UCLA
Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies

Title
Racism and Cultural Imperialism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/88v0x0vc

Journal
Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 25(1)

ISSN
0041-5715

Author
Deena, Seodial

Publication Date
1997

Peer reviewed

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

RACISM AND CULTURAL IMPERIALISM IN CONRAD'S *HEART OF DARKNESS*

Seodial Deena

Overview:

> They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.
>
> —Karl Marx[1]

> In shattering the mirror of representation, and its range of Western bourgeois social and psychic "identifications", the spectacle of colonial fantasy sets itself as an uncanny "double". Its terrifying figures—savages, grotesques, mimicmen—reveal things so profoundly familiar to the West that it cannot bear to remember them. It is in that sense, and for that very reason, that "the horror! the horror!" said in the heart of darkness itself, and the "Ou-boum" of the empty Marabar caves will continue to terrify and confound us, for they address that "other scene" within ourselves that continually divides us against ourselves and others.
>
> —Homi K. Bhabha[2]

The latter half of the twentieth century has been the most revolutionary period for writers of color. Political independence of many colonies in the 1960s and 1970s and the achievements of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States of America in the 1960s paved the way for the release of numerous marginalized voices. These voices drastically revised the dominant historical, theoretical, and literary perspectives. And for the first time in centuries, colonized and marginalized peoples began to "decolonize their minds." Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's

---

[1] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1935).

[2] Homi K. Bhabha, "Representation and the Colonial Text: Critical Exploration of Some Forms of Mimeticism," in Frank Gloversmith (ed.), *The Theory of Reading* (Brighton, England: Harvester Press, 1984) 119-20.

Decolonizing the Mind, Chinua Achebe's *Morning Yet On Creation Day*, V. S. Naipaul's *India: A Wounded Civilization*, and the works of many writers of color extended the charted path of truth and clarity.[3]

Gareth Griffith's statement about Ngugi's novels aptly describes the works of many other writers of color. Griffith points out that Ngugi's "novels illustrate how the desire to record the truth about the past and the destructive impact of colonialism on the integrity of traditional life became an almost universal impulse for writers of the first wave."[4] Thus, the decolonizing and revisionary work of these writers became critical, since for centuries the colonized have been fed a distorted or inadequate portrayal of themselves by colonial writers.[5]

For example E.J. Kalinnikova points out that "despite... Forster's most interesting descriptions of the town of Chandrapore, the holy Ganges, the Marabar caves—a Buddhist and Jainist object of worship—his work does not contain a deep analysis of Indian reality and Indian character."[6] Graham Greene reinforces this point in his acknowledgment: "It was Mr. Narayan... who first brought India, in the sense of the Indian population and Indian way of life, alive to me."[7] In fact, Forster himself alludes to the near impossibility of the colonizer to represent faithfully the colonized. He illustrates this through Mr. Fielding's response, "Try seeing Indians," to Adela Quested's desire "of seeing the real India," and Ronny's question of "how's one to see the real India?"[8] Just over a decade later, Forster admitted in the

---

[3] Timothy Brennan points out that "the history of our times is...the history of decolonization," and that at such a time like this the "European cultural history is in bad need of revisionary scholarship that would recapture some of this sense of interlocking, mutually affecting relationships," quoted from Timothy Brennan, "Preface," *Modern Fiction Studies* 35.1 (Spring 1989): 4.

[4] Garreth Griffiths, *A Double Exile: African and West Indian Writing Between Two Cultures* (London: Marian Boyers, 1978) 32.

[5] For a useful discussion on the colonial-biased representation of colonization see Dan Izevbaye, "The Igbo as Exceptional Colonial Subjects: Fictionalizing an Abnormal Historical Situation," in Bernth Lindfors (ed.), *Approaches to Teaching Achebe's Things Fall Apart* (New York: MLA, 1991). See also Chinua Achebe, "Colonialist Criticism," in *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays* (London: Heinemann, 1975).

[6] E.J. Kalinnikova, "India in Indian Writing in English and British Writing," in E.J. Kalinnikova (ed.), *Problems of Modern Indian Literature* (Calcutta: Statistical Publishing Society, 1985) 180.

[7] Graham Greene, *Introduction. The Bachelor of Arts. R.K. Narayan* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State College Press, 1994) i-x.

[8] E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (London: Harcourt, 1924) 24-25.

Preface to *Untouchable*: "*Untouchable* could only have been written by an Indian.... No European, however sympathetic, could have created the character of Bakha, because he would not have known enough about his troubles."[9]

Similar arguments are applicable to many colonial writers who try to portray the dilemma of colonization and marginalization. How can they understand oppression if they have not sat in the seat of the oppressed?[10] How can they speak of that which they have not known and experienced?[11] The discipline of empathizing with another race, class, or gender is uniquely acquired by few writers. Jean Rhys is one such writer.[12] Joseph Conrad falls short of this rare achievement which is exemplified by the racism and culturally imperialist ideology of his works.

I have consciously and deliberately selected Conrad because for over half of a century, he has been portrayed and seen as a primary example of one who empathizes with Africans. Further, I have chosen to explore Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* because this work seemed to have constituted the icon of Conrad's attack on the Establishment.

---

[9] E. M. Forster, "Preface," in Mulk Raj, *Untouchable* (New York: Bodley Head, 1970) vi-vii.

[10] I am using the illustration of Ezekiel sitting where the captives sat in order to understand the agony of their oppression: "Then I came to them of the captivity at Tel-abib, that dwelt by the river Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days" (Ezekiel 3:15).

[11] I am not proposing that one must be of the same race, class, or gender in order to understand the culture and condition of a group of people. Rather, I am saying that one needs to humbly 'put oneself into the shoes of another' in order to empathize with people of different races and cultures. Not all whites are colonizers, and not all people of color can empathize with the colonized. See Toril Moi's essay, "Feminist Literary Criticism" in Ann Jefferson and David Robey (eds.), *Modern Literary Theory* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1982), for the illustration of how not all women writers are feminist and not all male writers are anti-feminist.

[12] See Jean Rhys, *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography* (London: Duetsch, 1979) for arguments to support that Jean Rhys is more Caribbean than British and more black than white. She is regarded as both a West Indian and British author, but Rhys questions her family's claim of the concept of 'racial purity' in the Caribbean, see Theresa F. O'Connor, *Jean Rhys: The West Indian Novels* (New York: New York University Press, 1986). Judith Raiskin supports this point. See Judith Raiskin, "Jean Rhys: Creole Writing and Strategies of Reading," *ARIEL* 22.4 (Oct. 1991): 51-67. Furthermore, Rhys longs to be black, prays for a racial miracle, and admires black girls, see *Smile Please: An Unfinished Autobiography*.

