

**TAYEB SALIH AND JOSEPH CONRAD RE-
VISITED: SEASON OF MIGRATION TO THE NORTH
AND HEART OF DARKNESS**

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The topic of influence has always been a controversial one. The proximity of meaning between “influence” and “imitation” tends to put the reader, the author, and even the text on the alert since it could be understood as diminutive of the author’s originality, and yet it could be the only means of discovering and appreciating that originality. A major obstacle in the assessment of one author’s influence over another is the presumption that Text A (the influencer) is supposedly a great work against which Text B (the influenced) must prove itself. Hence, while this battle between texts may take the form of sibling or Oedipal rivalry¹ in works of the same culture (even if of different nationalities) or language, it becomes a very complex one when Texts A and B are not only of different cultures, but also of opposite ones such as East and West. The task gets even more problematic when Text A belongs to one of the most powerful literatures in the West (British) and Text B belongs to a relatively nascent literature in the East (Sudanese) and which has been colonized by the political system of the former. From this perspective the study of Joseph Conrad’s influence on Al-Tayeb Salih becomes fraught with many pitfalls: political, cultural, and even literary.

However, the abundant similarities between Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North* and Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* render a comparative study of these two novelists rather inevitable. What makes such a study more inviting is that both Conrad and Salih share dual cultures and come from countries that had suffered colonization: Conrad is Polish and British and Poland was colonized by the Russians and Salih is both African and an

Arab and Sudan was colonized by the British². Moreover, both novelists address the East/West conflict and the impact of colonization on the protagonists of their works. However, the difference in the dramatization of these issues is what distinguishes Salih from Conrad.

Most of the studies on Conrad and Salih have focused on the similarities between these two novelists and have overlooked the differences, which give *Season* its unique importance in postcolonial literature³. Brief references that relate Salih to Conrad appear in Muhammad Siddiq's Jungian analysis of *Season* in "The Process of Individuation in Al-Tayyeb Salih's Novel *Season*,"⁴ in Nabil Matar's "Tayeb Salih's *Season*: Circles of Deceit," and in Peter Nazareth's "The Narrator as Artist and the Reader as Critic in *Season*."⁵ Elad-Bouskila's "Shaping the Cast of Characters: The Case of Al-Tayyib Salih" gives a closer look at the similarities in the narrative technique between Conrad and Salih. However, the most extensive and focused study on Salih's *Season* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is Mohammad Shaheen's (1985) "Tayeb Salih and Conrad." Shaheen's article, enlightening as it may be in pointing out the obvious and the many subtle correspondences between the two works, stands as a case in point to the erroneous presumption raised at the beginning of this paper.

The serious problem with Shaheen's thesis is that it implies that an author's impact on another necessitates a replica or an "imitation" of Text A in Text B; that the influence of Conrad on Salih should result in exact correspondences and even emulation of *Heart of Darkness* in *Season*. This dangerous assumption leads Shaheen to conclude that Salih fails, and sometimes even miserably, "to produce a similar profound effect" as that of *Heart of Darkness* (160). Overlooking the cultural, political and even the literary specificities of Salih's work, Shaheen takes the Conradian mode of narrative presentation, which has been criticized by many critics, most notable of whom are E. M. Forster and F. R. Leavis, as the canonical one against which Salih's literary prowess should be measured. Shaheen even goes so far in his admiration of Conrad to say that it was Salih's bad luck to "draw upon Conrad whose original and complex mind is difficult to grasp" (169)—as though capturing the mind of Conrad is the ultimate test for Salih's literary competence as an author! The faultiness of such an assumption needs no illustration—suffice it to point out two great literary figures who drew on sources for thematic and structural purposes without adhering to exact correspondences with their original texts: Shakespeare and Joyce. Shakespeare draws on multiple sources for his

dramas without limiting his genius to the exact details of the source, and so does Joyce, whose appropriation of Homer's *The Odyssey* in *Ulysses* is a prime example of Text B's freedom in using a model and manipulating it to create its own individuality as a text.

