Which writers on the African Literature course take the reader most vividly into the mental labyrinths of the exiled self?

Mrs. G. Blore of London was one of many people asked by Paul Tabori to define exile. She describes a land, "where the people speak differently, where they live and *laugh* differently ... "[1]. In *The Anatomy of Exile*, Tabori ultimately reaches a definition of exile which begins thus:

> An exile is a person who is compelled to leave his homeland - though the forces that send him on his way may be political, economic, or purely psychological. It does not make an essential difference whether he is expelled by physical force or whether he makes the decision to leave without such an immediate pressure.[2]

A labyrinth can mean an "entangled state of affairs"[3], and in this essay, I shall proceed using a broader definition of exile than Tabori's in order to focus on the mental turmoil engendered by exile. I take exile to be a mental state, an emotional response to a separation from what the subject identifies as "home". I analyse the typical manifestations of sorrow, loss and isolation in the exiled self. I then explore the mental entanglements which the exile confronts: of sustaining their identity, obligatory change, gaining self-knowledge, and of the possibilities of belonging - through attempted kinship and performative adaptation. Finally, I investigate why homecoming is often a second exile, and why the breakdown of identification with the tribe is tantamount to a spiritual exile. Although the texts I will be discussing the most are Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Achebe's novels *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer At Ease*, I also involve a number of other instances of writing about African exile.

Exiles feel sorrow at the separation from their homeland and often even guilt at their absence from those they love. In Okot p'Bitek's poem from *Song of Prisoner* (1970), 'Is today not my

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1 [1]Paul Tabori, *The Anatomy of Exile: A semantic and historical study*, first edition, (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd, 1972), p. 33.

2 [2]Ibid., p. 37.

father's'[4], the speaker visualises the funeral rites being energetically performed in his village. His questions and exclamations "But who will make / The welcome speech?"[5], "But I am not there / ... !"[6], "But how can I address / The ghosts of my fathers / From here?"[7] express frustration and regret. The sense of frustration is exacerbated by the frenzied release, the catharsis which the speaker cannot "join them"[8] in experiencing: "I want to tread the earth / With a vengeance / And shake the bones / Of my father in his grave!"[9]. In Tidjani-Cissé's 'Home News'[10], we are inclined to confer feelings of guilt - mingled with regret - upon the speaker for whom "My soul shrivels a little / When home news tumbles over me"[11]. The addressee learns of the death of his mother and father in his absence, and reads such phrases as "My love, it's now ten years I've been awaiting you"[12] and "I beg you to return"[13] arriving at his psychological landing stage of "Loneliness-under-Hope"[14]. This exile is given an arguably African dimension by the straight-forward and mercenary requests for material goods demanded of the "been-to" - who is implicitly expected to be able to afford these obligations.

In *No Longer At Ease*, the narrator mentions the pain of Obi's exiled separation: "Four years in England had filled Obi with a longing to be back in Umuofia. This feeling was sometimes

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3 [3] *The Concise Oxford Dictionary: Of Current English*, seventh edition, ed. by J. B. Sykes, (UK.: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 558.

4 [4] *The Penguin Book of Modern African Poetry*, fourth edition, ed. by Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier, (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1998), pp. 393 - 4.

5 [5] id., p. 393.

6 [6] id., p. 394.

7 [7] id.

8 [8] id.

9 [9] id.

10 [10] id., pp. 137 - 8.

11 [11] id., p. 138.

12 [12] id., p. 137.

13 [13] id.

14 [14] id., p138.

so strong that he found himself feeling ashamed of studying English for his degree"[15]. Obi takes pride in his home village and their "great art of conversation"[16] in their tribal mother-tongue: Ibo. Thus Obi's study of English can seem to him a betrayal of his heritage - he too experiences guilt by leaving behind his roots. In *Things Fall Apart*, the fifteen-year-old[17] Ikemefuna repeatedly asks "When shall I go home?"[18]. We are told that he "was very much afraid"[19], "he tried to run away"[20], and that "he thought of his mother and his three-year-old sister and wept bitterly"[21]. Okonkwo's later separation from his village also makes him "full of sorrow" and "bowed with grief"[22] despite his family travelling with him. He epitomises the exile who Wittlin describes as the "*destiempo*"[23], a man who is "deprived of the time which now passes in his country"[24]. Okonkwo "regretted every day of his exile"[25] as "seven wasted and weary years"[26] partly because "He had lost the years in which he might have taken the highest titles in the clan"[27]. For Okonkwo, sorrow - and a sense of impatience - comes from his separation from the story of Umuofia - he is missing out on the developments which matter most to him.