Heart of Darkness has always been seen as Conrad's most dramatic and effective attack on Western exploitation of Africa through colonization, but this paper refutes the traditional responses to this text by examining traces of racism and cultural imperialism in Conrad's novella.

Racism Undermines Conrad's Attack on Colonialism in *Heart of Darkness:*

> *Heart of Darkness* registers its manifold preoccupations in a title which by signifying a geographical location, a metaphysical landscape and a theological category, addresses itself simultaneously to Europe's exploitation of Africa, the primeval human situation, an archaic aspect of the mind's structure and a condition of moral baseness.... the book has been interpreted as an attack on imperialism, a parable about the construction of ethical values, a mystic descent into the primal underworld, a night journey into the unconscious self and a spiritual voyage towards transcendent knowledge.... in joining an allegory about the destiny of colonialism's meretricious aspiration with a mythopoetic narration of the West's penetration into the estranging world of its other, the fiction paradoxically contains within itself the seeds of an unorthodox apologia for values it has discredited and disowned.
>
> —Benita Parry[13]

> According to [Keith] Carabine,[14] the rise of African literature has brought him [Conrad] to the forefront again, with at least one Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe, causing a storm by accusing Conrad of thorough-going racism. 'For many African writers, Conrad is the Lion of the Past, the person who they have got to get round if

[13] Benita Parry, *Conrad and Imperialism: Ideological Boundaries and Visionary Frontiers* (London: Macmillan, 1983) 20.

[14] Keith Carabine is a senior lecturer in English at Kent University and has served as chair of the Joseph Conrad Society.

> they are going to write. It is an incredibly big debate,' says Carabine. And all this on the basis of just one novella, the acclaimed *Heart of Darkness*, and a short story, *An Outpost of Progress*, which deal with the continent.
>
> —Andrew Davidson[15]

According to S. Ekema Agbaw, "the late 19th and early 20th century was the climax of European colonialism in Africa, when white traders, missionaries, travelers, colonial administrators, anthropologists and creative writers presented Africans as negations of themselves."[16] These portraits were, mostly, limited and inaccurate because "the English did not understand" most people from different races and cultures,[17] and their portraits were dependent on knowledge from science and literature. For example, John Buchan's *Prester John* (1910) reinforces "Africa as the dark continent, mysterious, romantic, dangerous, peopled by inferior savages, primitive and centuries behind Europeans in social and moral evolution, but consumed by instincts and passions which the civilized Europeans are more able to control."[18] Thus, by the mid-nineteenth century, a racially stereotyped portrait of the colonized was already established.[19] Many critics, including Agbaw

---

[15] Andrew Davidson, "A Man for All Reasons," *The Spectator* 27 August, 1994: 29.

[16] Stephen Ekema Agbaw, "An African Teacher of Conrad's Heart of Darkness in America," in Jim Glimm (compiler), *Proceedings: The 1993 Conference of the Pennsylvania State Universities, 1-2 October, 1993* (Mansfield, PA: Mansfield University Press, 1993) 134.

[17] Brian V. Street, *The Savage in Literature: Representations of 'Primitive' Society in English Fiction 1858-1920* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1975) 3.

[18] Phil Joffe, "Africa and Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness: The 'Bloody Racist' as Demystifier of Imperialism," in Keith Carabine, Owen Knowles, and Krajka Wieslaw eds., *Conrad's Literary Career* (Lubin: Maria Curie Sklodowska UP, 1992) 77.

[19] Colonial writers who were influenced by anthropology, love for exotic portraits, etc., include D. H. Lawrence, H. Rider Haggard, R. M. Ballantyne, John Buchan, and A. E. W. Mason. It should also be noted that Darwin's theory of evolution, *Origins of Species*, 1858, became a major influence on much of colonial literature from this period (see Brian V. Street, *The Savage in Literature*, p. 6).

The following passage from David Hume's *The Philosophical Works* (Darmstadt, Germany: Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1748) illustrates white ethnocentrism's influence on Western philosophy:

> I am apt to suspect the negroes, and in general all the other species of men... to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures

and Phil Joffe, feel that this practice has continued throughout the 20th century. Within this socio-economic and political milieu, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* appeared in 1899 in *Blackwood's Magazine*, and three years later it appeared in book form as one of the stories in *Youth*. Having "fame and publicity" and the prestigious literary friendship of John Galsworthy, Stephen Crane, H. G. Wells, Ford Madox Ford, Henry James, and others before its publication,[20] Conrad's place in the British literary canon was fortified with *Heart of Darkness*. Since then, this text has enjoyed canonical status, and has been studied as psychology, history, writing, modernism, and fiction.[21] It has been studied by both colonizer and colonized as the bible of colonialism.

Many Third World writers arriving in England identified with Conrad's marginalization and gravitated towards his works. These writers assumed Abdul R. Jan Mohamed and David Lloyd's theory that "cultures designated as minorities have certain shared experiences by virtue of similar antagonistic relationships to the dominant culture, which seeks to marginalize them all."[22] Furthermore, two "assumptions" "legitimized" the "colonial text."[23] In the first case, "there was ideological continuity between the colonizer and the colonized, that the metropolis and margin were united by a common culture and could hence read the colonial narrative uniformly."[24] In the

---

> amongst them, no arts, no sciences. On the other hand, the most rude and barbarous of the whites, such as the ancient Germans, the present Tartars, have still something eminent about them, in their valour, form of government, or some other particular. Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made in men original distinction betwixt these breeds of men.... In Jamaica indeed they talk of one negroe as a man of parts and learning; but 'tis likely he is admired for very slender accomplishments, like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly (252).

[20] Robert L. Ross (ed.), *International Literature in English: Major Essays on Major Writers*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991) ix.

[21] See epigram in Benita Parry, *Conrad and Imperialism: Ideological Boundaries and Visionary Frontiers* (London: Macmillan, 1983).

[22] Abdul Jan Mohamed and David Lloyd (eds.), "Introduction," *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) 1.

[23] Simon Gikandi, "Chinua Achebe and the Post-Colonial Esthetic: Writing, Identity, and National Formation," *Studies in Twentieth-Century Literature* 15.1 (Winter 1991) 32-33.