The purpose of this paper is not to vindicate Salih's originality—it does not need any. Rather it is to show that Salih's "misreading" of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in *Season* is intentional and is what endows it with its significant and crucial contribution to the ongoing East/West debate. In a speech in 1980, Salih rejects the romanticized image of the East, to which both the West and the East have fallen victim, and perceives "the so-called East/West relationship as essentially one of conflict" (Amyuni, 1985: 16). In *Season*, Salih subverts the one-dimensional conflict of East/West of *Heart of Darkness* into a multi-dimensional one that not only dramatizes the misconceptions *both* cultures have of each other, but also exposes the illusion of a self-sufficient, insular culture.

One can clearly detect the structural correspondences between *Season* and *Heart of Darkness*. Although Salih does not take his characters on a river journey as Conrad does, yet the Nile is ever present whether in the physical environment of the narrator or in the consciousness of Mustafa Sa'eed. Accordingly, the river in both novels is a major force with which the characters have to contend⁶. Whether it is the Thames, the Congo or the Nile, these rivers not only represent the amoral aspect of nature which while it liberates the individual from his/her cultural boundaries, it releases the two basic instincts of eros and thanatos.⁷ More importantly, the rivers are also emblems of their geographical cultures. Both Kurtz and Mustafa commit a satanic transgression when they appropriate their respective rivers, along with their cultures, in order to pose as gods. To Kurtz and Mustafa the river is a "snake" that tempts them to their amoral and primitive existence. They answer the call and glorify in their usurped divinity irrespective of the consequences. Kurtz invades the East with his colonial capitalistic culture and claims the ivory and the river Congo as his own. Addressing his listeners, Marlow reports Kurtz's claiming: "My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my—" (Conrad 70). On his part, Mustafa Sa'eed rapes the West with an eroticized image of his Nile which he prostitutes in order to become the Casanova of the West. Thus, he becomes "the Nile, that snake god," (Salih 39) that preys on helpless, sickly women and thrives on the pretentious liberals of the West. But poisoned by that which has nourished their monumental egotism, they both end up the victims of their own rivers.

Moreover, the journey motif in *Season* can be divided into the three phases or stations of *Heart of Darkness*: the Outer, the Central and the Inner—which Marlow has to cover before he meets his alter ego. Although Salih is not as explicit as Conrad in structuring his narrative, yet the narrator of *Season* passes through similar phases as Marlow. The three stations in *Season* could be outlined as follows: the outer station till the death of Mustafa Sa'eed; the central till the death of Mustafa's widow, Hosna; and the inner station is Mustafa Sa'eed's private room:

<i>Heart of Darkness</i>	<i>Season</i>
Outer Station	1-46 (Sa'eed's death)
--Manager: the cool and level-headed Accountant	The efficient and realistic Mahjoub
 Central Station	 46 – 105 (Hosna's death)
--Manager: the physically-fit manager	The sexually potent Wade Rayyess
--jungle initiation the blood of the cannibal helmsman	desert initiation the caravanserai
Inner Station	134-165 (Sa'eed's private room)
--Manager: Kurtz	Mustafa Sa'eed

A. The Outer Station:

In this phase both narrators give a rather sentimental and poetic description of their surroundings. What first attracts our attention are the major flaws in the narrators which render them more dangerous than a Kurtz or a Mustafa Sa'eed. First of all, Marlow and the narrator suffer from a severe myopic vision of their surroundings. Although they introduce themselves as being aware of the East/West dialectic, neither of them addresses it seriously and yet, ironically, they tell us that they are the enlightened ones. At the beginning of his tale, Marlow refers to the Roman invasion of England and says that the Romans "were men enough to face the darkness" (Conrad 9). This statement not only affiliates him with them, since he too was "man enough to face the darkness" of the jungle and was charmed by the snake-like river of the Congo (Conrad 12), but also underlines his colonial tendencies. Yet once he is well on his journey, he drops this theme, and focuses on his existential struggle with the inner and outer darkness represented by the jungle and Kurtz. Marlow's pretentious attitude is clear in his inability to humanize the

