

## Research Article

Received: 11/08/2021; Accepted: 19/08/2021; Published: 12/11/2021

# Mimicry, Ambivalence, and Hybridity of Lazlo Strange Character in Laini Taylor's *Strange the Dreamer*

Pramudya Lazuardi<sup>a</sup>, Arido Laksono<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University, Semarang, 50274, Indonesia

<sup>b</sup>English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University, Semarang, 50274, Indonesia

*pramudyalaz@gmail.com*

*arido@live.undip.ac.id*

## Abstract

The study aims to describe which aspects represent mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity using Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial studies. This research applies a qualitative analysis method. The primary source of the research data is the novel entitled *Strange the Dreamer* by Laini Taylor as the object of the study. In contrast, the secondary sources are books and journals related to the study that serves as the primary reference regarding the theory of Bernstein's heroism and Bhabha's postcolonialism. To collect the data, the writer uses the close-reading method. This study indicates that the journey of the main character of *Strange the Dreamer*, Lazlo Strange, is intertwined with postcolonialism issues that develop his act of mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity.

**Keywords:** postcolonialism; mimicry; ambivalence; hybridity; Lazlo Strange

---

## 1. Background of the Study

This universe resembles human conflicts of interest. War is a result of this struggle. The world has officially seen two wars, the first ending in 1919 and the second in 1945. Even though the battle is ended, the effects on the colonists are far from done. Post-war difficulties evolve throughout time and cross-cultural boundaries. These phenomena are postcolonial problems. They advise ex-colonials to accept their blended culture's various and often contradictory aspects as an inescapable truth of history [1].

Postcolonialism is a time in which individuals are influenced by war ideas. It alludes to the debate over colonialism's influence on culture and communities [2]. It is a critical theory that seeks to comprehend the concepts of power, identity, and culture among groups of people controlled by a single superior identity.

*Strange the Dreamer* is a fantasy story about Lazlo Strange, a war orphan enthralled with magical legends about the abandoned city of Weep. *Strange the Dreamer* has three races: humans, gods, and godspawns. When humanity settled Weep, the god race attacked

it. The god race perpetrated horrors including murder, enslavement, and adultery during the conflict. After retaliating, the humans won the fight. Aside from Weep, The Kingdom of Zosma is home to a variety of human civilizations. The kingdom also endured a similar conflict. Despite being of the same race, they have distinct cultures as the effect of the post-war.

The writer aims to examine the novel as the object of research to investigate Lazlo Strange's path of confronting postcolonial difficulties to emerge new and true identities from the perspective of Homi K. Bhabha's mimicry, ambivalence, and hybridity.

## **2. Methods**

### *2.1 Research Method*

The author uses qualitative analysis to analyze and explain phenomena in this investigation. The writer uses library research to acquire and verify data to draw information from literary works to support the study results [3]. The data is then inventoried and written utilizing a contextual technique in order to analyze the author's duties and readers, as well as conduct additional analyses [4]. Finally, the author uses an objective method to describe the novel's topic, character, place, and conflict in terms of the intrinsic element, concentrating on the link between the literary text and its unique literary techniques [5]. The writer employs Homi Bhabha's postcolonial critique approach for the extrinsic aspect.

### *2.2 Approach Method*

The writer uses two techniques to examine the novel in this research. The fundamental element of the novel's theme, character, and conflict is explained objectively in the intrinsic section. This approach focuses on connecting the literary text and its particular literary methods [5]. Aside from that, the writer also approaches the literary work using Bhabha's postcolonial critique. This critique focuses on the notion of "beyond," which includes ambivalence, imitation, and hybridity for the extrinsic aspect.

## **3. Theoretical Framework**

### *3.1. Postcolonialism*

The Empire Strikes Back by Bill Ashcroft was the first literary effort to address postcolonialism (1989). Many figures continue to expand this idea into new concepts. One is Homi K. Bhabha. Bhabha presents the concepts of imitation, ambivalence, and hybridity in *The Location of Culture* (1994). The notion from Bhabha's book is the result of the dominant culture's dispersion or seeds of culture and proliferation, replacement, or dominant culture.

