

SOME NOTES ON POST-COLONIAL LITERATURES

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Abstract: The current literary criticism in English language provides shelter for a host of trends including post-colonialism. It emerged in the departments of English of the main universities of the Western Civilization having as its target the new literary productions from the centers which were never at stake. The post-colonial approaches cover a wide range of subjects, such as the speech of the colonizer and that one of the colonized, issues concerning race, gender, sexuality, cultural identities, and diaspora, among others. Thus, the following essay points out the most relevant topics in this field of study and approaches some of the most important works of the recent post-colonial literatures.

Key-words: Multiculturalism; diaspora; identity; empire; other.

INTRODUCTION

In 1978, Edward Said publishes *Orientalism*, a work that sets up the beginning of the Post-colonial theory. Said's text is considered a landmark from which the Western academic institutions recognize the Post-colonial speech as a field of study and, since then, questions such as the speech of the colonizer and that of the colonized having been at stake as well as the relationship between the center and the periphery. Said points out in *Orientalism* that the West produced a distorted vision of the East, which was based upon a historical and cultural simplification and, as consequence, a reductionist, depreciative and generic idea of the East circulated and the part of the world was seen as the exotic, the miscigenated, the Other of the white and civilized Europe.

At the same time that the dismantle of the British Empire was taking place, it tried to keep an illusory unity under the community of nations called Commonwealth, which, in turn, was the reason for the creation of the Commonwealth literature in the departments of English. Even so, due to the political ambiguities of the term Commonwealth, once it brings strong ideological colors that compromise it, the specialized criticism coined it with a new designation: Post-colonial literature.

Thus, the Post-colonial literatures are those created by writers, poets, playwrights and critics from the countries that suffered the process of colonization taken by the European nations. The scope of these literatures covers a range of productions that extend, chronologically, from the outbreak of the process of colonization through the present day. Moreover, the Post-colonial literatures open cracks in the pillars that sustain the canon of English literature, and it is important to underscore that the Post-colonial literatures are causing a revolution in English language from within, *id est*, they are transforming the language of Shakespeare and Dickens with bright colors and strange cadencies besides a foreign eye.

1. THE POST-COLONIAL APPROACH ON THE LITERARY TRADITION

The Post-colonial theory brings to the literary and cultural contexts a host of questions to be rethought, as the linear view of history, seen as Eurocentric, the destabilization of the official canon and, among others, a rereading of the consecrated works, such as *The Tempest*, by William Shakespeare and *Heart of Darkness*, by Joseph Conrad. The latter is another sample of literary work which brings some ideological tools hidden behind some linguistic artifices as the old dichotomies light/dark, black/white, hero/villain, Europe/Africa, et cetera.

A Post-colonial reading of *Heart of Darkness* points out that the imperial attitude is underlined in its plot. It was written at the close of the 19th Century when the British Empire was still ruling India, Africa and a significant portion of the Middle East, among other lands. The narrative depicts Marlow's journey into the Belgian Congo. He tells about his experiences in Africa to his crew on a boat tethered in the Thames. What immediately come to surface are Kurtz's experiences in Congo as strong components of Marlow's overmastering narrative of his search for Kurtz at the heart of Africa. Edward W. Said, in his analysis of this novella inserted in *Culture and Imperialism*, stresses:

Conrad wants us to see how Kurtz's great looming adventure, Marlow's journey up the river, and the narrative itself all share a common theme: Europeans performing acts of imperial masters and will in (or about) Africa". (SAID, 1993, p. 23)

It is quite important to remark that at the end of the 19th Century, the British colonies around the world were the aim of a large variety of business such as the search for ivory in the Belgian Congo, one of the settings of *Heart of Darkness*. This novella is narrated by Marlow who addresses his speech to a limited audience constituted by some British fellows on the deck of the Nellie. Indeed, it is a blend of aesthetics and politics imperialistically coined displaying what is, perhaps, the last facet of the 19th Century, "an epistemology inevitable and unavoidable" (1993, p. 24). Then, we can conclude that Conrad, with his Eurocentric view, was wrong in his estimation that the former colonies could not go ahead without the Europeans.

