



UNIVERSIDAD DE BELGRANO

# Las tesis de Belgrano

Escuela de Lenguas y Estudios Extranjeros  
Carrera Licenciatura en Lengua Inglesa

A Deconstructive Reading of Heart of Darkness  
and Things Fall Apart

May human truth be fathomed  
May the furious swords be sheathed  
May we trod on peaceful ground,  
Henceforward.

N° 924

Constanza Barbariol

Tutor: Lorrain Ledwith

Departamento de Investigaciones

Fecha defensa de tesina: 17 de diciembre de 2015

Universidad de Belgrano  
Zabala 1837 (C1426DQ6)  
Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires - Argentina  
Tel.: 011-4788-5400 int. 2533  
e-mail: [invest@ub.edu.ar](mailto:invest@ub.edu.ar)  
url: <http://www.ub.edu.ar/investigaciones>



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## Abstract

There is never enough. Even though much has been said about post-colonial studies and research has been carried out in this extensive field, a final word on this issue has not been uttered and, I gather, it will not be pronounced soon either, as it is solely a question of human nature dwelling over those concerns that define our identity and constitute, ultimately, who we were, are or want to be. Consequently, the present analysis is based on *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad and *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe and the intention of the present work is to cut across both texts with a Deconstructive view to comment on relevant sections in the texts and explore how the texts enter in a dialogic relation that has bound them together for a long time by now.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank, first, my parents to instil in me the pleasure of learning and enjoying passionately whatever I did. My sisters who lovingly accompanied me through whatever door life opened for me. Lastly, in order, yet not in importance, I want to acknowledge the inspiration my Literature teachers gave me. Clearly -without knowing it- they marked my life with their generosity, kindness, knowledge and professional example. My life became certainly different after their enlightening lessons on Literature and –beautifully enough- Life and Literature became one to me, bound forever, a way of living. Florencia Perduca, Lorrain Ledwith, Isabel Vassallo: my sincerest “thank you”: you have helped me better myself day by day, book in hand.

## I) Introduction

“In the colonies the truth stood naked  
but the citizens of the mother country  
preferred it with the clothes on.”  
Sartre.

From a linguistic stance language structures the world and it is needed as a system of signs that mediates between the external and the internal reality that each human being has. Hence, humans are linguistic animals, to put it rather bluntly. Language, in this respect, can be conceived of as an instrument that allows communication and it seems to be quite linear and transparent. People think, put ideas in order and transmit them tidily. Yet, it is well-known that that is not the case. Interpersonal relationships are much more complex than that, not to mention the difficulty entailed in understanding one’s own feelings, thoughts, fears, prejudices and mental constructions of others. This gives place to a tension that defines and characterises nameless social constructs that have been replicated and reproduced for centuries and that few people have dared question.

Fortunately, with the passing of time some concepts have suffered changes. For instance, “literature” and “ideology” seem to be two terms that are tightly interwoven in a more modern conception of art: for one thing, the end of the XX and the beginning of the XXI century gave place to an overhaul of many deep-rooted beliefs that were no longer valid to make sense of the world around us because they were not enough to explain the complexity of the universe. It becomes revealing to see that this movement towards something “new” can be achieved through Literature.

Literature, which is simply another means to give expression to art, should be political, understood in the way that Rancière conceives art: it is a political commitment, as far as art is the means to produce a change and raise awareness about the human condition and existence. A work of art should *generate* values, worlds within worlds; ideally, it should be judged with defamiliarised eyes so that a certain philosophy or set of values can be founded from and on it. In other words, with eyes that are ready to apprehend a new experience and that are not tainted with preconceptions already. Moreover, Rancière also expressed his ideas saying that the artistic creation should modify our perspective and attitude towards our collective surrounding (Rancière, 2011:30). It all seems to point at the fact that there is a high degree of commitment

in political art and this is clearly conceived not as art that sides with political stands or parties, but rather as art that exerts itself to bring about some modification by means of positing new ideas, questioning old ones.

Around the 1960s it was Jacques Derrida and his theory on Deconstruction that came to the rescue of those ideas and beliefs that had been installed in society, deeply embedded and engrained and were wreaking havoc as they kept on being reproduced without being interrogated. In his book *Deconstruction Theory and Practice*, Christopher Norris explains that, from a Deconstructive standpoint, there is no longer a sense of “primal authority attaching to the literary work”. The place of criticism, in this view, is an active one as it is called into play to invade the long-held autonomy of the text and put to question “traditional attributes of literary meaning” (1982: 24). This is a crucial point that deserves close attention: “deconstruction is not simply a strategic reversal of categories which otherwise remain distinct and unaffected- it seeks to undo both a given order of priorities *and* the very system of conceptual opposition that makes that order possible” (Norris, 1982: 31) Up to a certain point then, Deconstruction can be understood as a “reactionist” movement to the more traditional ideas of Structuralism because the last one is a fervent and faithful seeker of “truth” in the text; it immobilises meaning in the text: language is merely a way of *representing* knowledge, yet it is not knowledge itself. Conversely, for Deconstruction there is no such a clear cut distinction between the text and criticism and this “activity of reading” interrogates the text and contests the rigid and reductive mode of Structuralism. For Derrida, Structuralism has a “residual attachment to a Western metaphysics of meaning and presence”, which implies that it replicates unquestionably a way of thinking which places the locus of “truth” and meaning in the way Occident perceives reality (Norris, 1982: 26). And, at the same time, a high priority is given to spoken language as it entails a sense of truth, authenticity and self-present speech as opposed to the depersonalised and deceiving shadow of writing. Nonetheless, what Derrida argues is that “writing has the power to dismantle the whole traditional edifice of Western attitudes to thought” (Norris, 1982: 29) because it is always a part of “social existence” (39) and Deconstruction is, therefore, an activity “performed by texts which in the end have to acknowledge their own partial complicity with what they denounce” (48).