natives. Throughout his journey he gives the reader accounts of the impact of the jungle on him, an account that is rendered in an impressionistic and ambiguous language that disguises his unwillingness to accept the reality of the natives. Several critics, especially Chinua Achebe,⁸ have pointed out Marlow's impressionistic and biased account of the natives. Although Marlow expresses his anti-colonialism before he embarks on his journey, his attitude towards the natives is a very contradictory one. His attempt at a sympathetic description of the blacks fails, as his reaction to what he sees does not go beyond the physical level. Thus, they appear to him as "raw matter" (Conrad 23), as "unearthly black shapes" (Conrad 24), and they are like the vegetation around them, their age cannot be figured out because "with them it's hard to tell" (Conrad 25). But in an attempt to exonerate himself from any colonial or racist tendencies, Marlow performs a charitable act of offering one of the natives "one of [his] good Swede's ship's biscuits" but, ironically, is extremely puzzled as to the significance of the white worsted on the neck of this unearthly figure (Conrad 25).

As for the narrator in *Season*, he too seems oblivious of the reality of the cultural implications of his surroundings. His nocturnal walks in the streets of the village are merely a context for his poetic effusions and a chance to give us examples of his poetic prowess, which stands in complete ironic contrast to the referential language of the villagers, especially his grandfather's friends. Furthermore, the narrator's preoccupation with playing the role of a detective blinds him to the impending tragedy of Hosna and Wad Rayyess. It is extremely ironic that while the narrator sees himself as fixedly rooted in his background like the palm tree and that his village never left him even while he was away, yet he seems to have forgotten all about his culture when he naively expects Hosna to have the power against her patriarchal society.

Moreover, inasmuch as Marlow misses the import of what he sees, the narrator in *Season* is equally simplistic in his view of his country. After seven years of absence in the West, his nostalgia for his people does not exceed the physical aspects of the village. The palm trees, the cooing of the turtledoves and the water pumps are enough indicators to tell him that "all was still well with life" and that he is "not like a storm-swept feather but like [the] palm tree, a being with a background, with roots, with a purpose" (Salih 2).

Second, it is in this stage that both narrators are introduced to and are intrigued by the enigmatic figures of Kurtz and Sa'eed. However, their first inquiry about them reveals nothing more than their great qualifications as business people, and yet the narrators' nightmares begin when this image starts to take a different shape as they get to know more about Kurtz and Mustafa.

B: The Central Station:

In the second phase Marlow's and the narrator's spiritual kinship to their respective alter egos increases as they get bombarded with conflicting reports and rumors from different sources on Kurtz and Mustafa. While Marlow hears of rumors about Kurtz's illness (Conrad 32) and of his being a "special being," "an emissary of pity, and science, and progress" (Conrad 36) and then of him as being a "scoundrel" (Conrad 46), the narrator in *Season* also hears contradictory reports about Mustafa. The Mamur describes him as an "arrogant and isolated" fellow who inspired both "envy and admiration" (Salih 53). In Khartoum, the narrator gets two other reports on Sa'eed, one from a Sudanese who claims that Mustafa was a spy for the British and that he is a millionaire, and the other from a Britisher who describes him as an unreliable economist and as a "show piece exhibited" by affectatious liberals (Salih 58).

Concurrent with the increasing conflicting reports on Kurtz and Mustafa, both narrators become more and more confused about themselves and their surroundings. Within an impressionistic style, Marlow and the narrator find themselves drawn to a big lie, embodied in Kurtz and Mustafa. "I went for him near enough to a lie . . . I became in an instant as much of a pretence as the rest of the bewitched pilgrims" (Conrad 39), says Marlow. After Sa'eed described himself to the narrator as "a lie", the narrator sees himself, too, as a lie: "was it likely that what had happened to Mustafa Sa'eed could've happened to me? He said that he was a lie, so was I a lie?" (Salih 49). Yet, a bit later he is mistaken for Sa'eed's son (Salih 56).

