

Heart of Darkness and its Critics: Controversies and Assessments

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By

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To

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Abstract

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is a *magnum opus* of twentieth century literary studies. No longer confined to the category of modern literature the novel has become a source of versatile criticism. After Achebe's indictment of Conrad as a racist in 1975 a controversy arose among literary scholars regarding the accurate interpretation of the novel. This paper investigates the controversy and tries to figure out the dominant issues that were taken up by various critics. Besides, it attempts to clarify the complexities involved in the evaluation of the text. Focusing on the postcolonial interpretation of the text this paper also examines the role of literary discourse in the formation of ideological conflict.

To Abbu & Ammu

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	6
Is Conrad a Racist?.....	9
Representations and Misrepresentations.....	24
Conrad and Imperialism.....	29
Conclusion.....	37
Bibliography.....	41

Introduction

In his introduction to *Joseph Conrad: Heart of Darkness and Other Tales*, editor Cedric Watts describes *Heart of Darkness* as ‘exciting and profound, lucid and bewildering; highly compressed, immensely rich in texture and implication’, the paradoxes of which ‘repeatedly ambush the conceptualizing reader or critic’ (2002: xviii). Containing references to wide range of problems such as political and psychological, moral and religious, social and evolutionary order, ‘the narrative’, Watts continues, ‘dextrously embodies literary theories and techniques which were yet to be formulated and labelled’ ‘in a critical interplay’ (*ibid.*). The editor further mentions that Conrad’s story sufficiently passes the test of fecundity or the ability to generate offspring which, according to him, is a test of literary merit. The story’s influence extends to works as diverse as Malinowski’s *Diary*, T. S. Eliot’s ‘The Hollow Man’, Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, William Golding’s *The Inheritors*, Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *A Grain of Wheat*, Robert Stone’s *Dog Soldiers*, George Steiner’s *The Portage to san Cristobal of A. H.* and Coppola’s film *Apocalypse Now* (1979) (*ibid.*).

One of the most important events in *Heart of Darkness* criticism is the public remarks of Chinua Achebe on Conrad’s racism which proved so outspoken that it ‘stimulated further critical responses’ (Kimbrough, 1988: xv). Although for some people the strengths of the tale outweigh its flaws, it is undeniable that Conrad’s portrayal of Africa and Africans has appeared to be offensive for others (Watts, 2002 & Kimbrough, 1988). However, we cannot simply conclude that the story received appreciation from westerners and criticism from non-westerners. Rather, a detailed study of the criticisms of *Heart of Darkness* after the 1970s shows that the novella received diverse response during the late 20th century including appreciation and criticism from both westerners and non-westerners (see Kimbrough, 1988 & Watts, 2002). For example, Wilson

Harris, writing from Guyana, defended Conrad from Achebe's attack as a fellow novelist whereas, Francis B. Singh from India attacked Conrad's colonialism (Kimbrough xv-xvi). Again, C. Ponnuthurai Sarvan from the University of Zambia defended Conrad (*ibid.*).

A lot of discussions have taken place in the past few decades about how to assess a literary work. Many theories have emerged in the twentieth century such as Formalism, Modernism, Postmodernism, Structuralism, Post-colonialism, Post-structuralism, Feminism etc. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which was generally read as a part of modern literature is no longer confined to this category. Interpretation of the novel now involves postcolonial, cultural and gender perspectives. This research work has tried to explore the grounds on which the critics of late 20th century were either attacking or defending Conrad. An attempt has also been made to figure out the dominant issues that were taken up by these critics and analyze these issues from an objective standpoint. Postcolonial ideas from Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) have been used in order to assess the novel's significance in contemporary literary studies.

The main purpose of this study has not been to show Conrad as racist, imperialist, or, colonialist. Rather, this study intends to explore the ways in which *Heart of Darkness* has been viewed by critics in the late twentieth and early twenty first century and reveal how their opinions have opened up fields for further criticism. In the process, it is hoped that this research will contribute to Conrad study by giving detailed information about the novel's reception in the late twentieth century and clarify lingering confusions about the novel. It is also hoped that this study will serve as a starting point for literature students and teachers of the twenty-first century intending to do further research on Conrad and postcolonial criticism.

Since *Heart of Darkness* was written more than a century earlier, responses to the text have been numerous (see Kimbrough, 1988; Simmons, 2008 and Watts, 2002). However, earlier critics have either praised Conrad for being one of the earliest writers to portray the negative sides of colonialism or focused on psychological analysis of the novella (Achebe, 1988). It is only in the late twentieth century that with Achebe's critique of Conrad the novella gained a new field of criticism (Kimbrough, 1988). This research is based on a review of late twentieth century criticisms of Conrad so that it can become possible to do an in-depth analysis of the controversies that has been going on during this period.

Is Conrad a Racist?

The concept of racism or racialism denotes any action, practice or belief that reflects a racial world view or an ideology that divides humans into separate and exclusive biological entities called “races”, assuming that there is a causal link between inherited physical traits and traits of personality, intellect, morality and other cultural behavioral features, and holding that some races are innately superior to others (*The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2002). Racism was at the heart of North American slavery and the colonization and empire-building activities of Western Europeans, especially in the 18th century. The idea of race magnified the differences between people of European origin in the United States and those of African descent whose ancestors had been brought against their will to work as slaves in the American South. By projecting Africans and their descendants as lesser human beings, the proponents of slavery attempted to justify and maintain this system of exploitation while at the same time portraying the United States as a bastion and champion of human freedom, upholding human rights, and democratic institutions, and producing unlimited opportunities to all, and equality. The contradiction between slavery and an ideology upholding human equality that accompanied a philosophy of human freedom and dignity, seemed not to have bothered Americans and Europeans at all.

By the 19th century racism spread around the world. Many nations began to think of the ethnic components of their own societies and in terms of religious or language groups, or in racial terms, and to underscore higher and lower races. Colonized people began to be seen as low status races and were exploited for their labor and resources. Gradually, discrimination against them became common in many places of the world. The expression and feelings of racial superiority that accompanied colonialism generated resentment and hostilities from those who were colonized and exploited, a trend that continued even after independence.

In the last half of the 20th century many conflicts around the world were interpreted in racial terms even though their origins were in the ethnic hostilities that have long characterized human societies (e.g. Arabs and Jews, English and Irish). Racism reflects an acceptance of the deepest forms and degrees of divisiveness and carries the implication that differences among groups are so great that they cannot be transcended.

Racism elicits hatred and distrust and precludes any attempt to understand the racialized Other. Apart from its association with racial superiority, hatred and exploitation of the Other the concept of racism also incorporates xenophobia and mass murder (for the purpose of genocide). All these features of racism are carefully integrated in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, a widely taught novel of English literature, which for a long time has been considered as a scathing attack on colonialism. While earlier critics talked of these issues to praise Conrad's attempt to transcend his time, postcolonial critics use the same issues to accuse Conrad of racism.