[24] ibid., 32-33.

second case, the colonized could regularly read "the colonial text from a point of identification with the colonizer and hence not recognize their othering in texts such as *Heart of Darkness.*"[25]

Nevertheless, having embraced Conrad on this basis, several of these writers soon discovered a subtle ambivalence and betrayal in Conrad. Chinua Achebe's reading of European texts forced the dominant perspective on him, but at the University of Ibadan he saw Damascus:[26] "I suddenly saw that these books had to be read in a different light. Reading *Heart of Darkness*, for instance, which was a very, very highly praised book and which is still highly praised, I realized that I was one of those savages jumping up and down on the beach. Once that kind of enlightenment comes to you, you realize that someone has to write a different kind of story."[27]

In *Decolonizing the Mind*, after praising Conrad's use of a variety of narrative voices in several of his novels, Ngugi concludes: "On the whole I found Conrad's vision limited. His ambivalence towards imperialism—and it was imperialism that supplied him with the setting and subject matter of his novels—could never let him go beyond balancing acts of liberal humanism."[28] V.S. Naipaul has reservations about Conrad as a novelist because "there is something flawed and unexercised about his creative imagination," and "he [Conrad] does not ... involve me [Naipaul] in his fantasy."[29]

On February 18, 1975, Achebe gave the second Chancellor's Lecture at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. The lecture was published in *The Massachusetts Review* in 1977 and revised for re-publication as "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" in *Heart of Darkness*, edited by Robert Kimbrough. Achebe's lecture attacks "the desire—one might say the need—in Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of

---

[25] ibid., 32-33.

[26] Saul was sincere but mistaken as he embraced the establishment's perspective in persecuting the church. However, the light of truth shone on him as he traveled to Damascus. Enlightenment caused him to be changed to Paul and to see things differently, from the minority's point of view (Acts 9:1-43).

[27] In Simon Gikandi, *Reading Chinua Achebe: Language and Ideology in Fiction* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1991) 6.

[28] Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Curry, 1986) 76.

[29] V. S. Naipaul, "Conrad's Darkness," in Hamner *Critical* 60.

negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest."[30] It also uses *Heart of Darkness* as an example of a racist portrayal of Africa. Achebe has convincingly demonstrated Conrad's racism in this text. According to Achebe, "*Heart of Darkness* projects the image of Africa as 'the other world,' the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality."[31] He carefully supports his thesis with comparative (historical, literary, psychological) data and textual analysis, showing how *Heart of Darkness* portrays Africa as primitive, evil, animalistic, and deformed.

Since Achebe's attack on Conrad, few critics/writers, including Francis B. Singh and Stephen Ekema Agbaw, have supported this postcolonial view.[32] Several critics/writers, however, have defended Conrad or attacked Achebe. Wilson Harris, a Guyanese writer, acknowledges that "the West does have the bad conscience Achebe attributes to it and is seeking therefore, some assuagements of its guilt," but he is convinced that Achebe's "judgment or dismissal of *Heart of Darkness* is wrong."[33] Charles Ponnuthurai Sarvan examines Achebe's charge of racism in *Heart of Darkness*, and with cool, lucid prose defends Conrad. Sarvan concludes that Conrad, unlike Joyce Cary and Graham Greene, does not pretend to understand the Third World, but while he "too was not entirely immune to the infection of the beliefs and attitude of his age,... he was ahead of most in trying to break free."[34]

Robert F. Haugh argues that Conrad delights in creating obscurities, and that these obscurities in *Heart of Darkness* present numerous problems of interpretation for critics. Peter Nazareth

---

[30] Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," in Robert Kimbrough (ed.), *Heart of Darkness* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988) 251-52.
[31] ibid., 252.
[32] The story of the King's new suit has some relevance here. The status quo teaches the masses to see the King's nakedness as his new suit, and they do adhere to the dominant ideology for one reason or the other. Only the little boy, who has no reputation to protect, has the innocence and boldness to shout out that the King is naked.
[33] Wilson Harris, "The Frontier on Which *Heart of Darkness* Stands," in Robert Kimbrough (ed.), *Heart of Darkness*, 262-63.
[34] Charles Ponnuthurai Sarvan, "Racism and *The Heart of Darkness*," in Robert Kimbrough (ed.), *Heart of Darkness*, 285.

condemns Achebe's attack on Conrad, explaining that "Achebe is a bad critic because, like Naipaul, he does not pay enough attention to words." Nazareth enlarges his explanation by including other Third World writers: "More than that, the explanation is that once Conrad helped Colonials break out, some of them looked back and found him unnecessary."[35] Hunt Hawkins methodically defends Conrad with his five defenses, and concludes with an appeal for recognition of Conrad's "special status as one of the few writers of his period who struggled with the issue of race" and for appreciation for "the remarkable fair-mindedness he achieved."[36] And P. J. M. Robertson in trying to "stress Achebe's value as a novelist" and to suggest the brilliant dialogue between *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart*, deviates to lacerate Achebe in defense of Conrad:

> How can a man so obviously intelligent and articulate be so perniciously wrong about a fellow writer and truth-teller? What can it be but a form of political jingoism that pushes Achebe into this anti-creative stance? Certainly nothing is accomplished in the crusade to promote dialogue between black and white. Worse, Achebe undermines his credibility and spoils the magnificent contribution he has made as a novelist and as founding editor of the African Writers Series. At the close of the Massachusetts lecture he refers to his "privileged position in African and Western culture" (p. 172). It is a privilege he has earned. But privilege entails responsibilities—as Conrad, Polish exile, wouldn't have needed telling.[37]

It would seem as if Robertson, as a colonial prophet, has pronounced judgment on Achebe because he, Achebe, has touched the 'Lord's

---

[35] Peter Nazareth, "Out of Darkness: Conrad and Other Third World Writers," *Conradiana* 14.3 (1982): 182.
[36] Hunt Hawkins, "The Issue of Racism in Heart of Darkness," *Conradiana* 14.3 (1982): 169.
[37] Robertson, P.J.M. *"Things Fall Apart* and *Heart of Darkness*: A Creative Dialogue." *The International Fiction Review* 7.2 (1980): 107.

anointed.'[38] Furthermore, this kind of patronizing, personalizing, and pontificating defense of Conrad demonstrates how difficult the process of decolonization is. The establishment will staunchly resist new discoveries which challenge the status-quo.