Furthermore, as both narrators start to feel their proximity to their alter egos, they both try to deny any interest in their subject of attention. At one point during his waiting for the rivets needed to continue his journey to the Inner Station, Marlow says,

I had plenty of time for meditation, and now and then I would give some thoughts to Kurtz. I wasn't interested in him. No. Still 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. (Conrad 44)

Likewise, the narrator in *Season* addresses his audience saying, "But I would hope you will not entertain the idea, dear sirs, that Mustafa Sa'eed had become an obsession that ever was with me in my comings and goings" (Salih 61). But a couple of pages later he, too, expresses great puzzlement regarding Sa'eed's moral equipment: "Mustafa Sa'eed used regularly to attend prayers in the mosque. Why did he exaggerate in the way he acted out his comic role?" (Salih 65)

C: Inner Station:

Prior to their entry into the inner station, into Kurtz's quarters and Mustafa's private room, the narrators undergo a ritualistic initiation that prepares them for their close encounter with their dark selves. In this phase, the narrators relate the relentless hostility and incomprehensibility of nature around them. In *Heart of Darkness*, and as the steamer approaches the Inner Station, Marlow describes his travelling up the river like "travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world" (Conrad 48), along a labyrinthine route that is full of "trees, trees, millions of trees, massive, immense, running up high" which "made you feel very small, very lost, yet it was not altogether depressing, that feeling" (Conrad 50). "We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings," says Marlow, "we glided past like phantoms, wandering and secretly appalled. . . . We could not understand because we were travelling in the night of first ages, of these ages that are gone, having hardly a sign—and no memories," and "what thrilled you was just the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate up" (Conrad 51).

While Marlow is overwhelmed with the thickness, the density and the darkness of the jungle, the narrator in *Season* is almost hypnotized with the naked brightness of the desert. The rhythmic repetition of the narrator's description of the scorching sun and the seeming endlessness of the road echoes Marlow's reaction: "There's no shelter from the sun . . .", says the narrator, "its rays spilling out on the ground as though there existed an old blood feud between it and the people of the earth . . . A

monotonous road rises and falls with nothing to entice the eye: scattered bushes in the desert, all thorns and leafless, miserable trees that are neither alive nor dead" (Salih 105). "No taste. No smell. Nothing of good. Nothing of evil" (Salih 111).

As though to intensify the confusion about Kurtz and Mustafa, both Conrad and Salih introduce yet another report about them. Before the much-awaited meeting of the doubles, two characters appear in defense of Kurtz and Mustafa. To the Russian disciple and Mrs. Robinson Kurtz and Mustafa are great figures who not only have enlightened them, but also have suffered greatly. The Russian explains that Kurtz has "enlarged [his] mind" (Conrad 79) and that he has "suffered too much, [but] somehow couldn't get away" (Conrad 81). Likewise, Mrs. Robinson's letter about Moozie (referring to Mustafa) describes him as a "tortured child" and as someone who played a "great part . . . in drawing attention . . . to the misery in which his countrymen live under our colonial mandate" (Salih 148). However, both Conrad and Salih undermine these sympathetic reports by giving the Russian a clownish appearance and Mrs. Robinson a sentimental and pampered diction.

Reaching the end of their quest, the narrators fall under the spell of their adversaries whose Faustian ambition attract and repel them. To Marlow and the narrator, Kurtz and Mustafa Sa'eed represent the tabooed desires of the id (whether moral or sexual)⁹ and thus their much sought encounter is transformed into a battle with an image of the self they have been denying throughout their journey. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow finds himself "lumped along with Kurtz" (Conrad 89) and when the pilgrims buried Kurtz, it was as though "they very nearly buried [him]" (Conrad 100). Similarly, while the narrator is at the threshold of Mustafa's private room he becomes "aware of the irony of the situation," for he finds himself beginning "from where Mustafa Sa'eed had left off" (Salih 134), and once he is in the room, he mistakes his reflection in the mirror for that of Mustafa (Salih 135). However, despite the abominable actions of Kurtz and Mustafa, the narrators admire them for having made their choice and acted on it. Marlow considers Kurtz as a remarkable man for "he had made that last stride, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot" (Conrad 101). Analogously, the narrator admits that Mustafa "at least made a choice, while I have chosen nothing" (Salih 134).

