

The Image of the Africans in *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart*

Dr. Latef S. Noori Berzenji

Assistant Professor, Kirkuk University.

Marwan Abdi

Assistant Lecturer, University of Duhok.

Abstract

The paper examines two opposing images of African culture presented in both novels: Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. *Heart of Darkness* depicts Africans as marginalized, voiceless and primitive, which is considered by many critics as an indictment of the hypocritical civilizing mission of the Europeans; whereas Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* repudiates the cultural assumptions presented by Conrad and delineates a totally different image of the African society in the process of change, which is aware of its past history and strives to control its future.

Keywords: Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Heart of Darkness*

1.1. Achebe and Conrad's Image of Africa

Although many critics acknowledge *Heart of Darkness* as an indictment of colonialism, there are some critics who claim that this novel portrays Africa and its natives as dark, mysterious and primitive. Many post-colonial authors, like Achebe, consider this image to be a degrading attempt to perpetuate that image of the Africans that is projected in the European system of beliefs. This mentality is evident in Hugh Trevor-Roper (1914-2003) Oxford historian's reference to the 'darkness' of the African past, and diminishing the African history. This reminds us of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* which is set in the dense, 'dark' and mysterious jungles surrounding the Congo River. In his essay published in 1977, "An Image of Africa" Achebe severely criticizes the assumptions posed by such historians and condemns the portrayal of Africans in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In this essay, Achebe rejects the long held belief of the other critics who label the novel as a post-colonial novel because he believes that it presented an image of Africa that was existent in the Western imagination. Conrad, he says, is a "thoroughgoing racist who ignores the cultural achievements of Africans and represents them not as people, but as 'limbs and rolling eyes' refusing even to confer language upon them" (cited by Trench-Bonett 84). Achebe also refutes Conrad's depiction of Africa as "a place of triumphant bestiality which functions as a 'foil' for an enlightened Europe" (ibid), and attacks Conrad's usage of 'racist' terms in describing the African natives and what he considers an intentional use of the narrative techniques, which highlights the differences between the 'whites' and the 'blacks'. Achebe

presents the following passage as one of the examples of such racist and degrading portrayal, where Conrad gives the reader one of his rare descriptions of an African who is presented as:

the savage who was fireman. He was an improved specimen; 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 (HOD 43).

In this context the African fireman is referred to as a "savage" a "dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat" who is "walking on his hind legs" a description that Achebe finds insulting. Moreover, Achebe refers to the image of the African woman who has obviously been some kind of a 'mistress' to Mr. Kurtz and now like a "formidable mystery" presides over Kurtz's departure (cited by Bloom 77). She is described as "savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent... Looking at us without a stir and like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose"(HOD40). Achebe disapproves this image because he believes that the African woman "fulfills a structural requirement of the story: a savage counterpart to the refined, European woman who will step forth to end the story" (cited by Bloom 77). This image is in sharp contrast with that of the intended, who is "floating toward" Marlow "in the dusk", and "She had a mature capacity for fidelity, or belief, or suffering"(HOD88).

The difference in the attitude of the novelist to these two women as Achebe argues is clear in "the author's bestowal of human expression to the one and the withholding of it from the other"(cited by Bloom 77).

Thus Achebe offers a severe critique of Conrad's novel, which as Cornwell claims, "served to expose a text long celebrated for its searing indictment of Western hypocrisy as in fact perpetuating some of the West's most derogatory and insulting stereotypes of Africa and Africans" (Cornwell 299). Achebe sees that *Heart of Darkness* "projects the image of Africa as 'the other world' the antithesis of Europe and, therefore, of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality"(cited by Bloom 73). He believes that Conrad's image of the Africans is that of a primitive and undeveloped nation, because they are set in a dark, prehistoric and underdeveloped setting. He later draws attention to the way the story begins on the River Thames, which is described as "tranquil, resting peacefully at the decline of the day after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its banks", and the actual story that takes place on the Congo River, which is "the very antithesis of the Thames"(ibid). In fact,

Achebe considers the River Congo as "quite decidedly not a River Emeritus. It has rendered no service and enjoys no old-age pension. [Instead] we are told that "going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world" (ibid).