I do not intend to analyze meticulously charges and defenses of Conrad's racism, although some analysis is necessary. Neither do I wish to dabble with the most famous defense of Conrad, which is that racism in *Heart of Darkness* is Marlow's, not Conrad's, and Conrad's relation to Marlow's racism is ironic.[39] Conrad's defenders have used and abused this point without acknowledging other important details about Conrad's vulnerability to racial depictions. I wish to highlight a neglected but critical factor in this controversy. Conrad's sincere attack on European colonialism, succumbing to canonical pressure, has betrayed the colonized Africans. And this betrayal reinforces his inability to empathize with Africans. The following discussion establishes a background for the development of this neglected factor.

Conrad had to be aware of the dominant ideology and perspective of colonialism, yet he failed to offend the colonizer's sensibility. Rather, he has received canonization and tenure from the massive body of colonial criticism. Any individual who truly and meaningfully rebukes the establishment is in danger. Yet, Conrad enjoys the colonial 'pat on the shoulder' from Western literary criticism. Is this because the entire West agrees and accepts the rebuke? I suspect not. Truth bites and it engenders strong retaliation. When Christ reproved the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes, they furiously sought to kill him.[40]

Conrad is a skillful but crafty writer whose subtlety, ambivalence, and obscurity have turned a double-edged sword into a

---

[38] See Nick Aaron Ford's, "Black Literature and the Problem of Evaluation", in Lloyd W. Brown (ed.), *The Black Writer in Africa and the Americas* (Los Angeles: Hennessey and Ingalls, 1973) and Hoyt W. Fuller's, "Towards Black Aesthetic", in Addison Gayle Jr. (ed.), *Black Expression: Essays by and about Black Americans in the Creative Arts* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1969), for an interesting discussion on the establishment's "stranglehold" on literature from writers of color. Fuller argues that "the White Literary Establishment is not willing to release its stranglehold on black literature" (267-68).

[39] Robert Burden (ed.), *Heart of Darkness: The Critics Debate* (London, Macmillan, 1991) 67.

[40] See Matt. 26:3-5; Lk. 22:2. Jesus told the Jews: "But ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you.... But now ye seek to kill me, a man that had told you the truth" (John 8:37, 40).

two-headed snake: he appeases the colonized by attacking the evil of colonialism, and pacifies the colonizer by dehumanizing the colonized.[41] Shetty points out that "contradictions, ambiguities, and discontinuities... are hallmarks of Joseph Conrad's colonial fictions. It is particularly difficult to assess Conrad's relationship to imperialism because of his shifting responses to the dominant political phenomenon of his time." As a result of this crafty subtlety, Shetty argues, Conrad's attack on colonialism must be re-examined in the light of postcolonial theory.[42]

Conrad portrays Africa—landscape, atmosphere, and history—as a primitive and evil place, which is how the dominant culture and ideology have always viewed Africa.[43] According to Achebe, "the book opens on the River Thames, but the story takes place on the River Congo, the very antithesis of the Thames."[44] Marlow reveals: "Going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world."[45] But the river is also personified repeatedly as a snake: "a mighty big river... resembling an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country, and its tail lost in the depths of the land."[46] The snake metaphor is effective, for no one can ignore the connotation of the snake as the embodiment of the devil and evil, especially for western Christian readership.[47] This metaphoric, religious language appropriately adds shades and depths of meanings to the portrait of evil, and it is effective for the *Blackwood*'s readership, who were grounded in biblical language.

---

[41] Other writers of color, especially Naipaul, find themselves in similar situations primarily because of their inevitable dependence on colonial publishers, criticism, and readership.

[42] Sandya Shetty, "*Heart of Darkness*: Out of Africa Some New Thing Never Comes," *Journal of Modern Literature* 15.4 (Spring 1989): 461-62.

[43] A. C. Cairns' *Prelude to Imperialism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965) analyses the British's response to Africa and finds numerous racial stereotypes based on white rulership over black. P. Curtin's *The Image of Africa* (New York: Macmillan, 1965) and G. D. Killam's *Africa in English Fiction 1874-1939* (Lagos: Ibadan University Press, 1968) are also useful sources for this point.

[44] Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa," 252.

[45] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (New York: Dover, 1990) 30.

[46] Ibid., 5-6. See also "the snake had charmed me" p. 6, and "the river was there... like a snake," 7.

[47] See Gen. 3:1-19 for an illustration of the deceptive and destructive work of the serpent. He tempted Eve and caused both Eve and Adam to disobey their creator, thus incurring the penalty for sin which is death (Rom. 6:23).

Achebe argues that "when a writer while pretending to record scenes, incidents and their impact is in reality engaged in inducing hypnotic stupor in his readers through a bombardment of emotive words and other forms of trickery much more has to be at stake than stylistic felicity."[48] Achebe cites passages like "it was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention,"[49] and "the steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy,"[50] and the change of adjectives from "inscrutable" to "unspeakable" to "mysterious"[51] to demonstrate Conrad's linguistic hypnoticism. Conrad and Marlow are clearly aware of the power of words. The Bible tells us that "the tongue [which gives utterance to words—language] is the tree to life and death."[52] Page four of *Heart of Darkness* records the excessive use of destructive words: "Sandbanks, marshes, forests, savages—precious little to eat fit for a civilized man . . . feel the savagery, the utter savagery . . . incomprehensible . . . detestable . . . fascination of the abomination . . . growing regrets . . . longing to escape . . . powerless disgust . . . surrender . . . hate . . . brute force . . . robbery with violence . . . aggravated murder."[53] Addison Gayle Jr. contextualizes the destruction of words: "Words, as Richard Wright noted . . . are indeed weapons. The most lethal warfare ever waged against a people has been waged against black people through the medium of words."[54] Gayle admonishes people of color to wage war against the establishment, and to refute any definition as inferior.[55] Linguistically, Africa becomes a scenario of evil. Marlow's journey into Africa and Kurtz's presence in Africa are portrayed as movements away from European civilization/light/spirituality to African primitivism/darkness/carnality. Marlow describes this movement:

---

[48] Achebe, "An Image of Africa," 253.
[49] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 30.
[50] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 32.
[51] Achebe, "An Image of Africa," 252-53.
[52] Proverbs 18:21; James 3:9-12.
[53] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 4.
[54] Addison Gayle Jr., "Cultural Strangulation: Black Literature and the White Aesthetic," in Angelyn Mitchell (Ed.), *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994) 38.
[55] ibid.

