Francesca Mastracci  
*L’Enigma del centro: Joseph Conrad e V. S. Naipaul*

**Abstract** – One of the most controversial problems that still troubles the Conradian critique is the question on where to find a ‘center’ in works in which the whole narration seems to be structured around a heart that in the end reveals to be devoid of any presence. Starting from its title, *Heart of Darkness* can be considered, in fact, as the epitomic example for this somehow oxymoronic dichotomy that also permeates more generally Joseph Conrad’s life and narrative. The aim of the present study is to demonstrate how the compulsive representation of a ‘center’ in his works is a crucial idiosyncrasy in the author’s career. Drawing upon Conrad’s narrative process, the Trinidadian writer V. S. Naipaul dedicates to his predecessor an essay that would forerun his own personal research for a literary and geographical center, as described in his autobiographical work *Finding the Center*. Finally, using the Derridean notion of a decentered center, the present study will analyze how it is possible to read in the reiteration of marginal spaces in their narratives a sense of their being transnational writers deprived of a unique center where to make their existence revolve.

**Keywords:** Joseph Conrad, V. S. Naipaul, Jacques Derrida, enigma, centre