Achebe argues that the image depicted in Conrad's work is favoured and desired by the Europeans, and conforms the Eurocentric view of the World. He even denounces those who 'justify' Conrad's work as dealing with universal themes such as "the fragility of civilization and the savagery that lurks in the innermost heart of every human being" (Cornwell 299) and claims that:

I should like to see the word "universal" banned altogether from discussions of African literature until such a time as people cease to use it as a synonym for the narrow, self-serving parochialism of Europe, until their horizon extends to include the entire world (quoted in Ashcroft et al. 2004: 60).

Cornwell emphasizes Achebe's view and contends that "the West uses the rubric of the 'universal' to impose upon others the point of view and values which it regards as 'natural' 'reasonable' 'logical' etc." (229). In his *Things Fall Apart* Achebe challenges this perspective and delineates Africa, with a long history, tradition and culture and a very complex system of beliefs.

Achebe discards the self-serving parochialism of Europe and the Eurocentric assumptions, when he asserts that "*Heart of Darkness* depicts Africa as a place of negations... in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest" (cited by Watts 53). He also condemns the way the Africans are denied speech 'dehumanized and degraded' and seen as "grotesques or as a howling mob" and asserts;

We see 'Africa as setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human factor. Africa as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity into which the wandering European enters at his peril'. Can nobody see the preposterous and perverse arrogance in thus reducing Africa to the role of props for the break-up of one petty European mind? But that is not even the point. The real question is the dehumanization of Africa and Africans which this age-long attitude has fostered and continues to foster in the world. And the question is whether a novel which celebrates this dehumanization, which depersonalizes a portion of the human race, can be called a great work of art. My answer is: No, it cannot (cited by Bloom 79).

Achebe argues that great literature must be "on the side of man's deliverance and not his enslavement; for the brotherhood and unity of all mankind and not for the doctrines of

Hitler's master races or Conrad's rudimentary souls" (cited by Sarvan⁶). This attitude inspired many critics to re-examine these works for finding out the true intentions.

1.2. The Speechless Africans in *Heart of Darkness*

Many critics and intellectuals acknowledge that *Heart of Darkness* could be considered as an indictment of the hypocritical civilising mission of the Europeans, while others criticize it for depicting Africans as marginalized or voiceless. Critics like Chinua Achebe, Cedric Watts, Charles Sarvan, Wilson Harris and Edward Said have presented many critiques and diverse outlooks over this question, sharing their experience with "an entire generation of African intellectuals who came to repudiate the cultural assumptions of the system in which they were educated, and to reevaluate [sic] pre-colonial African culture" (Cornwell 300). In his portrayal of the colonized people, Achebe defends those 'speechless' characters, as C.L. Innes argues:

Not only do the articulateness of his characters, their love of oratory, their delight in proverbs, the extended debates which are held at each meeting of the elders, constitute a telling response to Conrad's speechless Africans, he also dramatizes a society in the process of change, aware of its past history and desiring to control its future (47).

Achebe expressed his anger especially regarding the lack of speech of the African characters in this work, and claims:

But perhaps the most significant difference is the one implied in the author's bestowal of human expression to the one and the withholding of it from the other. It is clearly not part of Conrad's purpose to confer language on the 'rudimentary souls' of Africa. In place of speech they made 'a violent babble of uncouth sounds.' They 'exchanged short grunting phrases' even among themselves (cited by Bloom⁷).

Commenting on the subject, Patsy J. Daniels believes that "Marlow does not understand the language of the Africans, and so he describes their oral communication as 'noise' a description that Achebe finds offensive" (61). He, moreover, argues "of course, one reason Marlow can identify with Kurtz is his understanding of Kurtz's language" (ibid) but keeping in mind Conrad's impressionistic technique, and his "delayed decoding" he proposes that:

As in other instances of his delayed decoding, Marlow reports his immediate sense impression of the Africans' speech, which does not make sense to him: "I don't understand the dialect of this tribe". Because the Africans' speech is a complex system, Marlow cannot immediately correct his first impression as he does in other situations. Marlow tells us time and time again when there is something that he does

not understand; apparently the speech of the Africans is one of those phenomena that Marlow finds himself at a loss to explain (ibid68).

