

- (8) Jacques Berthoud, *Joseph Conrad: The Major Phase* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p.46. See also Hunt Hawkins, "Conrad's Critique of Imperialism in *Heart of Darkness*" *PMLA*, Vol. 94, No. 2, 1975, p. 295.
- (9) Linda R. Anderson, "Ideas of Identity and Freedom in v.s. Naipaul and Joseph Conrad," (*English Studies*, Vol. 59, No. 6 p. 511,
- (10) E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (London: Penguin, 1988), p. 139. Subsequent references to this edition will be cited paranthetically.
- (11) K.W. Gransden, *E. M. Forster* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1970) p. 97. Emphasis added.
- (12) Ibid, p. 85. For more details about the symbolic meaning of the caes, see Glen O. Allen, "Structure, Symbol and Theme in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*" *PMLA* LXX, Dec. 1955, p. 941.
- (13) Albert Camus, *The Outsider*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1974), p.11. Subsequent references to this edition will be cited paranthetically.
- (14) Adele King, *Camus* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, p. 47.
- (15) Robert Champigny, "Ethics and Aesthetics in *The Stranger*" in Germaines Bree (ed.), *Camus A Collection of Critical Essays* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1962), p. 124.
- (16) Jean-Paul Sartre, "An Explication of *The Stranger*" in Germaines Bree, p.111.
- (17) Philip Thody "Camus, *L'Etranger* Revisited," *Critical Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No.2, Summer 1979, p. 63.
- (18) Tayeb Saleh, *Season of Migration to the North*, trans. Denys Johnson-Davies (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1980), p 33. Subsequent references to this edition will be cited paranthetically.
- (19) See Muhammed Siddiq "The Process of Individuation in Tayeb Saleh's Novel *Season of Migration to the North*," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, IX, 1978, p. 83.

ents, his cultural ideas are quite naive. He reduces England to beautiful women who could be rendered inferior by his sexual energy. It is interesting to note that for Mustafa only his bedroom is where he finds his emotional identity: just as in the Sudan, where he eventually goes back, the locked room with its English books and furniture becomes his true intellectual identity. If the West represents for him intellect and mind, the East is reduced to incense, phallus and bed. The equation, despite its gross generalization, reflects Mustafa's conflict of the two values, which are both false in the final analysis, since neither the East nor the West can be reduced to labels and naive formulae.

#### NOTES

- (1) Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p. 16.
- (2) For more details about the aspects of culture, see Edward Taylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art and Custom* (Gloucester, Mass.: Smith, 1958), Vol. 2, p. 1. See also Alfred L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concept and Definitions* (Harvard University Peabody Museum of American Archeology and Ethnology papers Vol. 47, No. 1, 1952, p. 181) and E. Adamson Hoebel "The Nature of Culture," in *Man, Culture, and Society* ed. Harry F. Shapiro (N.Y.: Oxford Univ. Press, 1960) pp. 168-181.
- (3) This is essentially the subject of Edward W. Said's monumental *orientalism* (N.Y.: Mantheon Books, 1978).
- (4) Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (New York and London: Norton, 1971), p. 311. Subsequent references to this edition will be cited parenthetically.
- (5) Cedric Watts, *Joseph Conrad: A Literary Life* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 81.
- (6) Kenneth Graham, *Indirections of the Novel: James, Conrad, and Forester* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988), p. 102.
- (7) Gloria L. Young, "Quest and Discovery: Joseph Conrad's and Carl Jung's African Journeys" *Modern Fiction Studies* Vol 22, No. 4 (Winter 1982-83), p. 585.

anomalies' like Meursault have no place in this world, since people are judged not by what they think of themselves but by what they do. Meursault's killing of the Arab, no matter how hard he tries to rationalize it, or explains it, or justifies it, is a breach of cultural codes and values which even the colonial French law refused to condone primarily because Meursault did not seem to be a normal person from the "cultural" point of view. A recent critic offers the following insight:

Any Arab listening to the proceedings which lead to Meursault's death might well be excused for commenting that the Europeans execute a white man for shooting a native only if he also happens to have violated a white man's taboo about the correct way to behave at a funeral (17).