#### *3.1.1. Mimicry*

Mimicry is the act about standing out against a discolored background, not blending in. The context is that colonial subjects mimic dominant culture's lifestyle, thinking, food, conduct, and education. For Bhabha, mimicry notices rupture but converts it into an ambiguity that constitutes the colonial subject as a partial presence. Their subjectivity is shown through colonizer power. By refusing to be incorporated by colonial culture, the colonized abuses it. It implies that mimicry is a likeness as well as a threat [6 p.86-88].

### 3.1.2. Ambivalence

According to Bhabha, postcolonial ambivalence is the outcome of colonialism. It is related to the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer. The colonizer's people seem to reflect the colonized people. They thought they would have a better life if they followed the colonizer's example. In this way, the colonial other loses their social personality and the colonizer loses their social character [6 p.22]. Furthermore, he claims that ambivalence refers to a simultaneous appeal to an item, individual, or activity, as well as a repulsion from it [6 p.80].

### 3.1.3. Hibridity

The term "hybridity" describes the mixing of colonizer and colonized cultures. As a result of blending and moving, new identities arise. A person's hybrid identity is formed by combining two distinct cultures. However, hybridity involves cultural and political interaction between conquerors and colonized. It also affects the colonized's lack of culture [6 p.112].

Hybridity is the result of ambivalence mimicry used to understand the colonizer's culture. Hybridity may disrupt the colonizers' concept through disavowal reaction. The colonial hybrid reimplants colonial power in resistance mode. It shows that the colonized may retain their culture. As a result, acting as both a colonizer and a colonized person allows one to negotiate one's subjectivity with dominant power [6].

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 *Intrinsic Aspects*

#### 3.1.1 Theme

The writer claims the story's primary theme is ideas and life after the war. There are three major wars. The first is the Zosma war that made Lazlo an orphan. "A war for nothing". However, the war had a lasting impact on the orphaned children. The youngsters came to the monastery "like shipments of lambs," the monks said, "with no knowledge of their provenance" [7 p.4]. The Godspawn nicknamed the 15-year-old war in Weep "The Carnage". To end the war, a human race named Eril-Fane slays the six Mesarthim gods and their Godspawn during this event. After the war, the conflicts leave deep wounds on everyone involved and later develop vengeance for each race towards each other

### 3.1.2 Character and Characterization of Lazlo Strange

Lazlo is a war orphan who lives in the Kingdom of Zosma without knowing who his parents are or where he was born. A monk named Lazlo after his tongueless relative and the country named all war orphans Strange. Lazlo had grey skin when he was found as a baby.

In moral terms, Lazlo is generally aloof and seldom communicates. Isolating himself because the monks' rules enslaved him and kept him from being free proves his frustration with the rules. Lazlo lacks significant social relationships because of his monastery upbringing [7 p.14-15]. Despite being isolated, he grows up caring for all individuals of all races and overcoming all conflicts and challenges arising in his environment.

Lazlo is also characterized as having a creative mind. As a child, he intentionally avoided prayer to play swords like a Tizerkane warrior. Lazlo imagined himself fighting ancient war monsters while he was playing. With a few blows, he made the shadow monster run. As a result of his creative thinking, he grows fond of literature [7].

### 3.1.2 Conflicts of Lazlo Strange

Lazlo's first internal conflict came when he realized he was a war victim. He once grumbled upon his fate, "and none of us became children to be orphans," [7 p.1]. He accepted his fate and moved on with his life. Aside from that, there is a moment Lazlo must face his feelings of failure after understanding his true journey's goal. He fails to reunite the human and godspawn races and save Sarai, his first love. "This couldn't happen," the statement says. "This can't be it. He'd never felt more helpless." [7 p.456].

A set of rules and penalties that limit his ability to think and act is the external conflict for him. He is forbidden to think irrationally and act based on magic and fiction idealism. He ultimately addresses the issue by moving to a new place and applying his Zesmonan Abbey knowledge.

