

The Dark Heart of Language: An analysis of critical reactions to Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*.

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Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad is world-renowned as a masterpiece of English literature. It has been described as a classic novel of "literal ingenuity" because of its descriptive imagery and innovative allegory (Sherry, 1973, 133). Writers and authors worldwide have acclaimed Conrad's articulation of the written word. However in 1975, Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe accused him of being a "thoroughgoing racist" in his use of Africa as a backdrop for an imperialist novel in which the dehumanisation of a people is regarded as normal (Achebe, 1975, n.p.). In 1993 another Postcolonialist theorist, Edward Said, critiqued both Conrad's colonialist language and Achebe's Postcolonialist theory. Said's argument was that Conrad's novel had to be read in the context of its time. Achebe's criticism was part of a postcolonial drive to resist white representation of Africa and highlight the colonial, even racist assumptions they contained. This dissertation will explore the critiques of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* from the contemporary reviews in the 1900s to the Postcolonialist debates of Chinua Achebe and Edward Said in order to understand the contemporary attitudes to literature and language in the English novel of the early twentieth century. As an overview of Conrad's own context is necessary in order to understand both his aim in writing *Heart of Darkness* and the reactions of contemporary critics to it, I will begin by giving a brief contextual outline.

During the nineteenth century, Western society witnessed many transformations with regard to industrial, technological and geographical advances. Developments in shipbuilding, manufacturing, transportation, processing and distribution impacted on western society in an economic, political and military manner. The Atlantic Slave Trade had been abolished throughout the Americas, but European Empires still maintained colonies throughout many parts of the globe. Their focus subsequently turned to the continent of Africa and all the riches it had yet to offer. With the discovery of Quinine to counteract malaria and steamboats to navigate the inner most regions of this vast continent, the "scramble for Africa" began with great fervour in 1881 (Headrick, 1979, 231). This was a new wave of Imperialism by European countries, which would result in the small continent of Europe claiming ownership of Africa and much territory in Indo-China, Asia and Indonesia. By 1885 the Berlin Conference legalised and regulated the dissection of Africa among their European Colonists. King Leopold II of Belgium was granted the newly named Congo Free State as his private property for his personal use (Ewans, 2003, 169). Claiming he was converting, civilising and educating the Congolese people on humanitarian grounds, his playground in central Africa became a hell on earth for its inhabitants. Coinciding with this was the development of transportation and the demand for rubber after Frank Dunlop's revolutionary creation of the pneumatic tyre in 1887 (Ewans, 2003, 169). The Congo Free State would supply the rubber for an up and coming global motor industry and became the most exploited area of Africa with death, mutilation, torture and bondage being a daily way of life for the native Congolese people. It has been reported that up to ten million people lost their lives, in what some historians refer to as Africa's Holocaust or Genocide (Thomas, 2015, 127). The Congo Free State was raided, plundered and pillaged, physically, psychologically, economically and culturally.

The path for exploration was open for many Europeans to travel to foreign lands and experience different cultures and ways of living. Polish born writer Joseph Conrad was no

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exception and had already travelled extensively throughout Europe before his twenty-first birthday. Born in Poland in 1857, Józef Teodor Konrad and his family fled Russian occupied Poland and a harsh life of serfdom under a brutal Russian regime and moved to London for a better way of life, changing his name to the more anglicised Joseph Conrad (Conrad, 1995, 2). His love for seafaring led him to Africa in 1890 where he witnessed the brutal atrocities of King Leopold's armies and subjects against the people of the Congo. The impact of these experiences resulted in many novels written by Conrad between 1885 and 1904 such as *Almayer's Folly* (1885), *Youth* (1899), *Lord Jim* (1900) and *Nostromo* (1904) (Conrad, 1995, 2). In 1898 *Heart of Darkness* was published as part of a trilogy to appear in *Blackwood's Magazine* (Conrad, 1995, 3). The novel was received with great acclaim and was published in hardback in 1902. This novel depicted the exploration by Europeans in Africa and the effect of a different civilisation on the European mind.