Another singular icon of the Post-colonial literary studies is, paradoxically, one of the greatest literary references of colonialism: Rudyard Kipling. He was born in India but made the imperial England his home. He knew the British Empire from inside and, like Conrad, he emphasized the changing of scope of the British Empire in India and in Africa from an adventurous enterprise to what Said called "the empire of business". (1993, p. 23)

Kipling was the voice of imperialism. In spite of being well estimated as a poet and short-story writer by the main critics of the English literary canon, it is his only longer narrative *Kim* which has drawn the attention of the Post-colonial critics. Kim, the character who lends his name to the title of the novel, was created in the image of his creator. Kim is a double agent, an Irish orphan who thinks in Hindi and can be seen as a local. He has some spiritual fathers from different origins, a British, a Hindu, a Muslin, and a Tibetan Buddhist.

We can apprehend from the first pages that he was a character who deals with issues of identity. "Since the English held the Punjab and Kim was English" (ed. 1928, p. 3). Some pages ahead, we read: "Kim found it easier to slip into Hindu or Mohammedan garb when engaged on certain business" (ed. 1928, p. 6). In a dialogue with Lama, he says: "I am this holy one disciple" (ed. 1928, p. 63), and on page 223, he is alone and speculating: "Who is

Kim, Kim, Kim?” So, I think, it is not necessary to pick up more passages to understand that *Kim* is a novel that descends from the tradition of multiple homes and concerns identity.

Nevertheless, the Indian individual identity constructed by Kipling is a creature completely dependent of the British tutelage, and he extends his view of the Indian as an individual to India as a nation, whose cultural identity is turned into an assimilated country which would collapse in corruption and underdevelopment without the Britain’s assistance.

Throughout the novel, Kim has a conflict with the colonial service and his loyalty to his Indian colleagues is not solved. Here, it is time to see the character apart from his creator considering that for Kipling this conflict did not exist. It is known that his position favored the British agencies in India and, later in the narrative, the fact that Kim solved his doubts is a clear demonstration, by the side of Kipling, that it would be better for India to remain under British administration.

An important historical fact that is introduced at the heart of *Kim*’s plot is the mutiny or rebellion (the term to be used will depend on the political position of the one who uses it), which came about in 1857 and that is seen today as the beginning of the Indian insurrection on the British domination. Hindus and Muslims raised against the anomalies of rule by the East India Company but the British put them down brutally.

In *Kim*, the mutiny is narrated by a native who favors the British side and the revolt is regarded as “madness”. In order to balance his position or to soften it, Kipling writes some pages ahead that “madness ate into all the Army...” (ed. 1928, p. 64), and puts the words in the mouth of Colonel Creighton.

Another remark I may make upon Colonel Creighton is related to his condition as an anthropologist. In the portrayal of this character, Kipling seems to be conscious of the role of the anthropologists, historians and ethnographers as orientalists. Colonel Creighton, as anthropologist, is an evidence of the alliance between the European science and the political power at work in India as well as in other colonies. Creighton is also conscious of the divisions of the Indian society in castes and, like Kipling, he never interferes in such social organization. Then, to conclude, I state, in agreement with Said’s reading of the novel, that

Kim is a historical document “of its historical moment and, too, an aesthetic milestone along the way to midnight August 14-15, 1947, a moment whose children have done so much to revise our sense of the past’s richness and its enduring problems”. (ed. 1993, p. 162)

If the traditional scholars and critics of English literature have ranked Rudyard Kipling as a great poet and writer and one of the most important voices of British imperialism, the same can not be attested of Henry Rider Haggard, who shared Kipling’s ideology and who attempted to provide the English readers with the stories of the colonizers’ adventures in South Africa. The evidence lies in the fact that the main books on history of English literature do not dedicate more than a paragraph to a popular writer who published more than sixty books.

Now in the Multicultural era, this panorama is shifting and some studies on *She, Heart of The World, Allain Quaterman*, and especially *King Solomon’s Mines* can be found in the books by critics like Laura Chrisman, who devotes four chapters to him in her *Rereading The Imperial Romance: British Imperialism and South Africa Resistance in Haggard, Schreiner, and Plaatje*.

