The Representation of the African 'Other' in Melville's *Moby-Dick* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

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Abstract

This paper intends to propose a re-reading of Herman Melville's Moby-Dick and Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness and explore the authors' discourse in relation to 'Africanism' where the black African is portrayed as the 'Other'. Toni Morrison introduces the term Africanism as: "The denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreading that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people" (Morrison, 1992: 6). Africanism is, then, the way the West constructs Africa. The latter is seen as a place of passivity, full of monolithic blackness, populated with black savage people who need saving because of their savagery and depravity. The purpose of this work is to explore to what extent do the two authors' perceptions of the African 'Other' resemble and\or differ from those that the general ideologies of their times circulated.

Introduction

There may be no paragraph, no sentence, and no word of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* that has escaped attention or not be mined for critical meaning over the course of the hundred years and more since it was first published. Practically, the same

thing can be said for Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Thus, is it possible to say anything knew or relevant about these works of such remarkable density and resonance that has not at least been intimated before? For Bakhtin literature is another form of communication, and, as such, another form of knowledge. Thus "Even meanings born in dialogues of the remotest past will never be finally grasped once and for all", as Bakhtin noted, "they will always be renewed in later dialogue" (2002:39). Yet that 'renewed meanings in later dialogue' should be questioned too: perhaps the novel's forms of reach and connection make it transitive text: works dealing overtly with connections through space and time which become the kind of territory they describe, extending itself as we read it. Conrad himself noted that: "There are two more installments in [*Heart of Darkness*] which the idea is so wrapped up in secondary notions that you [Cunningham Graham]-even you! may miss it Mais après? There is an après" (Joseph Conrad, 1986: 157-8). Conrad, here, reinforces Melville's argument expressed decades before when *Moby-Dick* appeared. Melville wrote to Sophia Hawthorne:

> It really amazed me that you should find any satisfaction in that book [*Moby-Dick]* But, then, since you, with your spiritualizing nature, see more things than other people, and […] refine all you see so that they are not the same things that other people see, but things which while you think you humbly discover them, you do in fact create them for yourself. Therefore…I do not so much marvel at your expressions concerning *Moby-Dick*.
> (Quoted in Leon Howard, 1951: 12)

In both fictional works what is seen is likely to be not as pretty as some readers would prefer. Conrad's narrative aim is well expressed in his preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (1897). He states, "you shall find there according to your deserts: encouragement, consolation, fear, charm – all you demand- and,

perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask" (xi). Thus, a literary text may produce meanings, **"What art makes us *see,* and therefore gives to us in the form of '*seeing*', '*perceiving*' and '*feeling*' (which is not the form of knowing), is the *ideology* from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it *alludes"* (L. Althusser, 1971:222). The 'ideology', to which it alludes in *Moby-Dick* and *Heart of Darkness,* is 'Africanism'.

For Morrison, The imagination that produces work which bears and invites rereading, which motions to future readings as well as contemporary ones, implies a shareable world and an endlessly flexible language (1992: xii). The selected novels invite rereading and allow us to explore the place that the African Other holds in these fictional works. We consider that Melville and Conrad could not have ignored the presence of the African Other in their basically imperializing societies. Ishmael shows Melville's ambiguous attitude towards the Negroes aboard the Pequod. Marlow's attitude towards the Africans is also ambivalent, oscillating between two poles, and sometimes his reflection is affected by a distorted perception of reality. He displays at times a critical self-consciousness, voiced in demystifying irony and hardly veiled anger. At other times, he assumes an unconscious attitude of racial superiority, as, for example when he is offended by the 'provoking insolence' of the manager's Negro 'boy'.

Africanism: An Ideological Discourse of Otherness in *Moby-Dick*

Toni Morrison introduces the term Africanism as: "The denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreading that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people". (Morrison, 1992: 6)

Africanism is, then, the way the West constructs Africa. The latter is seen as a place of passivity, full of monolithic blackness, populated with black savage people who need saving because of their savagery and depravity. The 'authorial ideology' of race during the two authors' time was centered on the purity of the white race justified by racist school of anthropology and ethnology. At the end of the nineteenth-century most racist school of anthropology developed as a means to study other races and cultures and sought to discriminate between high culture and sub culture and describe the 'savage' and 'barbarian' in opposition to the 'civilized' to emphasize absolute forms of racial and cultural difference. The 'barbarism' of colonized people was 'scientifically' stated through these pseudo racial theories to justify their subjugation in the name of civilization and 'progress'. This, of course, played an important part in the propaganda of imperial expansion.

