

White Man's Burden(ed) by Others: Reading Chinua Achebe and Analysing Rudyard Kipling

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Abstract

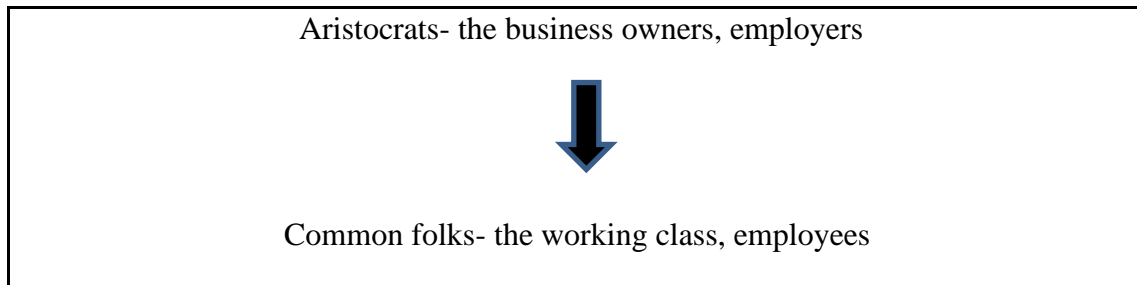
The chosen article by Chinua Achebe brought a hugely different angle of Conrad's Heart of Darkness i.e., the racist angle. He mentioned the keyways a text becomes so oblivious that readers 'normalize' the racist angle of the novella. In Conrad's critically acclaimed works, there is covert racism that Achebe pointed out to the global audience. Even as a reader from 'Orient' it took me some time to absorb the obvious fact staring right into the face of every reader. Achebe presents the very understanding of African culture, and it is absolute mockery by a renowned writer like Joseph Conrad. The major question here then arises is, what is culture?

Keyword: Post-Colonialism, Racism, Suppression, Conflict, Subjugation, Humanism.

According to Marxist critic Raymond Williams, there are three definitions of culture: First, culture can be used to refer to "a general process of intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic factors- great philosophers, great artists and great poets. (Storey)" The second definition is "a particular way of life, whether of people, a period, or a group. (Storey)" The last definition of culture is "the words and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity. (Storey)"

According to the *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* book author John Storey, often there is

another term used interchangeably with culture i.e., ideology. According to Storey, firstly ideology can refer to a “systematic body of ideas articulated by a particular group of people (Storey).” The second definition suggests “certain masking, distortion or concealment.” “Ideology is used here to indicate how some texts and practices present distorted images of reality.” “They produce sometimes what is called ‘false consciousness.’ Such distortion it is argued, work in the interest of the powerful against the powerless. (Storey)” Keeping these pertinent points in mind, one can always correlate the capitalist ideology where suppressors do not see themselves are exploiters, or the post-colonialist reading of several novellas, poems which highlight the extreme racist point of view of texts; readers from any point of the world do not pick the covert subjugation they have been subjected to. Typically, the colonised readers who have imbibed the subverted mentality and do not pick the subtle hints of colonisation in the texts. Mix-White writers like Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling etc, use a very dehumanized approach towards colonized subjects. The autobiography of Kipling highlights a very peculiar love-hate relationship towards the colonized subjects. Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* won over the global audience even with his prejudiced racist writing. This brings to a particularly important question which would be elaborated in this assignment, did writers of 20th century non-English background suffer from identity crisis and masked that by propagating white supremacist ideology (Storey) by being racist? In the early bourgeoisie society, the broad characterization of power dynamics was as follows:



The mindset of common folks who were employed by aristocrats were mostly of subordinate subjects who had to look after the colonized offices where they held position of clerks. The clerics who went to an exotic land far away from home had them being worshiped by the colonized subjects and the power dynamics here shifted abruptly. The Christian faith they had was abolished and they nearly became psychotic which led to ‘the horror! The horror’ (Conrad) state of these clerks. The suppression of years made them the ‘unconscious master’ of the natives and led to distortion of reality. These clerks soon became the most revered amongst the colonized land which was captured by many unbiased visitor and natives in their works. This suppression by the colonized aristocrats and their employees made the colonized subjects doubly distant from their own reality, culture, and roots. This left a very damaging scar on them as the colonized subjects were always compared and contrasted against the ‘white’ culture. It is so deeply seeded in the psyche that the effects can be felt years later as there is need for imitate the West in whitewashing every aspect mindlessly. Writers of ethnocentrism like Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling wrote to gain the sympathy of white supremacist despite spending some time in colonized nations. These writers paint an intense picture of ‘White Skin Black Mask’ the antonym of Franz Fanon seminal work ‘Black Skin White Mask’ (Fanon), where the effect of racism is read from the point of the view of coloured people. However, the other side that is, the author’s side was equally crippled and struggling for identity as Kipling opens his autobiography ‘Something of Myself’ with the following lines “Give me the first six years of the child’s life and you can have the rest (Kipling);” the first six years of his life were spent in India, where he was born. He longs for the first six years when a child is not assumed to be very perceptive or intelligent to be understanding the racial or power dynamics, yet Kipling wants to relive those six years. He is often branded as a racist, but he is too conflicted as a poet in this works. In his poem