With conflicting emotions of admiration and horror, the narrators are fascinated with the perversities they see in the very heart of the inner station. Kurtz's house is a pagan temple surrounded with the skulls of native rebels and Mustafa's private room is a Western microcosm of junk paraphernalia in the midst of the desert. Overwhelmed with their adversaries' colossal egotism, which reflects their own, both narrators have the urge to kill them: Marlow by strangling Kurtz and the narrator by burning Mustafa's room. But they refrain from doing so not out of moral restraint but because Kurtz and Mustafa represent their id and by killing them, they kill themselves. Moreover, these dark figures have offered the narrators a rare chance to have a glimpse into the essence of their own existence, of their prejudices and their misconceptions of the self and the Other, a glimpse that while it unveils the lies they have been living, it reveals Kurtz's and Mustafa Sa'eed's extraordinary personalities. Both Kurtz and Mustafa have the courage of judging themselves, of admitting the lie and the horror, and thus they win a moral victory over their narrators, whose enlightenment is probably only temporary. Although Kurtz and Mustafa Sa'eed appoint Marlow and the narrator as their trustees, these trustees fail miserably to do them justice: First, by withholding the truth from the female counterparts of their mentors: Kurtz's Intended and Sa'eed's widow, Hosna¹⁰. Second, in their ultimate betrayal of Kurtz and Mustafa Sa'eed, i.e, in their usurping the narrative of their protagonists, fragmenting it to pieces, in order to justify their own incompetence as narrators.

Although these correspondences confirm Salih's acknowledgment of the influence of *Heart of Darkness*¹¹, yet Salih's achievement lies in his subversive appropriation of Conrad's depiction of the East/West conflict. Two articles refer to Salih's subversion of Conrad's East/West dialectic. Although John Davidson's (1989) study of *Season* points out the Conradian narrative style in *Season* (385-86), it concludes with a major difference between Salih and Conrad:

Salih does not present a completely optimistic picture, for . . . the effects of oppression, whether it predates the coming of the British or developed afterwards, are visible throughout the Sudan. Salih celebrates the precolonial culture, but also exposes its evil just as he sees the potential benefits that comes with the British gunboats. Conrad's tension invariably devolves into an existential problem of locating the Western self in a

fixed position. . . . The narrator of *Season* cannot place himself in such a way, for Salih is calling for tolerance, not mastery. (Davidson, 1989: 396-97)

Davidson's cautious optimism about the ending of the novel—the narrator's choice of eros rather than of thanatos and the inevitable change in the attitude towards women through Hosna's death (396)—is somehow reiterated by Makdisi's "The Empire Renarrated." To Makdisi, *Season* is a "counternarrative of the same bitter history. Just as Conrad's novel [*Heart of Darkness*] was bound up with Britain's imperial project, Salih's [*Season*] participates (in an oppositional way) in the afterlife of the same project today, by 'writing back' to the colonial power that once ruled the Sudan" (805). Salih's *Season* 'writes back' by "draw[ing] its formal inspirations from Europe as much as it seeks to distort and undermine them; it remains, finally, an unstable synthesis of European and Arabic forms and traditions" (Makdisi, 1992: 815).

The key, however, to Salih's subversive reading of *Heart of Darkness* does not only lie in that it demands an audience that does not exist yet (Makdisi, 1992: 820), or in the author's call for tolerance (Davidson, 1989: 397). A less theoretical argument for Salih's un-Conradian approach is in the concrete, almost naturalistic, dramatization of the East/West conflict in *Season*.

Unlike Conrad, Salih does not let his narrator off the hook so easily. By choosing the narrator's own native land as the geographical matrix of his narrator's spiritual/psychological journey, Salih exposes the East/West dialectic which is mystified in *Heart of Darkness*. While Salih tests his narrator's assumptions about his culture and himself in his own village, Conrad spares his narrator such scrutiny by shipping him off to a foreign land.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow's experience of the East/West issue is divested of a dramatic interaction between Marlow and the natives and is sublimated into a metaphysical speculation which Marlow internalizes: the East is muted, filtered and colored through his western eyes and mind. Throughout the narrative, Marlow is preoccupied with re-calling his experience in the Congo in another attempt at fathoming the ever-elusive meaning of his existence. Before we embark with him on one of his "inconclusive" (Conrad 10) tales, the frame narrator tells us that the meaning of Marlow's story is not typical and that "to him the meaning of

an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping that tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze" (Conrad 8). Co's nais, as Watt (1988) succinctly puts it, "essentially impressionist in one very special way it accepts, and indeed in its very form asserts, the bounded and ambiguous nature of individual understanding" that has at its basis "subjective moral impressionism" (316). In other words, Marlow's experience in Africa is one-dimensional in that its search for reality is through a dialogue with one's own impressions of the Other, hoping to understand one's self by figuring out the meaning of these impressions. In the process, the natives function for Marlow, who "assumes that reality is essentially private and individual" (Watt, 1988: 316), as mere sounding board and remain not only nameless but also speechless, and thus, almost non-human¹². Salih's West, on the other hand, is full of real people with real names who exercise their human right to speak, to voice out their grievances or even their prejudices; in sum, they have the chance to live out their humanity. (All the women whom Mustafa victimizes speak out and even curse him.)

