

Achebe's critique of "heart of darkness"

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This paper seeks to support the Achebe's critique of "Heart of Darkness" in his essay "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness".

Firstly, Achebe argues that Conrad in his writing depicts a blatant prejudice against Africans.

He describes him as, "a thoroughgoing racist" (Achebe, 301). Conrad gives two diverse descriptions, when relating to Thames and Congo Rivers. He argues that Thames, "conquered its darkness" (Conrad, 299), and asserts that Congo is an impenetrably dark and void. Achebe argues that at one point in time, the two rivers resembled each other. Thus, Achebe criticizes Conrad's idea of expressing the two rivers as disconcerting that portrays the nature of Africans as living in the dark.

Conrad describes Africans as being responsible for terrorizing the steamer. Achebe finds this as a bestial rather than a human idea. In deed, Conrad goes ahead to depict the firemen aboard the steamer as, "an improved specimen and as a dog in a parody of beeches" (Achebe, 301). By this, Conrad seems to be applauding the natives living in the wilderness, while at the same time, mocking the steamer who is depicted as just an upright dog and a creature in the wrong place. This shows how prejudiced Conrad is in depicting the status of Africans, and feels happy because the natives are living in the wilderness.

Achebe accuses Conrad for being a, "purveyor of comforting myths" (Achebe, 300). His writings seem to be interpreting the records of events, as they unfold. However, he is just pretending to be genuine, whereas concealing the truth. His main intention is to supply the reader with

information that has no basis and hard to dispute. According to Achebe, white racism is deeply embedded in the society, such that no one questions it. It seems to be normal, hence not easily noticed by those who practice it.

On the other hand, Conrad refers to black people by the use of derogatory terms, such as "blackness", while showing his obsession for his race. During the Conrad's time, Africans were not advanced and were beyond the capacities shown in the novel. In his critics, Achebe argues that the Conrad was being a "fragrant racists" (Conrad, 32). He included historical happenings during the time of writing the novel. "Heart of Darkness" depicts the African image as, "the ther world" and advocates the need for civilization. Africa is projected as a place, where intelligence and refinement are mocked by the bestiality of Africans.

To assert his argument, he uses an imagery of the river Thames and Congo and describes them as, "going up that rivers were like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world". He argues that the rovers were not able to render any service just like the ages of good service to the race that Africans banks. He argues that, "Thames has been one of the dark places of the earth." (Hawkins, 251) Thus, in his own understanding, the two rivers cannot be good at the same time; one has to be good, while the other one is good. However, it was able to conquer its darkness, and attained light and peace.

To show the state of Africans, he uses the river Congo as he states that, "it would run the terrible risk of hearing grotesque echoes of its own forgotten darkness, and falling victim to an avenging recrudescence of the mindless frenzy of the first beginnings" (Conrad, 260). Conrad also depicts a negative

atmosphere of African in the "Heart of Darkness". He states, "It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention" (Achebe, 36). He further argues that, "The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy" (Conrad, 37). Achebe criticizes these two sentences, as they negatively describe Africans in which the characters are used. Moreover, the adjectives used in describing the conditions of Africans are themselves negating Africans' image. Conrad is criticized for his "adjectival insistence upon inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery".

(Hawkins, 280) Hawkins finds his stylistic use of words to raise serious questions of his faith and fairness in his writings. Vividly, Conrad seems to pretend to be recording scenes, their impacts and incidences of the past happenings. In doing this, he engaged in hypocritical use of emotive words among the other forms of trickery to show his intentions to demean the African culture. He assumes the role of purveyor of myths hence avoid falling into conflict with the psychology of his readers. Conrad describes an incidence where Europe in a steamer was going down the Congo and found the denizens of Africans. He writes, "But suddenly as we struggled round a bend there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping,, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage"(Conrad, 240).

A close look into this description shows how he viewed Africans not like them, but from another world, sane men. Conrad also fascinates in the mind

of the western world in the "Heart of Darkness". He states, "What thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity — like yours ...

. Ugly" (Hawkins, 40). Apparently, Conrad gives a description of African man as just limbs or rolling eyes. Moreover, he states that he had to look for a fireman describing him as an improved specimen as he could fire up in a vertical boiler. He adds that, "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" (Conrad, 56). This vividly shows his regard for African man and the way he did not appreciate his capabilities, as well as the fact that he was a human being just like him.

An annoying description of Africans is seemed when he writes, "A black figure stood up, strode on long black legs, waving long black arms" (Achebe, 120). This description shows that Conrad has deep problem with the blacks. He did not accord them any respect. Thus, there are various psychoanalytic critics in Conrad's work. He seemed to have irrational love and hate for the blacks. Conrad's picture of the civilians of Congo seems to be inadequate.

During this era, they were being subjected into the brutal rule of King Leopold, as they pretended to be bringing civilization in Africa. Despite this, Conrad did not agree with fact that Africans had some capabilities. This is shown as he writes, "The light of a headlong, exalted satisfaction with the world of men . . .

illuminated his face . . . and triumphant eyes. In passing he cast a glance of kindly curiosity and a friendly gleam of big, sound, shiny teeth. .

. his white calves twinkled sturdily" (Conrad, 320). In conclusion, I agree with Achebe's critics of " Heart of Darkness" by Conrad. As analyzed above, it is evident that Conrad was expressing his own fashion of vulgar prejudices, and insults to African man at the time when they were suffering from untold agonies and atrocities in the hands of whites. Indeed, he leads to questionable humanity of black people at the time. Hawkins describes Conrad as, " notoriously inaccurate in the rendering of his own history"(Hawkins, 35).

Thus, Achebe is right by criticizing the writings by Conrad.