> Going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine.... you thought yourself bewitched and cut off forever from everything you had known once—somewhere—far away—in another existence perhaps.... And this stillness of life did not in the least resemble a peace.... It looked at you with a vengeful aspect.[56]

Commenting on this passage, Francis Singh points out that "Marlow uses the unknown, remote, and primitive Africa as a symbol for an evil and primeval force, something similar to what E. M. Forster was to do later through the Marabar Caves in *A Passage to India.*"[57] One can add William Golding, Graham Greene, A. E. W. Mason, R. M. Ballantyne, D. H. Lawrence, Rider Haggard, and Rudyard Kipling to this list. Colonial writers see evil in the landscape and atmosphere of the colonies because of the evil within their hearts: evil of greed, lust, murder, and inhumanity. Christ's rebuke to the establishment reminds us that if the eye is evil, the whole body is in great darkness,[58] and the evil man out of his evil heart communicates evil.[59] The prophetic writer, Jeremiah, depicts that evil is within the heart of humanity.[60]

But writers from the colonies portray their landscape and atmosphere as good forces which resist the evil of the colonizers. The jungle and waterfalls in Wilson Harris's *A Palace of the Peacock* resist Don's evil, exploitative, and oppressive intentions, while Rochester fears the landscape in *Wide Sargasso Sea*: "Everything is too much"[61] and "I feel that this place is my enemy and on your side."[62] Landscape

---

[56] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 30.
[57] Francis B. Singh, "The Colonialistic Bias in *Heart of Darkness*," *Conradiana* 10 (1978): 43.
[58] Matthew 6:34.
[59] Matthew 7:17-20.
[60] Matthew 17:9.
[61] Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982) 70.
[62] ibid., 129.

in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* cooperates with the indigenous culture to resist the imperialist invasion.[63]

Marlow demonstrates the greatness of Kurtz as a gifted painter, "chief of the best station," with promise of climbing the corporate ladder,[64] a gifted communicator,[65] and "a great musician."[66] He then concludes:

> All of Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz; and... the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs had entrusted him with the making of a report, for its future guidance. And he had written it, too.... It was eloquent, vibrating with eloquence.... Seventeen pages of close writing.... But this must have been before his... nerve went wrong, and caused him to preside at certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites.[67]

So, according to Marlow, Europe has made a genius, but Africa has corrupted and destroyed him because "the wilderness had patted him on the head, and, behold, it was like a ball ... it had caressed him, and—lo!—he had withered; it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish imitation."[68] Marlow also sees Africa as the personification of hell which begins to grip him as his admiration for Kurtz increases, and from which he has to snatch Kurtz in order to save, if not his body, his soul.[69] Religiously, Marlow tells his audience, "never before, did this land, this river, this jungle, the very arch of this blazing sky, appear to me so hopeless and so dark, so impenetrable to human thought, so pitiless to human weakness."[70]

---

[63] Derek Walcott, *Another Life* (London: Cape, 1973) induces readers to view Caribbean landscape in a fresh and artistic way, and to fall in love with it. Michael Anthony makes readers take another look at Caribbean landscape through his personified and symbolic portrayal. See Michael Anthony, *The Year in San Fernando* (London: Heinemann, 1965).

[64] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 22.

[65] ibid., 43.

[66] ibid., 66.

[67] ibid., 45.

[68] ibid., 44.

[69] Jude captures this image: "And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh" (Jude:23).

[70] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 51.

Marlow's racial prejudice is obvious here. Agbaw exposes that Marlow had predetermined that there was a "colossal jungle" beyond the enigmatic coastline,[71] so he prejudicially sees the enigma "smiling, frowning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid, or savage, and always mute with an air of whispering, Come and find out.... The edge of the colossal jungle, so dark-green as to be almost black."[72] Such racially prejudiced description of Africa draws a strong reaction from Achebe because of its dehumanization of Africans:

> Africa as setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human factor. Africa as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril. Can nobody see the preposterous and perverse arrogance in thus reducing Africa to the role of props for the break-up of one petty European mind? But that is not even the point. The real question is the dehumanization of Africa and Africans which this agelong attitude has fostered and continues to foster in the world.[73]

If depicting Africa as primitive is bad, dehumanizing Africans is worse. One of the most significant injuries colonialism has done is to stereotype the colonized as animals. Centuries of this negative reinforcement renders it almost impossible to cast off completely this animal imagery. Wright's *Native Son* graphically records the prevalence of this practice in the 1930s.[74]

Conrad allows Marlow to narrate one of the most dehumanizing attack on the Africans:

> We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could

---

[71] Agbaw, 136.

[72] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 10.

[73] Achebe, "An Image of Africa," 257.

[74] In *Native Son* (New York: Harper, 1940), Wright's attack on the practice of viewing Blacks as animals include "monkey" (26), "rat" (8-10), "gorilla" (33), "ape" (373), and "beast" (373). See Robert Felgar's article, "The Kingdom of the Beast: The Landscape of *Native Son*," *College Language Association* 17 (1974): 333-7, for an exploration of animal imagery in *Native Son*.

> have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil. But suddenly, as we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rushed walls, of peaked grass roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage.... The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us—who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember, because we were traveling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign—and no memories.
>
> The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there—there you could look at a thing monstrous and free.... They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces.... Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough.[75]

Achebe points out that this is the central meaning of *Heart of Darkness*, and it captivates the Western mind.[76] Africans are also described as "shapes," "shadows," and "bundles of acute angles."[77]

In defense of Conrad, Hawkins acknowledges "the limitations of *Heart of Darkness*, at least as a picture of African colonization," when compared to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. He further concedes that "Conrad's story barely shows the Congolese. None of the African characters has a name. With the exception of Kurtz's mistress, no African appears for more than a full paragraph. We do not go into the minds of any of the Africans to see the situation from their point of

---

[75] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 31-32.
[76] Achebe, "An Image of Africa," 254.
[77] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 14.

view.... they barely speak, being limited to a total of four pidgin sentences."[78] Additionally, Hawkins textually illustrates Marlow's use of "frankly derogatory language in describing Africans."[79] These include referring to them as "savages," "niggers,"[80] and "the prehistoric man;"[81] describing their behavior as "grotesque,"[82] "horrid,"[83] "ugly,"[84] "fiendish,"[85] and "satanic;"[86] and comparing them to animals like horses,[87] ants,[88] bees,[89] and hyenas.[90] Hawkins concludes that "the image which Conrad projects of African life could hardly be called flattering."[91] Yet, this critic finds the freedom of conscience to postulate that Conrad's "attitude is complex, itself critical of racism, and... ultimately sympathetic to non-European peoples."[92]