Despite the shortage of studies on Haggard’s legacy in the canon of English literary criticism, he was a very popular author and so were many of his novels, with emphasis to

King Solomon's Mines, whose plot tells about how Sir Henry Curtis, Allan Quatermain and Captain John Good make a dangerous journey into the heart of the unknown Africa, looking for the legendary treasure of King Solomon based upon the support provided by an old map.

King Solomon's Mines is set in the context of scrambling for Africa but the associations with colonialism are crammed with stereotypes. On the one hand, the African characters are pictured with sympathy, as King Kukuanaaland and poor Khiva. On the other hand, the protagonists are Europeans as the three Englishmen quoted in the previous paragraph.

Haggard uses fact and fiction in order to generate mystery in his works; his contradiction related to colonialism is clear: whilst he criticizes it, he also upholds it. For him, the death of the African is necessary for the expansionism of colonialism can be achieved. In *King Solomon's Mines*, the death of Foutala means the eventual commodification of the African body as Laura Chrisman points out,

“... neatly exchanges an imperial threat (miscegenation) for an affirmation (symbolic; eternal devotion of a submissive Africa to her master)” (2000, p. 56).

The emergence of Post-colonial literatures and their theoretical counterpart brought to the literary arena many new figures of speech which are connected with the experiences of uprootedness, diaspora, exile and difference. By the same token, some figures of farce are brought to the surface of the literary productions of writers who explore their former status of colonized in order to reach the aim of writing back to the imperial centers.

Thus, Haggard's novel shows how Africa and its people purvey support for an ideological contradiction, i.e., Africa, the underdeveloped continent, with its variety of cultures, brings to surface the imperial subject as if, without the African, the modern Imperial identity could not exist.

2. POST-COLONIAL CARIBBEAN LITERATURE

The exploration of the status of colonized is exactly what we find in the works of V.S. Naipaul. In *Half a Life* and *The Mimic Men*, this feature can be approached. As the quest for identity permeates the Post-colonial writings in general, Naipaul's *Half a Life* tells the story of a race looking for its own identity that is lost in the dislocation and partially reconstructed in its encounter with the Other. The name of the main character, Willie Somerset Chandran, is the very incarnation of such attempt. The middle name, Somerset, was given in tribute to the famous English writer, while the surname suggests the Indian ancestry of the character and of the writer himself. Behind them, the relationship England/India can be depicted as well as the relationship England/Trinidad Tobago, the Empire/the Colony and, in the last instance, self/other.

Half a Life has four different settings, post-independence India, pre-independence Mozambique, London as the center of the Empire and Berlin, another sight related to the European self and, not by chance, a city which faces the Other in its current social (dis)order. Its plot is divided into three parts. The first depicts Willie's father biography, a character of half-rebellious Brahmin origin, whose wife comes from a low caste. The origin and status of Willie's parents root in him a feeling of shame that drives him towards a world of falsehood and Willie hides his own origin behind a mask he projects before the world. In this projection, he assumes a kind of Oedipus Complex and hates his father and his own history. In the second

part, Willie goes to London in search for a new identity but he only finds his own condition as an immigrant.

In London, Willie comes close to other immigrants, as Percy Cato, a Jamaican. Willie continues his game telling lies about his ancestorship and creating a Christian mother and a courtier father, but Percy is like him and they exchange their false identities. After some sexual experiences full of promiscuity, Willie finds himself divided with regard to his bid to achieve assimilation, which means a split identity.

As an immigrant, language became paramount for Willie. He could neither forget his native tongue, which would imply being tied to his denied identity, nor could he feel comfortable with his new language. In the third part of the novel, he shares this feeling with Ana, with whom he travels to Africa. In the meantime, he becomes a writer and in his first book he mirrors his doubled-edged condition. But it is important to stress that Willie feels his language, the house of his soul, escaping as he drifts away from one place to another and, in the end, as it was pointed out by Dr. Asha Chouby in *A Critique of Naipaul's Half a Life: Searching for Identity in Limbo*, the “quest for identity pushes the ‘subaltern’ towards silence”. (2002, p. 122)

The polarities order/disorder, reality/unreality, besides others, are present in the content of Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*, a work which sets up issues related to language and power. The range of experiences provided by the dichotomies is lived by Kripal Singh, the chief character, who embodies them and, around him, the contrast between the center and the margin is emphasized. In *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin argue that the “novel's identification of the union of language and power also identifies a geographic structure of power” (1989, p. 88)