Finally, so as to introduce the last key concept to approach the analysis of the texts, I want to make reference to the importance of the time of production and reception of texts in general. In this particular case, one of the texts chose- *Things Fall Apart*- is said to belong to what has been called “oppositional literature” or “writing back literature” defined as “a body of postcolonial works that take a classic English text as a departure point, supposedly as a strategy for contesting the authority of the canon of English literature” (Thieme, 2000:1)

The present work will tackle the analysis in the following fashion. In the first place, the theoretical framework will be divided into three sections. To begin, the concept of “Deconstruction” will be expanded and, subsequently, some definitions within “post-colonialism” are going to be explained, as they help contextualise Achebe’s text. Thirdly, two thematic units of analysis of the texts: language, culture will be explained, following John Thieme’s essay “Introduction: parents, bastards and orphans”. In what can be considered a second part of the work, the analysis of literary texts will take place in an attempt to cast light through and with the texts by Achebe and Conrad on how criticism and the texts are interwoven. This is the point that the present work intends to problematise: did Achebe have a point when he claimed that Heart of Darkness is a text that dehumanises Africans? Did Conrad stereotype Africa as the Dark Continent in his text? At the same time, has Achebe been able to find a “third space”, a new counter-semiotic system to represent Africanness?

## II) Theoretical framework

“If there is such a thing as literary theory, then it would seem obvious that there is something called literature which it is the theory of.”

Terry Eagleton.

### 1) Deconstruction: “He saw things as black and white. And black was evil”

“To deconstruct is to read texts with an eye sharply trained for contradictions, blind-spots, or moments of hitherto unlooked”

Terry Eagleton.

Derrida was one of the pioneers who originated what came to be known as Deconstruction and he himself said that he was “not sure that Deconstruction can function as a literary *method* as such. (...) The laws of reading are determined by that particular text that is being read (...) in this sense deconstruction is not a method.” (Wolfrey, 1999: 271) This statement by the French thinker posits a significantly challenging and most interesting question: readers are not faced with a set of fixed rules or theories that can be applied indistinguishably to any literary text because this would resemble –in a way- a magic formula that solved all difficulties. Rather, readers are presented with a “way of thinking” literary texts critically and, thus, fixed centres are questioned, once-univocal institutionalised propositions are cross-examined. In this respect, Deconstruction is not about taking a text apart or breaking it up as it were an apparatus made of several components that can be studied both together and then in isolation. It is, rather, a text-based technique and its purpose is to demonstrate that apparently neutral pairing of the elements is not neutral, not at all. But rather, this guileful coexistence of terms and binaries is grounded on violent hierarchies: one of the terms has a superior position over the other one. Recurrent examples of these ideas are: good-bad, man-woman, nature-culture, white-black, West-East. Deconstruction pushed the idea forward: it is not just a matter of turning these hierarchies upside down because that entails having another term commanding over the other; it becomes then necessary to expose and expand the *constructed nature* of that hierarchy. That is what has to be questioned.

Literary textuality has been defined already as a reality that is open and the locus of meaning in a text cannot be pin-pointed permanently or, at least, not within the texts that Umberto Eco defines as “open”, which offer a somewhat restrictive reading experience (Webster, 1990: 98). In this respect, there is a matter that deserves attention: even though a text is, as Barthes conceives it, a “network” and the author is somebody who “orchestrates linguistic raw materials” (Webster, 1990:99), the surface of a text is still a place where certain ideologies are inscribed, installed and reproduced. It is *this* concept that concerns the present study. Departing from the premise that meaning is not a stable concept: “meaning is never in fact single or fixed, but constantly proliferating and shifting or slipping, whether it be spoken or written language” (Webster, 1990:105) and centres of meaning call for dismantling because *that* should be the capacity of art insofar as it intends to break apart centres of meaning. Jacques Derrida explains in his essay “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” (1966) that “it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no centre, that the centre could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play” (Lodge, 2000: 91) Henceforth, it became desirable to move away from the idea of the univocal and fixed centre: there is no natural place for the centre, as Derrida says.

In a most illuminated conversation that Derrida held with John Caputo, the philosopher explains how “the very meaning and mission of deconstruction is to show that things –texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices of whatever size and sort you need- do not have definable meaning and determinable missions, that they are always more than any mission would impose, that they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy” (Caputo, 1997, 31) To fully inhabit this idea, a change in the mode of thinking and approaching texts needs to take place; it seems quite difficult to apprehend these concepts since there is a very powerful system that works in tandem with our intentions as critical readers and that is the powerful social apparatus: culture, politics, religion, history, philosophy exert an overwhelming influence

–many times subtle- and this mental strait-jacket is what many times deters readers from breaking up the structure. Nevertheless, the invitation is on the table.

In his essay entitled “Deconstruction” Andrew Benjamin places one of the characteristics of Deconstruction in “contesting, the authority of the linguistic, and of language and of **logocentrism**” (Malpas, 2006: 82) The bold type is in the original piece and one comes to think that this is pivotal in the analysis: it refers to those dark areas within the Western frame of mind that gave privilege and priority of one concept over another. Hence, Derrida opposed –to begin with- De Saussure’s priority of the spoken word over the written one. For De Saussure writing was depersonalised and it threatened truth with a deceiving shadow, whereas spoken discourse entailed truth, authenticity and self-presence. However, in Derrida’s mind “writing has the power to dismantle the whole traditional edifice of Western attitudes to thought and language” (Norris, 1982: 29). It is my intention then to dismantle the construction that has been made of both *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart* because a symphonic and agreeable order exists but just as a mere façade.

## 2) Post-colonialism: “Theory is good, but it doesn’t prevent things from existing”

“Writing is that which exceeds-  
and has the power to dismantle-  
the whole traditional edifice  
of Western attitudes to thought and language.”

Christopher Norris.

In the most inspiring text *The Empire Writes Back*, a very revealing fact can be grasped: with the shift in the understanding of history which, consequently, gave place to a different frame of mind, “Europeans were forced to realise that their culture was only one amongst a plurality of ways of conceiving of reality and organising its representations in art and social practice” (Ashcroft et al, 1989:154). The realisation that there was more to the world than just Europe challenged them to rethink the position of the Continent in respect with the rest of the world and to produce a new discourse that allowed Europeans to apprehend what was new to them. This became, consequently, the discourse of the conquest: one that would give Europeans the chance of enforcing their perception of the universe everywhere else.