As mentioned above, Joseph Conrad was greatly disturbed by the brutality of Colonialism and the experiences of his youth in Tsarist Russia (Magill, 1971, 3). His father had been accused of involvement in the Polish National Committee and both his parents died when he was young from the effects of the harsh life of exile they endured under the Tsarist regime. Conrad's father, Apollo Korzeniowski, stated before his death that: "the history of mankind is a history of the struggle between barbarism and civilisation" (Magill, 1971, 4). According to author Jonah Rashkin, Conrad himself would suggest similarities between Poland and the Congo (Magill, 1971, 4). In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad makes reference to: "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, 1995, 10). Conrad was clearly aware of the subjection of other cultures through Colonialism simply because of their appearance and skin colour.

Western society was drip fed information through newspaper articles and essays from journalists and explorers about the process of "civilising" the unknown regions of the globe, but it seemed to be quite a one sided story for many years until stories began to surface from such commentators as Sir Roger Casement or Anti-Slavery Associations (Conrad, 1995, xix). In Casement's *Amazon Journal*, editor Angus Mitchell connected *Heart of Darkness* to Casement's *Putumayo Journal*. According to Mitchell even though both Conrad and Casement started their explorations as: "imperial adventurer[s]" it becomes that of "an anti-imperial investigator" (Mitchell, 1997, 53). He describes how Conrad and Casement initially focused on the civilising process however, by the end of their journeys, they come to realise that the civilising process of Colonialism is dark and sinister. Conrad stated: "It is hard not to draw parallels with this extraordinary powerful metaphysical work describing a river journey in search of the darkness at the heart of the white man's civilization" (Mitchell, 1997, 53). Even though Conrad's was fiction and Casement's fact, both men experienced the colonial impact on Africa at this time and their descriptions are very similar.

Heart of Darkness begins with an unnamed narrator recounting the story of the main protagonist Marlow, a sailor, and his stories of the sea. Marlow is relating an epic tale of his experience travelling through the Belgian Congo and his journey up river to the various stations along the Congo. He sets the scene by talking of ancient exploration and then describes a place in his imagination: "the very end of the world, a sea the colour of lead, a sky the colour of smoke, ...sand-banks, marshes, forests, savages, - precious little to eat fit for a civilised man... cold, fog, tempests, disease, exile, and death- death skulking in the air... they must've been dying like flies here" (Conrad, 1995, 9). This language illustrates the binary between the light of civilisation and the darkness of uncivilised territory, reinforcing the danger of the unknown landscape to the European explorer. In this early stage of the novel the natives are savages to be feared and would conform to hegemonic western perception.

It is during this journey deeper into the central terrain that he witnesses and recounts the inhumanities, cruelties and blatant torture by the Belgian Colonisers of the native Congolese people. The descriptions of the overwhelming terrain and the treatment of natives set the scene for a novel of contemplation regarding the process of Imperialism, Colonisation and the casualties of Capitalism. Marlow travels deeper into this vast and unforgiving land in search of a trader Kurtz, who is renowned as an enigmatic figure by both natives and the Belgians. The Company's chief accountant describes Mr Kurtz as: "a remarkable person...a first class agent...sends in as much ivory as all the rest put together" (Conrad, 1995, 27). On the other hand, the "phantom" natives are the people sourcing all this ivory and being brutally regarded as sub-human: "One of these creatures rose to his hands and knees, and went off on all-fours towards the river to drink. He lapped it up in his hand" (Conrad, 1995, 25). These people are starved and worked to death but instead of Conrad saying this in plain English, he uses language such as phantoms, contorted angles, creatures, crawling on the ground. Although shocking to contemporary readers, Conrad is reflecting hegemonic attitudes that would have viewed Africans as animalistic and subhuman.

Marlow is used as the vessel to transport the reader into the heart of the Congo. He is recounting his tale to the only other narrator in this book who is an unknown listener. This technique allows Conrad to critique Colonialism using fictional characters thus removing himself from direct criticism of Europeans. The author uses Marlow to illustrate how the Belgians in the Congo crossed the boundaries of humanity once they were released out of the confinement of Western culture and civilisation. The vividness of the landscape comes alive alongside the death and destruction of its inhabitants: "All their meagre breasts panted together, their violently dilated nostrils quivered, the eyes stared stonily uphill. They passed me within six inches, without a glance, with that complete, deathlike indifference of unhappy savages (Conrad, 1995, 80). The natives here are described as machines, as if they were part of the Industrial revolution that had enabled much of this Colonisation in the first instance. They are somewhat similar to steam engines panting and puffing like a machine with eyes directed straight ahead. It is descriptions like these that give the impression to the audience that this type of work and treatment is all these natives were fit for. Other characters all symbolise aspects of Western civilisation in a foreign land. The chief accountant and the general manager are possibly symbols of a controlling, proud and methodical western public service. They refer to the Administration as if it is a god in the sky. These managers and accountants want to extract as much as possible from the area so they will be rewarded with honour and esteem when they return to Belgium. They have no regard for the means of extraction. Mr Kurtz symbolises the Colonisation mind set: "You should have heard him say, "...my intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my – everything belonged to him" (Conrad, 1995, 70). Everything is in European hands.