The ideology of Otherness is principally a matter of perception influenced by religious, cultural, economic and social interests. This racial belief became widespread in Britain and America and, obviously, it was expressed in literature. If such literature can demonstrate that the 'barbarism' of the native is irrevocable and deeply engrained, then the European's attempt to civilize the 'savage' native provides him moral superiority. We consider that the two authors sometimes adhere to the contemporary racial discourse; but most of the time, they resist and reverse the negative portrayal of the Other. Melville's ambiguities or Conrad's ambivalence towards the Other in terms of the dialectic of Self and Other in their fictional works can, partly, be explained by the fact that both are outsiders. Conrad as a Polish émigré in England can be considered as a racial outsider and Melville's social and economic demotion of his family makes him feel as a social other.

In Melville's work the discussion of the self-other dialectic peculiar to America in the first half of the nineteenth century is carried out in an ironic and metaphorical manner. In fact, Melville was able to employ "an imagined africanist persona to articulate and imaginatively act out the forbidden in American culture" (1992:66), as for example, slavery or ideological, and metaphysical concepts of racial difference in America. Indeed, the African-American characters in *Mody- Dick* serve both social and political purposes.

The portrayal of the black cabin boy, Pip, is quite significant in relation to the racial discourse. Dough-Boy Pip is "like a black pony", he is "over tender-hearted […] very bright, with that pleasant, genial, jolly brightness peculiar to his tribe'' (1994: 393). Once introducing this 'tribal' stereotype, Melville reminds his reader, "Nor smile so, while I write that this little black was brilliant, for even blackness has its brilliancy […] But Pip loved life, and all life's peaceable securities; so that the panic-striking business in which he had somehow unaccountably become entrapped, had most sadly blurred his brightness" (Ibid.394). Melville through using such phrases: "Nor smile so", "brilliant" and "entrapment" is referring to Africanism where he is trying to dissolve racist assumptions about African - Americans and slavery as a social, economic, and political institution which had "entrapped" and "blurred" the African - Americans "brightness".

Introduced through the Negro stereotype, as the happy-go-lucky, tambourine playing black boy, he is soon given another, more serious and more individualized dimension. It is Pip who perceives the full significance for himself and the rest of the crew of Ahab's determination to hunt down the white whale: "Oh, thou big white God aloft there somewhere in yon darkness, have mercy on this small black boy down here; preserve him from all men that

have no bowels to feel fear!" (Ibid. 149) His prayer, with its race-conscious overtones and following as it does immediately upon Daggoo's fight with the white sailor, refer to the racial discourse, a theme which reappears in Pip's later scenes. The incident of Pip's first leap overboard and Stubb's subsequent lecture on the relative value of whales and black men definitely, meant to function as a vehicle for comment on slavery.

The representation of the black as the Other refers to complex issues of the author's time, as Morrison well expresses it, "What became transparent were the self-evident ways that Americans choose to talk about themselves through and within a sometimes metaphorical, but always choked representation of an Africanist presence" (Ibid. 17). When the bowline wrapped around Pip's chest and neck, he is being drawn through the water beside the boat so Stubb, the mate, must decide whether to cut or not the line, thus saving Pip but losing the whale. The rope is cut and Pip is saved, but only to take a tongue-lashing from the boat's crew for costing them their catch. The terms of profit and loss in which Stubb and the narrator comment on Pip's action gives this episode another dimension: commerce reinforces the dialectic of self-other through exploitation of the Africans. Stubb cried, "Stick to the boat, Pip, or, by the Lord, I won't pick you up if you jump; mind that. We can't afford to lose whales by the likes of you; a whale would sell for thirty times what you would, Pip, in Alabama." And the narrator adds, "[…] perhaps Stubb indirectly hinted, that though man loved his fellow, yet man is a money-making animal, which propensity too often interferes with his benevolence" (Ibid. 395). In this passage, we can see Melville complaining about what Carlyle calls the cash-nexus. This cash-nexus is the cause of alienation of self-othering. Money, the Dollar, is the fetish that people worship. This fetish- the Dollar- inhibits the satisfaction of human desires for higher ideals reducing them into

membership of a commercial society with no individuals that is selves on their own.