Marlow says "this initiated wraith from the back of nowhere honoured me with its amazing confidence before it vanished altogether. This was because it could speak English to me. The original Kurtz had been educated partly in England" (HOD 59) but in contrast to this image, Marlow confesses his being "cut off from the comprehension" of the surroundings and expresses his view regarding the Africans and their way of speaking during his upstream trip, saying:

Yes, it was ugly enough, but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you-you so remote from the night of first ages-could comprehend (HOD43).

Wilson Harris also repudiates Achebe's charges of racism and argues that Achebe "sees the distortions of imagery and, therefore, of character in the novel as witnessing to horrendous prejudice on Conrad's part in his vision of Africa and Africans" and concludes that "Achebe is wrong in his judgment or dismissal of *Heart of Darkness* and of Conrad's strange genius..." (cited by Daniels 61). In fact, Harris sees no offense in Conrad's way of depicting the Africans' speech and he even resembles the sounds coming from the Africans to a harmonious song:

The loud cry and clamor as of an orchestra at the heart of the Bush... are of interest in the context of the human voice breaking through instruments of stone and wood and other trance formations to which the human animal is subject. Indeed it is as if the stone and wood sing" (ibid).

The African critic, Kiberaan gives Conrad credit "for not pretending to understand what he does not, [and] Lack of authentic African voices in *Heart of Darkness*, voices which Marlow could not comprehend" that he does not consider a justifying basis for a claim of racism (cited by Daniels 62).

Achebe also criticizes Conrad for the way he names the Africans and denounces his usage of the term 'nigger' which he has almost used 'nine' times to refer to the Africans. This term is first used to refer to the story, which is framed in this novella, i.e., the death of Fresleven that is presented at the outset of Marlow's main narrative. The Fresleven story that could be

considered a miniature of Marlow's story centres on a white agent's attack on the chief of an African tribe in a dispute about 'two black hens':

Therefore he whacked the old nigger mercilessly, while a big crowd of his people watched him, thunderstruck, till some man,-- I was told the chief's son,--in desperation at hearing the old chap yell, made a tentative jab with a spear at the white man-- and of course it went quite easy between the shoulder-blades (HOD 10).

Trench-Bonett draws attention to Marlow's telling of this story to those 'Englishmen' in Europe and his reference to the name of the chief by his 'title' which is a respectful word. But once the village leader is beaten (or as Marlow puts it, 'whacked') he is being called as 'the old nigger' (85). By such humiliation the old chief is no more that dignified glorious 'man and his dignity is taken from him, so he is named as 'nigger' at the same time the old chief's son who bravely stands against such abuses is called a 'man' while the villagers are labelled as 'people', 'men, women and children' and 'the population'. Therefore, the first 'nigger' that we meet in *Heart of Darkness* as Trench-Bonett contends "is a victim, and the insult is inseparable from his victimization" (ibid). This pattern is dominant through the work and almost all the 'niggers' in *Heart of Darkness* are those people who are being victimized, oppressed and stripped from honour and dignity. Awareness of Conrad's complexity as Watts argues, "may entail recognition of a currently widespread critical habit: the reductive falsification of the past in an attempt to vindicate the political gestures of the present" (57). Thus *Heart of Darkness*, as Watts asserts, "reminds us that this habit resembles an earlier one: the adoption of a demeaning attitude to colonized people in the attempt to vindicate the exploitative actions of the colonizer (ibid).