Moreover, while in Conrad the Faustian character (Kurtz) is not given the chance to properly speak for himself (probably because he has become one of the natives and not a Westerner anymore), his counterpart in *Season* (Mustafa Sa'eed) does. By allowing Sa'eed, this example of cultural mis-integration (Geesey, 1997: 129), to tell his own tale, true or false as it may be, Salih dramatizes the East/West conflict through a character whose presence is concretely felt and not just as a voice, or a metaphysical cry gone mad in the wilderness. Long ago Albert Guerard has pointed out that "one of the chief contradictions of *Heart of Darkness* is that it suggests and dramatizes evil as an active energy (Kurtz and his unspeakable lusts) but defines evil as vacancy" (244). In *Season*, however, 'evil' is not dramatized at the expense of the natives (the West in this case), for the narrator shares with us Sa'eed's diseased mind and understanding of himself and tells us of the prejudices and oppressions of his own countrymen.

Indeed, Salih adopts Conrad's narrative structure and characterization only to deconstruct them and show that Marlow/narrator's (or the Western) epistemological solipsism is an ineffectual approach for the understanding of the self and of the Other. In *Season*, Salih conflates this subjective experiential paradigm by dispelling some of the haze and mist that surround Marlow's tale, and gives us a glimpse at what is inside the

“kernel”. He takes us into the heart of the native culture, with all of its good and bad qualities.

With Salih the conflict between the East and the West is highly dramatized through the interaction between the narrator and the people of his village who constantly undermine and challenge his illusions and misconception of the East.

Whether in his contact with Mahjoub or Wad Rayyess or even Bint Majzoub, the narrator's confusion between East and West is concretely represented. The best example of the narrator's shortsightedness is that Mustafa, who, though he had lived in the West for over two decades and in the village for only five years, is capable of seeing through the villagers while the narrator cannot. When the narrator is browsing in Mustafa's room, he comes across a number of very expressive paintings of different figures from the village by Mustafa. But the one that stands out among them is that of Wad Rayyess which “was more in evidence than the others” and that there are eight paintings of him. “Why was he [Mustafa] so interested in Wad Rayyess?” asks the narrator (Salih 151). In fact, what escapes the narrator is that Mustafa, whom the narrator has resentfully labeled as a stranger, is more of a native of the village than the narrator himself. Why Wad Rayyess? The connection is very clear: Mustafa could see in this seventy-year-old man the same patriarchal/sexual power and oppression which women are victims of whether in the West or the East.

Another highly dramatized crucial scene in which Salih answers Conrad's Victorian ethos is the narrators' encounter with a spiritual wasteland. Before they reach the inner station, both narrators are summoned into an experience beyond any moral codes and beliefs. This symbolical psychological locus cancels the constituents of their acquired identity: nationality, religion, language, politics, race, etc. For a brief moment, the two narrators engage in a pagan ritual that connects them with primal existence away from any cultural differentiation. In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad dramatizes this encounter by the spilling of the cannibal's blood over Marlow's shoes and Salih by the caravanserai in which the narrator participates. In much the same way that the jungle (and its symbolic forces) attack Marlow before he meets Kurtz in the Inner Station, the symbolic forces of the desert attack the narrator before he meets Sa'eed in his private room. To Marlow the attack comes in the form of his

helmsman's death. Marlow's description of the incident is quite revealing in his perception of the Other as menacing and unacceptable:

We two whites stood over him, and his lustrous and inquiring glance enveloped us both. I declare it looked as though he would presently put to us some question in an understandable language; but he died without uttering a limp. . . . I was morbidly anxious to change my shoes and socks. "He's dead," murmured the fellow, immensely impressed. "No doubt about it," said I, tugging like mad at the shoe-laces. . . . I flung one shoe overboard...the other shoe went flying unto the devil god of that river. (Conrad 66-67)

Armed with Conrad's Victorian work ethics, Marlow "free[s] [his] eyes from his [the cannibal's] gaze and attends to the steering" (66). A bit later Marlow's explanation of his reaction betrays his rejection of any kinship with the Other. He says that it was "out of sheer nervousness [he] flung overboard a pair of new shoes! Now I think of it, it is amazing I did not shed tears. I am, upon the whole, proud of my fortitude" (68).