Gungadin, he writes about the man who is called as Gungadin, again deconstructed linguistically as the Ganga River, the holiest river of India, and the man Gungadin is responsible to serve water to the soldiers, he is referred as 'Bhishti,' a traditional term for water server but he misspells Ganga as Gunga showing his conflicted views. He constantly berates the man, still gives him the most derogatory praise in the initial part of the poem:

Was our regimental bhisti, Gunga Din,
 He was 'Din! Din! Din!
 'You limpin' lump o' brick-dust, Gunga Din!
 'Hi! Slippy *hitherao*
 'Water, get it! *Panee lao*,
 'You squidgy-nosed old idol, Gunga Din.' (Kipling)

This man ends up taking a bullet for the narrator which the poet praises in the following verse:

Yes, Din! Din! Din!
 You Lazarushian-leather Gunga Din!
 Though I've belted you and flayed you,
 By the livin' Gawd that made you,
 You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din! (Kipling)

Just like Heart of Darkness, Kipling faces the need highlight the naivety of colonized subjects and write about them as they were and not what the West wanted to be like. This half-hearted praise does not make-up the brutal racism and prominent damage these literary works have done in the minds of natives. Writer and critics like Achebe observe the hints of partiality and racism which is the humanistic trait of literature.

Works Cited

Achebe, Chinua. "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*." *The Massachusetts Review*, vol. 57, no. 1, 2016, pp. 14–27, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mar.2016.0003>.

The primary text for this assignment as it has a spectacularly distinct approach on *Heart of Darkness*. The work is often quoted as liberating and a breeze for natives condition. However, the subtle racism laced throughout the text e.g calling the narrator as wanderer of prehistoric earth or, the mistress reaction compared to his fiancée on Kurtz death. The emphasis on blackness to make it sound almost superfluous, shows the intent of the author. Using this article, I analysed the reading of another overt racist writer, Rudyard Kipling.

"Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction." *Routledge & CRC Press*, www.routledge.com/Cultural-Theory-and-Popular-Culture-An-Introduction/Storey/p/book/9780367820602.

This book on theory presents deep understanding of ideology, culture, and its misinterpretation by authors. It gave concise definitions with the understanding that can deconstruct various books.

Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. 2014.

This is the work Achebe has based his entire article on. Conrad was a Polish writer who was not well-versed in English, yet he made particularly important symbolic references in form of Thames and Congo River. It almost feels like the author wrote for inclusivity. This leads to questioning of his identity and integrity, something which should be investigated.

These authors are quoted for their landmark success as non-English native authors. They should be well-researched because of the influence is massive.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Penguin Books, 1952.

Franz Fanon gives a vivid account of racism encountered by coloured people and how they never get adjusted in any setting. I studied this piece in my Module 'Critical Theory Today' where the professor discussed how racism was prevalent in two stages. One by the colonial masters and the others between peers. This raises question whether writers faced this dilemma as well!

Rudyard Kipling. "Gunga Din by Rudyard Kipling | Poetry Foundation." *Poetry Foundation*, 2020, www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46783/gunga-din.

The post colonialist writers broadly characterised the writing in: Ambiguity, Hybridity. It is the effect of colonisation which makes the reader and writers give a close reading with these perspectives. Kipling as a writer gives ambiguous statements which marks the significant question: Did authors suffer from identity crisis, and they were forced to write for White Supremacists to have an impact? If so, why are these texts still read, so they not present racism equally?

Kipling, Rudyard. *Rudyard Kipling: Something of Myself and Other Autobiographical Writings*. Cambridge University Press, 1991.

The poem shows conflicted emotions of a White Man just like Mr. Kurtz who made the natives sound like villains but he realised his mistake in the last days of his life. He screams the words "The Horror! The Horror!" which change the understanding of entire text.

Similarly, Kipling's narrator has no affinity for the bhisti, but still admires him for saving his life.