In *Season of Migration to the North*, Mustafa's odyssey to England is marked by academic excellence, social mobility, and by utter failure to adjust himself to the values of the new culture: "a noble man whose mind was able to absorb Western civilization." (18) His bedroom, which reeks of sandal wood incense and ivory, is the center of his own culture and world (p. 30). In it the drums of Africa, the heat of its tropical forests, and the memories of past invaders, 'British, French and Italian' (p. 95) keep on reminding Mustafa of the alien world he is thrown into. For Mustafa, cultural ascendancy could be achieved in this bedroom, with an English woman. His bedroom epitomizes the East and it is where both Mustafa's sexual energies and the British women's bodies are wasted. According to Mustafa, the East seems to be a giant phallus whose might could conquer the West and restore confidence to an already shattered personality. Mustafa thinks that he can assert his identity through sexual domination (19). The ages of colonialism, and imperial ruthlessness are equated with conquering the bodies of English women: "so that when I slept with a woman it was as if I slept with a whole harem simultaneously" (p. 31). His wife, whom he kills, on their bed with an African dagger slowly inserted between her breasts represents Mustafa's final surrender to the illusion that the dagger (literally and symbolically) is the weapon he must use to subject the West to his domination.

Mustafa's successes in the academic sphere at quite an early age are countered by his cultural maladjustments. Despite his academic achievem-

subhumans, similar to crawling reptiles: "they'd slipped like lizards under cover of the rock" (p. 65). None of them is individuated, none of them has a personality, a name or an identity. They are hood characters who collaborate with the inclement weather to push Meursault to kill one of them:

It struck me that all I had to do was to turn back, walk away, and think no more about it. But the whole beach, pulsing with heat, was pressing on my back. I took some steps towards the stream. The Arab didn't move. After all, there was still some distance between us. Perhaps because of the shadow on his face, he seemed to be grinning at me. (p. 67).

Not that the Arab victim is innocent, this is an irrelevant question for the narrator. It is Meursault who gradually turns into a tragic figure gaining the status of an illuminated and liberated hero who has been victimized by the values and institutions surrounding him. His indictment is not based on the crime of killing the Arab (which was not a crime punishable by death) but on the jury's "appraisal of Meursault's character" (14). The real victim in *The Outsider* is not the Arab who lost his life but Meursault who kills him.

The events in the novel move us into the conclusion that of all the characters, French and Arabs, it is only Meursault who is sensitive to the alien culture around him. It bothers him, it hurts him, and finally it drives him to murder. The others, friends and neighbours, confront the same culture, but Meursault alone is vulnerable: He remains culturally 'pure', or immune to the Algerian surrounding. It is this 'purity' that leads to his downfall in the eyes of those who try him. Not that he has killed an innocent Arab, but because of the 'purity' of his cultural attitudes that turn the others against him.

Paradoxically, as Meursault's condemnation by the French grows more intense, his understanding of himself and of the others becomes more subtle. His conflict with the alien culture has eventually led to his downfall for he becomes a "disturbing factor" to the values of his companions (15). On the other hand he rejects their pseudo values and by so doing he shocks his own culture for "not accepting the rules of its game" (16). Cultural

Her mind, confused by the heat, shifts to the "more serious business of her life" (p.14), her relationship with Ronny. At that time, realizing her own problem of "not to love the man one's going to marry", she feels "like a mountaineer whose rope has broken" (p.148). For a second she thinks that love is not everything to a successful marriage. But with the handsome Aziz holding her hand, asking him about marriage and children, speculating about his attractive appearance, thick hair and fine skin and about the attraction of the women of his own race and rank to him, she is perhaps stricken by a form of sexual hysteria: "a virgin's fancy in a hot country," (11) She suffers a terrifying experience and enters the cave thinking that Aziz attempted to rape her.

What really happens in the cave is deliberately left ambiguous, for Forster is after its symbolic effects: Miss Quested, the product of the Western world with all its common sense and emotional denial; is now face to face with another force that she cannot understand. Confused by the natural mystery and by the heat and dust, she undergoes a conflict between body and spirit, an expression of the clash between the rational West and the mysterious emotional East. The incident of the caves is central to the meaning of the novel since it represents, in Gransden's words, "India's refusal to make sense according to the rules of Western logic" (12).