Contemporarily, it is certainly pertinent to the problem which fugitive slaves posed for Northern commercial interests. From an ideological and humanitarian standpoint, the North would be expected at least to admit - if not actually encourage - fugitives. But, as Melville's narrator observes, "man is a money-making animal," and Northern businessmen were overwhelmingly opposed to the abolitionists' efforts to encourage runaway slaves. Abolitionist agitation, in the eyes of such men, posed a dangerous threat to profits, and they were loath to exchange a whale - or anything else - for a black man, like Pip.

We can, then, say that Pip has an important role. He is delineated as a complex individual with a crucial part to play in the novel, rather than as a stereotyped Negro. Melville created Pip to humanize the mad Ahab and also to make us see the black boy's humanity. He makes Pip a Negro and calls attention to this fact both in the prayer and in the opening lines of "The Castaway" chapter. In the latter scene, Melville sets up the theme of human isolation and its relation to slavery. Pip's despair, his belief that he has been abandoned by the ship, is the product of his life as a slave, a sense that he cannot count as a human and this reveals Melville's concern with slavery.

Daggoo, one of the Pequod's harpooners, is another character in *Moby-Dick*. He is described as "a gigantic, coal-black negro-savage" from Africa. Melville takes the opportunity to introduce explicit Negro-white comparisons, in which the latter comes off second best: "a white man standing before him [Daggoo] seemed a white flag come to beg truce of a fortress" (1994: 127). Again in Melville's description of the African there is ambivalence. On one hand, the character's portrait fits the complacent American stereotype of the Negro as "a gigantic" and "savage"; on the other hand, there is something of the noble

savage convention ("Daggoo retained all his barbaric virtues"), where the Negro is not docile and self-effacing. Instead, Daggoo, "the imperial negro", is proud of his race. In chapter *Midnight, Forecastle* he states: "What of that? Who's afraid of black's afraid of me! I'm quarried out of it" (Ibid.178). The black character allows Melville to introduce an important theme: racial relationship between the white man and the black man. When Daggoo is challenged by another sailor who taunts him, "Thy race is the undeniable dark side of mankind--develish dark at that", he cries, leaping on his opponent "White skin, white liver!" (Ibid) The African calls the other's bluff, and in the ensuing fight Melville makes clear that this is not just another skirmish between sailors. It is a contest between black man and white man. We feel Melville, here, clearly on the Negro's side.

The last Negro to appear in *Moby-Dick* is the old Cook Fleece. He is introduced as a comic character when Stubb has some fun ordering 'the old black' to deliver a message to the sharks: "tell 'em they are welcome to help themselves civilly …but they must keep quiet." It is true that the sermon to the sharks mixes humor with a serious bit of philosophizing pertinent to the novel's theme; however, Fleece's thick dialect: "Fellow-critters: I'se ordered here to say dat you must stop dat dam noise dare" (Ibid. 288) reveals Melville stereotyping this one Negro when he has taken care to avoid such treatment of the others in *Moby-Dick*:

> The old black, … came shambling along from his galley, for, like many old blacks, there was something the matter with his knee-pans, which he did not keep well scoured like his other pans; this old Fleece, as they called him, came shuffling and limping along, assisting his step with his tongs, which after a clumsy fashion, were made of straightened iron hoops; this old Ebony floundered along, and in obedience to the word of command, came to a dead stop on the opposite side of Stubb's

sideboard; when, with both hands folded before him, and resting on his two-legged cane, he bowed his arched back still further over, at the same time sideways inclining his head, so as to bring his best ear into play.

(Ibid.287)

The above passage reveals an Africanist discourse where the comic scene and the Negro dialect may refer to Minstrelsy where the black entertains the white (Fleece and Stubb), and the old black obeying the white man's orders may refer to the master-slave dialectic. The ironic tone may probably refer to this 'africanist other' (borrowing Morrison's word) as Melville's strategy to critique slavery as a contradiction to American ideals, those that open the preamble of the Declaration of Independence that *all men are created equal*, that they are endowed by their *Creator* with certain *unalienable Rights*: *Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness*. What is important in the New World was its claim to freedom but what was disturbing was "the presence of the unfree within the heart of the democratic experiment" (1992:48). This can also be applied to Europe. When Conrad came to England at the end of the nineteenth century, England had already known a process of democratization that changed completely the social fabric at home and a colonial system based on racism in the colonies. This reversal aspect is an important theme that we can find in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