Due to the fact that the dwellers of the margins mistake words for power, they are not able to understand that the link between language and power signifies the control of the means of communication, which is essential for the maintenance of social order and the prevailing status quo. So, this novel is marked by ambiguity and, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, “such ambivalence is by no means disabling, for it provides the tension out of which emerges a rich and incisive reconstruction of post-colonial experience”. (1988, p. 91)

3. POST-COLONIAL INDIAN LITERATURE

Salmon Rushdie is another writer whose work is immersed in the quest for identity. For many Western critics, Rushdie is the godfather of Post-colonial literature because of the great impact caused by *Midnight Children* (1981) and also because his novels brought to the English language an enlargement of semantic scope, a kind of clever liberation of language, added to his conception of the new role of translation which, according to him, emerges from the former colonies around the globe to challenge the established norms of translation and their meanings.

Rushdie's conception of “translated men” is another point in focus. Taking into account his own experience as a man from India and England and as a writer who uses English as a vehicle of his work, he was able to translate himself through a transformation of signs scattered in the form of Hindi/Urdu words and phrases all over his work. In the view of Susan Bassnet and Harish Trivedi in *Post-colonial Translation*, “... the case of Salmon Rushdie is only a limiting example of the way in which Post-colonial literature can become the battleground of ideological disputes”. (1999, p. 24) Indeed, it was based on an ideological dispute that he was given a *fatwah* by the former Iranian spiritual leader Ayatollah Khomeini

owed to Rushdie's publication of *The Satanic Verses* in 1988, a novel whose reception caused turmoil in the Islamic world.

Although he has published eight novels until now and a lot of essays, it is not an exaggeration to state that his life and career are before and after the *fatwah*. Given this, *Midnight Children* remains as his milestone and since *The Satanic Verses*, these have been two of his works we cannot avoid commenting.

Despite being considered a breakthrough, *Midnight Children* can also be seen through a postmodern microscope if we consider that the intertext is the base of its composition. This strategy links this novel to Indian holy books, to Gabriel Garcia Marques' *A Hundred Years of Solitude*, Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and *The Arabian Nights*. *Midnight Children* reproduces the techniques consecrated by the Indian oral narrative tradition, whose origin can be traced back to ancient Sanskrit written texts as *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. The main feature of this kind of narrative is the absence of linearity and, consequently, it is full of digressions and reiterations besides the insertion of tale within the tale.

In *Midnight Children*, the cultural translation technique is used in the relationship between the narrator, Saleem Sinai, and the listener, his wife Padma Mangroli. When Padma is telling her story to Saleem, she pictures her cultural otherness through an Indian English replete with non-standard forms which characterize, among others, the Babu English. Her language, which is typical illiterate production of an Indian woman of low caste, contrasts with Saleem's English which is considered by himself as Standard British English. In their dialogue on page 193 of the 1982 edition, she produces utterances like "you are so much needing a looker-after", with 'so much' and 'looker-after' as samples of deviation caused by literal translation. So, these brief considerations are enough, I think, to show the hybridism which characterizes this magical realist novel set in India Subcontinent and which is crowded with characters as most of Post-colonial writings.

It is very difficult to write about such a complex work as *The Satanic Verses* in just a few lines. But its reception clearly typifies the "clash of civilizations" represented by the Islamic fundamentalists and the modern West. According to Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*, "it is the medium Rushdie uses to reinterpret the Koran that constitutes the crime" (1994, p. 226). The argument defended by Bhabha and Yunus Samad is that poetry is the canonical form of Islam and, in using the Western genre of novel, Rushdie subverted the logic of the Islamic history "but with deep historical insight" (1994, p. 226). Then, returning to the issue of cultural translation, Rushdie's reading of the *Koran* represents a subversion of its authenticity that is, in Bhabha's words,

"through the act of cultural translation – he relocates the Koran's 'intentionality' by repeating and reinscribing it in the locale of the novel of Postwar cultural migrations and diasporas". (1994, p. 226)

4. POST-COLONIAL SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE

Nadine Gordimer is a South African writer, whose Post-coloniality is analogous to the content of a latent dream, to use a Freudian nomenclature, once her most distinguished novels and short-fiction were written and published before the nightmare of the apartheid being done away with from her mother nation. As a political activist, she put her pen at the service of the anti-apartheid cause and joined the African National Congress after the Chaperville massacre in 1960.