The portrayal of women in *Heart of Darkness* is also a controversial one that has been tackled by many critics; Cedric Watts draws attention to Marlow's view that the 'Victorian' women are 'out of touch with truth...in a world of their own' (HOD 14), and Marlow's lie to the Intended, which has been the cause of so much critical debate (56). So in both cases, whether women are "culpably ignorant of truth" or "in need of falsehood supplied by males" as Watts contends, they are not being associated with the 'virile' activities of men - colonial warfare and the conquest of the 'wilderness' - have been depicted by Marlow as virtually deranged in their destructive futility" (ibid). And he refers to Conrad's *Chance* (1913) where Marlow sees women capable of seeing "the whole world, whereas men live in a fool's paradise" (ibid 57). Many critics see Achebe's representation of women within Igbo society as lacking as Conrad's. Cobham sees that Achebe presents husbands and wives in a

polygamous society, where "female characters are not presented in the fuller public roles that they would have played in reality..." (cited by Daniels 75) and argues, "it seems that Achebe, in his attempt to improve on Conrad's characterization of Africans, has under-represented, or misrepresented, half of them - the women" because like Conrad, Achebe's female characters have not been given a 'voice', even though he depicts imperialism from a different viewpoint and depicts Africans as more "civilized" (ibid). So in Achebe's Igbo village, while trying to compensate for those 'claimed voiceless Africans' females are presented as speechless and always associated with weakness, while men have the masculine power.

If one tries to read *Heart of Darkness* in the light Achebe's angry charges many controversial features may gain prominence. But one has to take into consideration the context in which these writers produced their works, i.e., one during the high tide of Victorianism, the other during the post-colonial period. So in order to be fair to *Heart of Darkness*, we need to regard the socio-political circumstances of its time. Many Third World writers, as Watts contends, argue that "while Conrad was certainly ambivalent on racial matters, *Heart of Darkness* was progressive in its satiric accounts of the colonialists" (55). Like many of his novels, Innes argues that:

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is largely single-voiced and almost unbroken, shaped and held by a European male narrator, Marlow, speaking to other men, seamen like himself, sharing his values and assumptions – about ideas of empire, the essential decency of the British, the relative inferiority of Africans... (48).

So like the contemporary European novels set in Africa, this work is a story of a quest, where white 'heroes' play the central roles and black personages are periphery and a part of "the natural scenery in what often becomes a metaphysical or allegorical landscape" where "whatever is discovered or learnt is brought back to Europe and used for the redemption or development of the European psyche" (ibid).

Singh notes that "though *Heart of Darkness* was vulnerable in several respects, including the association of Africans with supernatural evil, the story should remain in 'the canon of works indicting colonialism'" (cited by Watts 55). Critics, like Singh, try to see impartially the issue from a different vantage point, and mainly draw attention to the fact that like many of his contemporaries, Conrad was not entirely free from the infection of the

Victorian Mindset, but at least the first impression that the reader takes from reading his works is that he is trying to free himself from such long established norms, attitudes and mentalities. Edward Said commenting on this issue remarks:

Marlow's narrative leaves us with a quite accurate sense that there is no way out of the sovereign historical force of imperialism, and that it has the power of a system representing as well as speaking for everything within its dominion, Conrad shows us that what Marlow does is contingent, acted out for a set of like-minded British hearers, and limited to that situation (24).

C.P.Sarvan contends that Conrad was writing at a time when for most British people, including many socialists, imperialism was an admirable and glorious enterprise, and indicates that "relative to the standards prevailing in the 1890s, the heyday of Victorian imperialism, *Heart of Darkness* was indeed progressive in its criticism of imperialist activities in Africa, and, implicitly, of imperialist activities generally"(ibid)."Implicit in Marlow's storytelling" as Greaney points out "is a struggle to free his own discourse from the over-arching authority of the 'ominous voice' of colonialism (67). Thus Conrad presents his story in a way that provides the reader with multiple perspectives, concerning the issue of colonialism. While the anonymous narrator speaks with "romantic eloquence" of those great 'colonisers' who have started their 'adventure' on the Thames, but Marlow presents the other 'real' side of the story; "And this also... has been one of the dark places of the earth" and remind the reader that Britain, in the same way would have seemed as 'savage' to Roman colonizers as Europeans now see Africa. Watts considers this statement "a rebuke to empire-builders and to believers in the durability of civilization; it invokes a humiliating chronological perspective; and it may jolt the reader into circumspection"(59).