His escape and decision to work as a junior librarian at the Great Library of Zosma brings him back into contact with another external conflict. Librarians are considered slaves by scholars. While the alchemist Thyon had to steal his book, *The Complete Works of Lazlo Strange* because the librarian must always yield to the scholars [7 p.27].

## 3.2 *Extrinsic Aspects*

### 3.2.1 Mimicry

Lazlo develops natural and unconscious mimicry since he was born. At first, he has gray skin when he was a baby. In this example, he turns gray skin into normal human skin. After being fed and nurtured at Zemonan Abbey, Lazlo's skin finally returned to normal and resembled a "normal person." Normal humans are people who live in the Kingdom of Zosma's average civilization. Although this chapter is allegorical, the writer argues that Lazlo's subconscious drove him to adapt to Zosma's society.

When he was raised in Zemonan Abbey, a school for scriptwriters, he followed a rule that makes every boy learn and act based on only logical thinking in a never-ending cycle

manner. In fact, Lazlo enjoys fantasy novels and pretending to be a Zesmonan Warrior [7 p.9-11]. Because of his abnormal thinking, he was beaten as a form of punishment for discipline.

As a result, he slowly has to leave his identity of loving mystic arts. The monks also state that if he wishes to live a holy life like them, he must avoid all harmful sources of enjoyment. Some of his classmates felt he had lost his wildness due to the society there [7 p.14]. After these events, he escaped from the place to work in Great Library of Zosma

By working in the library, Lazlo uses his chance to hone his bibliotech skills. He even studies harder, conducts researches, and as a result, he writes a book entitled *The Complete Book of Lazlo Strange*. His book is a compilation of magic and Weep studies. Despite his efforts, he and his work were never acknowledged. To begin, he is a librarian. Second, his skill adds little to Zosma's. The scholars and other senior librarians think that a mere librarian is only the servant of the scholar. If a librarian breaks the limit, their effort will be meaningless and even be considered as uselessness [7 p.24]. This phenomenon indirectly makes the writer argue that this effort is to continue purifying their higher culture that praises logical science and its application. By this condition, Lazlo works hard to be able to pass the qualification test to become a companion for Tizerkane warrior and their journey to Weep.

After leaving the library and life there, Lazlo's voyage with his Weep local friends helps him re-implement a new culture as a type of adaptation. The writer believes it depicts his new culture. He no longer spends his days reading but adventuring. He also trained in combat and hunting skills. A Tizerkane warrior inspire and train Lazlo in the process. Lazlo accomplishes it despite not being a fighter. Upon doing that, he still admits that "He still felt like an impostor," [7 p.98]. His story-telling ability and his hobby of exploring knowledge of magic is no longer being underestimated. By this, the writer argues that Lazlo is actually more aware of how his life and culture are shifting, when compared with his previous life story. This condition is a clear indication of Lazlo's act of mimicry.

Lazlo's mimicry shows how binding norms restrain a minority with a distinct culture than the majority. Despite his limitations, Lazlo is continuously looking for methods to maximize his potential while maintaining his identity. When he was in Weep, his mimicry is intended to mock Zosma's culture. But, when he mimics Weep's culture, he feels like he belongs with these kinds of culture.

### 3.2.2 Ambivalence

Born into a new culture that suppressed his desire to create his personality, Lazlo stood still with his own identity. However, he slowly develops an ambivalence. There are several acts where he does things he does not like, but at the same time, he does those in order to utilize several strengths.

Lazlo utilized his first skills from Zemonan Abbey. Although all youngsters are taught to copy scripts, he also learns to read and understand books comprehensively. In result, he made his work utilizing his expertise. Nevertheless, Lazlo's brilliance clashes with Zosma's worldview. They encourage clever people to appreciate formal education, such

as university education. No matter how smart someone is, he will never be acknowledged unless he goes to university. A remark states that “they had the minds, but not the gold,” [7 p.24]. It suggests that there is a divide between smart people and wise people. A smart culture exists at Zosma, the writer infers. Unlike others who label science as rational or illogical. In the writer’s opinion, magical sciences are no longer addressed since they are a dead subject.