Conrad uses the brutality of Colonialism as a setting for the disintegrating mind of the European. In his description of: "the body of a middle-aged negro, with a bullet-hole in the forehead, upon which I absolutely stumbled three miles farther on" is regarded as a worse imposition on Marlow than on the dead man lying on the road (Conrad, 1995, 35). As Marlow travels deeper into the inner station the natives seem to become less human: "In a few days the Eldorado Expedition went into the patient wilderness that closed upon it as the sea closes over a diver. Long afterwards the news came that all the donkeys were dead. I know nothing as to the fate of the less valuable animals. They, no doubt, like the rest of us, found what they deserved. I did not inquire (Conrad, 1995, 48). This excerpt implies how the natives are less valuable than donkeys. The description is all the more shocking because of Conrad's calm, factual style of writing.

Heart of Darkness, as stated above, originated in 1899 as a series in *Blackwood's Magazine* and was initially published with two of Conrad's other novels *The End of the*

Tether and Youth. It was not critically reviewed until it was printed in hardback in 1902. Edward Garnett, writer and literary critic, claimed it was a “psychological masterpiece” and described it as being “too strong a piece of meat for the ordinary reader” (Sherry, 1973, 139). A reviewer for the *Athenaeum* reinforced this idea that Conrad’s novel showed extraordinary skill and complexity by stating that: “the reader is warned that this book cannot be read understandingly – as evening newspapers and railway novels are perused – with one mental eye closed and the other roving” (Sherry, 1973, 139). These reviews focused on Conrad’s ability to connect: “the sub-conscious life within us...to our conscious actions, feelings and outlook” (Sherry, 1973, 132). Conrad, according to these critics, commanded the reader’s psychological and physical attention to transport the reader onto the Nellie alongside Marlow on his journey. This clearly predicts that the reader will interpret Africa through the eyes of a white European traveller on an adventure.

The most common source of praise from all of Conrad’s reviewers at this time was his mastery of the English language and the methods and techniques he cleverly uses to mesmerise his reader with descriptive narrative. Garnett, Malone, Huneker and Clifford compare him to a master of English, on a par with great figures in English literature past and present. Garnett describes his work as encapsulating the: “stillness of the sombre African forests, the glare of sunshine, the feeling of dawn, of noon, of night on the tropical rivers, the isolation of the unnerved” (Sherry, 1973, 129). A reviewer from the *Athenaeum* notes how: “the craftsman’s methods are never obtrusive, and after turning to the last page of one of his books, we rise saturated by the very air they breathed” (Sherry, 1973, 138). Andrew Malone used language similar to the previous reviewers to describe Conrad’s novel as: “the events, which glow through the haze of memory and are illuminated by the spectral moonshine of imagination” (Malone, 1924, 459). The reviewers mentioned could be accused of competing with Conrad for descriptive excellence, but what is significant is that the issue of the racism highlighted by Conrad remains unnoticed by these highly intelligent critics of their time. How could they understand the depth of Conrad’s writing and yet not heed the blatant racism on every page? This reinforces the idea that racism was not an issue in the period and possibly did not even exist as a concept. Descriptive language, psychological effects on Europeans and the emotional heartbreak of a European woman lie at the heart of this novel for contemporary western reviewers. Furthermore Huneker describes Conrad as a foreigner to the English language but: “who has absorbed our native idioms, who has made for himself an English soul” (Huneker, 1914, 275). Clifford would patronise him further for mastering: “our magnificent language...which he only began to learn in his nineteenth year” (Clifford, 1904, 851). If the critics of this time saw little or nothing wrong with using condescending language towards Joseph Conrad because he was Polish, the chance of nameless black Africans having any significance in Western civilisation at this time was inconceivable.