The statement underscores the gap separating the two cultures: The culture of India with its sun, heat, and passions and the culture of the English with its cold and calculating logic. And Forster in the issue of cultural clash seems to be echoing Kipling's words that the East and West are the "twins [that] will never meet."

In Albert Camus's *The Outsider*, the concept of culture centers on heat, dust, sea, and the Arabs. Meursault is a Frenchman who is living among the French, but his surrounding is alien to him. His friends, his ideas, and his work are concerned with the French. Even his mother's death seems to take place in France: "the telegram from the Home says : your mother passed away." (13) Only the details of sand and heat remind, the reader of the Algerian culture: "It was like a furnace outside no sunlight splintering into flakes of fire on the sand and seas" (p.63, see also pp. 60, 61). The Arabs, who form the background of the story, are portrayed as capable of mischief and harm only. They seem to be

hatred of and cruelty towards the blacks is due to a clash with "his own culture, place and moment in time." (7) When Kurtz opts for Africa he opts for material gains and riches but his failure in the end is due to the fact that he is treating Africa in terms of European materialism, or as Jacques Berthoud puts it "what made sense in Europe no longer makes sense in Africa". (8) One of the essential truths that Marlow faces when he confronts the alien culture is that "people do not express their true identities but rather the roles assigned to them by their cultural situation" (9).

Kurtz's attitude is the sum total of the cultural situation expected of a European in Africa in the nineteenth century, and Kurtz's true identity finds its expression in his ruthlessness towards the natives. If Kurtz were to behave otherwise, he would have been thought of as a failure in terms of economic exploitation.

In Forster's *A Passage to India*, the cultural barriers which militate against the acceptance of Dr. Aziz in the English Community is counter-balanced by Miss Quested's fantasies excited by the alien land of India, its heat and its caves. Ronny, her future husband, has no compunctions and no scruples about justice, since for him it is an English concept and non-commensurate when applied to Indians. Dr. Aziz, his contrast, is compassionate, understanding and handsome. His closeness to Miss Quested and the beauty of his physique lead to her emotional outbursts and the accusation of Dr. Aziz as attempting to rape her.

When Miss Quested comes to India, she expects to see a frieze that should move her; instead India blurs all her impressions. It confuses distinctions: a cobra looks like a tree, a snake like a stick, an elephant like a hill (10). Furthermore, what happens in the caves threatens the possibilities of human harmony through affection and goodwill. Before Miss Quested and Dr. Aziz enter the caves, they encounter a heat haze, a distinctly Indian element of culture which has serious repercussions on the development of the novel: "the sun was getting high, the air felt like a warm bath into which hotter water is trickling (11); temperature rose and rose, the boulder said 'I am alive', the small stones answered 'I am almost alive!' Between the chinks lay the ashes of little plants;" (p. 147). Forster deliberately emphasized the effect of the heat and the sun on Miss Quested as an element conducive to cultural clash.

The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much (4).

In the words of Cedric Watts, "again and again the tale asks by what right people of one color dare to impose themselves on people of another"(5). Kurtz is a successful station manager from the European perspective because he amasses more ivory than any of the other station managers: "...Mr. Kurtz was the best agent... an exceptional man, of the greatest importance to the company," (p.23) and because of his extraordinary ability to get the natives to help him: "Kurtz got the tribe to follow him... They adored him" (p. 56-57). Kurtz isolates himself in the inner station, with no Europeans around, as if he wants to immerse himself in the Africa he is ruthlessly abusing. His cultural prejudices of belonging to colonial Europe which held to the supremacy of the technological over the less technological renders him ruthless and makes him think of himself as being a god. As Kenneth Graham has observed:

At the central station, Marlow morally deplors the "imbecile rapacity" of the white men and associates the unreality of the scene around him with that human capacity (6).

