Heart of Darkness Post-Colonialism

Links:

• [Dr. Kristi Siegel’s Introduction to Modern Literary Theory (scroll down)](http://www.kristisiegel.com/theory.htm)

[• Emory University Introduction to Postcolonial Studies](https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/postcolonialstudies/)

•[Political Discourse: Theories of Colonialism and Post-colonialism](Political%20Discourse:%20Theories%20of%20Colonialism%20and%20Post-colonialism)

•[Purdue OWL Postcolonial Criticism](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/722/10/)

•Wikipedia Postcolonial Criticism (Just for introduction and general reference. DO NOT USE AS A CITED SOURCE<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postcolonialism>

History is written by the victors. Consequently, post-colonial critics explore how literature reveals the relationships between colonizers and colonized. Postcolonial theory looks at issues of power, economics, politics, religion, and culture and how these elements work in relation to colonial hegemony (western colonizers controlling the colonized).

Postcolonial critics are often concerned with who speaks for whom. The literary text itself may be examined closely to determine in what ways, explicitly or allegorically, privilege the colonizer or colonized. The text may also be examined for what it reveals about the operations of cultural difference -- the ways in which race, religion, class, cultural beliefs and customs combine to form individual identity and the world of the work.

Example from Full Essay

Heart of Darkness projects the image of Africa as “the other world,” the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant beastiality…

It might be contended, of course, that the attitude to the African in Heart of Darkness is not Conrad’s but that of his fictional narrator, Marlow, and that far from endorsing it Conrad might indeed be holding it up to irony and criticism. Certainly Conrad appears to go to considerable pains to set up layers of insulation between himself and the moral universe of his history. He has, for example, a narrator behind a narrator. The primary narrator is Marlow but his account is given to us through the filter of a second, shadowy person. But if Conrad's intention is to draw a cordon sanitaire between himself and the moral and psychological malaise of his narrator his care seems to me totally wasted because he neglects to hint however subtly or tentatively at an alternative frame of reference by which we may judge the actions and opinions of his characters. It would not have been beyond Conrad’s power to make that provision if he had thought it necessary. Marlow seems to me to enjoy Conrad’s complete confidence—a feeling reinforced by the close similarities between their two careers.

--From “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness” by Chinua Achebe.

Questions to answer in your Congo Diary:

1. How does black and white imagery both reinforce and subvert racial attitudes?

2. How does the portrayal of “civilized” and “primitive” cultures both reinforce and subvert racial attitudes?

3. How does the comparison of the Thames and the Congo relate to a discussion of race?

4. Compare how Africans and Europeans are portrayed. Look at power structures—how has power and how is that power maintained? Who’s condemned? Who’s admired? For what reasons? What complexities surface?

5. To what extent does Marlow return to Britain physically and mentally altered from his colonial experiences.

6. Is there a possibility for resolution in the societies Conrad creates? Do any of Conrad’s characters exhibit a high moral standard? If so, what kinds of characters stick to their principles?

7. Are Marlow’s attitudes also Conrad’s attitudes?

8. Is this a racist book?