According to Foucault, discourse is a “system of statements within which the world can be known” (Ashcroft et al, 2000:42) and the prolific work of thinkers in the aftermath of the two World Wars led to an overhauling of discourses that seemed to be futile, invalid and inaccurate after the experience of war. Precisely, literature and art nourished themselves from these novel discourses and political changes so as to start depicting a reality “truer” to the “reality” that was lived, if that is ever possible. As a consequence, with shifting paradigms there was a different understanding of the state of affairs and, hence, human production. It is the attempt of the present work to approach two texts together and to explore the ways in which theories on Post-Colonialism become a significant tool to penetrate the surface of *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart* from a different perspective than the one allegedly held in the time of its production. In order to carry out the analysis, I will also refer to the importance of the term “post-colonial”. This has been defined by Ashcroft et al as “the study and analysis of European territorial conquests, the various institutions of European colonialism, the discursive operations of empire, the subtleties of subject construction in colonial discourse and the resistance of those subjects (...) to such incursions and their contemporary colonial legacies in both pre- and post-independence nations and communities” (Ashcroft et al, 1998:187). As the authors explain, post-colonial “theory” has been produced in all societies where the imperial force of Europe laid hands on, however, the material produced did not come always in the form of a theoretical text. “Post-colonial”, as they see it, has come to embrace both the material effects of colonisation and the vast multiplicity of everyday responses to it throughout the world. As they explain in the book: “We use the term ‘post-colonial’ to represent the continuing process of imperial suppressions and exchanges throughout this diverse range of societies, in their institutions and their discursive practices. (...)” (Ashcroft et al, 1995:2). In this explanation it becomes clear that there is a relationship of dominance in which one country dominates over the other and in this interaction part of the identity of the dominated territory is lost.

Hence, this term becomes relevant to the present analysis insofar as *Things Fall Apart* is an example of those texts produced by committed writers who through their profession wanted to denounce and speak about the suppressions exerted by the ruling powers, the conquerors. At the same time, the setting in time of the text is pre-colonial Africa which turns to be instrumental for Achebe’s intention: he denounces the



quintessence of colonial discourse and he does this by means of “appropriation”. Ashcroft et al explain that this term makes reference to those post-colonial societies that “take over aspects of the imperial culture-language, forms of writing, film (...) that may be of use to them in articulation to their own social and cultural identities” (Ashcroft, 2000: 19). This is because language used in this way, that is to say, language that has been appropriated criticises, it “can bear the burden of another experience”, as Achebe put it. (Ashcroft, 2000: 19). What the author may have intended to produce was an experience of defamiliarisation in order to pull to pieces the ultimate assumption that English language is the imperial centre. Moreover, the reader gets to witness the change in culture from pre-colonial African to post-colonial one which illustrates what was mentioned above: in the transaction of cultures there are elements that are lost. And, most of the times, lost for good.

### 3) “Parents, bastards and orphans”

Even though there was a shared social fiction according to which the colonised territories were better off with the Europeans ruling over them, it was little by little evident that the colonising country was depriving more and more its colonies from language and, consequently, identity. John Thieme develops in an essay, from which I have borrowed the title to this section, “Parents, bastards and orphans”, a most interesting concept. He speaks of “con-texts” and “pre-texts” and he explains that he has chosen “the terms ‘con-texts’, to indicate postcolonial texts that engage in direct, if ambivalent, dialogue with the canon by virtue of responding to classic English text, and ‘pre-text’, to refer to the canonical texts to which they respond” (Thieme, 2000:4). These concepts become another anchoring point for the present work because *Heart of Darkness* becomes the “pre-text” and *Things Fall Apart* is, thus, the “con-text”. The relationship between texts is always complex and ambivalent and on wondering why, the answer may be that, as Thieme argues, “while dominant discourses may be challenged by counter-discourse practices, counter-discourse cannot ultimately offer ‘genuine revolution’” (Thieme, 2000: 3). That is to say that a real deconstruction has not taken place yet, otherwise, a new space should have been found: a third place which does away with violent hierarchies and prevents the pre-text cultures from becoming devoid of their –as mentioned– language and identity.

The influence of family bonds is ever pervasive: whether humans like it or not, rebelling against this is a lost battle, because the liaison that exists between children and their parents is inevitable and long-lasting and, equally important, it transcends in time and space. What happened to colonies during the imperial race that reached its peak in the XIX is related to what Edward Said explains, the filiative figure is a very useful prism through which to look at post-colonial literary relationships (Thieme, 2000: 7). Those “adopted” territories resembled a lot the features of the “motherland” that was looking after them. Similarities can easily be spotted in terms of architecture, political organisation and education. Yet, part of the process of bringing up a child is encountering difficulties and dealing with problems when the child confronts parental authority. This is troublesome for the adult, however, it is a healthy sign of maturity and progress; the once-dependent child is becoming an autonomous thinker ready to judge and challenge impositions, regulations or any kind of hurdle which he/she does not agree with. Colonies are no different: there came a moment when the relationship between the ruling and ruled countries became strained because impositions started to be challenged. In relation to this issue, Homi Bhabha says “what is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives or originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences” (Thieme, 2000:6). Otherwise, the reading of the “pre-text” becomes stagnant water if everything boils down to pinpointing the suppressive discursive field that is/was constructed there, without intending to move forwards, to find a challenging discourse. Quite rightly, Edward Said argues that “culture and imperialism cannot be separated and genres such as the novel ‘were immensely important in the *formation* of imperial attitudes, references, and experiences” (Thieme, 2000:16). Some novels can definitely be read as blueprints of imperialism and this is the case with Conrad’s text, in Achebe view as long as the text has been very often said to be one that presents the African continent as the one that needs to be “rescued” by Europeans of its savagery and lack of civilisation. Let’s take for now what Chinua Achebe says in this respect. To his mind, Conrad “projects the image of Africa as “the other world”, the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilisation, a place where man’s vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality” (Achebe, 1988: 252). Africa becomes the foil of Europe: a place where the savage has to be suppressed and educated, “a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe’s own state of spiritual grace will be manifest” (Achebe, 1988: 251) To top it off, towards the end of this essay in defence of Africa, Achebe writes “Africa is to Europe as the picture is to Dorian Gray- a

carrier onto whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate.” (Achebe, 1988: 260) I am inclined to believe that Achebe’s way of thinking was valid.

### III) Textual analysis: summary of *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart*

#### 1) Summary of the *HOD* and *TFA*

On the basis of the concepts shared so far the focus henceforward will be placed on two elements to approach the two literary texts: language and its power to construct identity and representation, in the light of the theoretical backgrounds. To put it differently, I will problematise how language constructs worlds and the result of this may be a misrepresentation of the other, in other words, a construction of the other as someone marginal or evil.