Achebe, no doubt has played a key role in this regard. On 18 February, 1975, he presented a second Chancellor's lecture at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst titled "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness'" (Kimbrough, 1988). In it, along with several other accusations leveled against Conrad, Achebe called Conrad a "bloody racist", although in a later revised version of the article, the phrase became "a thoroughgoing racist" (Watts, 2002:xxi). According to Achebe (1988), Conrad discriminated between the Europeans and the Africans in a number of ways. For instance, Conrad portrayed Africans in a way that reduced them only into body parts and not as normal human beings. Thus Conrad's story includes dehumanizing descriptions of Africans such as the following:

But suddenly as we struggled round a bend there would be a glimpse of rush walls, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes

rolling under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage.....It was unearthly and the men wereNo they were not inhuman. Well, you know that was the worst of it – this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped and spun and made horrid faces, but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity – like yours – the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough,...

(Quoted by Achebe, 1988: 253-254)

Achebe argues that in such passages lies the meaning of *Heart of Darkness* and they explain the fascination it has for the Western mind. Achebe then talks of another passage where Conrad gives us one of his rare descriptions of an African who is not just limbs or rolling eyes:

And between whiles I had to look after the savage who was fireman. He was an improved specimen: he could fire up a vertical boiler. He was there below me and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat walking on his hind legs. A few months of training had done for that really fine chap. He squinted at the steam-gauge and at the water gauge with an evident effort of intrepidity – and he had filed his teeth too, the poor devil, and the wool of his pate shaved into queer patterns, and three ornamental scars on each of his cheeks. He ought to have been clapping his hands and stamping his feet on the bank, instead of which he was hard at work, a thrall to strange witchcraft, full of improving knowledge.

(Quoted by Achebe, 1988: 254)

Achebe argues that although Conrad cannot appreciate the African in the boat, they at least have the merit of “being in their place” (254). Thus things being in their place is of utmost importance for Conrad. This perception is reinforced by the following lines: “Fine fellows – cannibals – in their place” (254) and “They wanted no excuse for being there. They were a great comfort to look at.” (255). Achebe points out that Conrad’s discriminatory attitude continues in the depiction of Kurtz’s African and European mistress. Conrad describes the African woman as “savage and superb, wild eyed and magnificent....She stood looking at us without a stir and like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose.” (Quoted by Achebe,

1988:255) because a) she is in her place b) she stands as a savage counterpart to the refined, European woman who will step forth to end the story. Thus the European woman appears

.....all in black with a pale head, floating toward me in the dusk. She was in mourningshe took both my hands in hers and murmured, “ I had heard you were coming.”She had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering.

(Conrad quoted by Achebe, 1988:255)

Apart from the physical descriptions of the Africans, the question of language is another area which draws Achebe’s attention. Achebe (1988) alleges that though Conrad bestowed human expression to Europeans, he withheld it from Africans. In place of speech the “rudimentary souls” of Africa make “a violent babble of uncouth sounds” and “exchange short grunting sounds” (Conrad quoted by Achebe, 1988:255). Achebe also notices that only on two occasions Conrad confers a language (even English) on the “savages”. The first occurs when cannibalism gets the better of them: ““Catch ’im,” he snapped with a bloodshot widening of his eyes and a flash of sharp teeth – “catch ’im. Give ’im to us.” “To you, eh?” I asked; “what would you do with them?” “Eat ’im!” he said curtly....” (*ibid.*). The second occurs when the death news of Kurtz is conveyed by a black: “Mistah Kurtz – he dead” (*ibid.*). Achebe argues that although at first sight these instances might appear as unexpected acts of generosity from Conrad, they actually constitute some of his best assaults, because he wants to assure his readers of the “unspeakable craving” in the hearts of the Africans (255-256).

Achebe (1988) also questions Conrad’s liberalism, arguing that Marlow holds those advanced and human views which are appropriate to the English liberal tradition. In his opinion, Marlow is able to toss out such “bleeding-heart sentiments” as the following passage does:

They were dying slowly – it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest.

(Conrad quoted by Achebe, 1988:256)

Achebe (1988) further says that Conrad's liberalism "took different form in the minds of different people but almost always managed to sidestep the ultimate question of equality between white people and black people" (256). In this regard he quotes Albert Schweitzer, a missionary working in Africa during Conrad's time: "The African is indeed my brother but my junior brother" (257). Achebe says that Conrad would not even use the word *brother*, however qualified. Instead he was more concerned about the African's *laying a claim on it*.

The use of the word 'nigger' by Conrad also bothers Achebe. Achebe admits that during the time in which Conrad was alive the reputation of blacks was at a low level, and Conrad must have been influenced by contemporary prejudice. Moreover, Achebe believes that Conrad had an antipathy to these people which can be explained only by his "peculiar psychology" (Achebe, 1988: 258). He thinks that Conrad had a problem with 'niggers' and blackness and he quotes a few instances which prompted him to think thus. One is worth mentioning here as it would trigger Achebe's angry remark that will immediately follow: "A black figure stood up, strode on long black legs, waving long black arms..." (Conrad quoted by Achebe, 1988:258). Achebe remarks that we are to react to it: "as though we might expect a black figure striding along on black legs, to wave white arms" (Achebe, 1988: 258). He says that the irrational love and irrational hate that jostled in Conrad's heart should be of interest to psychoanalysts.

Nevertheless, his opinion in this regard is that irrational love may at worst engender foolish acts of indiscretion but irrational hate can only endanger the life of a community.

The basis of Achebe's accusation of Conrad as racist then is Conrad's use of the word 'nigger' and portrayal of Africans as inferior to Europeans in terms of their appearance, their not having a language and their "savage" desires. Achebe underscores Conrad's categorizing of Africans and it is this treatment that bothers Achebe, because it is ultimately related to the life of a community. Achebe thinks that Conrad's latent racism had not been stressed because white racism against Africa is such a normal way of thinking that its manifestations go totally unremarked.

Achebe's attack on Conrad was controversial but it prompted many critics to read the novel with renewed vigor. "Was Conrad Racist?" – the question continues to disturb many. Candice Bradley, Associate Professor of Anthropology in Lawrence University, was asked the same question by her students. According to her, many African -American students answered it positively. They also pointed out that the book was not read in traditionally black colleges in the USA, and that there was little value in it being read there. However, one student said that language was used differently in the 1890's and what we interpret now as a racist word was then, a relatively neutral one without racist overtones (p.2).