In contrast, the narrator in *Season* exalts in the desert feast of nothingness. Despite the hostile, barren surrounding of the desert, a feast of life takes place where those who pray are alongside with those who drink, where men and women join in dancing and singing, where all the masks of discrimination drop:

We became a huge carvanserai of more than a hundred men who ate and drank and prayed and got drunk We clapped, stamped on the ground, and hummed in unison, making a festival to nothingness in the heart of the desert. . . . the night and the desert resounding with the echoes of a great feast, as though we were some tribe of genies". (Salih 113-114)

In a rare epiphanical moment, the narrator, the sophisticated intellectual with a Ph.D. from England and who has been searching for knowledge, instinctively celebrates with complete strangers the feast of life. Answering life's call, "to our hero, living is a matter of healthy instincts and will, not of sheer reason; it is an affirmation of the *here* and *now*, as they appear and reflect themselves in the heart, not a far truth to seek with the intellect" (Khairallah, 1985: 108-109). Throughout the novel, the narrator has been, like Mustafa Sa'eed, wielding his intellect against his heart. Although he loves Hosna, and despite the fact that he can have a

second wife and, thus, spare her and the village a gruesome tragedy, he refuses to do help and behaves like a westerner. However, in caravanserai the narrator joins the natives of the desert (the bedouins) in a ritual of communality. He becomes one with the bedouins, and one with the nothingness of the nature, where no questions are asked, where men and gods are equal.

To further illustrate the importance of this scene which sharply distinguishes Salih's dramatization of the East/West conflict from that of Conrad's, one may recall the climactic experience of Mrs. Moore in Forster's *A Passage to India*. In this novel, which is also about the clash of cultures and colonialism, Mrs. Moore is a Christian Britisher whose big heart and open imagination enable her to connect with the Muslim Indian, Aziz, and the Hindu Indian, Godbole. She knows that she should take off her shoes before she enters the mosque and she admires Godbole's wasp. Up till her visit to the Marabar Caves, which are neither Christian nor Muslim nor Hindu, Mrs. Moore is very sympathetic towards the natives and critical of the British behavior in India. Yet Mrs. Moore's Western notions of the self and the Other fail her tragically in the caves where she finds herself shoulder to shoulder with the natives and face to face with their elemental existence that she shares with them:

It was natural enough: she had always suffered from faintness, and the cave had become too full, because all of their retinue followed them. Crammed with villagers and servants, the circular chamber began to smell. She lost Aziz and Adela in the dark, did not know who touched her, couldn't breathe, and some vile naked thing struck her face and settled on her mouth like a pad. She tried to regain the entrance tunnel, but an influx of villagers swept her back. She hit her head. For an instant she went mad, hitting and gasping like a fanatic. For not only did the crush and stench alarm her; there was also a terrifying echo. . . . Whatever it said, the same monotonous noise replies, and quivers up and down the walls until it is absorbed in the roof. "Boum" is the sound as far as the human alphabet can express it. . . . Hope, politeness, the blowing of a nose, the squeak of a boot, all produce "Boum" . . . Coming at a moment when she chanced to be fatigued, it [the echo] managed to murmur, "Pathos, piety, courage—they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing

has value." If one had spoken vileness in that place, or quoted lofty poetry, the comment would have been the same—"ou-boum." (Chapter 14, 158-59)

Forster's Mrs. Moore achieves an extra step beyond Marlow, yet like him, and, "out of sheer nervousness" at the close contact with the natives, she rushes out of the Cave, withdraws into herself and later on dies of heart failure. Like Marlow, she shares the western notion of exclusion as a strategy to define one's self. Accepting the blood of the cannibal or the Indian echo obliterates the dividing lines that separate British from African or Indian, Black from White, or East from West. In the caravanserai episode, however, Salih takes Marlow and Mrs. Moore one step further to show them that insularity (or exclusion) is a death wish, whereas inclusion and communality, momentary and transient as they may be, are a celebration of life, of eros, a source of strength to muster in the face of life's destructive forces, the thanatos.