Before getting started with the analysis proper, a brief summary of the two texts will be given. To begin with, *Heart of Darkness* is Conrad’s framed novella written in 1899 that revolves around Marlow, a sailor, and his journey up to the Congo River to meet Mr Kurtz, who has earned a reputation for being an idealist man of great abilities. The text could be said to respond to Victorian concerns, namely a noticeable interest for the acquisition of lands in order to expand the British Empire, yet it is a Modernist text in style. It is loaded with symbols and the semiotic system constructed through colours, animals, objects and nature –together with the striking use of lexis and punctuation– help to make of this text something like a book or a painting. The main plot takes the reader through the Company’s journey to Africa. As Marlow travels to and through Africa, he encounters brutality in the Company’s stations. The reader cannot help feeling shocked in his/her eye’s mind as violent images are presented amidst an apparently impenetrable darkness. As with all literary texts: it is not about *what* the text means, but rather *how*. In this case what is salient is how “using the journey into a physical interior as a correlative for a journey into a psychological heartland” (Thieme, 2000: 15) highlights the difficulty that those travelling on the *Nellie* had to make sense of a new reality. The atrocities witnessed are unspeakable for the narrator and, after all, because the narration is mediated it becomes difficult to trust the narrative. Memory fails, as it is shown in the following quote: “And I heard –him- it- this voice- other voices- all of them were so little more than voices- and the memory of that time itself lingers around me, impalpable, like a dying vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage, or simply mean, without any kind of sense” (HOD: 76). And the reader also learns that “all Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz; and by-and-by (...) most appropriately, the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs had intrusted him with the making of a report, for its future guidance.” In the wake of the experience that the text renders, the reader concludes that the “Suppression of Savage” will eventually be replicated and reproduced. Imperialism takes the lead.

On its part, *Things Fall Apart* is aligned with Yeats’ poem “The Second Coming” from which Achebe borrowed a verse to title his novel. This text can be said to “write back” or “strike back with the pen” to Conrad’s novella. The main line of the plot revolves around Okonkwo who is a wealthy and respected warrior of the Umuofia clan, a lower Nigerian tribe that is part of a consortium of nine connected villages. The text opens with Okonkwo tormented mind, as he is haunted by the memory of his father ill doings, who –in Okonkwo’s eyes- was a coward and died leaving him the burden of cleaning that reputation. As the story unfolds, the reader becomes immersed in the life of Umuofia people and Okonkwo internal turmoil: he wants to earn a reputation of his own, yet he cannot get rid of his past and this yields terrible mistakes or, even worse, inaction from his part.

## 2) *Heart of Darkness*, “After us, the savage God”

“The conquest of the earth,  
which mostly means taking it away  
from those who have a different complexion  
or slightly flatter noses than ourselves”

*Heart of Darkness*.

Conflict arises when a fake sense of universality is imposed and held valid everywhere. That is to say, if the world is understood in the same way wherever we are, there is a risk of misinterpreting and misconstruing reality. Very clearly, Oberika's brother in *Things Fall Apart* says that “what is good in one place is bad in another” (TFA: 74) to what Okonkwo adds wisely “The world is large” (74), which implies that they seem to know that there is more to the world than Igbo people. Later on Oberika says “the world has no end, and what is good among one people is an abomination with others” (TFA: 141). The clear understanding that these people have of the concept of otherness is not the same, however, as the one Marlow has in the portrayal of his arrival in Africa in *Heart of Darkness*. It is very enlightening to see how each text presents and depicts the first encounter with one another and to see how these characterisations serve to inscribe and perpetuate a distorted knowledge of “the other”. After all, as Said questions, “we allow justly that the Holocaust has permanently altered the consciousness of our time: why do we not accord the same epistemological mutation in what imperialism has done and what Orientalism continues to do?” (Said, 1978: xvi)<sup>1</sup> Which comes to explain much of the conflict between the East and the West.

Referring back to the moment of arrival, the change or alteration of truth is so much disguised that there comes a moment when questions stop being asked and there is a naturalisation of, for example, the fact that the *Nellie* and those travelling in it “glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse” (HOD: 63). The portrayal that the reader gets is one of a “whirl of black limbs” that simply creates chaos and disorder: “moving, mumbling, muttering, rushing, pushing and gushing their “prehistoric” energy onto those white men: “the prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us- who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings” (HOD: 63). What this quote shows is precisely the moment in which the white men lacked understanding of what they saw and heard, yet, arbitrarily and deliberately –with Victorian and imperial mind- engaged in an interpretation of the present phenomenon that depicted these unknown men as savages who moved with lack of control, almost as if they were beasts. Even the alliteration and consonance serve to emphasise their rough movements and rather guttural noises: “moving, mumbling, muttering, rushing, pushing and gushing”, here the /m/ sound is very relevant since it seems to mirror even the noise produced by apes or monkeys.

In the minds of those on board, there is no desire whatsoever to understand or come to terms with a reality dissimilar to theirs, rather the opposite. Marlow, in fact, inscribes the marginalising discourse with which they left English waters and they headed to “all that mysterious life at the wilderness that stir in the forest, in the jungles, in the hearts of the wild men” (HOD: 34). The previous quote serves to epitomise how without having reached the place they knew already that they would encounter untamed men. Later on, taking up the words of the women who “knitted black wool feverishly” (HDD: 38), the narratorial voice repeats that the lady refers to “weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways” (HDS: 40). The scene here is shocking because it presents the men as if they were literally animals that needed to stop being fed by their mothers, as the text goes, “weaning” them. Furthermore, “they were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, -nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom” (HDS: 44). This little extract, just as well as many others from the text, comes to illustrate what Derrida meant by “violent hierarchies” that have been reproduced without much questioning. Africans are depicted as “shadows of disease”, non-entities that with a sickly green colour dim in the darkness that characterises them and they stand in total opposition to the whiteness and purity that defines Europeans. What is more, pathetic fallacy is very revealing in the text: Africans are illustrated with pitch-black darkness, the same that characterises the continent as a whole.