The exile often has difficulty retaining their identity.What Innes regards as one of the most significant qualities of *Things Fall Apart*, is "the way in which it demonstrates the intricate

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15[15] Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1987), p. 45.
16[16] id.
17[17] Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, first edition, (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1986), p. 9.
18[18] id., p. 20.
19[19] id.
20[20] id.
21[21] id.
22[22] id., p. 96.
23[23] Dr. Joseph Wittlin, 'Sorrow and Grandeur of Exile', *Polish Review*, (New York, 1957). Quoted here from *The Anatomy of Exile*, (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd, 1972), p. 32.
24[24] id.
25[25] *Things Fall Apart*, (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1986), p. 117.
26[26] id.
27[27] id., p. 123.

relationship between a man's individual psychology and the social context in which he has grown up"[28]. When exiled to Mbanta, and deprived of the context of his rising status, Okonkwo begins to doubt his own *chi* and his defining ambition - "his life-spring"[29] - temporarily dries up. When, in Léopold Sédar Senghor's poem 'In Memoriam'[30], the speaker wishes to descend from the isolation of his tower above the roofs of Paris "To join my brothers with blue eyes"[31], he must first reaffirm and temper his own identity. He calls upon the "guides of my race"[32], the spirits of his dead ancestors, in the line "Let me think of my dead!"[33]. He calls upon them to "Protect my dreams"[34] and is then strengthened enough that he may descend. In contrast, Okonkwo's exile deprives him permanently of direct communion with his ancestral spirits, "he knew that he had lost his place among the nine masked spirits who administered justice in the clan"[35]; and excommunicated thus from this tie with tradition, Okonkwo loses a part of his identity - his *egwugwu* alter-ego.

Marlow describes the difficulty of sustaining the self's identity when deprived of those subjectifying and constituting elements of the homeland - "where no warning voice of a kind neighbour can be heard whispering of public opinion. These little things make all the great difference. When they are gone you must fall back upon your own innate strength, upon your own capacity for faithfulness"[36]. Marlow respects the Company's chief accountant who manages to live in his own self-contained reality - who "in the great demoralisation of the

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28[28] Catherine Lynette Innes, *Chinua Achebe*, first edition, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 24.
29[29] *Things Fall Apart*, (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1986), p. 94.
30[30] *The Penguin Book of Modern African Poetry*, (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1998), p. 314.
31[31] id.
32[32] id.
33[33] id.
34[34] id.
35[35] *Things Fall Apart*, (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1986), p. 123.
36[36] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. by Robert Kimbrough, third edition, (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), pp. 49 - 50.

land ... kept up his appearance"[37] and absorbs himself in "making correct entries of perfectly correct transactions"[38] - while an agent dies in his office and "fifty feet below the doorstep I could see the still tree-tops of the grove of death"[39].

Whilst the Company's accountant provides a model for oblivious, hermetic exile, Marlow describes him as "this miracle"[40] and exile more often involves change in the exiled self. Adorno writes of the expectation in America of the 1930s that migrants "would prove themselves in the new land not to be so haughty as to insist stubbornly on remaining what they had been before"[41]. The exile is faced therefore with obligatory or inevitable change. The doctor in *Heart of Darkness* explains to Marlow that "the changes take place inside you know"[42] adding that it would be "interesting for science to watch the mental changes of individuals on the spot"[43]. In *No Longer At Ease*, Obi returns from England, no longer a Christian[44]. He lies, telling his father that he did read the English Bible during his time away from his father's faith; but England has changed his beliefs.

Exile is for Obi a time of growing and self-knowledge. "It was in England that Nigeria first became more than just a name to him"[45]. I would suggest that this is perhaps because Obi finds that England provides a point of reference by which he is able to contextualise home; that he experiences how - in Saussurian terms - difference constitutes meaning[46]. For Marlow

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37[37] id., p. 21.
38[38] id., p. 22.
39[39] id.
40[40] id., p. 21.
41[41] Professor T. W. Adorno, in *The Intellectual Migration*, ed. by Donald Fleming and Bernard Bailyn, (Belknap Press / Harvard University Press, 1969). Quoted here from: *The Anatomy of Exile*, (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd, 1972), p. 407.
42[42] *Heart of Darkness*, (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), p. 15.
43[43] id.
44[44] *No Longer at Ease*, (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1987), p. 51.
45[45] id. p. 11.
46[46] "The Sign Considered in Its Totality: Everything that has been said up to this point boils down to this: in language there are only differences": Ferdinand de Saussure, 'Course in General Linguistics', *Literary Theory: An Anthology*; first edition, Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, (UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), p. 88.