1.3. Conrad's Impressionism vs. Achebe's Realism

Achebe presents a different image of the Africans from the perspective of an insider as he considers the earlier history of the nation that was presented by the colonisers as biased and degrading. He provides the reader with a clear sample of the way the colonisers presented the history of the colonised through the Commissioner's report on the death of Okonkwo. Here, a westerner who is a government official in charge of the colonised nation shows his intention to write a book about the ongoing events. Although he has lived and has been in a sort of interaction with the natives, he does not have an in-depth and comprehensive knowledge of them. Achebe compares Marlow's account of the Africans with that of the

District Commissioner; thus he replaces the 'story of the Africans' being told from a white man's perspective with the one being told from the perspective of a native who sees everything 'from within'. The voice of the native dominates the whole narrative and only in the final stage a 'white' plays a significant role in retelling the events. Analysing this work, Moses draws attention to the "stunning racial reversal of the roles of master and slave" and argues that "in *Things Fall Apart* it is the African black (chiefly Okonkwo) who speaks for aristocratic paganism and the European white (principally Reverend James Smith) who takes the part of slavish Christianity" (Moses 123).

Here Achebe impliedly brings close the two works through associating Marlow's account and his portrayal of the Africans with that of the District Commissioner. The Commissioner's book focuses on Okonkwo's life, but with no thorough understanding of his personality and the social milieu. He entitles his book "The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger" and in this way Achebe tries to highlight the huge gap between the different viewpoints of the insider and an outsider. Thus he suggests that Conrad's image is neither a real nor a true image of the Africans, because *Heart of Darkness* is written from a westerner perspective. Interestingly though, as Dan Izevbaye points out, "Achebe presents somewhat the same African view of [the] whites that Conrad does in *Heart of Darkness*, but not exactly the same kind of relationship" (cited by Daniels 71). Thus, Achebe's Igbomendo does not distinguish between the whites, but Conrad's Africans hate all the white agents, while in Achebe's story the case is different, because these characters, as Nichols claims, are "a group of people for whom the white race was still a myth" (ibid 72).

The differences between the two novels can be reduced into one single phrase - point of view - and "point of view" as Cornwell claims "makes all the difference in the world" (299). Comparing some prominent passages that somehow similarly portray Africa and the Africans would be useful to see the effect of this difference in the perspectives of the both novelists. Conrad who rejected scientific positivism, and questioned the ability of scientific methods to understand and interpret the world in most of his works uses impressionistic style. In the following passage his description of Africans rendered in an elusive and complex language, as Marlow recalls his first impression of African wilderness:

Watching a coast as it slips by the ship is like thinking about an enigma. There it is before you - smiling, frowning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid, or savage, and always mute with an air of whispering, come and find out. This one was almost featureless,

as if still in the making, with an aspect of monotonous grimness. The edge of a colossal jungle, so dark-green as to be almost black, fringed with white surf, ran straight, like a ruled line, far, far away along a blue sea whose glitter was blurred by a creeping mist (HOD 15).

This abstract presentation prepares the reader for the fact that the appalled beholder is in a struggle for knowing and comprehending the surroundings. "Watching" is quickly followed by "thinking" so he demands the reader to take part in such meditation throughout the whole story. Later on by personifying that sight, he describes it with different adjectives like "smiling, frowning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid, or savage, and... mute" and asks the reader passionately to accompany him in that quest for "finding out". The next description, which is about the "colossal jungle" is unclear and covered by mist to an extent that he is unable to differentiate between "dark-green" and "black". With such depictions, the reader is set against suggestive, complex, misty, and unclear images, so like Marlow he has to meditate and find out the unknowns and the unspoken findings. The same attitude is seen when Conrad describes Kurtz's African mistress when he describes her as "treading the earth proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments... She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress" (HOD72). Here the first impression is that of awe, wonder and admiration that Marlow expresses in his encounter with that African lady. In fact, the description does not give the reader a thorough knowledge of that woman as she is being described vaguely; Marlow terms her as "proud, savage, barbarous, wild-eyed" but at the same time mysterious and "ominous". That mystery and menacing power however may be related to the psychology of that lady that is totally 'unknown' to Marlow and even to the modern reader. Thus Marlow tries to convey the very impression of 'his' encounter with that lady who is the closest comrade to the god-like Kurtz.

