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Research Article

Analysing the Aspects of Racism in Joseph Conrad's Writing

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ABSTRACT

This paper which entitled Joseph Conrad as racist writer aimed at exploring whether Joseph Conrad is racist or not. For the purpose of this paper, the researcher adopted analytical-deductive approach because it is appropriate with the nature of study. Furthermore, relevant extracts are drawn exclusively from Chinua Achebe's "An image of Africa" and Edward Said's "Two visions in Heart of Darkness". A number of results were found out; some of the most important ones were: Joseph Conrad has an obsession with skin color. Some indications show that Joseph Conrad uses racist expressions. His thoughts are highly affected by the environment of imperialism in which he was exposed to. With reference to the study's results, the researcher recommended that further studies relevant to this field should be conducted and placed more emphasis on other aspects concerning Joseph Conrad racist thoughts. Conrad's others views than imperialistic world-view needed to be highlighted by other concerned researchers.

Key Words: deductive, analytical, racist

المستخلص

هدفت هذه الورقة وهي بعنوان جوزيف كونراد كاتب عنصري إلي اكتشاف ما اذا كان جوزيف كونراد عنصري ام لا. لغرض هذه الدراسة استخدم الباحث المنهج التحليلي الاستقرائي بحيث انه مناسب لطبيعة هذه الدراسة وكذلك تضمنت الورقة مقتطفات ذات صلة أخذت حصرياً من ورقة شنوا اشيببي صورة من افريقيا وادورد سعيد رؤيتين في رواية قلب الظلام. توصل الباحث لنتائج أهمها أن جوزيف كونراد له هاجس مع لون الجسم، ايضا بعض الدلالات اظهرت ان جوزيف كونراد استعمل تعبيرات عنصرية في روايته قلب الظلام، ايضا افكاره تأثرت حسب جو الامبريالية التي عاش فيها. اوصي الباحث الباحثين الذين لهم صلة بهذا المجال مزيدا من الاهتمام في اوجه الافكار العنصريه لدي جوزيف كونراد. ايضا علي الباحثين تناول افكار كونراد خلافا للنظرة الامبرياليه.

الكلمات المفتاحية: استنتاجي، تحليلي، عنصري.

INTRODUCTION

With reference to Joseph Conrad's novella Heart of Darkness many critics and writers comment on the novella in the light of its racism, the famous writers who responses on this Novella are Chinua Achebe and Edward Said. Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness is considered one of the great works of English literature. The early responses to the novella praised the novella and called it one of the events of the literary year. However, this changed in 1977 when Chinua Achebe criticized the novella for being racist. As a response to Achebe's critique, Edward Said defended Conrad in 1993. This paper argues that each critique is

highly influenced by the time period in which it was written. It explains how they have been influenced and from what stand points they have entered into the debate on Conrad. Finally, it also shows how the discussion has changed over time. This paper focuses on the work of a few of these critics, some which are especially notable. Firstly, it goes into more detail about the early reception of the novella (early responses). Secondly, it looks at the critic who spurred life into Conrad debate again, Chinua Achebe. Finally, it will look at the responses to Achebe's criticism in Edward Said's "Two visions in Heart of Darkness".



Before beginning to explore the critical responses to the text it might be a good idea to start with a good summary. Heart of Darkness deals with Marlow's expedition on board steamboat into the African jungle in search of an ivory-trader named Mr. Kurtz who is worshipped by the Africans and he exploits this. Marlow does however; manage to bring Mr. Kurtz a board the steamboat. "the horror, the horror" are the last words Mr. Kurtz said before he died on the way back to England (Conrad 69) and Marlow returns to England without him. In England, Marlow visits Mr. Kurtz intended and gives her Kurtz old letters. She remembers what a great man Mr. Kurtz was and how much she loved him. She also wants to know what his last words were, to which Marlow replies "your name"