While analyzing the colonialistic bias of *Heart of Darkness* Frances B. Singh (1988) shows how Marlow, who apparently claims to be superior to blacks, ironically proves himself no better than them. Singh (1988: 276) says:

Like a tribesman he possesses talismans to ward off evil, only he calls them devotion to duty, efficiency, and a sense of responsibility. Incidentally the physical manifestation of his devotion to his job, the strips of woolen blanket

hastily tied to leaky steam-pipes, looks perilously similar to his “very second-rate” helmsman’s impromptu magic “charm, made of rags, tied to his arm.”

In response to Achebe’s critique of *Heart of Darkness* Cedric Watts wrote an essay titled “‘A Bloody Racist’: About Achebe’s View of Conrad” which was published in *The Yearbook of English Studies* in 1983. In this essay, Watts tried to defend Conrad by presenting counter arguments to the issues raised by Achebe and by discussing the criteria involved. Calling Achebe’s attack as ‘disconcerting’, Watts says that he has long regarded the novel as great in terms of its powerful criticism of racial prejudice (196). That Achebe’s accusations could not change Watt’s previous stance is also made clear when Watts (1983:197) notes:

However, his denunciations do have the ironic effect of drawing attention to the very strengths that he seems unable to perceive; and they suggest that a critic should not be deterred by its apparent obviousness from reiterating what is important in a work.

According to Watts (1983), Conrad’s tale amply protests the dehumanization of blacks which Achebe thinks is celebrated by Conrad. He thinks that of all the people in the story the blacks are portrayed as “the happiest, healthiest and most vital” (p.198) and quotes the following passage:

They shouted, sang; their bodies streamed with perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks - these chaps; but they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement, that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast. They wanted no excuse for being there.

(Conrad quoted by Watts, 1983:198)

Watts argues that if 'dehumanization' is a sign of racial prejudice, then Conrad frequently exhibits his prejudice against whites. He also says that the above instance can be used as a point of reference against which we can assess the depredation of the whites and measure the condition of the ‘hollow men’ i.e. European pilgrims. About the passage that Achebe considers

to incorporate dehumanizing description of the Africans, Watts' (1988) opinion is that Conrad is giving us a plausible rendering of the responses of a British traveler of c. 1890 to the "strange and bewildering" experiences offered by the Congo. If one takes the context of the passage into consideration then s/he would understand that instead of showing myopic and patronizing attitude, Marlow here questions the basis of the patronizing outlook whether of others or himself, by reference to the brutalities of the whites ('Transgression - punishment -bang! Pitiless, pitiless. That's the only way') and their absurdities ('I noticed there was a hole in the bottom of his pail') (p.199). He says:

"the myopic is increasingly cured by the tale's tendency to show what most whites at that period were unable to see. The narrative obliges the reader to ask whether civilization is a valuable, fragile improvement on savagery, or a hypocritical elaboration of it".

(p.199-200)

Watts identifies three possible suggestions that the tale offers: 1. Africa offers the primitive basis from which European culture has fortunately evolved; 2. Africa offers the raw and vigorous truth which has been adulterated and concealed by European culture; and 3. The suggestion of cultural equivalence between the two regions.

Regarding Achebe's claim that Conrad wanted Africans to be in their place, Watts' view is that Conrad rather implies that the whites should stay in their place, which is not the Congo. It is because of the whites' unwanted intervention in the Congo that the 'really fine chap' (the black fireman) becomes 'the thrall to strange witchcraft' (Watts, 1983: 200). Watts here adds that Conrad called the colonial power in Africa as 'competitors for the privilege of improving the nigger (as a buying machine)' (*ibid.*).

Although Achebe declares that Conrad maintained his discriminatory attitude towards the African mistress, Watts does not think so. Watts argues that even if Conrad has portrayed the

two women in contrast to each other that contrast is deliberately eroded. Pointing out similarities between the African mistress and the European Intended such as their same gesture, loyalty to Kurtz, both having impotent charms etc., Watts (1983) argues that the readers are prevented from seeing the contrasts in Conrad's art without also seeing the similarities. He also points out the limitation of Achebe's observation in saying that Conrad did not grant speech to the African woman. He says: "The black woman is certainly capable of speech" and quotes the lines which prove it: "She got in one day and kicked up a row. ... She talked like a fury to Kurtz for an hour" (p.200). Thus Watts debunks any possibility of considering the European woman as way superior to the African one.

In answer to Achebe's accusation that Conrad granted speech to the Africans only to condemn them out of their own mouth, Watts (1983) says three things: 1. He mentions research done by Norman Sherry which lead him to claim that the crews of the vessels which plied the Congo were from Bangala and the 'Bangalas' were "joyfully cannibalistic" (p. 201). Bangala is the name of a dialect of Lingala, a language spoken by the people of the Orientale Province of the Democratic Republic of Congo and also of a station set up along the Congo river in the 19th century (Wikipedia). Watts here seems to imply that Conrad did not say anything wrong about the Congolese being cannibals. 2. Even if the Africans condemn themselves, the Europeans do the same more frequently. For example, the aunt expresses her naive belief in 'weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways', the manager talks of 'unsound method' and Kurtz says, 'The horror! The horror!' etc. 3. More importantly what the cannibals say should be taken ironically because the story shows how Marlow is puzzled by the cannibal crew's restraint. On the other hand, the narrator strongly hints that the European, Kurtz, lacks restraint and participates in rites in which he eats human flesh.

Watts regrets that although Achebe concedes that Conrad's tale contains 'advanced and human views', he gradually proceeds to treat them as retrograde and inhuman. Watts (1983: 202) says:

Achebe appears somewhat hard to please. When the tale offers views which he regards as illiberal, he condemns them; and when the tale is humane and liberal, he redefines such liberalism as racialist illiberalism.....And in his treatment of liberalism Achebe seems to be assailing what he should defend. The liberal tradition commends the maximization of human liberties; it has advocated the abolition of slavery, and upholds the jury system in courts of law and the democratic electoral system in politics. To sneer at liberalism is to sneer at democratic principles and to support racialism.

Thus Achebe's comment that Marlow is able to "toss out bleeding-heart sentiments" appears to Watts as "utterly inappropriate to the measured, specific, and shrewdly ironic passage that he quotes" (p.202). Calling Albert Schweitzer's hospital 'a big improvement', Watts argues that far from sidestepping the question of equality between white and black, the internationally recognized campaign like that against Leopold's regime in the Congo did much to raise the question. Watts also refers to Casement's report for the government and E. D. Morel's *Red Rubber* and says that their works also questioned the white's claim to moral superiority over the blacks. Moreover, Watts quotes a passage from Conrad's closest literary acquaintance R. B. Cunninghame Graham to show that a liberal M. P. like him also denounced the cruelty inflicted by the white man upon blacks, regardless of the his Belgian or British identity.