Garnett makes reference not only to Conrad’s “extraordinary gift” as a writer, but also touches on the aspect of Colonisation. He states how Conrad illustrated the catastrophic effect “uncivilised” Africa has on: “the deterioration of man’s morale, when he is let loose from European restraint and planted down in the tropics as an emissary of light armed to the teeth, to make trade profits out of the subject race” (Sherry, 1973, 132). The language in this quote suggests that Conrad’s main concern was the negative impact Colonialism on the Colonisers! When Europeans arrived on foreign shores, they automatically held the belief that their actions were righteous and superior to any native laws, beliefs or customs. This empowerment allowed them to disregard their moral behaviour and ignore any code of ethics in the name of Christianity and civilisation. Garnett emphasises Conrad’s talent to extract: “the psychological truth of this masterly analysis of two Continents in conflict, of the abysmal gulf between the white man’s system and the black man’s comprehension of its results” but still neglects to mention the effect of Colonialism on the native African people

(Sherry, 1973, 139). Both Conrad and his critics thus clearly concentrated solely on the psychological effect the experience of Colonialism had on the “white man in Africa” (Sherry, 1973, 129).

An unsigned Review in the *Manchester Guardian* of December 1902, goes so far as to dismiss Conrad’s account of Colonialism as merely the backdrop to a European adventure story: “It must not be supposed that Mr Conrad makes attack upon...Imperialism. In no one is the essence of the adventurous spirit more instinctive. The end of this story brings us back to the familiar, reassuring region of common emotions, to the grief and constancy of the woman who had loved Kurtz and idealises his memory. It shows us how far we have travelled” (Sherry, 1973, 135). This writer would put the heartbreak and grief of a European lady as a more important emotion than the cruelties and torture suffered by a nation of peoples. This quote alone puts the mind of white European intellectuals into context at this time. It highlights the disregard for the native Africans as if they were not capable of human emotion unlike their western counterparts. Europeans had set Africa up as a sub-human continent to ease their conscience with regards to colonising it.

This same review described the: “high-water mark of English fiction and ...great expression of adventure and romance...No labour is too great; no danger is too close for this great adventure of the spirit” (Sherry, 1973, 134). The review also mentioned “a struggle with phantoms worse than the elements” but still neglects to mention the atrocities inflicted on natives. It is implied that it is the chained half starved natives that are the phantoms to be feared. Garnett came close to detecting the brutalities of colonialists at one stage only in his review, when he described: “the helpless bewilderment of the unhappy savages in the grasp of their flabby and rapacious conquerors” (Sherry, 1973, 129). In this quote he acknowledges the greed of the colonisers, however “unhappy savages” is a very mild description for bondage and slavery of human beings. The use of language such as savage, wild, unknown, and darkness is negative language compared to the binary of the language used to describe Conrad. Language such as “faithful, true, modern, pride of fellowship and intensely modern” paint the civilised European in a completely different light to that of the savage African (Armstrong, 2016, 284). Garnett also stated in his review: “all this is a page torn from the life of the Dark Continent – a page which has been hitherto carefully blurred and kept away from European eyes” (Sherry, 1973, 132-133). Conrad in his novel thus reinforces for the Europeans the idea of the Dark Continent and its effect on white Europeans. If he was attempting to highlight the cruelties of Colonialism, his contemporaries either refused to detect it or it was not an issue at this time that was regarded as a problem.

From this review of the contemporary critiques it is possible to ascertain that there was not an awareness of racism at the time of *Heart of Darkness*, as it just did not exist. The “natural” understanding of race was the superior white race above all other races. This was part of the psychological mind-set of western patriarchal society that was indicative of the context and understanding of Colonialism. As far as people at the turn of the twentieth century were concerned, the issue of race was biologically, psychologically, physically and scientifically proven as a natural difference and inferiority. The English novelist, poet and critic Ford Maddox Ford describes Conrad as a: “great poet and an honest man...So scientifically and with precision we may deduce his immortality, and his dust may lie in its Kentish sunlight heedless of passing clouds” (Gordan, 1942, 307). This quote clearly reinforces the idea of the clean and pure Western civilised land in contrast to the dark heart of Africa with its uncivilised and unknown black interior.