in *Heart of Darkness*, the journey into the heart of Africa is what Bettina Knapp refers to as his Great Nekyia or "Night-Sea Journey"[47]: a rebirth ritual in which the individual exposes himself to his collective unconscious at the limits of human endurance. It is this Homeric formulation of a mythical pattern which is accomplished by "Oriris in a boat; by Jonah in the belly of a whale; by Theseus in the labyrinth; by Moses in the desert; by Christ from an entombment"[48] and in milder form by Obi on his return sea voyage: "All night Obi rolled from one edge of the bed to the other in sympathy with the fitful progress of the little ship groaning and creaking in the darkness"[49]. Knapp's approach to exile is a Jungian one and she reads *Heart of Darkness* as Marlow's journey of self-discovery to confront his own exiled animal shadow. Thus, as Marlow journeys into exile, he also journeys into the archaic primeval stratum of his psyche, away from civilisation and closer to what "Jung termed the *collective unconscious*"[50]: "we were travelling in the night of the first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign - and no memories"[51].

With change comes the possibility - for the exile - of belonging to, or connecting with, the people around them in their foreign surroundings. In *Things Fall Apart*, Uchendu affirms that Okonkwo "does not belong here. He is an exile, condemned for seven years to live in a strange land"[52]. Okonkwo feels "cast out of his clan like a fish on to a dry, sandy beach, panting"[53] and "beginning life anew without the vigour and enthusiasm of youth"[54]. However,

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47[47] Bettina Liebowitz Knapp, *Exile and the Writer: Exoteric and Esoteric Experiences: A Jungian Approach*, first edition, (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), p. 56.

48[48] id., pp. 56 - 57.

49[49] *No Longer at Ease*, (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1987), p. 22.

50[50] *Exile and the Writer*, (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), p. 50.

51[51] *Heart of Darkness*, (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), p. 37.

52[52] *Things Fall Apart*, (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1986), p. 96.

53[53] id., p. 94.

54[54] id.

it is Uchendu who urges Okonkwo to find ""refuge in his motherland""[55]. Using the ideologies of ""duty""[56], ancestral spirits and kinship, Uchendu rebukes him: ""Is it right that you, Okonkwo, should bring your mother a heavy face and refuse to be comforted? Be careful or you may displease the dead""[57]. Uchendu enfranchises the exile in his new community saying: ""These are now your kinsmen""[58]. Where kinship is accepted, it can provide solace, but for Marlow on the Congo it is a question of whether one is "man enough"[59] to admit "the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly"[60]. Marlow appears to come closest to connecting with the natives when he sees his black helmsman's dying gaze: "like a claim of distant kinship affirmed in a supreme moment"[61].

By performing within the semiotic codes of their host country, the exile can gain a greater degree of acceptance. Nevertheless this is a performance, and as Foner makes clear with regard to Jamaican Migrants, "many Jamaicans conform to some English cultural patterns and social institutions, but they have not wiped out the old nor are they fully ready to be assimilated and socialised into the new"[62]. In *No Longer At Ease*, performative adaptation is exhibited by Obi: ""I didn't mind the weather very much in the end," said Obi, who had learnt that an Englishman might grumble about his weather but did not expect a foreigner to join in"[63]. Triolet describes exile as "really the existence of a poor relation, forced into humility,

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55[55] id., 97.
56[56] "Your duty is to comfort your wives and children and take them back to your fatherland after seven years": id.
57[57] id.
58[58] id.
59[59] *Heart of Darkness*, (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), p. 38.
60[60] id.
61[61] id., p. 51.
62[62] Nancy Foner, 'The Jamaicans: Cultural and Social Change among Migrants in Britain', *Between Two Cultures: Migrants and Minorities in Britain*, ed. by James L. Watson, first edition, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), p. 122.
63[63] *No Longer at Ease*, (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1987), p. 19.

into a marginal life"[64] and Frischauer rejoins, "They [the foreign-born] may go far - but not too far"[65]: in this instance, it would be going "too far"[66] for Obi to grumble about the weather. Max Dorsinville evokes the mental ramifications inherent within the expedience of performative adaptation, as he explains the birth of the Negritude movement: "there was a feeling of belonging to a common culture relegated to the depths of a deliberately forgetful consciousness in an everyday existence officially sealed by the look of the Other"[67]. Obi recounts how, when travelling on a London bus, if "he had to speak in English with a Nigerian student from another tribe, he lowered his voice"[68]. He fears that others around them, the English, "would naturally assume that one had no language of one's own"[69]. Part of what is "humiliating"[70] in this situation is perhaps its unwelcome reminder of the legacy of colonialism - two countrymen still cannot talk without recourse to the coloniser's language. However, there is also the implicit suggestion that Obi fears that the "proud owners"[71] of English will look pejoratively upon their manner of speaking: hearing two Nigerians speaking English as spoken in Nigeria, in contradistinction to the "Queen's" English.