To my mind, the quote that synthesises *Heart of Darkness* is “The horror!”. This expression is used with incremental repetition and the reader is persuaded into believing that Mr Kurtz experience in the heart of Africa is equalled to a horrific experience: one which is too revolting to tolerate because it shows the

<sup>1</sup> In 2003, Said wrote a new Preface to his original text and this quote belongs to that section.

repulsive and sickening side of human experience. The text, moreover, is loaded with silences and spaces of indeterminacy that leave quite a lot to the reader's imagination. There are no crystal-clear indications as to what the horror was all about: was it an inner realisation that Marlow had? Or was it what he saw? Nonetheless, the inferences that readers can draw are guided in ways that inevitably lead to a place where Africanness and wretchedness are equalled, once again constructing African identity as something evil. The following quote helps to portray the previous idea: "He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision, -he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath- "The horror! The horror!" (HOD: 97). These European men see things and these are visions that are unutterable. There are many things left unspoken in the text. "He had summed up- he had judged. "The horror!" He was a remarkable man." (HOD: 98). "(...) he seemed to stare embracing, condemning, loathing all the universe. I seemed to hear the whispered cry. "The horror! The horror!" (HOD: 102). Moreover, the text reads "the dusk was repeating them in a persistent whisper all around us, in a whisper that seemed to swell menacingly like the first whisper of a rising wind. "The horror! The horror!" (HOD: 105). Africans are systematically constructed and presented as animals. This is the epistemic violence that Derrida spoke about. Basically, most images in the text explore the lexical field of animals their movements, attitudes and a kind of bestial nature. For instance when it says "I saw vague forms of men running bent double, leaping, gliding, distinct, incomplete, evanescent" (HOD: 73), native Africans are presented as if they were monkeys jumping from one tree to another. To continue illustrating, "unexpected, wild, and violent as they had been, they had given me an irresistible impression of sorrow. (...) The danger, if any, I expounded, was from our proximity to a great human passion let loose. Even extreme grief may ultimately vent itself violent- but generally takes the form of apathy..." (HOD: 71) Here, the image is in keeping with what was said before: Africanness is carved in the shape of uncontrolled emotions, leading more often than not to violence.

Once *The Nellie* arrived in Africa, the activities there became simply a matter of imposing, destroying, and appropriating. A quote that serves to prove this point is: "You should have heard him say, "My ivory." Oh yes, I heard him. "My intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my- "everything belong to him" (HOD: 76). The reader is puzzled, how come that everything belonged to Kurtz? That was not his land, after all. The appearance of the white men meant usurping everything: "Ivory," jerked the nephew; "lots of it- prime sort- lots most annoying, from him" (HOD: 59). Moreover, the quote that goes, "Hadn't I been told in all the tones of jealousy and admiration that he had collected, bartered, swindled, or stolen more ivory than all the other agents together?" (HOD: 75) stands in direct opposition to Kurtz' characterisation some pages before: "I was curious to see whether this man, who had come out equipped with moral ideas of some sort, would climb to the top after all, and how he would set about his work when there." (HOD: 58) There is a resounding significance in the drastic opposition between "moral ideas" and "swindled and stolen more ivory".

Furthermore, African men are referred to as "prehistoric man" whose frenetic moments resembled almost those of a string-puppet, a non-human entity that is being manipulated by someone else and the movement of limbs is foregrounded: "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" (HOD: 63). The image the reader gets is one in which fragmentation and chaos are perfectly constructed. To fully paint the picture, the narrator explains how these men "howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity- like your- the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar" (HOD: 64) Again here, the reader is struck, as the mere thought that these people could have "humanity" is presented as unconceivable. What is more, the auditory images have a direct implication on wolves and how they sound and what they do.

These are some examples that serve to epitomise the presentation given of Africans in the Western eye. Conrad's book brims with instances that help to construct the identity of Easterns as treacherous, wild and uncivilised people. These are the violent hierarchies Derrida intended to deconstruct and question, so as to penetrate the surface of the text and question, at least a bit, those constructions. In this respect, Terry Collits explains as well how racial categories are rather useless in isolation because the marker of difference always functions to identify, draw borders and operates at the interface in a "dangerous and messy confusion of attractions and refusals (...) meanings are social, discursive" (Tiffin, 1994: 65). And in an almost Bakhtinian wink towards the carnivalesque and the implication of the reversal of roles through the act of wearing masks, Collits adds that what "skin and masks have in common is that they mark the interface between the self and the world; they are the border" (Tiffin, 1994: 66). This was one of the ultimate desires of the vehement and unrelenting force of conquerors: ascribe each skin-colour a stable identity that would, in turn, define certain characteristics to each skin-colour. As it is known, identity is constructed in opposition. It has been clear, though, that in a post-colonial fashion differences are seen as a threat that has to be destroyed and later on, silenced. Conrad reads these African men as savages, cannibals, ready

to adopt devil-like attitudes because they cannot refrain their impulses: "Why in the name of the gnawing devils of hunger they didn't go for us- they were thirty to five- and have a good tuck in for one (...) I might be eaten by them before very long" (HOD: 69) The reading done by Kurtz here is a taste to start savouring all the mis-readings that he treats his readers with. These African men were not, in fact, cannibals as the colonisers had tagged them, but they are framed as such. Yet, whatever course of action they take, it is going to be read in this fashion.

"I don't know why, but I assure you that never, never before, did this land, this river, this jungle, the very arch of blazing sky, appear to me so **hopeless** and so **dark**, so **impenetrable** to human thought, so **pitiless** to **human weakness**" (HOD: 82). The bold-typed words are mine and they illustrate how Africa is seen in European eyes, loaded with negative associations, the land becomes an easy target for their imperial project. After all, why would they not tamper with these communities if they were so in need of order and civilisation?

Going back to the first problem in the analysis of the work: has Conrad construed Africa in a dehumanised way? My inclination is to believe that he did do so. Of course, it is not my intention to fall into what is called "Genetic Approach" which posits that "a work of fiction has a meaning because its author intends a meaning, and the intention of the author is the meaning of the work" (Kenney, 1988:106). Readers and critics will never know which was Conrad's intention, but what can be used as sufficient evidence is his text. And his discourse, language is enough to argue that the construction of Africans in a very unfavourable and unfair one. Not surprisingly, post-colonial criticism has occupied itself with the analysis of these "grand narratives" where the construction of the oppressed has been perpetuated.