Africanism: A Racial Discourse in *Heart of Darkness*

The debate over 'Africanism' in relation to Conrad's fictional work, *Heart of Darkness,* has started with Chinua Achebe's terms "Bloody racist" (1977:787) in his essay "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*". By pointing out Marlow's horrific depiction of the Africans he encounters as mute 'savages', Achebe highlights what he

considers a clear-cut racism inherent in Conrad's work towards blacks. Let's see his view on the following passage when Marlow remarks of the native African, who was his fireman, "[…] was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat walking on his hind legs. A few months of training had done for that really fine chap" (1990: 97). Marlow adds: "He ought to have been clapping his hands and stamping his feet on the bank, instead of which he was hard at work […]He was useful because he had been instructed" (Ibid). For Achebe, the above passage shows Conrad dehumanizing Africans in this novella by denying them the presence and individuality accorded to European characters in the novel. He states:

> Having shown us Africa in the mass, Conrad then zeros in on a specific example, giving us one of his rare descriptions of an African who is not just limbs or rolling eyes…He might not exactly admire savages clapping their hands and stamping their feet but they have at least the merit of being in their place, unlike this dog in a parody of breeches. For Conrad things (and persons) being in their place is of the utmost importance.
>
> (Ibid.788)

So, is Marlow expressing European prejudice of racial superiority? Achebe implies that Conrad evokes ethnocentric racial stereotypes of savages stamping and staying in their place; i.e., the blacks in the 'jungle', while Europeans have advanced beyond that state. We consider that the narrative of *Heart of Darkness* embodies ambivalent meanings where it is hard to state Conrad's racial discourse over an 'Africanist presence'. If we take Conrad's ideas of 'right place' and 'displacement' the meaning will change. We think that the irony turns against the Europeans, those who have chosen to put themselves in the wrong place, bringing their 'improving knowledge', and their 'instruction' to hide their financial motives. What Marlow, for example, perceives as the 'incrustability' of his surrounding is the degree to which it threatens him. Despite its 'strangeness' or 'otherness', Marlow

feels a 'kinship' with the jungle; it is monstrous and yet it is attractive to him. Even if he cannot comprehend and therefore cannot control or contain it, he is aware that it is a source of power and force. This shows an inversion of power between the white man and the colonized land. The relationship of colonizer to the colonized is one of dominant possession. The colonizer assumes that he owns and controls the colonized space and can use its indigenous inhabitants as he wishes. But, for Conrad the land is a space not controlled by but controlling Marlow and later shown to control Kurtz. The equation, then, that the white man's act of possession towards the 'strange land' is just inverted.

The state of confusion that Marlow experienced after the death of the black helmsman gives another dimension to this event. The horror of the death of the helmsman makes Marlow confused, which is expressed in his panicked concern to change his shoes, now uncomfortably clogged with blood. The disruptive intensity shows Marlow close to the black, seeing in him a lost person, despite their difference. For with their work "neither that fireman nor I [Marlow] had any time to peer into our creepy thoughts" (1990: 98). Here, there is identification between the self and the Other. Freud tells us that communication with the other is often a communication with the self. When people lament the death of others, they are in fact weeping over their own through identification and kinship with the dead. It may refer to Conrad's lament, which alludes to the 'lost' mother and home. This pain and deception is consciously and unconsciously expressed in this fictional work.

It is true that the natives are in no way individuated. They are 'prehistoric'; their frenzied howling and dancing are, like the wilderness, monstrous and attractive, whose incomprehensibility and exotic 'otherness' are equally attributed to them. The landscape is thus virtually erased of

the human – in any social-cultural manifestation. Rejected back into a distant past, the natives are reduced to separate anatomical parts, "black hands, a mass of hands"; "[…] naked breasts, arms, legs, glaring eyes – the bush was swarming with human limbs in movement, glistening, of bronze color" (Ibid.200). These phrases assimilate the human bodies into the trees and bushes, underscoring the stereotype of primitive savagery – the black as a contemporary ancestor, as a physical animal, and as a human body without intellect. The whole novel draws heavily upon a body of cultural texts rich in images and assumptions about Africa and the African as primitive, which pervaded mid and late nineteenth-century European culture – and which still have their powerful representatives today. Achebe considers that Conrad's work is a part of a whole discourse about Africa that includes "whole libraries of books devoted to the same purpose." (Achebe, 1977:783) By 'Cultural texts' we mean not just adventure novels, but other literary forms – travel journals, missionary reports, newspapers, illustrated magazines – and mass cultural enterprises and scientific exhibitions. Via such media, Africa and the Africans are represented for Europeans understanding and 'consumption' as the darkest wild place full of 'savages', which produce stereotypic images of the African as the 'Other'.

