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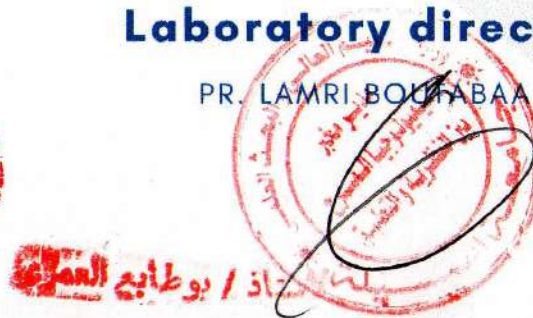
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Conrad and Naipaul: Postcolonial Journeys into Darkness

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Abstract

The present article attempts to examine the shared affinities between Conrad and Naipaul. Conrad and Naipaul share a sense of cultural dislocation which manifests itself in formal and thematic levels in their fiction. Naipaul shares with Conrad some characteristics, including education, work, and a disappointed feeling with London. Thus, the question of how to read Naipaul's characters divided the critics, viewing him, for example, as an alternative ego for Conrad. In *The Mimic Men*, Singh clearly shares his point of view of the world's 'half-made' societies.

Keywords: form and theme; place and displacement; postcolonial intertexts; the degradation of the idea; *The Mimic Men*

Introduction

In an essay entitled "Conrad's Darkness," Naipaul claims how he came "round to Conrad," another non-British born writer, after the influence of both Dickens and Wells' social comedy (*Return* 207). As a writer, Naipaul could make his romantic career as abdicating his early "Fantasy" (216). In addition to that, he figures out kingship spirit in Conrad with whom Naipaul shares a sense of cultural dislocation which manifests itself on the levels of both theme and style.

Unlike earlier English novels, Conrad's use of a first-person narrator has created a relativistic atmosphere. Similarly, Naipaul uses a first-person narrator to represent the Third-World life in negative way, and to show his cultural relativism. Moreover,

Naipaul considers Conrad as his most significant literary precursor, having a strong familiarity for his subjects which in turn make him an apt critic of the modern world's social and psychological disturbance. Talking about the great novelists who wrote about highly organized societies, Naipaul neither has such a community, nor could share the allegations of these writers. He, simply, cannot see his world reflected in theirs (Thieme 23).

Crossing Linguistic, Material and Moral Border

Conrad's ability to indulge in a strange language and his moral relativism are what really impressed Naipaul. He, aptly, was able to overcome a language that was not his own in different ways and that could express the material and moral meaning of his world, despite the fact that he knew his first English word at the age of nineteen. Moreover, Naipaul also shows admiration of Conrad's exploration of moral questions such as the concepts of action, success, and decision making (Duerden and Pieterse 124-126).

As such, Conrad's influence is ubiquitous in Naipaul's work. He has revisited the geographical terrain of *Heart of Darkness* through his novella *A Bend in the River* which is set in Central African Republic. Similarly, his novella *In a Free State* (1971) is an apparent intertext to Conrad's book, where two British expatriates, at a time of crisis, journey by road through a newly independent East-African country. However, it is in *The Mimic Men* that Conrad's influence is the most overt. Indeed, *The Mimic Men* echoes Conrad's *Nostromo* in its use of the fictional island, Isabella. The other Conradian prototype in *The Mimic Men* is its structural use of fragmentation and unchronological narrative. Such devices are used by Conrad in his novels such as *Lord Jim* and *Nostromo* (Thieme 24).

Naipaul may share with Conrad some characteristics, including education, a clerk, and a disappointed feeling with London. Thus, the question of how to read his characters divided the critics, viewing him, for example, as an alternative ego for Conrad. Nonetheless, Singh clearly shares his point of view of the world's 'half-made' societies that Naipaul writes about in Conrad's essay, and hopes to convey it in the history of the Gibbonesque Empire, which will express the deep chaos of their community.

Postcolonial Intertexts

Similar to Conrad's *Nostromo*, *The Mimic Men* reflects Naipaul's vision of "the world's half-made societies", "corruption of causes", the "moral degradation of the idea", as well as Singh's unsuccessful quest and pursuit for a perfect system, which gives way too easily to nasty sexual encounters and political cynicism (Thieme 25).

According to the hybridization theory, both Naipaul and Conrad are considered as analysts of the cultural incision lines and coalition produced by European colonialism. Naipaul, nevertheless, identifies the negative results of such contacts which have been reflected in his characters who look back nostalgic to racial purity. For instance, *The Mimic Men*'s protagonist, Ralph Singh, dreams of a pure Aryan time (Thieme 23).