In contrast, Achebe's language, which is 'simple' and 'direct' gives the reader a very direct sense of the atmosphere:

At last the rain came... All the grass had long been scorched brown, and the sands felt like live coals to the feet. Evergreen trees wore a dusty coat of brown. The birds were silenced in the forests, and the world lay panting under the live, vibrating, heat. And then came the clap of thunder. It was an angry, metallic and thirsty clap, unlike the deep and liquid rumbling of the rainy season. A mighty wind arose and filled the

air with dust. Palm trees swayed as the wind combed their leaves into flying crests like strange and fantastic coiffure (TFA43).

Achebe's language is very simple and completely different from that of Conrad, and the reader does not find any trace of that 'hazy', 'misty' and 'mysterious' Africa, instead the image is full of life and colour. This sense is clearly conveyed in simple adjectives such as 'brown', 'evergreen', 'dusty', and 'thirsty', and the lively atmosphere is presented by terms such as 'panting', 'vibrating', 'heat', 'flying' etc. A complete and clear picture of the Africans is presented in a simple style, like his portrayal of the African girl, Akueke:

She wore a coiffure which was done up into a crest in the middle of the head. Cam wood was rubbed lightly into her skin, and all over her body were black patterns drawn with uli. She wore a black necklace which hung down in three coils just above her full, succulent breasts. On her arms were red and yellow bangles, and on her waist four or five rows of jigida, or waist beads (TFA69).

It is quite clear that the writer's detailed description of the lady comes from his full knowledge of the clan's culture, history and tradition. Achebe even refers to Akueke's personality when he describes her as 'shy' or very young, which is in contrast with Marlow's description of Kurtz's African mistress. Akueke's hair style is referred to as 'coiffure' which is used to describe the palm trees as they "swayed as the wind combed their leaves into flying crests like strange and fantastic coiffure" (TFA 43); thus by associating the lady with the awesome 'palm trees' Achebe emphasizes her honour and strong personality. In such clear, direct and realistic depiction the reader is given the chance to see and understand many details about the Igbo life in Achebe's homeland.

In this regard one may claim that the image presented from the perspective of an outsider is not real, because he is not aware of the way the native people think and behave. Said, regarding this issue, draws attention to the way Marlow acknowledges "the tragic predicament of all speech" (23) when he says "it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence,—that which makes its truth, its meaning—its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream—alone..." (HOD32). In this context Marlow is totally aware of the fact that he is not completely free to communicate the 'truth' that he has found, yet he does his best to convey the 'truths' that he finds in that African experience through his own "overmastering narrative" of his voyage into the 'Heart of the Dark Africa'. "And whatever is lost or elided

or even simply made up in Marlow's immensely compelling recitation" as Said points out, "is compensated for in the narratives sheer historical momentum, the temporal forward movement –with digressions, descriptions, exciting encounters, and all" (Said 23). Therefore, in these exciting encounters, even the reader does not get the impression that he is reading a work which tries to present just an imperialistic world-view, instead its multilayered structure gives a comprehensive image of the effect of the Colonial enterprise on both the colonisers and the colonised Africans. Thus the narration does not only focus on the 'white' agents, but the same importance is also given to the Africans' sufferings, misery and traumas.