Sufficient evidence has been given as to why it can be stated that Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is a text that shows a rather sordid interpretation of life in pre-colonialised Africa as if the inhabitants back then lacked the "moral" qualities Europeans did have. It has been my intention, however, from the outset of the work to problematise this argument in order to see whether there was reasonable evidence to destroy this violent construction and come up with a new point of access to the text. After all, as Edward Said says "no one is purely *one* thing" (Ashcroft, 1995:98) which illustrates once more the fact that boundaries become permeable and fickle. It was Achebe himself then one who in 1988 said the following: "The point of my observations should be quite clear by now, namely that Joseph Conrad was a thoroughgoing racist. That this simple truth is glossed over in criticism of his work [*Heart of Darkness*] is due to the fact that white racism against Africa is such a normal way of thinking that its manifestations go completely unmarked". Then, he goes on to add categorically: "(...) and the question is whether a novel which celebrates this dehumanisation, which depersonalises a portion of the human race, can be called a great work of art" (1988: 256). The case is clear that the African writer sided with the argument that Conrad reduced the importance of Africa in the order of world and he presented characters totally devoid of humanity. Nonetheless, if new entry-points to the texts were to be found, it can be said that very act of writing carries with it the belief that there is a story that needs to be told and that might be the story of Kurtz who went mad because of all the things that he witnessed in Africa. Marlow says to the reader: "I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, yet struggling blindly with itself" (94). To my mind, there was in Kurtz' character a human side that Achebe overlooked which could have been a metonymic representation of a denouncement to the European presence in Africa. Marlow says it in these terms: "I wanted to give that up too to the past, in a way, -to surrender personally all that remained of hum with me to that oblivion which is the last word of our common fate" (101). The term "oblivion" carries with it much of what was the quintessence of the imperial conquest: atrocities were then forgotten. There is room to believe that there was a memory that they did not want to keep and, it is my belief that the obscurity of their souls was too tormenting for their minds. "The horror" points as well to the darkness of the European arrival in Africa. Furthermore, towards the very end of the text, it reads "he died as he lived" (104) which might be another indication that there was something else to Kurtz' life and death than the imperial conquest, and "all his promise, and all his greatness, of his generous mind, of his noble heart, nothing remains- nothing but a memory" (104).

### 3) *Things Fall Apart*: “The centre no longer holds”.

“The more of the world we inhabit,  
the better it is for the world.”

Cecil Rhodes.

To perpetuate his claim, there is substantial and convincing evidence in Achebe's text that Igbo people do have customs, culture, traditions and beliefs that deserve respect. These are not so clearly shown in *Heart of Darkness*, though. Achebe's text has become a classic of African literature in English for its powerfully evocative images of an “oral, organic and largely male-dominated society are held to be an accurate **representation** of pre-colonialism” (Pope, 2002: 326). The text becomes complex as it dwells in a “third space”, that precise space which Deconstruction wanted to find. In what sense can I posit that it finds a new space that breaks hierarchies? It is my belief that the Nigerian writer constructed a world for Igbo people that did justice to who they actually were, moving away from the demonising presentation that Conrad gave them; at the same time, the arrival of white men to Africa stands as the imprint with which Europeans will sear African history.

From the very beginning, Achebe presents characters that enjoy music, pay homage to their ancestors and cling to the traditions and microcosm in which they had been brought up: after all, is not that the way every society functions? What the author seems to be doing is to work against “(...) radical, fearful, and complex vision in which ‘primitive’ art was seen as expressive of the ‘other side’ of the European, civilised psyche, the ‘dark’ side of the man” (Ashcroft et al, 1989:156). On what grounds can a European frame of mind understand what other peoples around the globe can adopt as part of their identity? To illustrate, we learn that they celebrated “making music and feasting” (TFA: 5), and enjoyed “first kites that returned with the dry season, and the children who sang songs of welcome to them” (5) yet these images are never depicted in the text by the Polish writer. At the same time, the reader learns that “among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten” (7), and once again Conrad decides not to include this aspect of African culture in *Heart of Darkness*.

Achebe, without much ado, makes reference to this situation in his essay “The African Writer and the English Language” where he asks himself the following question: “Can an African ever learn English well enough to be able to use it effectively in creative writing?” and the answer to the question is “yes”. If, conversely, one asks “Can he ever learn to use it like a native speaker?” the answer to the question, to him, is “no”. And this is because, to Achebe, the use of that universal language can simply help to spread a message or idea universally; it is “medium of international exchange” solely. The rest is submission. Using the conqueror's language is submitting your own and giving it up for that has been the imposition and precisely this is what has to be avoided. Nonetheless, if the conqueror's language is indeed used, this should be so simply as a way of denouncing injustice, inequality and abuse, as Achebe said, the “medium”. To illustrate the point: “It is right that man should abandon his mother-tongue for someone else's? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling” (Achebe, 1997: 61-62). Evidently, to the Nigerian writer there was an act of unfaithfulness and disloyalty in using the conqueror's language. Nonetheless, it is very interesting to think about the distinction between the use of an imposed language, which is what Achebe denounced, and the choice of learning a new language willingly, as in the case of Conrad. We are not clear what Achebe thought of that situation, yet, to my mind, there is a difference that should be acknowledged.

Furthermore, *Things Fall Apart* evidences the defamiliarisation Igbo people felt when they encountered white men. They say “these white men, they say, have no toes” (TFA: 74), showing how the concept of “shoes” was totally out of their concept of clothes and dressing, inscribing their pre-colonisation culture. Other aspects of African culture that Achebe clearly depicts in his text are religion and rites: “Uzowulu's body, I salute you,” he said. Spirit always addressed human as “bodies”. Uzowulu bent down and touched the earth with his right hand as a sign of submission. (TFA: 90) Furthermore, kota nuts are a motif in the text as they always appear in moments when there is a rite to be followed, showing how important it was to stick to traditions that kept their culture and tradition going. For instance, the celebration of a marriage condenses various cultural elements of Igbo people –that even become cultural capsules for the readers– “They sat in a half-moon, thus completing a circle with their hosts. The pots of wine stood in their midst (...) Obierika presented kola nuts to his in-laws. His eldest brother broke the first one. “Life to all of us, (...) and let there be friendship between your family and ours.” “The crowd answered: “Ee-e-e!” (TFA: 117). The scene in the reader's mind is not altogether transparent because it is not clear what the auditory

images stands for, however, there is a marked sense of ritual and tradition that no reader can fail to see.

White men do not understand their rituals and celebrations, their culture. Conversely, Igbo people seem ready to come to terms with cultural and religious differences: “You say that there is one supreme God who made heaven and earth,” said Akunna on one of Mr’s Brown’s visits. “We also believe in Him and call Him Chukwu. He made all the world and the other gods” Not surprisingly, Mr Brown does not like this comment and answers, “You carve a piece of wood (...) and you call it a god. But it is still a piece of wood” (TFA: 179). In this conversation Mr Brown proves to be rather intolerant as he “protested” whenever he spoke and totally underestimates Akunna’s remarks saying “the worst thing about it is that you give all the worship to the false gods you have created”, while adding that “the head of my church in that sense is in England” (TFA: 180). This serves as sound evidence to posit that upon their arrival and settlement, white men simply wanted to impose their conception of the universe, their religion and organisation of society. They intended to conquer and divide.

