Joseph Conrad: Betrayal and Identity

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Main content

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SINCE Thomas Moser's Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline (1957) Conrad studies have been reluctant to deal with the later fiction. Hampson contends that this has robbed us of a chance to see Conrad examining issues of identity that, in the later works, demand a more flexible approach than has been adopted to date.

Hampson argues that identity is called into question by choices which can be seen as betrayals. Borrowing from R. D. Laing, he shows us Almayer, for example, in his "attachment to his self ideal"(6) as deluded and therefore betraying himself. Nina, torn between the identity Almayer imposes on her as his daughter, and her love for Dain, finally betrays his ambitions for her and her own upbringing, choosing a new identity in the process.

What emerges from this is a three part view of Conrad's development. Up...

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means of negotiating ideas about identity. The book uses a Laingian analysis of the self and identity. The book also argues against the 'achievement and decline' model and makes a case for the serious study of Conrad's early and late fiction.