Watts (1983) further observes that it is the whites of the Congo rather than the blacks who are portrayed as hollow in the story. For him, Marlow's contempt of the "ignorant, sheeplike people" in the streets of the "sepulchral city" (p.203), the whites' superstitious devotion to the fetish of ivory, the French warship's firing shells into a continent, the profound meaning of the church bells just like that of the blacks' drums are indicators of the fact that Conrad has

portrayed the whites as no better than 'primitive'. Watts says: "If one 'heart of darkness' is explicitly central Africa, another is London, centre of 'a mournful gloom', 'a brooding gloom'." (p.203).

About Achebe's indignation at Conrad's speaking of an encounter with 'a buck-nigger' in Haiti, Watts (1983) says that Achebe could impose similar more indictment on Conrad by talking of the 'nigger' of *The Nigger of The Narcissus* as well as the casual anti-semitic references in the letters of Conrad and his friend Graham. Watts explains these instances by saying that both Conrad and Graham were influenced by the climate of prejudice of their times when racial and particularly anti-Semitic prejudice was common to people of all classes. However, for Watts, the best work of both men seems to transcend such prejudice. Moreover, Watts observes that it is the general rule in Conrad's fiction that the more forceful the expression of racial prejudice, the more corrupt is the speaker. For example, Watts notes that the bullying captain in *Lord Jim* refers to the Moslem passengers as 'dese cattle', and it is a sign of Kurtz's moral collapse that he refers to the blacks as 'brutes'. Watts' attempt to justify Conrad's use of the term 'nigger' is also evident in his introduction to *Joseph Conrad: Heart of Darkness and Other Tales* (2002). Calling the word as "historically realistic", Watts (2002: xxi) says: "the obnoxious term was widely and casually used by whites in the 1890s and long afterwards; indeed, it could be heard in American films more than a century later." We should also take into account Bradley's (1996) observation in this regard. On the basis of Gilbert's research who found out that the word 'nigger' was considered offensive in both the U. S. and Britain in the 18th century, Bradley (1996) argues that Conrad was certainly aware of the word's derogatory implication in 1898. However, he does not think that it proves Conrad as a racist. Rather, he says: "Perhaps Conrad constructed Marlow as a racist, at least in part, by having him use such

words as "nigger" or savage in a few select places in the book" (p.3). He points out that most of the time Marlow uses the word 'nigger' when he sees that an African is being badly treated or dehumanized. On other occasions Marlow uses Negro or Black.

The gist of Watts' counter arguments regarding Conrad's racism is that Conrad's tale is a criticism of the whites' racial prejudice which consists mostly of their claim to moral superiority. The examples that Achebe (1988) quotes to show that Conrad has dehumanized Africans should be taken ironically. They reveal that it is actually whites who are portrayed as hollow and savage. Whites condemn themselves more frequently than blacks. Instead of showing Kurtz's European Intended as superior to black mistress Conrad has shown a lot of similarities between them. Moreover, it is not that whites always try to support racial prejudice because people like Cunningham Graham, Robert Casement, E. D. Morel have criticized white's brutalities. Watts implies that even if there were some signs of racism in Conrad it should be excused because his best works transcend such prejudice.

Almost the same views as Watts are echoed by C. P. Sarvan. Like Watts, Sarvan (1988) focuses more on the ironic aspect of Marlow's character and the text's suggestion to reexamine Europe's claim to be civilized and therefore superior. According to Sarvan (1988: 283), the crucial question that Conrad's story raises in the mind of its readers is whether European "barbarism" is "merely a thing of the historical past". He also argues that Conrad's forceful criticism of colonialism cannot be lightly passed over simply as weak liberalism and that the contempt was not on grounds of race itself. For Sarvan, uncomplicated "savagery" is better than the "subtle horrors" manifested by almost all the whites Marlow met on his voyage. Above all, Sarvan also notes that while Conrad was not free of all prejudice he has resisted the temptation to use physical appearance and setting as indicators of nonphysical qualities. About the

dehumanization of blacks Sarvan (1988: 285) says: "...though it is extreme to say that Conrad called into question the very humanity of Africans, one's perspective and evaluation of this work need alteration". Sarvan refers to Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Leonard Kibera's views in this regard. Whereas Thiong'o thinks that Achebe overlooked the positive aspect of Conrad's novel i.e. his attack on colonialism, Kenyan novelist Leonard Kibera appreciates the fact that Conrad does not pretend to understand the third world as do Joyce Cary and Graham Greene. Sarvan's final comments are: "Conrad too was not entirely immune to the infection of the beliefs and attitudes of his age, but he was ahead of most in trying to break free."(*ibid.*)

Watts and Sarvan thus agree that while Conrad questions the basis of racial prejudice of whites, he himself was not totally immune to the racial prejudice of his time. For them Conrad's attempt to bring the then existing colonial barbarism under scrutiny at a time when European colonization was at its peak, is something that saves Conrad from the blame of racism. Evidently, Achebe could not take Conrad lightly since his portrayal of Africans was related to the life of his own community. However, his final comments can be regarded as more logical in this regard: "Conrad saw and condemned the evil of imperial exploitation but was strangely unaware of the racism on which it sharpened its iron tooth" (Achebe, 1988: 262).

Collits (2005) rightly points out that Achebe's attack on Conrad opened up a range of interrelated problems. One of them is whether we are now better placed to judge Achebe's accusations. According to Collits, the general consensus is that we are not. Noting the unpreparedness of the Western academics to deal with such transgression of Achebe, Collits (2005) says that Achebe's essay presented the First-world intellectuals with some "still unresolved problems" (p.98). Nevertheless, Collits thinks that by viewing *Heart of Darkness* as a "stable embodiment of Conrad's political beliefs and attitude towards blacks", Achebe

“misread” the novel (*ibid.*). Conrad cannot be called a racist because he never engaged with racist discourse. Conrad’s ‘conscientious’ anti-racist attitude and sympathy towards subjugated people at the early stage of his writing career as well as his early comments on these matters encourage Collits to come to this conclusion. However, he does not deny the fact that Marlow’s attitude mimics European prejudice. Yet Collits supplements it by saying that instead of individual entities Marlow is more engaged with processes of historical change and he directs his anger and contempt towards the “disruptive system that denatures Europeans and Africans alike” (p. 99).

The following observations of Collits (2005) can provide us further help in understanding Conrad’s racism:

In writing with muted anger on behalf of unrepresented and misrepresented strange peoples, he anticipates the diagnostic polemics that their descendants would produce in the late twentieth century itself.....Yet the fact that he explicitly addresses the question of racial prejudice at the outset of his public career shows why his novels would inevitably become test case in post-colonial analyses of European racism.