The reader learns, in *Things Fall Apart* that Okonkwo –together with Igbo people- had indeed a strong sense of their culture and identity, which made them feel proud of belonging to the tribe. In the references made to culture in TFA, by no means can the reader perceive an image of cannibalism, as it is hinted at in *Heart of Darkness*. Nonetheless, there might be a degree of violence, especially to Western eyes, when Okonkwo mistreats his wives or even kills Ikemefuma. In closer inspection, the reader learns that such an act is yet another instance of Igbo culture and understanding of the world; it has to do with how they apprehended the experiences lived: “ ‘When did you become a shivering old woman,’ Okonkwo asked himself, ‘you, who are known in all the nine villages for your valour in war?’” (TFP: 65). This quote comes to explain their mind frame, how the tribe had wrought a culture following certain patterns. Okonkwo had to prove himself manly enough to break free from his father’s ghost and show his manliness to the rest of the tribe.

Conversely, *Heart of Darkness* depicts the arrival with a high degree of apprehension, “secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse” (HOD: 63). Ironically enough, and running counter to what has been previously shown through Conrad’s text, it is the group of white men in *Things Fall Apart* the one that betrays the interests of Umuofia and Ogbuefi Ekwueme people and these twelve men (the reader wonders if Achebe was subtly making a reference to the Twelve Apostles) handcuffed the six Umuofia men that had been taken to the District Commissioner: white men doubled in number the Africans and, anyhow, the District Commissioner added: “if you only agree to cooperate with us. We have brought a peaceful administration to you, and your people so that you may be happy. If any man ill-treats you we shall come to your rescue.” But shortly after, a couple of lines later, the reader learns that these men were shaved off all the hair and “at night the messengers came in to taunt them and to knock their shaven heads together.” This does not seem to be a “peaceful administration”, as they had promised. Not at all. Even less when it is said that a messenger “hit each man a few blows on the head and back” (TFA: 194) The text is loaded with dramatic irony: the reader has been fully informed that this was not going to be a peaceful administration. The following dialogue leaves no doubt that *Things Fall Apart* is about the colonisation of Africa for good. They were deprived of their culture and identity:

“Have you not heard how the white man wiped out Abame? (...) We must fight these men and drive them from the land. “It is already too late,” said Obierika sadly. “Our own men and our sons have joined the ranks of the stranger. They have joined his religion and they help to uphold the government.” (TFA: 175-6)

To illustrate the point of “appropriation” developed earlier on, no one better than Achebe; his novel reads: “You will have what is good for you and I will have what is good for me. Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too. If one says no to the other, let the wind break.” (TFA: 19) Later on the text reads, “The lizard that jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground said that he would praise himself if no one else did” (TFA: 21) These two examples serve to epitomise clearly that language, when appropriated, can become another experience which is not the uni-directional that was for the coloniser. In both cases the reader is left with a feeling that there is something more to it, something that he/she misses. Basically, there is a defamiliarising experience. In this respect, there is here a complex blending of oral tradition, customs and proverbs that are totally alien to the reader. When writing in this fashion, the process is two-folded: firstly, to show that the African continent has a language and culture that needs to be learnt since knowing how to read and write in English is not a guarantee that will allow any reader in the world to access the text. At the same time, Achebe makes a political statement in writing in the language of the coloniser to show him how he can be, ironically enough, totally marginalised from his mother tongue. The coloniser is forced to dwell in the place of alien, of the “other” now, while being his (m)other tongue. Fascinating word “mother” in English.

Examples that serve to foreground the importance that language has in the definition of the “other” is the moment of story-telling in *Things Fall Apart*. It is undeniable that stories are crucial in maintaining and helping circulate oral tradition and this is especially more relevant for Igbo people to whom orality is all. In interspersing the narrative with stories that are marginal to the reader, Achebe shows how language becomes a domain, a territory that also needs to be conquered; it is not enough with geographical expansion. The following quote: “Once upon a time”, she began, “all the birds were invited to a feast in the sky. They were very happy and began to prepare themselves for a great day. They painted their bodies with red cam wood and drew beautiful patterns on them with *uli*.” (TFA: 96) These quotes present elements and images that are totally alien to the European reader: the red cam wood and a special dye (*uli*). Moreover, another feature of analysis that springs from this example is the use of African words that were not translated. Stories, specific African lexis, onomatopoeia are some of the instances that Achebe finds to appropriate English and use it as a tool to inscribe, mark and outline the extent to which language can be deconstructed and, hence, a third space can be found: this is not African, it is not English, it seems to be “African English”. After all, that is what Deconstruction is all about. It not a question of moving in binary oppositions, but rather, finding new spaces. Here, the point is made clear: Achebe dismantles the Eurocentric conception that speaking English “is enough”.

The style of Achebe’s text becomes a hybrid in terms of language. This concept is everything to post-colonial studies and one of the definitions given by Ashcroft et al is that “the idea of hybridity also underlies other attempts to stress the mutuality of cultures in the colonial and post-colonial process in expressions of syncreticity, cultural synergy and transculturation” (1998:119). The African writer wanted to do justice to Igbo people before the arrival of the white men; he hybridises English and as the reader leafs through the pages, there is the realisation that folk tales, songs, onomatopoeia and signs of Africanness are interwoven in order to evoke and conjure up African identity through language. “Go-di-di-go-go-di-go. Di-go-go-di-go. It was the *ekwe* talking to the clan. Once of the things every man learned was the language of the hollowed out wooden instrument. Diim! Diim! Diim” boomed the cannon at the intervals” (TFA: 120). Such an image can become vague to the reader. An analogy can be drawn even with the effect created by montage: in the same way as the juxtaposition of images creates a concept in visual media, here overlapping images are thrust upon the reader for him/her to make sense out of them. Some further examples to epitomise the point made before are the following. Firstly, there are quotes that highlight the oral texture of the narrative: “All this anthill activity was going smoothly when a sudden interruption came. It was a cry in the distance: *Oji odu achu ijiji-o-o!* (*The one that uses its tail to drive flies away!*)” (TFA: 114). There are also idiomatic expressions frequently used, “whenever you see a toad jumping in broad daylight, then know that something is after its life” (TFA: 203). Finally, a significant quote that goes “He still remembered the song:

*Eze elina, elina!*  
*Sala*  
*Eze ilikwa ya*  
*Ikwaba akwa oligholi*  
*Ebe Danda nechi eze*  
*Ebe Uzuzu nete egwu*  
*Sala*

He sang it in his mind, and walked to its beat.” (TFA: 60) The insertion of this song, which is totally unknown to the reader, is the way to pull to pieces the assumed centre of imperialism and Achebe uses language to “write back” and he tries to neutralise the misrepresentations of Africa and uses discourse as his means to achieve this. This song, for instance, is unglossed hence the reader is forced to make-do without a crucial knowledge about the character’s motivations and words of encouragement in this moment of the novel. Everything there is for the reader to do is to assume and (re)construct through certain context and frame of mind. In this respect, the procedure does not vary much from what colonisers did with African people. “Does the white man understand our custom about land?” “How can he when he does not even speak our tongue?” (TFA: 176).