A vast number of critics have entered into the debate concerning Conrad's Heart of Darkness. Some of the more notable critics include Albert Guerard, Chinua Achebe, Ian Watt, Hunt Hawkins, Peter Brooke, Patrik Brant Hinger, Mariana Torgovnick, Jeremy Hawthorn, Willson Harris, Edward W. Said, and J. Hiller Millis. In his paper "An image of Africa" Chinua Achebe considers that Joseph Conrad is racist because in this novella Conrad has an obsession with skin color, he depicted the African as black creatures with evil eyes and long black arms and long black legs and have faces like grotesque masks, strong muscles, energy and a wild vitality. In Conrad's (69) Marlow described the manger's boy as putting his "insolent black head in the doorway". Also he described Africans as savages with wild eyes, using an unrefined language consisting of grunts and short phrases sounding like a violent babbles, and sometimes he refers to them as specimen. Marlow comments of how one African is an improved specimen because he can fire up a vertical boiler (Achebe 172). The point is exemplified in the discussion of the meaning of the two rivers in Heart of Darkness, how travelling on the Congo river is like going

back in time to the earliest beginning of the world (Conrad 33) and how Thames has also once been a dark place, but is now in light and peace. Edward Said in his response to Achebe's (An image of Africa) in his critique "Two visions in Heart of Darkness" states that we must not blame the Europeans for the misfortunes of the present. We should instead look at the events of imperialism "as a network of interdependent histories that would be inaccurate and senseless to repress, useful and interesting to understand." (Said 19) We live in a global environment and racial hatred can lead to destruction. (ibid. 19-20). Said further mentions how the imperial attitude is captured in Conrad's Heart of Darkness" It is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one existence- that which makes its truth, its meaning- its subtle and penetrating essence. We live as we dream-alone (Said 23). Said explains how Marlow wants us to understand that Kurtz's looting adventure, Marlow's journey and the narrative are linked and how they all work as a demonstration of the Europeans acts of imperial mastery in Africa (ibid. 23). He further comments of how the narrative gives us a sense that there is no way out of the historical force of imperialism. Conrad wants to demonstrate that Marlow is limited to his situation. At the time Conrad would probably not be able to have presented anything other than an imperialistic world-view "Independence was for whites and Europeans the lesser or subject peoples were to be ruled, science, learning, history emanated from the west (Said 24). To Said, Conrad's narrative is bound to a certain time and place. Conrad does not see an alternative to imperialism and the native he wrote about seemed to be incapable of independence. He could not foresee what would happen when imperialism came to end. Conrad allows readers today to see an African that is not made up of dozens of European colonies, even if he himself might have had a



very limited idea of what African was like (Said 25).

This is a particularly important point, Said sees the novella more as an important time-document which displays a vision that was seen as "normal" and correct at the time. Kurtz's speech is also full with discrepancies, which gives the reader a sense that everything presented might not be exactly what it appears to be.

Conrad way of demonstrating this discrepancy between the Orthodox and his own view of empire is to keep drawing attention to how ideas and values are constructed (and deconstructed) through dislocations in the narrator's language. Marlow, for example is never straightforward. He alternates between garrulity and stunning eloquence (Said 29).

Conrad also wants to give the reader a sense of disorientation. What appears secure might not be secure at all (Said 29).

The policeman in the corner, for instance- is only slightly more secure than the white man in the jungle, and requires the same continuous (but precarious) triumph over an all-pervading darkness, which by the end of the tale is shown to be the same in London and in Africa (Said 29).

To Said, Conrad realized that "darkness" could be colonized or illuminated.

Conrad's limitation is that even though he understood that colonialism in one way was just dominance and land grabbing. He still could not understand that imperialism had to come to an end, so that the natives could live their lives free from European domination. (As a creature of his time, Conrad could not grant the native their freedom, despite his severe critique of the imperialism that enslaved them (Said 30). As Parry demonstrates in this quote: Although Said recognized "the scrupulously ethnocentric nature" of Foucault's undertaking. Hulme argues that he chose to emphasize the inherent possibilities of this work in the interests of extending to a global terrain the concept of discourse with the

constant implication of textuality within networks of history, power, knowledge and society (Parry 69).

