mamoon and Harry, provided he publishes his novel, and naturally, Kureishi himself as the author of *The Last Word*-have the last word.

To refer one last time to Oakley's commentary regarding the double nature of biography as a two-level text about both the biographer and the person chosen as the biographer's subject, (431) Kureishi's novel actually appears to be a multi-level text: while the first level consists of Kureishi's literary text about the fictional writer, Mamoon Azam, and his fictional biographer/prospective novelist, Harry Johnson, the second unwritten level is related to factual V.S. Naipaul and his life-writer, Patrick French; Harry's biography of Mamoon constitutes the third level, and Mamoon's "*A Last Passion*" makes up the fourth level. In fact, in a near *mise en abyme* of levels, Mamoon's interpretation of Harry's ripening as an artist serves as a mirror, an unwritten text, of his own artistic personality and his past or present anxieties, while Harry's written biography about Mamoon simultaneously offers an unwritten psychological portrait of Harry himself, based on his personal manner of selecting and synthesising significant events from Mamoon's life and career.

It is seen that in the process of artistic creation literary artists like Kureishi, or Naipaul, or his fictional counterpart, Mamoon Azam, in *The Last Word*, are taking full advantage of their in-between status, heavily drawing on the liminal space which provides contemporary ethnic authors with a subjective platform of free aesthetic production. In this respect, Donald Weber's comment on the function of Kureishi's liminal status concerning his literary output is worth mentioning:

> Kureishi's embrace of his liminal status, the creative empowerment made available by his shifting position as a writer 'caught between two cultures, ideologies, colours…English and not English; middle-class but classless; outsider insider,' will inevitably compel him to resist both the politics of ethnic insiderism (the British-Pakistani community of London should not expect Kureishi to soften, let alone apologise for his biting satire any time soon) and the Left critique… [for] (Kureishi is not likely…to relinquish the imaginative freedom and subversive curiosity of the artist to join the collective struggle. ("No Secrets Were Safe from Me: Situating Hanif Kureishi" 130)

In Homi Bhabha's words, this liminal status has an "empowering condition of hybridity" (219), enabling authors to produce freely in an ethnospace. The ethnospace liberates the artist from the restrictions of all diasporic concerns, ideologies and paradigms imposed on the artist by the absolutism of one single culture because it is made of an amalgamation of different cultures. Thus, never being bothered by the hyphenated epithet, "British-Pakistani author" preceding his name, Kureishi makes use of his liminal status and feeds on the so-called ethnospace to fulfil his authorial needs, just like the subject of his fictional biography, "Indian-born" Mamoon Azam, not to mention "Trinidad-born" V.S. Naipaul himself.

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