Highlighting Conrad's limitations of Africa,[93] Hawkins claims that Conrad's focus is on Europeans. He then documents outside sources, mainly Eurocentric reports, to establish the practice of cannibalism in Africa.[94] Marlow acknowledges that no cannibalism takes place in his presence, since "they had brought along a provision of hippo meat."[95] Yet, according to Agbaw, "Conrad contrives the most unconvincing dialogue to support his view [and the dominant view] of Africans as cannibals."[96] And the fact that critics like Hawkins have had to go outside the text for "objective evidence," which he believes is "almost impossible to obtain"[97] to support African

---

[78] Hawkins, 163.
[79] ibid., 163.
[80] Conrad, *Heart*, 19.
[81] ibid., 36.
[82] ibid., 14.
[83] ibid., 36.
[84] ibid., 37.
[85] ibid., 37.
[86] ibid., 68.
[87] ibid., 45.
[88] ibid., 15.
[89] ibid., 63.
[90] ibid., 43.
[91] Hawkins, 163.
[92] ibid.
[93] These limitations include spending less than six months in the Congo, lack of any African language, and little association with Africans.
[94] Hawkins, 164-66.
[95] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 31.
[96] Agbaw, 135.
[97] Hawkins, 164.

cannibalism, demonstrates fictional contrivance.[98] Furthermore, if Conrad's focus is to portray the evil of colonization from the European's side, why continue to portray Africans in an animalistic manner?: "That fool helmsman, his hands on the spokes, was lifting his knees high, stamping his feet, champing his mouth, like a reined-in horse,"[99] or as wild, fierce and savage?[100] Additionally, if Europeans are the focus, how do we account for the following passage?:

> A slight clinking behind me made me turn my head. Six black men advanced in a file, toiling up the path. They walked erect and slow, balancing small baskets full of earth on their heads, and the clink kept time with their footsteps. Black rags were wound round their loins, and the short ends behind waggled to and fro like tails. I could see every rib, the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope; each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking.[101]

The significance of this passage is to demonstrate the evil of European colonization, but apart from Marlow the colonizers are not in the scene. The readers' focus shifts from the evil of European colonization to the animal imagery of the Africans. "The short ends behind waggled to and fro like tails," "their limbs were like knots in a rope," "each had an iron collar on his neck," and "bights swung between them" present a powerful connection between animals and Africans.

Sounds are common to both human beings and animals, but language distinguishes people from animals. Conrad reduces this distinction by permitting only two short sentences of dialect to the Africans: "'Catch 'im. Give 'im to us.'" "'Eat 'im!'"[102] and "'Mistah Kurtz—he dead.'"[103] By denying Africans language and associating

---

[98] Agbaw, 136.
[99] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 40.
[100] ibid., 54.
[101] ibid., 12-13.
[102] ibid., 36.
[103] ibid., 64.

them with sounds, "a violent babble of uncouth sounds,"[104] "short, grunting phrases,"[105] and sounds of drums,[106] Conrad has dehumanized Africans more completely than his predecessor, Shakespeare. Shakespeare affords undeveloped language to Caliban, then gives him an imitation of Prospero's language, and towards the end of the text Caliban uses learned language to resist colonial oppression. But this is not the case with Conrad. Furthermore, Stephen Ekema Agbaw argues that "the phrases attributed to the African Helmsman do not reflect African broken English or Pidgin as it was spoken in the late 19th century, when direct influence of the Bantu languages was more obvious than it is today."[107]

Additionally, Marlow's language of disassociation reflects racism. Describing the prevalence of death among Africans, he focuses on one young man: "The man seemed young—almost a boy—but you know with *them* it's hard to tell."[108] The word "them" distances himself from the Africans.[109] Singh documents another Conradian usage of disassociating words. Marlow in *Lord Jim* questions whether Jim is "one of us," meaning the good and white colonizer or "one of them," meaning the bad and black colonized. "Them" is inferior to "us."[110] Conrad's use of the "language of the dominant culture" demonstrates not only its influence from "evolutionary anthropology and psychology," but also its near impossibility to resist the fetters of the status quo. Further, it clearly illustrates Edward Said's point that the critic of colonialism who "functions from within the dominant culture" must find it difficult to break the "ideological barriers."[111]

---

[104] ibid., 16.
[105] ibid., 36.
[106] ibid., 17.
[107] Agbaw, 136.
[108] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 16, emphasis added.
[109] 1992 independent presidential candidate, Ross Perot, encountered much political pressure for his use of racially charged and disassociating words like "you people," in reference to African Americans.
[110] Francis B. Singh, 45-46. Robert Hampson, in "'Heart of Darkness' and 'The Speech that Cannot Be Silenced,'" *English: The Journal of English Association*, 39.163 (Spring 1990), pp. 16-17, argues that African languages have been "assigned a lower position in an implicit hierarchy of languages."
[111] Quoted in Shetty, 461-62. See Edward Said's "Seeing Through the Story," *Times Literary Supplement* (Oct. 1984); and *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979).

Conrad juxtaposes Kurtz's African mistress with his European intended. The African mistress is portrayed as "a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman.... With a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments.... She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent.... She stood looking at us with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose."[112] But the European intended "came forward, all in black, with a pale head floating towards me in the dusk.... She took my hands in hers and murmured.... She had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering.... She talked as thirsty men drink."[113] Achebe cites that the African woman "fulfills a structural requirement to the story: a savage counterpart to the refined, European woman who will step forth to end the story."[114]

Sarvan defends Conrad through his argument that the "European woman is pale and rather anemic," while the African woman is "gorgeous, proud, superb, magnificent, tragic, fierce, and filled with sorrow. She is an impressive figure and, importantly, her human feelings are not denied."[115] But Bette London's point on Conrad's dehumanization and displacement of the African woman refutes Sarvan's defense of Conrad. London demonstrates that "the native woman... remains positioned in the narrative as the ideological counterpart—and opposite—of white, European womanhood, and hence outside the category 'woman.'"[116] Furthermore, by portraying the African woman as promiscuous and the European woman with "a mature capacity for fidelity,"[117] Conrad has reinforced a well-known, racial stereotype concerning feminine sexual morality.