During his six-month journey to Weep, Lazlo learns a lot from the Tizerkane warriors. After all, Lazlo must recognize that he is not one of them despite his efforts to learn their language and battle style. He feels he lacks other abilities, like fighting, that Tizerkane needs. As a result, Lazlo is forced to take a menial job. Lazlo has felt ambivalence, yet he continues to live in Weep and learns the culture there.

### 3.2.2 Hybridity

Lazlo gains a new identity as a result of his cultural experiences. This new culture arises from transcultural in the resulting area/space. Lazlo’s cultural hybridity gives him a new character and identity. Although Lazlo does not know where he came from, he is characterized as a child who enjoys being alone in his fantasies. Restrictions at Zemonan Abbey eventually stop him. During his stay, he does a regular job. However, while working in Zosma’s Great Library, he develops a new persona.

While working as a junior librarian, reading and doing research is Lazlo’s new culture. He also applies skills he gained when copying manuscripts in the monastery. He eventually becomes a more intellectual person [7 p.14].

Although being a bookworm, when he goes to Weep, he left his reading habit and emerged in a new culture. Being the disciple of the Tizerkane warrior who is recognized for its science and storytelling, he learns fighting, language, and culture. He also discovers Weep’s culture that glorifies librarians as the keeper of wisdom, not just mere servants of scholars [7 P.70]. This information strengthens Lazlo’s sense of self as a librarian and a ‘dreamer’.

Finally, based on his understanding of the god and the godspawn, Lazlo meets a new culture. Suheyla and Eril-Fane eventually explain that there had been colonialism and enslavement against people in the city of Weep [7 p.228]. Later, he decides to find a way to put an end to this long-term hatred between the human and the godspawn race.

In the end, Lazlo changes into a different being—a mix between a human and a godspawn, either in physical or spiritual form. Laini Taylor described this event as the culmination of Lazlo’s life. Nobodies like Lazlo have powerful emotional senses. He adapts to and combines two diverse cultural ideas. The proof reveals his various selves. The word ‘hero’ defines his true identity. Since childhood, he has wished to be a hero.

The writer believes Lazlo recognized he had formed a separate personality from his life’s responsibilities at this time. This is emphasized by the narrator’s quotation, “Who did Lazlo think he was?”, when he encounters the godspawns in the Citadel. Later, the narrator adds with another question, “Orphan, librarian, or hero? Maybe he was all of

them” [7 p.479] The writer concludes that Lazlo’s journey while facing several postcolonial issues develops his multicultural and ambiguous identity.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study’s analysis has two parts: intrinsic and extrinsic. Characters and conflicts are crucial in assessing the narrative’s concepts. The main character’s actions and their relevance in every story element are essential in studying its development. It focuses on Lazlo’s journey while facing the issues of Bhabha’s postcolonialism as effects of the great wars and how Lazlo maintains his sense of restraint and his identity-blending.

Lazlo Strange needs to imitate Zosma’s culture to eat and survive. The civilization of Zosma tend to accept different civilizations to break free from the restraints. However, he rejects the limitation so he may conduct his own identity. As the result of several restraint, struggles to face the opposition, and ambivalence towards preserving his own belief, a new identity emerges through his cultural contacts with humans and godspawn. The novel describes this event as the birth of Lazlo Strange’s new identity.

#### **References**

- [1] Tyson, Lois. (1999). *Critical Theory Today*. Garland Publishing, Inc. New York
- [2] Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2000). *Post-colonial studies: The key concepts*. London: Routledge.
- [3] George, Mary W. (2008). *The Elements of Library Research: What Every Student Needs to Know*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- [4] Behrendt, S., (2008). *Contextual Analysis*. [online] Unl.edu. Available at: <<http://www.unl.edu/english/sbehrendt/StudyQuestions/ContextualAnalysis.html>> [Accessed 20 March 2021].
- [5] Abrams, M. H. (1953). *The mirror and the lamp: romantic theory and the critical tradition*. Oxford University Press.
- [6] Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
- [7] Taylor, L. (2017). *Strange the dreamer*. Little, Brown and Company.