

The poisonwood bible and the heart of darkness

Literature



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A Comparison of The Poisonwood Bible and The Heart of Darkness

The similarity between Barbara Kingslover's book, 'Poisonwood Bible' and Conrad's book, 'The Heart of Darkness', is that both these novels, "denounce the vices of Western imperialism through the adventures of White people in the Congo" (Leder, 72). Leder has also noted, "both novels presaged public protests against abuses in the Congo, specifically the excesses of the Leopoldian regime in the Congo and the involvement of Western powers in the murder of Patrice Lumumba" (72). 'Poisonwood Bible' can be considered as a "re-writing of 'Heart of Darkness' from a woman's point of view" (Leder, 72). Conrad's novel, published in 1899, was later criticized for having a racist undertone and also as a sexist one (Leder, 72). The theme of Kingslover's novel is also racism and gender, though in an opposite perspective (Leder, 72). Conrad's novel depicts the Congo at the time of the beginning of its colonisation by the West, but Kingslover has completed her book when colonial rule was reaching its fag end (Leder, 72). In, 'The Heart of Darkness', all the protagonists are men, while in 'Poisonwood Bible', the protagonists are women, which makes a sea change in the perspective of this book as compared to 'The Heart of Darkness'. 'The Heart of Darkness' is the story of a sailor's voyage, Marlow, through the Congo river (Conrad). Marlow is entrusted with the task of bringing back, an employee of his company who had gone to the forest in search of ivory and eventually had become a psychic patient (Conrad). In this story, as narrated by Marlow, women appear either in the domestic realm- "naïve and idealistic" Western women- or in the outside world as "savage (Congolese) woman" (Leder, 73). In 'Poisonwood Bible', on the contrary, the Western women are not confined to homes, are adventurous, and are part of a

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universal sisterhood including the Congolese women (Kingslover). In Kingslover's story, all the African people are good, and almost all the Western men are bad, but in Conrad's novel, only the Western men are worth detailed mentioning at all. But the narrative technique used by both the authors has one more similarity. It is in the use of more than one narrator, which imparts a design, contemporary for all times, to both these novels.

Works Cited

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