The chain-gang episode shows Africanism as "a dark and abiding presence […] both a visible and an invisible mediating force" (1992:46). Marlow gives us details of what he witnesses. He gives us images of appalling decay and futile suffering, waste and physical atrocity, and this is surely accentuated by some phrases of the following extract: "A slight clinking behind me made me turn my head. Six black men advanced in a file, toiling up the

path…I could see every rib… each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were clinking" (1990: 154). The accumulation of particular concrete sense impressions (aural and visual) images - clinking, advancing blacks, iron collars - slowly consolidate into meaning. Marlow hears a clinking and gradually he attributes signification to it: it is the chain of a chain gang. Later, the description is more violent with the description of the 'shapes' in the grove of death. The following phrases- the face, the black bones, the eyelids, the orbs, the bundles of acute angles and dying laborers- reveals slavery as an inhuman enterprise.

Hence, the misrepresentation of the natives in this narrative is Conrad's 'strategy' to make us 'see' the atrocities caused by the ideology of difference celebrated in the nineteenth century in Europe. The episode of the 'chain gang' dramatizes the Self - Other dialectic where the African Other is reduced to a slave, a disposable subject. The 'clinking' sound of the chain refers to a historical reality of the slave trade in Africa, and mediates Conrad's criticism towards the whole enterprise as an economic otherness.

It is through Marlow that Conrad manipulates several aspects of Africanism. During his voyage up the river, at "The Central Station", he recalls that 'going up that river was like traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings" (Ibid. 182-183). The primeval world which Marlow encounters is also full of savages: "we were wanderers on prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil" (Ibid.185). The ambiguity in relation to the 'savage' is the pronoun 'we' used by Marlow. His use of the

pronoun - we - seems awkward. If we deconstruct this stylistic turbulence, we have to wonder about Marlow's meanings of this pronoun. Who is this 'we'? If it implies a familiar conversing community, who belongs to it? Later, the reader has a possible answer. Kurtz's ideals are disclosed in his report of the International society for the suppression of savage customs where he began with the argument that *we* white, from the point of development we had arrived at, 'must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings-we approach them with the night as of a deity" (Ibid.199), and so on. A multiplicity of voices can then be heard, and no clear hierarchy can be established among them.

Conrad as a Western shows his belonging to Europe even if he didn't accept the white man's deeds overseas. One reason that makes us say this is the fact that Marlow shares an ambiguous moral relationship with the main character, Kurtz. Marlow states: "I should be loyal to the nightmare of my choice" (Ibid. 231). However, Conrad's use of the 'civilized vs. the 'savage' opposition may be seen as a 'strategy' to propose the contrast and to redistribute the defining terms of it. In fact, qualities which are attributed to the 'civilized' are shared by the 'savage'. He, thus, critically undermines the 'progressive' thrust of the Darwinian view of the evolutionary social development by suggesting that the 'civilized' is nothing more than the 'primitive dressed up in "pretty rags – rags that would fly off at the first good shake" (Ibid. 187). The image of the savage reflects the inner truth of the human kind and it is the 'forgotten and brutal instincts', which drive 'civilized' Kurtz into the wilderness where he behaves as a 'savage'.

Hence, in *Heart of Darkness* light/dark, past/present**,** civilized/savage reveals a mode of thinking central to modern Western culture. This mode of thinking is a part of

everyday form of living as good/bad; old/young-that it becomes a natural structure of thought. Then, as an everyday mode of perceiving and organizing people and the space, and objects around the people, this opposition carries with it the conviction of the substantial. Things are in or out, standing or sitting, left or right. Applied to this narrative, Conrad finds in these binary images a powerful tool which, when re-evaluated, can provide the means for a radical and disturbing critique of the Western's too-easily assumed cultural norms. Conrad shows the white color representing 'blackness' and the "civilized" Kurtz to be uncivilized and savage. Accordingly, Marlow's comments on the barbarity and brutal instincts he discovers in Africa suggest a critique over Victorian ideas of progress. Thus the negative representation of the 'Other' as savage may be applied to both the Africans and Europeans.