(p. 97)

Although Collits believes that Conrad wrote on behalf of the ‘unrepresented and misrepresented’ people, after reading the whole story few readers would feel the same. Because of its depiction of the injustice done to blacks, many critics considered the story to be a critique of European colonialism. But as is evident, Conrad’s story contains a lot of examples which does not give the reader any impression that blacks have a distinct culture of their own as do whites. It may be said that Conrad, through Marlow, showed an ambivalent attitude to blacks. The story also contains examples which express Marlow’s hatred towards colonizers. Nevertheless, since Marlow cannot totally grant human status to blacks or come out of the prejudice that blacks should be civilized by whites and that his racial prejudice exceeds his anti-colonial attitude, he is

a racist. As for Conrad it is hard to tell because, on the one hand, it is evident from his letters that he considered English colonizers as better than others (see Kimbrough, 1988; Singh, 1988). This belief along with the fact that he considered Africans as inferior to ‘civilized’ people (as pointed out by Singh, 1988), prove him to be a racist. On the other, since in *Heart of Darkness* his protagonists Marlow and Kurtz are representative of English colonizers, and as Marlow says “All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz” (Conrad, 1988: 50), it debunks any possibility that he favored English colonizers. In other words, Conrad critiqued English colonialism and with it the idea that Africans should be civilized by whites. In this sense, he cannot be called a racist.

When we judge somebody as racist we do so after being convinced that that person’s attitude reflects racist prejudice. It is quite clear that Marlow begins to show such prejudice as he travels across the ‘mighty big river’ – a journey which confronts him with the question of very basis of civilization and humanity. In order to understand how Marlow is put into this humanity – barbarity conundrum it is important to note that the conundrum is not set in a city or a “civilized” place. Consequently, we need to identify and scrutinize Conrad’s way of representing the continent in which the story takes place.

Representations and Misrepresentations

While the early criticism of *Heart of Darkness* was concerned mostly with political, moral, psychological and structural analysis of the text, in the late twentieth century the focus fell upon representation of Africa and its people in the narration of whites. Although Conrad does not explicitly state that his story is set in Africa the particular set of imagery as well as hints that he uses in the story along with his letters to his friends put a boundary to the kind of place that can be referred to and leave little scope for doubting that Conrad was writing about Africa (see Kimbrough, 1988; Bradley, 1996; Simmons, 2008; Collits, 2005). In an attempt to discover how postcolonial scholars analyze the representation of Africa in *Heart of Darkness* this chapter also focuses on some historical facts of the continent.

Aware that defenders of Conrad would emphasize the moral deterioration of a European caused by isolation and disease where Africa has been used merely as a setting, Achebe (1988) picks up this point for cementing his arguments. He argues that Conrad has used Africa not only as a “setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human factor” but he also reduced Africa to the “role of props for the break-up of one petty European mind” (p 257). According to Achebe, Conrad did not originate the image of Africa that is portrayed in the story but carried on the dominant image that was and is in the Western imagination. He thinks that the West seems to have a need for “constant reassurance” of its civilization by comparison with Africa. Referring to Marco Polo’s *Description of the World* where the author put down his impressions of the travels he made, Achebe argues that even a great traveler like Marco Polo did not mention two “extraordinary” things about China. One is the art of printing which was not yet known in Europe and the other is the Great Wall of China, which is the only creation of man which can be seen from the moon. The point that Achebe makes here is that travelers can also be blind.

Whatever the reason is, in *Heart of Darkness*, Achebe finds the pictures of the African people given by Conrad “grossly inadequate”. Achebe justifies his claim by talking of the Fang people who live just north of the River Congo and whose skill in making masks Conrad did not mention in his story. Achebe says that these people are among “the greatest masters of the sculptured form” and the masks made by them marked the beginning of cubism (p. 260). Apart from the people, Achebe observes that Africa has been projected by Conrad as “the other world” or, the antithesis of Europe. The Congo is also included in this “othering”. For instance, Conrad portrays the Thames as calm and peaceful, and argues that that has been of great service to the people whereas the Congo is portrayed as if it has “rendered no service and enjoys no old age pension....“Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world””(Achebe, 1988: 252) . Achebe adds:

For the Thames too “has been one of the dark places of the earth.”It conquered its darkness, of course, and is now in daylight and at peace. But if it were to visit primordial relative, the Congo, it would run the terrible risk of hearing grotesque echoes of its own forgotten darkness, and falling victim to an avenging recrudescence of the mindless frenzy of the first beginnings.

(ibid.)

Conscious that he may be challenged on the grounds of actuality, Achebe says that he would not believe any traveler’s tale whom he suspect to be “jaundiced”, even though he himself has not made the journey. He quotes Conrad’s biographer, B. C. Meyer, whose opinion we may take along with Achebe’s. Meyer said of Conrad that he was “notoriously inaccurate in the rendering of his own history” (Quoted by Achebe, 1988:259).

In his lecture titled “Africa and Africans in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness”, Professor Candice Bradley (1996) gives us some ideas about the history and people of the Congo and Africa. She says that before the “partition of Africa” by the river Congo during 1880-1890 many Europeans

had only “toeholds” in Africa. There was a big blank space in the map of Africa about which the Europeans did not know much. The mapmakers used to fill the blank space with drawings of wild animals. People, especially travelers, traders, missionaries and the like used to take isolated journeys into the continent. The center of Africa was filled with people who lived in tribes, bands, empires or kingdoms. These people had territories with boundaries which they defended. They also had forged trade relationships and utilized long distance trade routes. For instance, they had 2000 year history of contact with Egypt. By 12th century Islam had entered the continent in the North and West. People even used to write their histories in Arabic.

About cannibalism of the Congolese, scholars seem to have different opinions. Bradley (1996) argues that although the people of the Congo did not have a written history, they were not primitives, cannibals or savages. There were four societies in the Congo which had kingdoms and which traded with the Portuguese since the fifteenth century. The occupation of these people also included hunting and slave trade. The hunters were known as Mbuti, Efe or Pygmies. The pygmies had lived in this region for about 40000 years and the group “Deep Forest” borrows sounds for their music from these people. Bradley also mentions that there is clear evidence of the fact that these people had contact with Egyptians and that their music had reached the Pharaoh’s court. In the seventeenth century two of these people were even taken to Italy where they were taught Italian and playing the piano. As has been mentioned earlier, based on Norman Sherry’s research Watts (1983) gives the completely opposite view as he argues that the Congolese crew of the vessels that plied the river were cannibals. Frances B. Singh (1988) comes up with more details of cannibalism. She says that in *Heart of Darkness*, when Marlow travels with a group of cannibals Marlow’s attitude reveals his fear, ignorance and disdain. Marlow cannot understand why cannibals show restraint because, as Singh (1988) says, “he never

completely grants them human status: at best they are a species of superior hyena” (p.273). Singh argues that because of his narrow mindset Marlow cannot see that cannibals do not eat human flesh out of greed or lust. Rather, they observe it as a ritual which, they think, is connected with the welfare of their society. She further mentions:

... a society in which cannibalism has ritual significance cannot possibly be a symbol for a lawless and bestial one. All primitive ritual, no matter how shocking it may appear to an outsider, is, in the words of Johan Huizinga, “sacred play.....fecund of cosmic insight and social development”.