Two years later, the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela turned her militancy even stronger. While she fought in the political sphere, she developed a prolific literary career writing texts which deal with moral and racial issues. *The Lying Days* (1953) opens her vast collection of works and until the release of *The Conservationist* (1974), the novel which awarded her the Booker Prize in 1974, a host of others had been produced condensing the memories of the dark years of the racist regime of South Africa. Among them, *A World of Strangers* (1958), *Occasion for Living* (1963), *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966) and *A Guest of Honor* (1970).

In *The Conservationist*, two levels of narrative are detected. One is exercised by an omniscient narrator who describes the plot and its unifying elements. It is a story of a white man, Mehring, who is well off, divorced and father of a teenager who buys a farm in Johannesburg's surroundings to spend his leisure time. The farm is a place where a black body, probably assassinated, is found. The other level of the narrative is quite subjective as it evolves from monologues which reveal Mehring's identity and links it to the Negro found in his son's farm. The monologues contradict his son's version of the Negro's death. Afterwards, the son and his lover depart from the country instead of facing the consequences of their actions and the social issues.

It is remarkable to stress that the monologues are constructed through the usage of the pronouns "you" and "he" replacing the names. Both pronouns address the ambiguity as "you" can refer to the son or to his lover whilst "he" can assign the father or the son. It is up to the reader to discover who is who.

July's People (1981), in turn, brings an imaginary revolution through which the Black people defeat the regime of the apartheid and conquer their freedom. The novel plays off various groups of *July's People*: his family, his village and the Smales (a white couple). The plot peruses the way people deal with the choices they are forced to make by violence, race hatred and the state.

After being awarded with the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991, Gordimer carried on publishing her novels and short-stories, but from *The House Gun* (1998) and *Get a Life* (2005) to her 2007 short fiction *Beethoven Was One Sixteenth Black*, her dream of the end of the apartheid became manifest. Besides, the Post-coloniality of South Africa is, *ipso facto*, inaugurated with the wind-up of the apartheid and the internal colonization.

CONCLUSIONS

We can conclude from these notes that novel is the post-colonial genre *par excellence*. Another point we cannot avoid stressing is the emergence of post-colonialism as a new form of Orientalism, as advocated by Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge. However, some problems related to linguistic core have been raised by the theoreticians and writers as well. If writers of the former colonies cannot return to 'pre-english' condition and nurture their literature in the old and native languages, such as Sanskrit and Yoruba, the productions in the language of the colonizer imply a diving into the metropolitan cultures and from there they bring the new forms of expression.

Given this linguistic imbroglio, it is necessary to conclude that the appropriation of the vehicle of expression results in an unsolved contradiction represented by the presence of the colonized and the colonizer in the modes of representations. So, in terms of literary theory, post-colonialism proposes a new aesthetics in which new concepts and tropes, which give voice to the peripheral, are at stake. Consequently, it is quite important to understand post-colonialism as an ideological orientation and not as a historical phase. Thus, two post-

colonialisms come to surface: the post-colonialism of opposition and the postcolonialism of complicity. The former emerges with the independence of the old colonies; the latter is an inherent form typical of the process of colonization and that is exactly the vision that post-colonial theory is contesting.

Nevertheless, the model of linear history which prevailed in the literary field does not sustain anymore and it urges to think about new forms of writing both the history of the people from the former colonies and the history of literature and the arts, a task which demands a new model based on the dialogue between the nations considered central and those regarded as peripherals.

From the literary point of view, the Post-colonial literary theory claims for a new aesthetics which would be based on concepts and tropes that take the vision of the Other into account, of that one who did not have voice in the official history. Therefore, it is necessary to understand Post-colonialism as an ideological orientation, and not as a historical phase.

Finally, in these times of terrorist threats in Europe and in the United States, of Arab Spring and financial collapses almost everywhere, the promises of post-colonialism in places like Palestine, Libya, Syria, Sudan and others is a fallacy of postponed hopes.

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