Conrad's influence on Naipaul's work is very apparent in *The Mimic Men*. This is clear in his use of allusions, his use of a fragmentary and unchronological narrative structure, as well as in his use of a first person unreliable narrator to tell the story and filter the events. Conrad and Naipaul are both expatriates and alien to the language they are using. Both are non-English writers marked by their characteristics of displacement. The latter is manifest in both formal and thematic levels. The use of an

unreliable narrator and a fragmented narrative render their works as different from most traditional English novels. On the other hand, in *The Mimic Men*, Naipaul dramatizes socio-historical, socio-political, as well as psychological effects of imperialism (Thieme 1360). In *The Mimic Men*, Ralph Singh expresses his idea about Empire,

It was my hope to give expression to the restlessness, the deep disorder, which the great explorations, the overthrow in three continents of established social organizations, the unnatural bringing together of peoples who could achieve fulfilment only within the security of their own societies and the landscapes hymned by their ancestors, it was my hope to give partial expression to the restlessness which this great upheaval has brought about (*The Mimic Men* 32).

Singh voices his views concerning the displacement of individuals and the ensuing restlessness because of colonialism. Thus, *The Mimic Men* presents a deep reflection on the psychology of colonialism as Ralph Singh strives to restore order to his life. By the end of the novel, he learns that the act of writing has indeed helped him establish order and stability. Thieme states that Singh searches for order in different ways and places,

he looks for it in London [...], the Aryan past of his ancestors, the Edenic state of pre-Columbian America, the pastoral world of Latin literature and even, when he dreams of retiring to one of the few cocoa estate houses remaining on Isabella, in the heyday of the plantocracy (Thieme 1360).

Nonetheless, Singh states that “All landscapes turn eventually to land, the gold of the imagination to the lead of the reality” (*The Mimic Men* 9). He seems to be unable to find order in all these forms of quest and gives way to escape, and to scepticism about the colonial idea (Thieme 1359-60).

In “The Return of Eva Peron”, Naipaul presents the predicament of colonialism in Argentina, Trinidad, and the Congo. He also examines his affinities to Conrad.

Not as a man with a cause, but a man offering, as in *Nostromo*, a vision of the world’s half-made societies, as places which continuously made and unmade themselves, where there was no goal, and where always ‘something inherent in the necessities of successful action .. carried with it the moral degradation of the idea’ (Naipaul, *Return*, 1980, 216).

As such, both Naipaul and Conrad meet at the levels of theme and style to unveil the moral degradation of the idea of colonialism and imperialism. They both use writing as an escape from the socio-political and psychological disorder witnessed by their unreliable narrators (Thieme 1360).

Conclusion

As a conclusion, both Naipaul and Conrad meet at the levels of theme and style to unveil the moral degradation of the idea of colonialism and imperialism. They both use writing as an escape from the socio-political and psychological disorder witnessed by their unreliable narrators.

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First National Online Conference on: Borders /Crossing Borders in Contemporary Literature and Culture

On April 26 – 27th, 2023

Under the Patronage of the Rector: Pr. Ammar Boudelaa
The Dean of the Faculty: Pr. Ammar Benlkoreichi
and The Laboratory of the Semiotics of Theater: Between Theory and practice
President of the Conference: Dr. Nassima Amirouche

Conference Program

Day One

April 26th



Welcoming Note

Session One 9:00

Speakers	University	Title of the Presentation	Allotted Time
Dr. Elizabeth Bishop	Texas State University	"Algerian Students Across Borders: Tunisia in Cold War Culture"	9:30 9:45
Dr. Naciera Boubaya	Mohamed Lamine Debaghine University (Sétif)	Crossing Borders in <i>Migrants Sans Noms</i> by Tarek Belfadel	9:45 10:00
Dr. Mohammed Senoussi	Mohamed Boudiaf University of M'sila	Home and Murderous Identities in Khadra's <i>The Attack</i>	10:00 10:15
Ms. Zineb Kahina Ghediri	Mohamed Lamine Debaghine Setif2 University	Feminism crossing social borders through multiculturalism: The case of Arabic and Western feminist texts.	10:15 10:30
Ms. Lina Serir	University of Ain Temouchent	Walls and Borders in Zamyatin's Dystopia	10:30 10:45
Dr. Oussama Mahboub	Teachers' Training College of Bouzareah (ENSB)	Post-Arab Spring refugees in Europe: A new home, a new identity?	10:45 11:00
Dr. Fattoum Mouissa	Amar Telidji-Laghoutat University	Travelling Cultures and Spatial Identities in Transnational Narratives: the Quandary of Being at Crossroads in Susan Abulhawa's <i>Against the Loveless World</i> (2020)	11:00 11:15
Dr. Salah Eddine AAID	University of Oum El Bouaghi	"The land of memory" and the Trope of Silence in Abdulrazak Gurnah's <i>By the Sea</i>	11:15 11:30
Dr. Abla AHMED KADI Dr. Asma DJAIDJA	University of Djelfa University of Khenchla	Transcultural Tapestry of Arab-American Identity in Diana Abu-Jaber's <i>The Language of Baklava</i>	11:30 11:45
Discussion			