(Singh,1988 : 274)

That cannibals also consider their opponents’ humanity unlike whites who do not see blacks as human is evident in Stanley Diamonds words: “Even ritualized cannibalism.....recognizes and directly confronts the concrete humanity of the subject” (Quoted by Singh, 1988: 274). Singh also says that if Marlow could notice things he would see that cannibals do not eat human flesh so casually and kill others so indiscriminately with rifles as do whites. Rather, the idea of cannibalism involves a hand-to-hand combat without any weapon so that the strength and heroism of one person pass into another (p. 274). It gives the other person a chance to defend himself and prove his manliness as well (*ibid.*).

Then why this misrepresentation or absence of a holistic representation of blacks in Conrad’s story? Bradley (1996) talks of some of the images of Africa and Africans that Europeans had in their mind during the nineteenth century. Some of the sources of these images were the stories of travel through Africa. Among them were Henry Stanley’s books *Through the Dark Continent* (1879), *How I Found Livingstone in Central Africa* (1890) and in *Darkest Africa* (1891) which were quite popular at that time. Bradley says that even if Conrad had not read them, he at least was influenced by the pictures of Africa that was presented by the books. Bradley also says that since Conrad read anthropology, he might have read early anthropological accounts of Africa.

Many of these writings were made by missionaries and specialists who had gone to Africa either to “save souls” or “cure the sick” (p.8). As a result, disease, paganism, physical darkness, insanity, savagery, primitiveness, and sexuality became some of the dominant images associated with Africa. As Collits (2005) says that rather than speculating about life in Africa prior to colonialist intervention Conrad presents the Congo a late instance of this intervention and the narrative “mediates on horrors past, present and to come” (p.99).

When an author gives birth to a story it becomes a mode of representation of certain people and place. When the author intends to criticize certain prejudice of a society his mode of representation also gets directed towards that end. But when the author himself cannot come out of that prejudice, his work is bound to be affected by that prejudice, whether consciously or unconsciously. Similarly, *Heart of Darkness* which was meant to be critique of European way of handling colonialism cannot reach its goal because, Conrad’s sympathy for the colonized gets jaundiced because of his racial prejudice. Although he succeeds in showing the dark side of colonialism he also jeopardizes the life of Africans by representing them as inferior to whites. Ultimately, instead of being a true critique of European colonialism his *Heart of Darkness* becomes a misrepresentation of the colonized world.

If Conrad misrepresented blacks why did he do so? To answer this question we need to go back to the historical moment of imperialism in which *Heart of Darkness* was published.

Conrad and Imperialism

Edward Said defines imperialism as “the practice, theory and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 2004 : 122). As a conscious and openly advocated policy of acquiring colonies for economic, strategic and political advantage, imperialism did not emerge until around 1880. The beginning of classical imperialism is attributed to the year 1885, when the Berlin Congo Conference ended and the ‘scramble for Africa’ got underway. In its more recent sense imperialism is associated with the Europeanization of the globe which came in three major waves – the age of discovery during the 15th and 16th centuries; the age of mercantilism during the 17th and 18th centuries; and the age of imperialism in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The development of imperial rhetoric and of imperial representation of the rest of the world from the 15th century involved a desire for and belief in European cultural dominance – a belief in a superior right to exploit the world’s resources than pure profit (Ashcroft et al., p. 126). In the late 19th century the hegemony of imperialism was confirmed by the power of imperial discourse rather than military or economic might.

A lot of discussion on *Heart of Darkness* has evolved around the political and economic aspects of imperialism. When we talk of the economic aspects of imperialism in the story, we find that Marlow shows his hatred towards the profit-making intention of Europeans. Early in the story we are told that Marlow does not like the way Romans conquered the rest of the world because they were not efficient. Although at first he thought that the colonizers he worked for were better than Romans, as he remembers what he saw of their colonization process, he comes out of that illusion and says: “The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a

pretty thing when you look into it too much” (Conrad, 2008: 21 - 22). Later he talks of the intention of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition: “To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglar breaking into a safe” (Conrad, 2008: 51). As Levenson (1988: 395) observes:

Imperialism presents itself to Conrad as an affair of inefficient clerks, disaffected functionaries, envious subordinates, and defensive superiors – all arrayed within a strict hierarchy whose local peak is the General Manager and whose summit is the vague “Council in Europe”.

The late 19th century was the peak of European imperialism and imperial policy became “openly aggressive” during this period (Ashcroft et al. 2004). As Marlow was witnessing the aggressive nature of imperialism his belief in the moral purpose of imperialism gets shattered. But he does not give up hope in it and this is evident in his speech at the beginning of the story: “What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to....” (Conrad, 2008: 22).

Along with the political and economic reality of imperialism there is a cultural aspect of it which came to forefront with Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). In this book, Said explores how subtly through imperialist discourse dominant power shapes our notion of culture by claiming their culture as superior and better. Said says that contemporary discourse assumes the primacy and complete centrality of the West and its form is “totalizing”, its attitudes and gestures “all enveloping” and it “shuts out” much even as it “includes, compresses and consolidates” (p.24). Said observes that in *Heart of Darkness*, readers are able to feel the enormous power of Kurtz’s African experience through Marlow’s “overmastering narrative” of his (Marlow’s) journey into the African interior towards Kurtz. Said (1993:25) says:

This narrative in turn is connected directly with the redemptive force, as well as the waste and horror, of Europe's mission in the dark world. Whatever is lost or elided or even simply made up in Marlow's immensely compelling recitation is compensated for in the narrative's sheer historical momentum, the temporal forward movement with digressions, descriptions, exciting encounters, and all.

Said also says that in Conrad's story there is a common theme evident in Kurtz's "ivory -trading empire", Marlow's journey towards Kurtz, and the narrative itself: "Europeans performing acts of imperial mastery and will in (or about) Africa" (p25). Apart from the narrative, Said observes that the people in Marlow's audience are representative of the business world; this implies that during the 1890s the "business of empire" had become "empire of business"(p.25). Said argues that Conrad does not give us any perspectives other than the "world-conquering" attitudes of Kurtz, Marlow and his audience on the deck. Because of its imperialist politics and aesthetics, which at the closing years of the nineteenth century seemed to be "inevitable and unavoidable", *Heart of Darkness* works quite effectively. Said identifies two possible visions that can be derived from Conrad's story.