However, that quote is not about Heart of Darkness. It demonstrates how Said historicizes and contextualizes texts. He looks at when the novella was written and problematizes it by stating that Conrad probably could not have presented anything other than imperialistic world-view. Said does however, state that Conrad is highly critical of imperialism but that in the end finds it inevitable and unavoidable. Said has slightly tackled the same subjects as Achebe, but he keeps a more balanced and neutral tone throughout the essay.

Theoretical Frame Work

The early critics commented on how the novella was one of the events of literary year and a masterpiece (Armstrong 307-308). One critic called the novella a destructive experience and mentions that people must not suppose that Conrad's novella is against colonization, expansion or imperialism. It is above all an adventure experience, where the ending featuring the woman who idealizes Kurtz's memory acts as a way of signifying just how far the reader has travelled. Another critic commented on Kurtz's intended and her belief in the villain's heroism. In another review the critic commented on the fact that Conrad has moved past the two classes in fiction. Heart of Darkness does more than just deal with movement and adventure or offer a characterization of the human mind. Conrad has motives, adventure and philosophic presentation, of the human character. According to one critic the novella can't be understood with one eye closed and Conrad demands the full attention from his readers. A number of critics found the prose beautiful and the novella atmospheric but one critic thought that the narrative was unconvincing and felt that it too often lost its spontaneity and became too rhetorical. One critic mentions that there is no prejudice in the novella.



What is the most striking to a 21st century reader about the early responses to the novella is that the race aspect is almost completely left out. There is however, one early critic that does bring up the race aspect. Edward Garnett ends his review by stating that Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* offers "an analysis of the deterioration of the white man's morale, when he is left loose from European restraint, and to make trade profits out of the subject Conrad responded to this in a letter and wrote "Your brave attempt to grapple with the foggishness of *Heart of Darkness*, to explain what I myself tried to shape blindfold, as it were, touched me profoundly". What we can make out of this is that the novella is in fact about the immorality of whites in Africa. Also, Conrad had written to Black Wood one month before the first installment of the novella and said that his idea behind the novella was "the criminality of inefficiency and pure selfishness when tackling the civilizing work in Africa". However, it should also be noted that post-structuralism shows us that the intentions of the author are not to be "trusted" or even worthy of consideration. It is however, interesting historically.

The race aspect is mostly ignored by early critics. A historical background of how race and racism was looked upon in 1902 explains why this might be the case. In his "An image of Africa", Achebe assumes that everyone reading his critique will understand what he means when he refers to racism. But the meaning of the word is by no means self-evident, as the concept of racism has changed over time. It is important to understand that the word racism did not exist when Conrad wrote his novella. This does of course not mean that racism did not exist but people thought about the subject of race very differently than we do nowadays. Word like racism was not needed Firchow (1903: 234). When Conrad wrote his novella, race-thinking was considered so normal that a The first time a word was used with these negative connotations was in 1907. It was the word racialism which is defined as the "belief

in the superiority of particular race leading to prejudice and antagonism towards people of other race, especially those in close proximity who may be felt as a threat to one's cultural and racial integrity or economic well-being" Firchow(1903: 234). The first use of the word racism was in 1936, over ten years after Conrad death. Also the definition of racialism does not seem to fit in with the racist attitudes towards the Africans, since they did not feel that their culture was threatened or that the African could harm their economic status .

More importantly, *Heart of Darkness* is not the only artistic work where the critics completely missed the racial context. A similar example can be seen in the early responses to the painting J M W Turner's *The Slave Ship*. As Paul Gilroy has shown, the famous art-critic John Ruskin did not acknowledge the "racial" content of the painting. Gilroy writes: Thinking about England is been conducted through the "racial symbolism that artistic images of black suffering provide. These images were not an alien or unnatural presence that had somehow intruded into English life from the outside. They were an integral means with which England was able to make sense of itself and its destiny Gilroy(1993: 84). It should be noted that the early responses to the painting are from the 1840s and exactly the same time-period as when *Heart of Darkness* was written. The responses, nevertheless, exemplify that same logic. Because racialism is seen as something natural, the critics do not think about it. Instead they read the novella for its aesthetic value, and spend a longer time discussing the literary qualities of the novella. In the early responses to the novella *Heart of Darkness* no one even comments on the racism and "race" is completely ignored. Rather, the critics focus on the form of the novella. Some have commented on the adventure experience and how it is a philosophic presentation of the human character. It is also interesting to note that one even commented that there is no prejudice in it.