Session Two 13:00

Speakers	University	Title of the Presentation	Allotted Time
Dr. Mohammed Gouffi	Mohamed Boudiaf University of M'sila	The Conradian Journey and Early Crossings to the Metropole in the Algerian Arabic-language Novel the Case of Mohammed Al 'Ali 'Ar'Ar's Ma la Tadhruhu al-Riyah (What the Winds Cannot Wipe off)	13:00 13:15
Dr. Bachir Sahed	Mohamed Boudiaf University of M'sila	Conrad and Naipaul: Postcolonial Journeys into Darkness	13:15 13:30
Dr. Rawiya Kouachi	Mohamed Lamine Debaghine University.	Crossing Borders: Liminal Space and Disrupted Identities	13:30 13:45
Dr. Bennaou Youcef Dr. Hamoudi Aboubakr	Mohamed Boudiaf University of M'sila	A Comparative Analysis of Boualam Sansal's <i>Harraga</i> and Abdelilah Hamdouchi's <i>Whitefly</i> : Exploring Themes of Displacement and Survival	13:45 14:00
Ms. Kenza Abdi	M'hammed Bouguara University (Boumerdes)	Fantasy Fiction as a Border Literature: Representing Territoriality, Centrality and Periphery in V. E. Schwab's <i>A Darker Shade of Magic</i> .	14:00 14:15
Ms. Salima Ben Abida	Mohamed Khider University of Biskra	Trauma of Displacement and the Challenges of Adapting to a New Culture in Mohsin Hamid's <i>Exit West</i> (2017)	14:15 14:30
Discussion			

Day Two

April 27th

Session One 9:00

Speakers	University	Title of the Presentation	Allotted Time
Dr. Nassima Amirouche	Mohamed Boudiaf University of M'sila	Crossing Borders in Norma E. Cantú's <i>Canicula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera</i>	9:00 9:15
Dr. Emily Jane O'Dell	Parami University / Bard College	Myanmar's "Border" Literature: Rohingya Poetry, Prose, and Theatre as Resistance	9:15 9:30
Ms. Chargui Bachagha Ms. Fatma Drid	Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University (Mostaganem) Badji Mokhtar University-Annaba	Crossing the Line: Confronting the Human Toll of Border Crossing and Displacement in <i>The Devil's Highway</i>	9:30 9:45
Dr. Fatima Zohra Dib	Laarbi Ben M'hidi University of Oum El Bouaghi	Revisiting Notions of Home, Identity, and Belonging in Michael Ondaatje's <i>Anil's Ghost: a Transnational Approach</i>	9:45 10:00
Dr. Belaid Afettouche	Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-Ouzou	Title: Mobility, Border Crossing and Resistance in Mary Austin's <i>Lost Borders</i>	10:00 10:15
Ms. Selma Chouchane	Sétif 2 University	Identity Within/Across Borders: The Middle Passage in Toni Morrison's <i>Beloved</i> and Alice Walker's <i>Possessing the Secret of Joy</i>	10:15 10:30
Ms. Marya Slimani	Mohamed Khider University of Biskra	Crossing Borders with the Burden of Traumatized Mind	10:30 10:45
Ms. Amel Benia	Mohamed Boudiaf University of M'sila	Is inclusion possible in contemporary Multicultural communities? Transcending cultural barriers in Fredrik Backman's <i>A Man Called Ove</i> , <i>Britt-Marie Was Here</i> , and <i>Beartown</i>	10:45 11:00
Ms. Zahra Demmane	Mohamed Boudiaf University of M'sila	Traversing Borders, Fragmenting Identity in Elias Khoury's <i>Gate of the Sun</i>	11:00 11:15
Ms. Houaria Lilya ADLA	Aboubakr Belkaid University, Tlemcen	Diasporic Identities: Portrayal of Cultural Assimilation in the Film <i>Lion</i>	11:15 11:30
Ms. Selma Bekkai	Aboubakr Belkaid University, Tlemcen	Challenges and Opportunities for National Identity in Post-Apartheid South Africa: The Impact of Territorial Separation.	11:30 11:45
Discussion			

Conclusion and Recommendations