In the same way as natives in Africa were swindled language, culture and identity, so is the reader of *Things Fall Apart* deprived of certainties about language. Consequently, Chinua Achebe manages to reshape and remould the usage of language so as to turn it into a site of contestation and struggle, which is just the same struggle African peoples had to bear. And I insist on the following point: what Achebe seemed to aim at is simply to denounce what those who conquered were doing. Why English one might wonder? It is English the language since it is universal and reaches all distant corners of the world; it is the perfect means for him to put his message across. This is how *Things Fall Apart* ends: “*The Pacification of the*



*Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*". These are literally the last words written on the page. Does not this deserve a close look into abuse of other people's language and identity? "Pacification of Primitive Tribes" (TFA: 209). The ending is loaded with dramatic irony: the reader knows that Africans are doomed: they will not be pacified, they will be crushed.

## IV) Conclusion

By now, it may become evident to readers that texts are context-bound: even if they are to be interpreted in the frame of their production because they are a vivid and living evidence of the historical moment that cradled them, it always becomes relevant to resignify them and find new entry-points. Going back to the initial questions that the present work intends to answer: was Achebe correct when he claimed that *Heart of Darkness* dehumanises African? It seems to me that after what I have read and analysed, he was. Did Joseph Conrad stereotype Africa as a Dark Continent? I am inclined to believe that he did. He was not able to think beyond the frame of mind of the time; he seemed to have been biased by his context. At least, the text that the Polish writer produced veers towards a very negative representation of Africanness. Of course, readers cannot tell whether this was intended to reproduce the Victorian frame of mind in order to raise awareness of the prejudice held, or it was the conception that Conrad actually had. I believe, anyhow, that determining which of the last two options is the "correct" one is not important. It would mean going for an interpretation of the author's intention and, at the same time, killing the Romantic idea of genius and inspiration. That is not my intention. Yet, the evidence that I rely on, the text, shows sufficient instances that allow me to assure that there are significant traces of discrimination and sharp binary oppositions between "white-black", "we-they", "Europe-Africa", "good-evil" which are perpetuated in the text.

If Chinua Achebe is tackled through Derrida's ideas, it is possible to have access to the other side of the situation. Achebe's energies were addressed to dismantle what others before him had firmly established and I believe that this was possible through the theories of Deconstruction. Terdiman concludes that "no discourse is ever a monologue...it always presupposed a horizon of competing, contrary utterances against which it asserts its own energies" (Ashcroft 1989:167). So my second purpose was to see whether Achebe was able to find a "third space", a new counter-semiotic system to show *through and with* language what he believed in. And it is my conviction that he has indeed found it. *Things Fall Apart* instrumentally shows that new semiotic systems need to be found in order to continue opening up spaces and condemning the segregation present in other texts and the text itself is the living evidence that this can indeed be achieved. In other words, there is a need of deconstructing with freshness sites of struggle and contestation. In this respect, Achebe's dexterous use of English served him to show that depicting Africanness from a European frame of mind was not enough and, above all, was not fair. Evidence has been presented so as to show the ultimate partial and biased view of life in Africa. Moreover, *Things Fall Apart* is also a vehicle to apprehend the experience of alienation: while reading the text, it becomes palpable that even if the language is familiar, the way of narrating and the images presented are completely bordering and marginal to the reader. On the basis of the research done, I side with the opinion that Achebe intended to create a world in the text which could prove Europeans their incomplete presentation of "the other world". In the Prologue that he wrote for Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Jean Paul Sartre brought to light the position of Europe in respect to colonialism. He brilliantly said: "It is enough that they show us what we have made of them for us to realise what we have made of ourselves" (Sartre, 1961:13), which is a poignant arrow that strikes Europeans just in the middle of their imperial hearts. For once, those who felt courageous enough could start seeing themselves in the light of the atrocities committed in the thirst for power, land and domination. In this respect, the analysis of *Heart of Darkness* shed light on interesting matters. With all rightness, this text by Conrad has been acclaimed for years on end as a masterpiece both in its form and content. As far as the aesthetic of the text is concerned, Conrad has been inscribed in what is referred to as "Impressionist writers" (Childs, 2000: 76) due the techniques applied in the text, almost as if the sheet of paper were a canvas where to immortalise impressions that the reader will reconstruct progressively. Yet what puzzles the reader is that references to "darkness" can be seen as multi-directional: where is that darkness? Is it in one's self? In "the other"? Is a voyage to the heart of Africa moving towards "the heart of darkness" or does it lie within Europe and its *logocentric* way of conceiving the world? Clearly enough, from Achebe's point of view *Heart of Darkness* is a text that inscribes discrimination against Africa, segregation of its peoples and the text places the continent as the antithesis of Europe and its civilised societies. In his words, "a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality" (Achebe, 1988: 252) Africa, then, becomes the binary opposite of Europe: "Africa as a metaphysical battlefield

devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril" (Achebe, 1988: 256); "the very humanity of black people is called in question" (id, 258) However, it has also been argued that the text by the Polish writer resists another point of access and Conrad's intention might have been another than adhering to a discourse of segregation. In its own right, the text may as well denounce the European darkness in living with the mental burden of the atrocities committed.

Finally, I would like to conclude my work quoting the words Stephan Greenblatt who explained that "language is the slipperiest of human creations; like its speakers, it does not respect borders, and, like the imagination, it cannot ultimately be predicted or controlled" (2006:62) The reader is invited by Greenblatt –and myself– to reflect upon the overwhelming power that language carries simply because it takes within itself ideology that transcends time and space. Hence, being a product, being a construct, it entails that meaning cannot be circumscribed and made fix, quite the opposite. Producing this work has made me reflect deeply upon many issues, not only in terms of literature and textual analysis, but also about the human condition. I hope the reader derives some food for thought out of this work as well.

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