Conrad bought into the typical stereotypes of his period, which emerged from "books of travel and exploration and colonial conquest."[118] One common, racial stereotype was to portray the colonized peoples as flat-nosed, which subsequently identified these

---

[112] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 55-56.
[113] ibid., 68-70.
[114] Achebe, 255.
[115] Sarvan, 284.
[116] Bette London, "Reading Race and Gender in Conrad's Dark Continent," *Criticism* 31.3 (Summer 1989): 237.
[117] Conrad, *Heart*, 69
[118] Claude Rawson, "Gulliver, Marlow and the Flat-Nosed People: Colonial Oppression and Race in Satire and Fiction, Part 1," *Dutch Quarterly Review of Anglo American Letters* 13.3 (1983): 162.

peoples with animal savagery. For example, travel books by Léry, Hakluyt, Thomas Herbert and Dampier influenced Swift's description of the Yahoos as flat-nosed people.[119] Marlow describes the colonized as "those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves".[120] Such influence on Conrad has not gone unnoticed. Brian V. Street cites a passage from Conrad's *A Smile of Fortune* and one from anthropologist Evans-Pritchard in demonstrating how "the reading of reports of foreign people and the interpretation of them involve the selection of particular, often dramatic features of their lives without regard to the total context which gives them `a sense of proportion.'"[121] Terry Eagleton, also, demonstrates that Conrad's pessimism is not personal but societal. And Conrad, "an `aristocratic'

---

[119] ibid., 162.

[120] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 4.

[121] Brian V. Street, *The Savage in Literature*, 1-2. The following are the two passages referred to:

> She had formed for herself a notion of the civilized world as a scene of murder, abductions, burglaries, stabbing affrays and every sort of desperate violence. England and France, Paris and London (the only two towns of which she seemed to have heard) appeared to her sinks of abomination, reeking with blood, in contrast to her little island where petty larceny was about the standard of current misdeeds, with now and then some pronounced crime – and that only among the imported coolie labourers on sugar estates or the negroes of the towns. But, in Europe these things were being done daily by a wicked population of white men.... It was impossible to give her a sense of proportion. I supposed she figured England to herself as about the size of the Pearl of the Ocean, in which case it would certainly have been reeking with gore and a mere wrecked of burgled houses end to end. One could not make her understand that these horrors on which she fed her imagination were lost in the mass of orderly life like a few drops of blood in the ocean. Quoted from Joseph Conrad, *A Smile of Fortune* (New York: Dent, 1912), p. 67; and

> Most specialists who are also fieldworkers are agreed that primitive peoples are predominantly interested in practical, economic pursuits; gardening, hunting, fishing, care of their cattle and the manufacture of weapons, utensils and ornaments and in their social contacts; the life of the household and family akin, relations with friends and neighbors, with superiors and inferiors, dances and feasts, legal disputes, feuds and warfare. Behaviour of a mystical type in the main is restricted to certain situations in social life in such a way that to describe it by itself as Levy-Bruhl has done deprives it of the meaning it derives from its social situation and its cultural accretions. Quoted in E. E. Evans-Pritchard, "Levy-Bruhl's Theory of Primitive Mentality," *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts* (Cairo: Oxford University Press, 1934).

Polish exile deeply committed to English conservatism,"[122] allied himself with "the Western bourgeois class."[123] For "long before his books became bestsellers," Conrad "lived like a squire, with maids, chauffeurs and the like," and he invested his inherited 15,000 pounds (presently worth around 900,000 pounds) in a South African gold-mine.[124]

Additional evidence reveals that Conrad's *Niggers* was originally *Bloody Niggers*, highlighting his view of "niggers," and *Heart of Darkness* records some additional negative portrayal of them; their "eyeballs" glisten,[125] the fireman is "an improved specimen,"[126] the helmsman is a "fool nigger,"[127] and he is "mad."[128] This line of racial preoccupation can also be cited in his contrasting descriptions of his first encounters with an Englishman and a black man. Conrad describes his first encounter with a black man: "A certain enormous buck nigger encountered in Haiti fixed my conception of blind, furious, unreasoning rage, as manifested in the human animal to the end of my days. Of the nigger I used to dream for years afterwards."[129] But his teenage account of his first English man receives a different description: "(his) calves exposed to the public gaze...dazzled the beholder by the splendor of their marble-like condition and their rich tone of young ivory.... The light of a headlong, exalted satisfaction with the world of men...illumined his face...and triumphant eyes. In passing he cast a glance of kindly curiosity and a friendly gleam of big, sound, shiny teeth...his white calves twinkled sturdily."[130] Conrad's bias is further demonstrated in his preference for brown-skinned people, and in so doing, he has reenacted Prospero's complete rejection of Caliban—the black—but his appreciative term-use of Ariel—the brown. This colonial feature, for example, has been illustrated in the Caribbean,

---

[122] Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Theory*, (London: Methuen, 1976) 8.
[123] ibid., 7.
[124] Davidson, 29.
[125] Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 11.
[126] ibid., 33.
[127] ibid., 41.
[128] ibid., 41.
[129] Quoted in Jonah Raskin, *The Mythology of Imperialism*, (New York: Random House, 1971) 143.
[130] Quoted in Bernard Meyer, *Joseph Conrad: A Psychoanalytic Biography*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967) 30. See also Achebe, "An Image of Africa," 258, which first drew my attention to Raskin and Meyer's works.

during Conrad's days, where the blacks (Africans) have been dehumanized by slavery, but the browns (East Indians) have been treated slightly better as indentured servants. Critics like Felix Mnthali, D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke, and others point out that Conrad's characterization is "more generous" to Eastern, brown races.[131]

Joseph Conrad is a talented writer. His works bear numerous literary and stylistic values that few writers can achieve. My contention is not to deny Conrad's canonical status, as Achebe advocates, but to demonstrate how subtle racism and cultural imperialism operate even in the works of authors who profess to attack the establishment on behalf of the colonized. Authors like Conrad underestimate the seductive power of the status quo, and they end up in the devil's/colonizer's party without knowing it. This situation becomes more complicated when mainstream critics would go the extra mile to defend or deny Conrad's racism, while the few Third World critics could encounter double jeopardy if they confronted the status quo. And for more than half a century, this critical failure of Conradian criticism to depict the whole truth has left the mass of Conradian students in the "heart of darkness". For the critics, like the narrator, cannot tell the truth about colonization, and students, like the Intended, continue to view the colonized from a biased, dominant perspective.

Before Joseph Conrad, the struggle between the colonizer and the colonized had been tremendously unequal, was between Prospero and Caliban. The conflict has always been in favor of the colonizer/Prospero, who has control over the means of production.[132] Caliban/the colonized has much ground to cover before even coming to a position of the voiced. For the most part, colonial writers have depicted colonialism, and the few colonized writers' works that have been interpreted mainly by colonial critics.[133] Conrad's *Heart of*

---

[131] Quoted in Robert D. Hamner, "Colony, Nationhood and Beyond: Third World Writers and Critics Contend with Joseph Conrad," *World Literature Written in English* 23.1 (1984) 112. See Felix Mnthali, "Continuity and Change in Conrad and Ngugi," *Kunapipi*, 3.1 (1981), and D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke, *Developing Countries in British Fiction* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1977).