The first vision renders the world from the perspective of official European or Western imperialists. It incorporates the idea that although whites may have physically left their old colonies in Africa and Asia, they retain those not only as markets but as "locales on the ideological map" over which they continue their domination morally and intellectually. As Said says, this vision leads to "mass slaughter, and if not to literal mass slaughter then certainly to rhetorical slaughter" (p. 28). The second vision allows us to understand that Conrad made his narratives local to a time and place and did not claim it as "unconditionally true" or "unqualifiedly certain". Said (1993) observes:

... Conrad does not give us the sense that he could imagine a fully realized alternative to imperialism:Since Conrad *dates* imperialism, shows its contingency, records its illusions and tremendous violence and waste (as in

Nostramo), he permits his later readers to imagine something other than an Africa carved up into dozens of European colonies, even if, for his own part, he had little notion of what that Africa might be.

(p. 28)

Thus in *Heart of Darkness* Said finds on one hand, an intellectual attempt to continue white domination of the world by the “all-enveloping” nature of Marlow’s narration; on the other, lack of any certainty about the future of imperialism. Said argues that although Conrad could not conclude that imperialism had to end, in the postcolonial world there exist a whole movement, literature, and theory of resistance and response to empire. Now the writers are able to truly read the great colonial masterpieces which misrepresent them oppositionally.

While analyzing the imperialism manifest in *Heart of Darkness* William Atkinson (2004) focuses on the immediate context of the novel, especially as projected by *Blackwood’s*, the magazine where the novel was first published in three installments. While Atkinson agrees with other critics that the novel is critical of imperialism, he thinks that what is said about imperialism and whose imperialism is being talked about are more germane issues. He also says that when we read a text along with other materials that provide background information or those which accompany the text, then we find a “third text”. Thus these additional materials affect our way of reading a text. The same thing also happened with “The Heart of Darkness” (the original title of the novel as published in the magazine). According to Atkinson, like the silent audience of the *Nellie* the readers of *Blackwood’s* expected that the authors of the magazine would be “civil” in their writing. Focusing on the anti-French attitude of the *Blackwood’s* readers, Atkinson argues that one of the basic rules of *Blackwood’s* was that the good imperialists are British and the bad imperialists are not. Since “The Heart of Darkness” was a part of the moral and political discourse of *Blackwood’s* it remained faithful to this discourse. Consequently, “The Heart of

Darkness” acknowledges the complexities of the imperial project, and shows the negative effect of imperialism but does not refer to the British as types of bad imperialists.

The significant error in Atkinson’s observations is that he fails to identify that Conrad’s protagonists in *Heart of Darkness* are representative of British. The fact that Conrad did not totally exclude British in his critique of imperialists is also observed by Watts (1983). Watts identifies a number of devices used by Conrad in his story to justify his claim. For example, Conrad does not mention the African region as Belgian Congo or the ‘sepulchral city’ as Brussels; he cites the dominoes as ‘the bones’ in the fourth paragraph of the story (*bones* is a Sino-European colloquial name for Dominoes); he says of Kurtz : “All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz” etc. Watts says that although Conrad’s tale contains many paradoxes, his position regarding imperialism is not self-contradictory i.e. he includes all Europeans in his examples of bad imperialists.

The fact that the novel is about imperialism is also mentioned by Bradley (1996). He observes that the images of the Thames in Conrad’s novel prove that the novel is basically about imperialism. The Thames is connected to the Congo not only physically like other rivers, but also economically. This economic connection is manifest by the flow of ivory to Europe, the presence of London at a distance, and the brooding gloom over the Thames.

Related to the discussion of imperialism in *Heart of Darkness* is Marlow’s colonialistic attitude. Although colonialism is slightly different from imperialism, Edward Said describes it as a consequence of imperialism the concept of which incorporates the idea establishing settlements in distant territories (Ashcroft et al., 2004). As we know from Bradley’s (1996) lecture, during the time of Conrad’s visit in the Congo, Congo was not a Belgian colony but a personal

possession of King Leopold. However, the basic idea behind colonialism and imperialism is same as both legitimizes the domination of whites in the whole world. It is probably in this connection that the Indian critic Frances B. Singh finds in Marlow a colonialistic attitude. Singh (1988) thinks that Marlow reflects in his thinking three kinds of impressions about colonialism in *Heart of Darkness* – one is a direct attack on colonialism, one is an ironic attitude to it and the other is a tendency to see it as a metaphor. She thinks that Marlow’s sympathy for the blacks is superficial because he feels sorry for them only when he sees them dying and not when he sees them “healthy” or “practicing their customs” just like a “good colonizer” to whom such a feeling helps to rationalize his policies (Singh, 1988: 272). She says about Marlow: “He may sympathize with the plight of blacks, he may be disgusted by the effects of colonialism, but because he has no desire to understand or appreciate people of any culture other than his own, he is not emancipated from the mentality of a colonizer” (p. 272). According to Singh (1988), in order to be a truly anti-colonial work, showing an ambivalent attitude about imperialism (as many would argue about Conrad’s position about colonialism) is not permissible because, it compromises one’s position. She concludes by saying that the colonialistic bias of *Heart of Darkness* is a by-product of Conrad’s conflating his belief of Africans with ¹Hartmann’s theory of the unconscious and “reveals the limitations of Conrad’s notions rather than the existence of a reactionary and racist streak in him” (p. 280).

Although Marlow’s attitude exhibits the imperialistic prejudice of whites, Collits (2005) believes that Conrad’s text is not contained by Marlow’s “limited and prejudice-ridden” liberalism. Collits (2005: 99) says:

¹ Eduard von Hartmann was one of the “more enlightened” anthropologists of Conrad’s time whom Conrad was reading when he was writing *Heart of Darkness*. (Singh, 1988: 280).

In confronting European readers with the inherent contradictions of that ideology, *Heart of Darkness* appears to signal its doom. To that extent, it can be read as a book that takes apart colonialism without being able to imagine what lies beyond it.

While these critics remain occupied with the novella's European imperialism, Watts (1983) finds out a different kind of imperialism in Achebe's critique of the novella. Watts names this as "ideological imperialism" and accuses Achebe of practicing it. Watts argues that Achebe would have praised *Heart of Darkness* if he had found its values matching his own ones, which among others include hostility to imperialism. Watts says that in the way a sceptic could sincerely be interested in Donne's religious verse or, a socialist could sincerely enjoy Pope's 'Epistle to Burlington' or, an optimist could sincerely take pleasure in Swift or Kafka, Achebe could not commend those works which differ from his own ideology. He says:

A critic who in his travels through the world of letters seeks to commend those areas which he can annex as supports for his own values is practising ideological imperialism: his readings may constitute a support-system for himself as critical emperor.