The basis of Colonialism was to insert in the human mind set an ideology of race superiority (Castle, 2001, 14). The issue of race or colour of human skin being a signifier for either inferiority or superiority is the prominent “truth” imposed by western civilisation on non-western areas or newly discovered areas of the world (Castle, 2001, 20). Europeans were

regarded as civilised, superior and uniquely bestowed with God given talent and intelligence over all other non-white communities. Non-whites were an inferior race and not fully human by white European standards. This ideology became the fundamental justification for the acquisition of overseas territory throughout the era of Imperialism, in particular from the 1870s to 1960s (Castle, 2001, 22). There is an old proverb Chinua Achebe quotes many times which states: "Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter" (Williams, 2013, n.p.). It was this quote that inspired Achebe to be a writer, to tell the African's side of African history and literature. It is with this aim in mind that he critiques Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in order to deconstruct this novel from the perspective of a colonised native African. Before analysing Achebe's critique of *Heart of Darkness*, I will give a brief overview of the aims of Postcolonialism.

Postcolonial theory is a direct response to Colonialism and can be dated from the inception of Colonialism. Postcolonialist theorists deconstruct all aspects of western thought regarding Colonialism and western civilisation and bring to the surface the action behind the ideology. Language, religion, culture, politics and all areas of western living that were imposed on colonised nations are critiqued. In their book *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, Laura Chrisman and Patrick Williams challenge western economies: "to admit once and for all, without flinching at the consequences, that the decisive actors here are the adventurer, and the pirate, ...appetite and force, and behind them, a form of civilisation which finds itself obliged, to extend to a world scale, the competition of its antagonistic economies" (Chrisman and Williams, 1993,173). Postcolonial writers have peeled away the layers of propaganda, media, advertising and white history surrounding the Colonial conquest to uncover the true Capitalist greed and hunger for consumerism which lay at the heart of this empire. Chrisman and William further accuse Colonialists in the guise of military and missionaries of inventing false binaries equating Christianity with civilisation and Paganism with savagery. This ensured a place for the colonisers at the acceptable end of the spectrum while leaving all other colonised nations of various skin tone as the victims of a savage culture who required civilising at all costs (Chrisman and Williams, 1993,173). Postcolonialist Dela Layiwola describes how: "conceptualisations in the English language have tended to foreground English studies as the basis of hegemonic discourses: always with an undercurrent of an empire relating to its periphery" (Layiwola, 2001, 141). Anything "other" than a European language, most significantly English, is disregarded and referred to as foreign, strange, unknown or simply incoherent. This relates to the theory of otherness and ethnocentrism that both Homi K. Bhabha and Edward Said would connect to Colonial criticism. Marginalising a race to the level of subjugation can only be advantageous to one side, the oppressor.

Ngugi Thiong'o states how language is a critical tool used by Colonisers on the colonised masses, which is as brutally successful as inflicting violence: "Berlin of 1884 was affected through the sword and the bullet. But the night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and the blackboard. The physical violence of the battlefield was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom" (Chrisman and Williams, 1993, 436). This supports Layiwola's statement about English being used as a tool of hegemony and all that is "normal" in the world. If the colonised people did not learn English or the European language of their coloniser they were unemployable and impoverished in their native land. Jacques Derrida would take this even further to deconstruct what he called the "white mythology". This western culture is constructed by western Reason (Derrida, 1974, 11). Reason, logic, Christian, civilise, educate: these are terms associated with white western mythology imposed on all other societies as hegemonic norms. The connection between meaning and language are manipulated by one side (western civilisation) to enforce a hegemonic ideology of what is natural and true compared to its

binary “other”. Postcolonialist writers use Derrida’s method of deconstruction to uncover the hidden meanings of western language and texts to explain the patriarchal power base supporting Colonisation.