[132] See Terry Eagleton's *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1976), chapter four, for a discussion of how the colonizer's ownership of the means of production ensure that the products and producer adhere to his design.

[133] See Achebe's "Colonialist Criticism," John F. Bayliss, "Ghettoization and Black Literature," and Abraham Chapman, "Concepts of the Black Aesthetic in Contemporary

Darkness has entered this critical scene with a seemingly massive attack on European colonization. And for over seven decades, this ironic, surface interpretation has prevailed without question. Why has it taken so long to uncover racial bias in Conrad?

The answer is twofold. In the first case, colonial criticism outweighs colonized criticism by far. Robert D. Hamner provides insightful and useful scholarship for this point. Hamner has collected materials written about Conrad's place in Third World Literature, and has created three categories. Europe, England, and the United States of America are placed in group one, the colonizing powers; Australia and Canada are in group two as former colonies which have developed into "powerful, industrialized nations"; and Africa, India/Sri Lanka, the Malaysian archipelago, and the Caribbean basin are in group three as the Third World.[134] Setting aside colonial criticism which studies *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, and *Nostromo* as anything except in relationship to the colonial world, Hamner illustrates that between 1895 to the early 1980s the bulk of criticism still comes from group one. Group one has some 120 writers and 146 publications. 10 writers and 12 publications are from group two, totaling 130 writers and 158 publications. This leaves the Third World with the remainder out of 179 writers and 227 publications, group 3 has 49 writers and 69 publications.[135] Added to this astonishing disparity is the fact that India and Africa alone account for 1,545,811,000 people, approximately 28.43 percent of the world's population. Group one has an approximate population of 982,648,000, only 18.08 percent of the world's population; group two has an approximate population of 45,299,000, 0.83 percent of the world's population; but group three has an approximate population of 2,034,702,000, 37.43 percent of the world's population.[136]

Why so few voices from the Third World? And why such a small percentage? Comparatively speaking, group one and two enjoy 15.37 and 26.67 percent voiced representations, respectively, while the Third World is allowed only 3.39 percent voiced representation.[137] The

---

Black Literature," in Lloyd W. Brown (ed.), *The Black Writer in Africa and the Americas* for insightful discussion on how colonial criticism interpret writings from the colonized.

[134] Hamner, 108-09.

[135] Hamner, 109. Hamner states 70, but my calculation reveals 69.

[136] *1993 Britannica Book of the Year*, 546-57.

[137] Calculations are done with population figures estimated to the nearest thousand. Approximate figures are used in all cases here.

conclusion is that Third World nations have been "muzzled" by colonialism. But the independence of many nations in the 1960s and 1970s has accounted for the publication of 22 articles on Conrad in the 1960s.[138] Hamner postulates that "in ten years, [there has been] an eleven hundred percent increase."[139] From the 1970s, 42 articles and two books have emerged, and three years into the 1980s have seen the publication of 10 articles.[140] When the marginalized minority is so overwhelmed and overpowered by dominant ideology and culture, then Conrad's betraying racism subtly cripples the already wounded colonized. Under false pretense, Conrad has helped the colonialist establishment more than he has aided the oppressed, and this is what I call literary and cultural imperialism.

The second reason why it has taken this long to focus on Conrad's racism is because of canonical pressures.[141] In 1896 articles in the Singapore *Straits Times* questioned Conrad's accuracy in his portrayal of Eastern characters and scene.[142] In the 1970s, Malayan critic Lloyd Fernando called for a Third World perspective to Conradian criticism,[143] and Chinua Achebe accused Conrad of explicit racism.[144] Very little critical exploration from a Third World perspective has heeded these three isolated calls. And even the few Third World responses to Achebe's attack on Conrad are divided.[145] Most of these

---

[138] Several colonies gained independence from their colonizers during the 1960s and 1970s. These include Algeria, Barbados Benin, Botswana, Burundi, Central African Republic, Congo, Gabon, Gambia, Guyana, Ivory Coast, Jamaica, Madagascar, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Singapore, Senegal, Somalia, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Zaire, and Zambia in 1960s and Mozambique, Angola, and Bangladesh in the 1970s.

[139] Hamner, 110.

[140] ibid., 110.

[141] My article, "Colonial and Canonical Control Over Third World Writers," which was accepted for publication by *Commonwealth Novel in English*, explores the implications of canonical pressures on colonized writers.

[142] It is likely that these articles are from expatriates.

[143] Lloyd Fernando, "Conrad's Eastern Expatriates: New Versions of His Outcasts," *PMLA* 91.1 (1976): 78-79.

[144] Achebe, "An Image of Africa," 257-58.

[145] Hansvan Merle, "Jumble of Facts and Fiction: First Singapore Reaction on Amayer's Folly," *Conradiana* 10.2 (1978): 161-66. See Cheddi Jagan's *The West on Trial; The Fight for Guyana's Freedom* (New York: International Publishers, 1972). See Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1956) for accounts of the role of Britain's "divide and rule" policy in racial conflicts in British colonies.

critics are writers also.[146] They have to consider their writing career and reputation. To survive economically and literarily, they have to write for Western audiences and publishers, and this factor influences their critical and fictional content and style. Achebe waited for the establishment of his career before challenging the establishment, while Ngugi changed his name after gaining international recognition. If an emerging writer or critic changes her name today, who cares? If he/she were to be the first to attack Conrad's racism, I dread to imagine the critical reception.[147] For if someone, like Achebe, with an established reputation has been torn apart by the status quo for pointing out the king's nakedness, what would be the fate of emerging writers/critics who decide to attack the literary bureaucracy? Many Third World critics/writers have to consider wisely publication and promotional pressures, and therein lies the power of the colonial and canonical machinery.

---

[146] Some of the leading critics from the Third World are also the leading writers. These include Wilson Harris, V. S. Naipaul, George Lamming, Samuel Selvon, Derek Walcott, R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, etc.

[147] This insight emerges from one of my Shakespeare professor's dismissal of Third World interpretations and appropriations of Shakespeare's plays like *The Tempest*. Not only has the professor dismissed these, but he has also confined the teaching of Shakespeare to a narrow Eurocentric orbit.