Ahab/ Kurtz: 'Interlocutors' of Africanism

Ahab and Kurtz, as 'white heroes', ironically, stand as Western interlocutors of Africanism. To reinforce the supremacy of the 'white' race both Melville and Conrad invest their characters – Ahab and Kurtz– with supernatural qualities. They stand as 'types' for America as the 'promised Land' and Britain as the 'grand empire'. Melville presents Ahab as 'God-like' man. He is invested with the qualities of a great hero, and Kurtz is described as being "an exceptional man, of the greatest importance!" (1994: 165) Conrad goes further by making him stand as "a universal genius" (Ibid.173) Both Ahab and Kurtz are respected and feared, "not much of an insult, that kick from Ahab" (1990: 135) "be kicked by him [Ahab]; account his kicks honors" (Ibid.136). Whereas Kurtz "you don't talk with that man – you listen to him." (1990: 213) The rumors, too, are used to magnify the characters and make

them appear as heroic figures. Conrad, like Melville, first alludes to Kurtz, then, gradually, builds a heroic stature round him and realizes a pattern for a hero.

The authors' criticism toward Africanism as a racist discourse in Western thought is done through both Ahab' and Kurtz' demon-intoxication or possession.

Melville goes on to describe the rise of Ahab's monomania, when, after the fight, lying in his hammock and rocked by the storms of the Patagonian Cape, "this torn body and gashed soul bled into one another; and so interfusing, made him made". He adds, "[…] far from having lost his strength, Ahab, […] did now possess a thousand fold more potency than ever he had sanely brought to bear upon any one reasonable object"(1994: 186-88). Melville gives us a remarkable account of how a physical wound unites with mental anguish in a craziness that comes to possess and redirect the mind upon a single insane object. The same process is done by Conrad towards Kurtz: "The wilderness[…] had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation" (1990: 205). Both Ahab's and Kurtz's madness make them see things as they are but as we cannot bear to have them.

Ahab demon- possession mediates Melville's critique towards Western Civilization with its obsession to material acquisition. Kurtz's megalomania to appropriate the 'dark continent' refers to the European colonizer. The process of demonism on psychological grounds of both Ahab and Kurtz can be seen as an ironical strategy to demolish the "white supremacy", and mount a critique to the issue of slavery. Kurtz's concluding cry sounds as an end for both 'white' heroes.

Conclusion

This study has shown that Africanism as a racial discourse has no settled voice, in both fictional works, vacillating in dialectic or continuing dialogue between Melville's ambiguities and Conrad's ambivalence. For Morrison, "Encoded or explicit, indirect or overt, the linguistic responses to an Africanist presence complicate texts, sometimes contradicting them entirely" (1992: 66). On one hand, they both inhabit and manipulate contemporary racial discourse, giving a material sense of its structures and functions. Melville gives us his understanding of racial position as an American man in the mid-nineteenth-century where ethnology gives substantial sense to the ideology of race. *Moby Dick*is marked by the self-other dialectic where the African is othered by slavery. *Heart of Darkness* is also marked by an Africanist discourse where Africa is described as "impenetrable jungle" with "enormous wilderness" and black slaves. On the other hand, in both authors'narratives, the "linguistic responses to Africanism" provide paradox, ambiguity, and violence; and serve as a means to critique slavery. For them, this 'Africanist other' becomes a means of thinking about the science and politics of race, the constitution and the boundaries of the human bodies, and the deep structures of identity.

We dare, then, to suggest that Melville and Conrad use artistic strategies to transfer internal conflicts of a "black darkness" to whiteness as "meaningless", "unfathomable" and "implacable" in *Moby-Dick* and to violently silenced black bodies in *Heart of Darkness*. For different and sometimes similar reasons, they experienced a life of restlessness, which might explain the perpetual quest for identity and selfhood in their respective works. The confluence of personal factors of instability like the loss of parents at an early age, social and economic demotion of their families, and the encounters with people of various races and classes on their trips helped to define the dialogue of sympathies, and anxieties of the two authors' imagination; and above all their rejection of the established Westerner notions both scientific and

ideological. Hence, Africanism is used, by both writers, as a metaphor for questioning the validity of 'scientific' theories and, sometimes, refuting the contemporary racial discourse. While sharing their contemporaries' curiosity of that age-old desire of the Other, Melville and Conrad maintained an ironical relationship towards it.

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