This is not surprising considering that racism was not even a word and it shows that "race-thinking" was seen as something so normal that no one even noticed it in the novella.

Methodology

The researcher adopted analytical-deductive approach because it is appropriate with the nature of study. Furthermore, relevant extracts are drawn exclusively from Chinua Achebe's "An image of Africa" and Edward Said's "Two visions in Heart of Darkness". The study will adopt the following methods

Questions of the study

The study will use the following questions for collecting the data relevant to the present study.

1-To what extent are the expressions employed by Joseph Conrad in his novella Heart of darkness about African reflected racism?

2-To what extent can Edward Said's "Two visions in Heart of Darkness" convince the reader that Joseph Conrad is not racist?

Furthermore, relevant extracts are drawn exclusively from "An image of Africa" by Achebe and "Two visions in Heart of Darkness" by Edward Said.

Statement of the study

1. Most of the expressions adopted by Joseph Conrad reflected racism. He used to repeat the word "Negro" in most of his writing. He has an obsession with skin color, he described the Africans as creatures with long black arms and long black legs and has evil eyes. He described the manager's boy as putting his insolent black head in the doorway.

Edward Said can't convince the reader that Joseph Conrad is not racist because he himself wrote "We must not blame the Europeans for the misfortunes of the present. We should instead look at the events of imperialism as a network of interdependent histories that would be

inaccurate and senseless to repress, useful and interesting to understand".

Said (1993) "Conrad could not foresee what would happen when imperialism came to an end. Conrad allows reader today to see an African that is not made up of dozens of European colonies, even if he himself might have had a very limited idea of what African was like." (Said 25) These expressions mean that if Conrad knows that imperialism will come to an end he won't describe the African in this way, so this can't convince the reader that Joseph Conrad isn't racist.

Aims of the study

A major concern of the paper is to explore how Joseph Conrad is racist. This appears in his novella Heart of Darkness.

The study is hoped to provide practical help in decoding literary work and gives a recap of how Joseph Conrad is racist.

The following are the extracts drawn exclusively from Chinua Achebe's "An image of Africa", Edward Said's "Two visions in Heart of Darkness" and Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness".

- 1- The Africans are black creatures with evil eyes and long black arms and long black legs and have strong muscles, energy and a wild vitality. Marlow described the manager's boy as putting his "insolent black head in the doorway." (Conrad 69)
- 2- "Travelling on the Congo River is like going back in time to the earliest beginning of the world. (Conrad 33)
- 3- "Africans are savages with wild eyes, using an unrefined language consisting of grunts and short phrases sounding like violent babbles. Marlow comments of how one African is improved specimen because he can fire up a vertical boiler. (Achebe 172)
- 4- "We must not blame the Europeans for the misfortunes of the present. We instead look at the events of imperialism as a network of interdependent histories that would be inaccurate and senseless to repress, useful and interesting to understand. (Said 19)

