

# Colonial discourse is key within the novel english literature essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



It shall be prudent to begin by giving a brief definition of what is meant by colonial discourse before looking at the texts. Colonial Discourse is the way in which the hegemony of imperial rule is conveyed within the text as a set of values, representations and beliefs that reinforce the ideology. It is " a term brought into currency by Edward Said who saw Foucault's notion of a disclosure as valuable for describing that system within which that range of practices termed 'colonial' come into being." [1] George Orwell's *Burmese Days* has an array of imperialistic views, which are held in opposing views with the main character. Flory describes imperialism as " the lie that we're here to uplift our poor black brothers rather than to rob them" [2] Colonial discourse is key within the novel, which as a result raises the question of identity and binary oppositions. None more so than in the case of Flory, in one breathe an honourable English gentleman enjoying the riches his new cultures has to offer and in the next berating the " dirty nigger" and bathing in the relief of being " out of the stink" for a time. [3] Flory is a contradiction who is torn between his British roots and his love of the Burmese culture, this love is shown via his friendship with Dr Veraswami. Flory is the personification of Gramsci's idea of Imperial ideology, as he believes that the discourse providing the hegemony is right yet he faces an ideological struggle within himself due to his love of his new culture. It can be argued that due to his steadfast dedication to the British Empire, for whom he works, he is a loyal imperialist and is comfortable using and exploiting the Burmese for his own gain as well as trying to impose his ' superior' worth and colonise the Burmese. With his desire to do this along with integrating himself into the Burmese way of life he succeeds merely in creating a

juxtaposition coupled with binary opposition that ultimately leads to his demise. Orwell shows how corruption was commonplace and that the natives were not classed as equal nor valued and those who befriended them were also judged. " I can't bear a fellow who pals up with the natives." [4] A harsh representation of British colonial rule is given by Orwell and Flory is the embodiment of what the colonizer sees as weak and traitorous to the British Empire due to his friendship with Dr Veraswami. Conversely Flory is viewed by the natives as an unwelcome outside threat to the world in which they live. As Bertens said " the inferiority that orientalism attributes to the East simultaneously serves to construct the West's superiority." [5] A Passage to India ends just as it begins with the connotation of mystery. Forster sets about exploring the issues of British colonialism and raises the question as to whether or not the foreign Englishman can coexist with the native Indian. The connotation of mystery is a key factor throughout the novel. The English gentlemen are shown in many differing yet a typical persona towards the Indians whom they control. Conversely, the Indians are given the connotation of confusion and disarray. At a time when foreigners were othered, classed as weak, and morally corrupt with little human values, almost to the point of despotism Forster completely reverses this viewpoint by casting the Englishwomen, and rightly so, as overwhelmingly racist and condescending towards the natives. Englishmen are not except from the scathing attacks wielded by Forster's pen, but they are shown to be slightly more humane and merely unable to relate to the natives. Forster gives the impression that although he despises the way the English bureaucrats' go about their business without a thought in their head for neither the natives

nor the land they colonize, he does not directly question their presence or their right to the country. This is shown by the nuanced and culturally rich portrayal of India's beauty and characteristics. However, issues of religion and cultural differences do arise between the Muslim and Hindu characters, Miss Quested highlights this. The concern she has over becoming no more than a caricature of her former self along with the way she views Ronny as the epitome of British ruling class and the ease with which he leads that life. Similarly Fielding takes pride in the fact that he has befriended an Indian Muslim and this indirectly raises the biggest question within the novel - who is effected by colonisation, the colonized or the colonizer and maybe more aptly, both? Conversely, Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness uses a much more complicated manner to address the issues of colonialism and imperialism. Through deconstruction, it can be seen that Heart of Darkness forms a colonial discourse where the African is represented by the European as " savage, exotic, cannibal and primitive." [6] This is the image given to the reader via the protagonist Marlow as he travels from the outer station to the central station and eventually up the river to the inner station. Along the way, copious scenes of torture and cruelty, verging on slavery, are to be seen. This imagery is powerful even if incidental, evidence of colonialism. It can be argued that the natives and the surrounding area provide a metaphor for the prehistoric Europeans with the lack of civilisation and uncultured ways that the Europeans have evolved from, whilst the African is still seen as the unintellectual beast that lives in the shadows of the land. The native is the personification of evolution in action whilst the land becomes anthropomorphized." The idea of colonialism may also be said to designate

the attributes of the specific political and epistemological discourses by which the colonising power defines those who are subjected to its rule." [7] Conrad's portrayal of the natives as racially inferior shows the xenophobic westernised image of Africa as seen through the eyes of the typical hegemonic European, regardless of the fact that Marlow did not witness any primitive act such as cannibalism " They did not eat each other before my face." [8] However, Marlow does continue to belittle the native with derogatory language and also does them the disservice of denying them a name claiming that " violent babble" [9] and crude grunts is their only means of communication. " They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces, but what thrilled you was the thought of their humanity - like yours... Ugly." [10] Chinua Achebe, states that this discourse calls the " very humanity of black people into question." [11] It can be argued that by conforming to the social attitude and common consensus of the period, Conrad projects the Darwinism theory of evolution upon the natives. As Marlow's journey is described as " travelling back to the earliest beginning of the world", [12] the African is dehumanized further into a subspecies, a hybrid of ape and Caucasians. " One of these creatures rose to his hands and knees and went off on all fours towards the river to drink" [13] Conrad uses Marlow to show the imperial ideology of the West. The Europeans are superior and natural leaders due to the uncivilized and weaknesses of the colonized Africans. This ideological hegemony is most evident in the character of Kurtz, as he epitomises the European view with his robust and racist attitude towards the colonized natives and his steadfast belief that all blacks should be exterminated. The natives are of no human worth to Kurtz who takes

pleasure in their slaughter and brazenly displays the deceased heads on poles as a trophy and symbol of his superiority. If the natives do summon the strength to up rise and show resistance it is short lived, as they have nothing to fight the control, the Europeans hold them under. Just like the shadows, they have no power, no voice and no substance. Conversely, Kurtz is blinkered by the corrupt idea that it is the right and duty of his to uphold the natural superiority of white colonial heritage. Not only does Kurtz have a heart of darkness, he is the heart of darkness. Kurtz's marginalisation of the oppressed native is completed by the racist manner in which he treats his mistress in contrast to the fair and equal way he treats his white partner. Marlow's anti essentialist views seem to stem from preconceived notions and derogatory stereotypes. However with the acknowledgement that the natives merely have "slightly flatter noses"[14]he does in a sense admit some equality but for inconsequential differences. Heart of Darkness tussles with ideological struggle, which Gramsci pioneered as the main issue surrounding cultural indifference.[15]Marlow does reveal that his journey "seemed somehow to throw a kind of light on everything about me"[16]but he also notes that it "was not very clear"[17]and that the truth would be "too dark altogether".[18]Heart of Darkness faced ferocious criticism, especially from Chin Achebe. In his essay 'An image of Africa' he described it as a racist novel which portrayed Europeans in a positive light at all times whilst showing the Africans as unintelligible and animalistic. With the discourse throughout Heart of Darkness showing Europeans to be much more advanced and evolved compared to the un-evolved bestial African, Achebe denounced Conrad as a thoroughgoing racist. A bloody racist.[19]Further to

this criticism, Conrad's fin de siècle has also been questioned as to what the perpetuated views held by the colonists were aimed at, did it question the colonist viewpoint towards Africans or did it question colonisation as a whole.