This atmosphere is dominant from the earliest encounters with the 'chain gang' to the final image of the 'Africanrebels heads on the poles'. Therefore, Conrad's narrative techniques make Marlow not only the mouthpiece of the colonisers but also that of his inner thoughts, the suffering of Africans and Kurtz. In a conversation with Sarvan, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o accepts some of Achebe's criticisms against Conrad, but believes that he has failed to notice Conrad's attack on colonialism, and states that the image of "The skulls stuck on poles outside Kurtz's house" is in fact "the most powerful indictment of colonialism" (cited by Sarvan 9). He further argues that no African writer has created "so ironic, apt, and powerful an image: ironic when one considers that Kurtz and many others like him had come to "civilize" the non-European world; apt when one recalls what they really did" (ibid). Repudiating the claims that in Conrad's work the Africans are marginalized and are not given their due significance, Watts draws attention to the way "Marlow gives them prominence when he describes, with telling vividness, the plight of the chain-gang and of the exploited workers dying in the grove" and argues "what the other Europeans choose to ignore, Marlow observes with sardonic indignation, relegation, which is criticised, is a theme of the narrative" (56). Thus in such inconclusive portrayal of those encounters in the voyage to the heart of "ivory – trading empire, Conrad wants us to see how Kurtz's great looting adventure, Marlow's journey... and the narrative itself share a common theme: Europeans performing acts of imperial mastery and will in (or about) Africa" (Said 23).

Many modern readers may focus on a sort of Faustian theme in which the supernatural 'Evil' is associated with the Africans and the surrounding wilderness. The best sample for such association is the scene in which Kurtz tries to return towards the strange rituals of the natives, as within the wilderness: "a black figure stood up, strode on long black legs,

waving long black arms, across the glow. It had horns - antelope horns, I think - on its head. Some sorcerer, some witch-man, no doubt: it looked fiend-like enough" (HOD78). In this encounter Marlow refers to his endeavour to break that supernatural power, which he regards as a

Spell- the heavy, mute spell of the wilderness – that seemed to draw him to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions. This alone, I was convinced, had driven him out to the edge of the forest, to the bush, towards the gleam of fires, the throb of drums, the drone of weird incantations; this alone had beguiled his unlawful soul beyond the bounds of permitted aspirations' (HOD79).

In this text Marlow seems to be following the mainstream of the Victorian mentality, i.e., associating good with 'whites' and evil with the 'black' Africans. Achebe stands against the idea that this attitude towards the Africans in *Heart of Darkness* is not Conrad's but that of his fictional narrator, Marlow, and argues "Certainly Conrad appears to go to considerable pains to set up layers of insulation between himself and the moral universe of his history, [as] ... his account is given to us through the filter of a second, shadowy person" (cited by Bloom 78). Moreover, he argues that if Conrad intends to draw a space between himself and "the moral and psychological malaise of his narrator, his care seems to me totally wasted... [and] Marlow seems to me to enjoy Conrad's complete confidence" (ibid). Whereas Cedric Watts comments that these are 'Marlow's observations', and they "lack the authority that would be granted by an omniscient narrator" (55) and draws attention to Conrad's deliberate use of a "doubly oblique narration" and asserts:

Marlow's tale, which is interrupted by dissenting comments by his hearers, is being reported to us by an anonymous character [and] Marlow himself has explicitly drawn attention to the difficulty of seeing truly and reporting correctly, and he is known for his 'inconclusive' narratives (ibid).

Therefore, the reader has to be careful that Marlow is under the strong effect of the ongoing events, especially in the final encounter when he is describing Kurtz's strife with death and evil, he seems to be rather puzzled. Hence the reader cannot trust all of Marlow's 'impressions'. In his essay 'Morality and the Role of the Reader' Daniel C. Melnick draws attention to the reader's role in extracting the implied ideas and states that "Conrad's reader is placed in a position to observe both processes of self-defence and discovery at work in the narrative... In essence, Conrad is placing us in a position to carry and affirm Marlow's

imaginative viewpoint beyond the limits of his expression of it"(Melnick cited by bloom 72). He argues further that the image of Marlow's journey of discovery is "then, a crucial and revealing one for the role of the reader himself who in imagination penetrates to the 'heart of darkness' who comprehends both the achievement of Marlow's penetration and its limits, his defensive piety and obscurity"(ibid).