- 5- "Conrad couldn't foresee what would happen when imperialism came to an end. Conrad allows readers today to see an African that is not made up of dozens of European colonies, even if he himself might have had a very limited idea of what African was like. (Said 85)
- 6- "It is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one existence- that which makes its truth, its meaning, and its subtle and penetrating essence. We live as we dream-alone." (Said 23)
- 7- "Marlow wants us to understand that Kurtz's looting adventure, Marlow's journey and the narrative are linked and how they all work as a demonstration of the Europeans acts of imperialism mastery in African. (ibid-23)
- 8- "The narrative gives us a sense that there is no way out of the historical force of imperialism. Conrad wants to demonstrate that Marlow is limited to his situation. At the time Conrad would probably not be able to have presented anything other than imperialistic world-view; independence was for whites and Europeans and the lesser or subject people were to be ruled, science, learning, history emanated from west." (Said 24)
- 9- "As creature of his time, Conrad couldn't grant the native their freedom, despite his severe critique of the imperialism that enslaves them." (Said 30)
- 10- "Your reading of Heart of Darkness determines if it's racist or not. Heart of Darkness is calculated a failure to depict achieved cross- cultural understanding. Marlow can't understand African since he is a foreigner. Joseph Conrad a sailor and adventurer before he became a writer. He works for the king Leopold of Belgium; it was the classic moment of imperialism, and Conrad was embarking on what might have been a life of wealth, power and wickedness." (Armstrong p.431)

Discussion and analysis

In extract one: Joseph Conrad portrayed the Africans as black creatures with evil eyes and long black arms and long black legs and have strong muscles, energy and wild vitality, Marlow described the manger's boy as putting his "insolent" black head in the doorway (Conrad 69).

From this extract the researcher finds that Joseph Conrad uses racist expression.

In extract two: Joseph Conrad describes the Congo River as dark while describing the Thames as in light and peace.

In extract three: Conrad portrayed the Africans as savages using an unrefined language consisting of grunts and short phrases sounding like a violent babbles. "Achebe 172"

The researcher believes that these expressions are considered as racist expressions.

In extract four: Edward Said wants to defend Joseph Conrad by mentioning that people shouldn't blame Europeans and by this he means "the author" for mentioning these expressions and this will not convince the reader that Conrad isn't a racist.

In extract five: Edward Said also wants to defend Joseph Conrad by mentioning that Joseph Conrad couldn't foresee what would happen when imperialism came to an end.

The researcher sees these expressions couldn't defend Conrad from being racist and the reader may ask whether Conrad wouldn't use these expressions if he knew that the imperialism would come to an end one day.

In extract six: The researcher also believes that these expressions which Edward Said mentioned couldn't defend Joseph Conrad from being a racist.

In extract seven: Joseph Conrad mentioned that his characters Kurtz and Marlow work as a demonstration of the Europeans acts of imperialism.

So this means that they are representatives of colonies.



In extract eight: Edward Said himself represents that independence was for whites and Europeans and the lesser or subject people were to be ruled, science learning history emanated from west. By these expressions he means the others are uncivilized and lived in darkness. In extract nine: Said mentioned that Conrad couldn't grant the native their freedom 'instead' whether he has the right to describe them in such expressions. In extract ten: Armstrong considered that the novella "Heart of Darkness" is calculated a failure, and describes Marlow as a foreigner and he couldn't understand the African. Also he describes Conrad as embarking on what might have been a life of wealth, power and wickedness. This illustrates that Joseph Conrad is a racist.

The results

- 1-Joseph Conrad has an obsession with skin colour.
- 2-Some indications show that Joseph Conrad uses racist expressions.
- 3 –Joseph Conrad thoughts are highly affected by the environment of imperialism in which he was exposed to.

Conclusion and suggestions

This paper analyzes Joseph Conrad racist thoughts in Chinua Achebe "An image of Africa", Edward Said "Two visions in Heart of Darkness" and Joseph Conrad "Heart of Darkness" due to the fact that

the above mentioned papers and novella remarkably have tackled Conrad racist thoughts from different views of points. It is obviously that Joseph Conrad has obsession with skin color, some indications show that Joseph Conrad uses racist expressions in his novella Heart of Darkness, and Joseph Conrad's thoughts are highly affected due to the environment of imperialism in which he led his life.

By the end of this paper it wishes to find its way to put forward a solution for the problems of the research, also it politely suggest that;

- Other researchers relevant to this field should place more emphasis on other aspects concerning Joseph Conrad racist thoughts.
- Conrad's other views than imperialistic world-view needed to be highlighted by other concerned researchers.

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