

CRITIQUING CAMUS, DENOUNCING ISLAMISM: KAMEL DAOUD'S THE MEURSAULT INVESTIGATION AS DOUBLE-EDGED POSTCOLONIAL REWRITING

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Abstract

Kamel Daoud's The Meursault Investigation (2015) is a recent addition to the category of postcolonial rewriting, a field enriched with seminal texts like Jean Rhys' Wide Sargasso Sea and J. M. Coetzee's Foe. Ostensibly a counter-text to Albert Camus's classic novel The Stranger (1942), Daoud's debut novel is an equally fierce indictment of post-Independence Algerian society, particularly the Islamist sweep over Algeria and its authoritarian interpretation of religion. Narrated from the perspective of Harun, the brother of the nameless Arab Meursault kills in Camus's novel, The Meursault Investigation is for the major part an attempt at the restitution of the dignity, honour and identity of the colonized Algerian subject. However, being a staunch individualist, Daoud does not mouth the patriotic rhetoric of most fellow Algerians, nor does he capitulate to the diktats of the religious fanatics, thus inviting criticism from both the nationalists and the Muslim conservatives. The paper examines this ambivalent self-positioning of Daoud's novel between Camus and Algeria, imperialism and Islamism.

Keywords: *Camus, meursault, algeria, islamism, postcolonial, rewriting.*

“A book which does not contain its counterbook is considered incomplete” (Borges 11)

“Writing is compulsorily affiliated to re-writing” (Gamal 1)

“At the foundation of any writing there is a predatory act.” (Kamel Daoud)

The concepts of writing back to the Empire and rewriting canonical Eurocentric texts are well established in Postcolonial Literature and Postcolonial Studies. Postcolonial re-writings of canonical texts such as Michel Tournier's *Vendredi ou les Limbes du Pacifique (Friday, or, The Other Island)* (1967), JM Coetzee's *Foe* (1986) both re-writings of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), a counter text to Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, have served both as continuations as well as critiques of the canonical texts they sought to rework. A recent addition to this category of writing is Kamel Daoud's debut novel *The Meursault Investigation* (2015).

Albert Camus's classic novel *The Stranger* (1942), is narrated from the perspective of the pied noir¹ protagonist, Meursault; the palimpsest that lies submerged under this canonical tale about Meursault and the post-War European's existential angst, is the story of Meursault's victim, the nameless Arab. The Arab is a marginal figure in Camus's story, a defenceless, voiceless victim. When Meursault is tried following the murder, the fact that he killed an Arab, or another human being, for that matter, appears less important to the Court than his unfeeling, apathetic nature. Meursault is sentenced to death not for homicide, but for refusing to cry at his mother's funeral. As Mersault himself puts it, “... in the speeches of my lawyer and the prosecuting counsel a great deal was said about me; more, in fact, about me personally than about my crime.” (Camus 98). The murder of the Arab is only a pretext for Meursault's trial, condemnation and execution. The Arab himself is rendered almost invisible in Camus's existential tale. He is not even the Other; it is the society, that sits in judgement on Meursault and punishes him for not conforming, which