Daniels differentiates between Conrad's and Achebe's style of writing and remarks "unlike Conrad, who used impressionistic techniques, Achebe constructed *Things Fall Apart* realistically"(70).So using such technique,

mist or haze is a very persistent image in Conrad [and] ...the fugitive nature and indefinite contours of haze are given a special significance by the primary narrator; he warns us that Marlow's tale will be not centered on, but surrounded by, its meaning; and this meaning will be only as fitfully and tenuously visible as a hitherto unnoticed presence of dust particles and watervapor in a space that normally looks dark and void (Watt quoted in Moore169).

Such impressionistic techniques, hazy presentations of those experiences, and what Cedric Watts terms as "oblique procedures" make the reader thinkthat:

Marlow can probably be trusted most of the time, but we need to keep up our guard. He isn't fully reliable. Indeed, Conrad took greater pains than did most users of the oblique narrative convention to preserve the possibility of critical distance between the reader and the fictional narrator(55).

Comparing the two different techniques,John G. Peters also remarks that:

Impressionism is at its core a response to scientific positivism. It saw realism, a child of science, as flawed in its oversimplification of reality. Impressionism's presuppositions, methodology, and product all point to a reality that is very different from that of realism (Peters, 2004: 13).

BiodunJeyifo seesRealism in post-colonial writing as a necessaryTechnique and argues that "Myths and distortions of the vast colonialist literature onAfrica made realism in the post-colonial context a historic and ideological necessity" (cited by Daniel 70). Therefore, Achebe's third-person narration following the conventional style of realistic novel tries to report the external events and authorial comments or judgments. Whether Achebe has been successful or not in producing a realistic novel, Jeyifo observes that "the characters, situations, and feelings seem so concrete and memorable that social and human conflicts assume a logic of their own, quite independent of any abstract balancing act by the author

in the service of objectivity", but at the same time he admits that "because the novel is 'set in the past,' Achebe cannot 'objectively' avoid interpreting that past" (ibid). Eric Sipyinyu Njeng in his article 'Achebe, Conrad, and the Post-colonial Strain' believes the portrayal of Africans as savages in reality "represents anti-Africanism and subservience to Occidental values" (1). He, moreover, criticizes Achebe for centrifugal characterization that is presenting Okwonkwo initially as a very important character and later on as a marginal one. This decentring of the protagonist, as Njeng argues, "diminishes him as well as the African values he is supposed to represent. This centrifugal aesthetics of constructing events resulting in the protagonist removed from the centre, satisfied Achebe's intention of supplanting African values with Western values" (ibid).

So comparing two works that differ in many aspects, we find out that they are unified in one major theme, which is colonialism and its impact on the colonised Africans. Achebe who tried to 'replace' the earlier image with his own presented a work that in the like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is open to criticism. Behind these controversies, however, one can find the real intent that is to unmask and unveil the truth, which was hidden to the world, i.e., for Conrad's case the Victorian Europe and for Achebe the Post-colonial world. Although Conrad's medium of presentation is different and shrouded in mist and haze, nonetheless, Garnett asserts that, "Conrad's intention was unmasking the benevolent pretensions of the essentially commercial endeavour, and subverting the genre that had constructed the subject as such was an effective means of doing so" (cited by White 2004 174). Garnett, moreover, argues for the realism of this "impression of the conquest by the European whites of a certain portion of Africa, an impression in particular of the civilising methods of a certain great European Trading Company face to face with the 'nigger'" (ibid). Conrad's narrator travels from Europe to Africa to discover the "dark irrationality" which Innes finds it "suppressed in the hearts of European men" (49); a darkness that Marlow finds it embodied in Kurtz's "unspeakable" ceremonies, in "heads of the Africans rebels on the poles" and his final nameless horror.

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