Opposition to Kurtz is punishable by death, with the head of the victim put on the stake, outside Kurtz's house (p. 59). His relationship with the natives does not foster a healthy cultural exchange, since Kurtz treats the natives in terms of marketable commodities. His practices, crimes, material success and even the ivory he sends to Europe do not exonerate him from the guilt that crushed him. The success he has enjoyed becomes meaningless and empty in front of all the misery he has caused, and which paradoxically turns against him. His final words "The horror! The horror!" could epitomize the abyss into which he has fallen as a result of the clash between the colonially-used culture and the colonially-oriented one.

The tension between the primitive society he attaches himself to and his civilized personality is so strong that he is either to yield to 'the primitive' completely or to reject it. His rejection, which manifests itself in his

between nations seems to be possible, but on a deeper level, this understanding turns out to be transient, superficial, or effected.

The novels discussed below are classics of the modern age: each novel has defied critical exegeses, and each novel enjoys a tantalizing obliqueness. More importantly for our immediate purpose, each novel sheds some light on the concept of culture, and also in each novel, culture acquires a meaning different from the other.

"Culture" in these novels could refer to isolation, nature, race, color, dust, heat and sex. To examine these novels from the cultural point of view is to offer a fresh insight into how culture penetrates literary works, and also the delicacy with which novelists handle and respond to anthropological considerations.

The devastating effect of an alien culture on an individual is true of Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), Miss Quested in E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924), Meursault in Albert Camus's *The Outsider* (1942) and Mustafa in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1969). These four novels also point to the agony each character undergoes as he or she is uprooted from the native culture: Conrad emphasizes the derangement Kurtz falls into because of his long isolation from his natural habitat (his European culture), and Forster highlights the confusion and excitement Miss Quested feels as she sees the Indian frieze with its naked shapes and phallic images and the sensuality that surrounds her. Camus singles out heat and the sun as elements of an alien culture which militate against Meursault and render him compulsive and helpless. Cultural maladjustment and delusions of domination through sexual prowess mark Mustafa's mind as he gropes for his true identity.

In Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the cultural confrontation between Kurtz and Africa does not simply reflect brutal colonialism against black Africa or the oppressor against the oppressed but more essentially the novel underscores the fatal consequences of the clash between the two cultures the Europeans who subscribe to the supremacy of the whites and the blacks who are oppressed, abused, and crushed. Conrad, the ever skeptical humanist, was never happy with such platitudes, and he always questioned the bases of colonialism and the myth of the right of the white race to conquer the world:



## Cultural Encounter in Literature

### A Note on Four Modern Novels

By

Dr. Adnan K. Abdulla and Aneel T. Rustam

The concept of culture is notoriously obtuse in its protean meanings. That it could refer to a "whole way of life, material, intellectual, and spiritual" seems to raise more questions than answering them (1). When anthropologists discuss "culture", they primarily associate it with modes of economic production, patterns of behavior, authority, religious practices, hierarchy of social, marital, tribal power, etc. (2) When the same concept is discussed by students of literature, they tend to discuss it in terms of those aspects which alienate a character from others and from himself such as color, dust, heat, or sex. In other words, the concept of culture assumes in literature significances and frames of reference not ordinarily discussed by anthropologists.

One of the most striking instances of "culture" in literature is the traumatic experience a character undergoes as he faces a foreign culture.

When a character finds himself imposed on an alien land, his reaction tends to range from absolute antagonism (such as the case with conquerors throughout history) to complete assimilation. But when a character opts for another culture in lieu of his native one for a variety of reasons (economic, religious, intellectual, etc.), then the new culture which he tries to get assimilated into poses a host of problems which the character frequently fails to surmount. When the new culture is marred by historical contention, disagreement, and bellicosity as that which obtains between East and West, then the problems are compounded. Travelers, politicians, historians, military leaders, men of letters and adventurers have tried to conquer, assimilate, compromise, or understand the East for such diverse reasons as colonialism, imperialism, tourism, or commercial exploitations (3).

"East and West" is only a narrow facet of a larger area of cultural confrontation, and cultures are impervious to others, and those who intrude realize that understanding a different culture entails understanding oneself first. Although cultures differ, some sort of understanding