This leads us to Chinua Achebe, the main critic of Joseph Conrad and *Heart of Darkness*. Achebe was born in Ogidi, Eastern Nigeria in 1930. His father’s uncle had held the title of “highest but one” in his clan and it was him the Western missionaries were taken to meet upon their arrival at the turn of the century (Achebe, 1996, vii). Unlike Chinua’s father, his uncle was not enamoured by these white people but he treated them with respect and tolerance. Chinua’s father, however, embraced their religion, education and way of life, which meant Chinua had the privilege of an education (Achebe, 1996, viii). This he says he is grateful for, but as a child he longed for the culture of his clan, to which his father now referred as heathens (Achebe, 1996, viii). He was one of a handful of Africans to qualify from the University of Ibadan in the 1950s. This group of highly elite Africans soon learned of the trauma, devastation and destruction of centuries of the Slave Trade, the Scramble for Africa and the shambles of decolonisation throughout the Continent of Africa. Out of this memories would surface. Chinua himself would explain how: “the storyteller creates the memory that the survivors must have – otherwise their surviving would have no meaning” (Achebe, 1996, x). If memory is suppressed, it becomes warped and destructive.

It was when Achebe found himself in the liminal space between despair and optimism within his country of Nigeria that he began to write his novel *Things Fall Apart* in 1958. He left his career as Director of External Broadcasting during the Biafra War in Nigeria and worked as a diplomat for the Biafra Ministry (Achebe, 1996, ix). He became Senior Research Fellow at University of Nigeria in Nsukka and travelled worldwide lecturing. He was Professor of Languages and Literature at Bard College, New York and Professor of Africana Studies at Brown University, Rhode Island. He published a collection of novels, short stories, essays and poetry, including *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *Arrow of God* (1964), *Anthills of Savannah* (1987) and *Home and Exile* (2000). In 1975 he gave a lecture in the University of Massachusetts entitled “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*” (Achebe, 1996, viii). The inspiration for this lecture was a conversation he had on campus with a man about his profession: “What did I teach? African literature. He never had thought of Africa as having that kind of stuff, you know” (Achebe, 1975, n.p.). This statement recalled to him what Hugh Trevor Roper, a famous Regius Professor at Oxford had also maintained: “African history did not exist”.²

This began the process of taking the highly acclaimed classic novel, Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, and dissecting the perceived gross and racist inaccuracies, which lie between its cover. The reason it was important for Achebe to do so was because *Heart of Darkness* is regarded as “permanent literature” – taught, read and analysed constantly throughout the world (Achebe, 1975, n.p.). Achebe’s argument is based on the Postcolonialist premise that: “Western psychology sets Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe’s own state of spiritual grace will be manifest. Africa is to Europe as the picture is to Dorian Gary -- a carrier onto whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate” (Achebe, 1975, n.p.). Again this is the binary illusion of the goodness of white European civilisation in comparison to the “other”: the dark, barbaric savages of Africa. Achebe believed that Conrad saw and condemned the “evil of imperial

² Excerpt from T. Roper’s lecture (1963) which was subsequently broadcast and published: “Perhaps, in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none, or very little: there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is largely darkness, like the history of pre-European, pre-Columbian America. And darkness is not a subject for history” in Appiah, K. A. (1998) “Africa The Hidden History” in *The New York Times*

exploitation but was strangely unaware of the racism on which it sharpened its iron tooth” (Achebe, 1975, n.p.). Achebe accuses Conrad and Western society of using Africa as a prop to unravel the mental state of European minds. This could not be done on Western soil as dramatically as in the dark unknown of Africa. Conrad’s constant reference to niggers, savages, brutes and animalistic tendencies in the native Africans reinforces Achebe’s argument that Conrad was a “thoroughgoing racist”: “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. Certainly Conrad had a problem with niggers” (Achebe, 1975, n.p.). The language of western “civilised” tongues can elevate one race over another by using either, positive and eloquent language towards one, and debasing, negative language towards another. This argument is strongly illustrated by Achebe in the many examples he gives of the degrading language Conrad used to describe the natives: “His inordinate love of that word itself should be of interest to psychoanalysts. Conrad did not originate the image of Africa, which we find in his book. It was and is the dominant image of Africa in the Western imagination and Conrad merely brought the peculiar gifts of his own mind to bear on it” (Achebe, 1975, n.p.).