(p.207)

Watts refers to Alan Sinfield's 'Against Appropriation' in this regard where Sinfield suggests that one of the main functions of critical discourse should be to defy and decrease appropriative tendencies in our reading. In other words, Watts implies that since Achebe cannot resist the temptation to appropriate the literary text he reads, he values those works which match his own ideology and therefore practices ideological imperialism.

Thus imperialism is present in *Heart of Darkness* not only in its depiction of the imperialized world from the perspective of a white but also in its failure to anticipate that imperialism has to end. While the framing of the whole story on the Thames, the silence of Marlow's audience and

the story's being published in the *Blackwood's* indicate the fact that the story was part of imperial discourse; the vivid picture of the barbarity of whites in search for ivory shows the true nature of political and economic propaganda of imperialism. In all these ways the book plays a significant role in shaping a binary notion of culture in the reader's mind - i.e. the culture of whites is superior whereas black culture is inferior.

Conclusion

Creation of any literary text involves two sides – one is the reader's side and the other that of the author. When an author produces a piece of literary work he has certain ideas and purpose in mind which he tries to express through the resources of a language. As the author struggles to represent reality while combining his ideas, the task becomes quite difficult. Another thing which gets automatically involved in the process is his attempt to aestheticize the work by his manner of telling and playing with words. When the work reaches the reader's hand it falls into another process of creation in which the reader becomes the creator. This is because the reader is supposed to create meaning out of the text while keeping in mind that he is reading a piece of art work which is an embodiment of the author's imagination and experience. Thus the reader's task is also difficult since he has to be careful about what is being made up in the text and what is not. In other words, the success of a literary work depends on both the reader and the writer.

One finding of this paper is that most of the controversies surrounding *Heart of Darkness* stem from the fact that all the critics have not given equal importance to the same aspect of the novel. For instance, Chinua Achebe and Frances B. Singh focuses more on Marlow's representation of blacks; Cedric Watts and C. P. Sarvan focuses on the narrative technique and the text's brave attempt to attack colonialism; Bradley emphasizes the historical facts of the Congo whereas Atkinson emphasizes on the history of *Blackwoods*. The most interesting debate has been between Achebe and Watts because, Achebe's critique expresses his resentment towards whites whereas Watts tries his best to point out the limitations of Achebe's observation.

A big challenge in evaluating *Heart of Darkness* has been deciding the appropriate context in which to assess the novella. If one judges the novella by placing it in the present context when most of the countries of the world are dependent on the western countries in one way or other and are gradually becoming aware of its detrimental effect, one sees that the novel involves a racist discourse and reflects an imperialist view of the world. Although one cannot be sure whether a western reader would be able to feel it or not, but today any reader from a third world country would be able to feel the redemptive force of Marlow's narrative towards blacks. As Marlow does not reveal the last words of Kurtz to his Intended it indicates his reluctance to see the end of Imperialism. Marlow's attitude reveals his belief in the superiority of western culture which undermines his sympathy for the blacks which the readers see at the beginning of the story. However, the story could have been anti-imperialist because when Marlow finishes his story he says that he could not do justice to Kurtz. But as he adds that if he did so it would make the world darker and as his audience also did not react to his feeling of guilt it only reinforces the imperialist bias of the story. Again, if the story is relocated in its immediate context i.e. late nineteenth century, then it would be called a scathing attack on imperial activities despite its racialist representation of blacks. This is because that was the time when imperialism had reached its peak though very few people were aware of its true nature.

Conrad defines art as "a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bring to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its ever aspect" (Conrad, 1988: 223). He said that the purpose of art is not to make immediate profit but to make us hear, feel and see. He believed that if a work of art becomes successful in serving this purpose then one would get whatever he demands i.e. fear, charm, consolation, encouragement and also "glimpse of truth". So truth for Conrad consists of "a moment of vision, a sigh, a smile – and the

return to an eternal rest” (p.225). If on the basis of this knowledge we evaluate *Heart of Darkness* then it can be said that Conrad has successfully rendered the truth of imperial adventure and the dark side of human nature by exploring the layers that hide the truth. But the truth he reached was one-sided. It is problematic because this truth endangers the life of a community which he does not want to understand.

That Conrad did not want to be a revolutionary is evident in his own words: “At a time when nothing which is not revolutionary in some way or other can expect to attract much attention I have not been revolutionary in my writings. ...imperfect Aesthete, I am no better philosopher” (Conrad, 1988: 218). Conrad believed that if one becomes revolutionary it frees him from all the scruples associated with ideas. For him a revolutionary idea contains in it intolerance and fanaticism. Consequently, the optimism associated with it appeared to him as hard, absolute and forbidding. This helps us to understand why one does not find Marlow revolutionary.

Although Conrad found the optimism hidden in revolutionary ideas unacceptable, he did not see the world as totally pessimistic or hopeless. He wrote: “To be hopeful in an artistic sense it is not necessary to think that the world is good. It is enough to believe that there is no impossibility of its being made so” (Conrad, 1988: 228). However, one does not find any such optimism in his depiction of the world in *Heart of Darkness*.

This dissertation has shown how in postcolonial studies Conrad’s story continues to produce new arguments and interpretations. Certainly, Achebe’s role in this regard will remain influential for a long time. As Collits (2005: 101) says of Achebe: “His own truth-telling ironically benefitted Conrad, in so far as it made the reading of Conrad’s fiction a far more exciting activity than it had been previously.” He also says that as Conrad ruptured the order of things at the turn of the century by writing *Heart of Darkness*, so did Achebe by delivering his

“shocking” lecture on racism in *Heart of Darkness* in 1975. Indeed, the debate surrounding *Heart of Darkness* will not end if everyone considers his ideology as superior to others. Watts is right in the sense that he understands that imperialism is all about imposing one’s ideology over others. But in condemning Achebe for criticizing whites’ imperialist attitude Watts himself is trying to legitimize western imperialism. The fact that western people were imperialist in the past and continue to be so in the present is undeniable. However, now there is a growing consciousness among the people of the ‘other’ world that what the west has been historically doing in the name of imperialism cannot let go on forever. They now know that in order to free themselves from the clutch of imperialism they are the ones who have to take the initiative and not the whites. Consequently, there should be a tremendous growth of anti-imperialist discourse which will remove all the misconceptions of the ‘other’ world that have been traditionally projected by the western discourse of which *Heart of Darkness* is a fine example.

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