Whether in the jungle or in the desert, this scene symbolizes the merging of contraries where life and death, black and white, East and West, good and evil lose boundaries. The acceptance of such experience is an acceptance of the Other without any preconceived ideas that lock up the individual not only in a linguistic web but also in an insular culture that has from within the seeds of its own corruption. More in line with Blake's "without contraries no progress," Salih redirects Conrad's and Forster's view of the East/West conflict. In *Season* he undermines the notions of the insularity or purity of cultures, whether Eastern or Western. Just like the lemon tree that also produces oranges, the grandfather's chaotic yet durable house, and the desert feat of nothingness, life springs out of contraries and not of isolation.

One of the legacies that Kurtz and Mustafa Sa'eed entrust their narrators with is their life story. However, both narrators fail to put together the shattered pieces. Their refusal to do justice to their alter egos is rather inconsequential because their own narratives have already betrayed them: Kurtz's and Mustafa's portraits are already drawn by the text: they are a composite image of the managers of the outer station (the Accountant and Mahjoub) and those of the Central one (the physically fit manager and the sexually potent Wad Rayyess)—a composite portrait which only those with "two eyes" can see. As Geesey (1997) succinctly points out that Salih's novel is a "positive message of bicultural, or cultural, *grafting* as an antidote to the 'germ' of cultural contagion that may be a negative by-

product of European colonial endeavors in Africa" (139). The dedication which Mustafa Sa'eed has for his unwritten biography is an apt description of Conrad's Marlow, who is one of "those who see with one eye, speak with one tongue and see things as either black or white, either as Eastern or Western" (150-151)—and thus have nothing to read!

Notes

1. See Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* (London, 1975) which applies the Oedipal rivalry between poets and their predecessors and presents the reading of poems (or literature) as a "misreading" or "misprison" of earlier works in order to appease the anxiety of the influence.
2. See Davidson (1989) for a brief biographical look at the impact of Conrad's and Salih's education, 386.
3. For a rather extended list of research done on Salih's works, see Ami Elad-Bouskila, 59-60.
4. Muhammad Siddiq, "The Process of Individuation in Al-Tayeb Salih's Novel *Season of Migration to the North*," *Journal of Arabic Literature*. IX, 1978, 67-104.
5. Matar's and Nazareth's articles are in Mona Takieddine Amyuni's *Season of Migration to the North: A Casebook*. Beirut: American U of Beirut, 1985.
6. Bouskila notes Salih's inversion of the standard symbolic meaning of the river in that while it serves the narrator as a means of purification, it serves for Sa'eed as a means of death.
7. From a Freudian point of view, the river may also embody the two basic instincts: eros (the instinct to live) and thanatos (the urge for self-destruction or death). This Freudian reading is supported by Salih in his speech at the American University of Beirut (Amyni 15).
8. Although the debate on Conrad's racist or colonial tendencies is inconclusive, Achebe's reading has brought about a series of responses. See Wilson Harris, Frances Singh and C.P. Sarvan in the Norton Critical edition of *Heart of Darkness* edited by Robert Kimbrough, 3rd edition 1988.

9. See Catherine Rising, *Darkness at Heart: Fathers and Sons in Conrad* (West Port, CT: Greenwood P, 1990) for a psychoanalytical study of Conrad's work, especially pp. 40-50 on *Heart of Darkness*, and Siddiq's article for Salih's depiction of the struggle between the ego and the id.
10. Both the Intended and Hosna exhibit unshakeable belief in Kurtz and Sa'eed, respectively, which further exposes the vacuity of the narrator's moralizing in their respective narratives.
11. Salih makes a specific reference to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* in his speech (Amyuni 15).
12. Achebe notes that: "there are two occasions in the book . . . when Conrad . . . confers speech, Even English speech, on the savages" (255).

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