Achebe observes how the: “eagle-eyed English critic F. R. Leavis drew attention long ago to Conrad’s adjectival insistence upon inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery” (Achebe, 1975, n.p.). This reinforces the idea of otherness as simply being beyond human belief. Labelling a person or a place as inexpressible or incomprehensible allows people to use any terminology they choose without the guilt of causing offence as it has already been characterised as beyond human. He accuses Conrad of using Africa simply as a vehicle to tell his story. By doing this Conrad: “eliminates the African as human factor” (Achebe, 1975, n.p.). Achebe describes this act as: “perverse...preposterous arrogance...of one petty English mind” (Achebe, 1975, n.p.). Achebe attacks people who say Conrad is empathic towards Africans, stating that they are blatantly wrong because they do not realise how the language of Colonialism is as brutal to Africans as the physical brutality was: “And where is the proof that he is on my side? A few statements about it not being a very nice thing to exploit people who have flat noses? It is simply not enough. You cannot diminish a people’s humanity and defend them” (Achebe, 1975, n.p.). Being in a position to see Colonialism for what it is but yet dehumanise people by using debasing language is unacceptable for Achebe.

Not all Postcolonialists agree with Achebe’s argument. Edward Said defended Conrad’s position. Said had a similar background to Conrad, being from a war torn country that was somewhat ignored by world powers, and he claims to understand Conrad’s mind set (Said, 1993, 72). He highlights the cultural differences between East and West and the difficulties of imposing Western systems of representation on people living in the East or the Orient. In 1993, he published his essay “Two visions in *Heart of Darkness*” in which he defends Conrad as a product of his time, limited and restricted by the elements of Colonisation and his European readership. The collusion between culture and politics is a central theme in Said’s argument. Said refers to both European and African history as “interdependent” which needs to be understood for its context. At this time and in this space Colonialism was inescapable. It reached into every corner of the globe and its effect is still being felt today. This Eurocentricity in the context of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a functioning reality that was undisputed for decades. Conrad was part of this Eurocentrism regardless of his life experience. Being a writer and a traveller he contributed to the link between Empire and literature, which he displayed in his novels. In his book *Orientalism*, Said argues that: “Conrad’s Africans, come from a huge library of Africanism, as well as from Conrad’s personal experiences” (Said, 1993, 80). Direct experience or true reflection does not exist in the world of literature. It is interwoven with the author’s own life

experience, impressions and thoughts. Conrad quotes the dark ages of Roman invasion, however he aligns Imperialism with: "Salvation, which sets "us" off from the damned, despised Romans and Belgians" (Said, 1993, 82). This shows that although Conrad despises Imperialism, he cannot help seeing it as the only alternative. "We" the English have a justifiable cause to invade, take control and dominate foreign territory for its own good (Said, 1993, 82). Said maintains that the European novel at the turn of the century could not exist without the experiences of Colonisation and the effects of Empire on the "narrative authority of the European mind set" (Said, 1993, 82). Adventure novels, romance novels all at their heart had some influence of Empire upon their creation. In this context, Said argues it would be impossible for Conrad as a European, not to be affected by Empire.

Colonialism was part of life in the nineteenth century and racism was a fundamental element of this process. Colonialism could not have operated successfully for Europeans if racism had been an issue. The contemporary critiques prove this overwhelmingly in their reviews of *Heart of Darkness*. The plight of the native Africans is not reflected in their critiques of the novel whatsoever. Racism did not exist for Europeans as they were scientifically and "naturally" the civilised race superior to all else in humanity. I would agree with Achebe that Conrad's use of African natives would in today's terms clearly be regarded as racist, but he was a man of his time living in an age of Imperial hegemony and dominance. Racism did not exist as a term as society did not need the term. It was understood as a God given right that white Western civilisation ruled the world and was on this earth to "civilise" all other nations. Conrad saw the flaws in this ideology and the Capitalist greed that it actually did represent, but did not manage to find an alternative option to the racist language he used to degrade an entire nation of people. Colonial and Postcolonial theory is of its time. Postcolonial theory is fundamental to the understanding of Colonialism but both are contextual and this is significant to understanding how systems reacted in the past and will act in the future. This does not excuse racism, abuse or discrimination but it helps to understand the attitudes, beliefs and values that some very intelligent people had during this period in history. Based on my research I would suggest that Conrad was an insightful and thoughtful writer and witness of Imperialism. I suggest that he was shocked by the atrocities of Colonialism in the Congo, but he did not have the language or the understanding of racism to describe it by anything other than in the terms that continued to reinforce the hegemony of White superiority. It is right that this hegemony is now challenged and deconstructed by Postcolonialist critiques like Achebe, but this needs to be balanced by an awareness of early twentieth century ignorance of race.

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