In many African writings, it is the time of homecoming after the period abroad which is the true time of exile. The returned exiles are now "been-to"s - they will move in different circles, and are treated differently. They must also come to terms with a country which has changed in their absence. In *No Longer At Ease*, a university degree is described as "the

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64[64] Elsa Triolet, *Rendez-vous des Étrangers*, *Les Lettres Françaises*, (Paris, October 13th, 1966). Quoted here from: *The Anatomy of Exile*, (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd, 1972), p. 17.

65[65] Willi Frischauer, 'I am a Bloody Foreigner', *New Statesman*, (London, November 19th, 1965). Quoted here from *The Anatomy of Exile*, (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd, 1972), p. 403.

66[66] id.

67[67] Max Dorsinville, 'Senghor or the Song of Exile', *Between Two Cultures*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), p. 64.

68[68] *No Longer at Ease*, (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1987), p. 45.

69[69] id.

70[70] id.

71[71] id.

philosopher's stone"[72] which transmutes salary and status. Since a been-to with a degree from England was generally thought by many West Africans to be "more skilled than one who had studied at home"[73] according to Goody and Groothues, it can be inferred that former exiles such as Obi would have been even less likely to return to their former place in a community. Instead, they risk becoming the isolated elite, tantamount to practically being white in their infiltration of former colonial posts: "To occupy a "European post" was second only to actually being a European. It raised a man from the masses to the élite whose small talk at cocktail parties was: "How's the car behaving?""[74].

In the mammy wagon *God's Case No Appeal*, travelling to Umuofia, Obi is not only ostracised as a "too know"[75] young man because of his new-found anti-corruption principles; he also finds that his time in England has put a critical distance between him and his own culture. Obi seems inadvertently to begin evaluating "for the first time"[76] the folk song sung by the traders, as a cultural artefact. In so doing, he casually imposes upon his heritage, the analytical terms and techniques he internalised most fully during his indoctrination abroad: "He was pleased with his exegesis and began to search in his mind for other songs that could be given the same treatment"[77]. When Obi pushes his way into the doctor's surgery, the hostility he attracts is directed at - and probably made more antagonistic by - his government post: "You tink because Government give you car you fit do what you like? ... Beast of no nation!"[78]. Obi has become an exile from two nations.

72[72] id., p. 84.
73[73] Esther N. Goody and Christine Muir Groothues, 'The West Africans: The Quest for Education', *Between Two Cultures*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), p. 158.
74[74] *No Longer at Ease*, (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1987), p. 84.
75[75] id., p. 40.
76[76] id., p. 42.
77[77] id.
78[78] id., pp. 137 -138.

The gap between the rich and the poor in Nigeria itself creates Two Nations, of which been-to's are most likely to occupy the rich, powerful elite. In Funso Aiyejina's poem 'A View of a View'[79], it begins to seem that the enfranchised and successful are the ones truly in exile from the reality of what Africa is. They live "coded"[80] lives, "made purer and safer"[81] in the ivory tower unreality of a five-star hotel. In contrast, the stoic toil of the fisherman keeps him - however undesirably - in contact with the elements "waiting for the appropriate tide"[82], and with the reality of manual work under trying conditions. The "babylonic heights"[83] of the hotel recall Psalm 137[84] - thereby further suggesting an inversion in which the hotel guests are in exile in their five-star pseudo-paradise: "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept / when we remembered Zion"[85]. In 'Homecoming'[86], Lenrie Peters writes about the difficulty of returning to a changed hometown: "Too strange the sudden change"[87]. The shock of the new confronts "times we buried when we left"[88] - the exile's static past as remarked by Wittlin[89] - and upsets memories which "we had properly arranged"[90]. The lines "Luxuriant weeds have grown where we led / The Virgins to the water's edge"[91] suggests that the tradition of female circumcision has been abandoned in the exiles' absence. What was supposed to be familiar

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79[79] *The Penguin Book of Modern African Poetry*, (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1998), pp. 289 - 290.
80[80] id., p. 290.
81[81] id.
82[82] id.
83[83] id., p. 289.
84[84] The Holy Bible: New International Version, second edition, trans. and ed. by The Committee on Bible Translation, the International Bible Society, (UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980), Psalm 137: 1 - 4, p.627.
85[85] id., Psalm 137: 1, p. 627.
86[86] *The Penguin Book of Modern African Poetry*, (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1998), p. 87.
87[87] id. line 5.
88[88] id. line 6.
89[89] See above, p. 3. 'Sorrow and Grandeur of Exile', *Polish Review*, (New York, 1957). Quoted previously from *The Anatomy of Exile*, (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd, 1972), p. 32.
90[90] id. line 7.
91[91] id. lines 11 - 12.

has become strange - even the house is "Lived in by new skeletons"[92] - and the homecoming, the "longed for returning"[93] has become a second exile from a land now colonised by the present: "The present reigned supreme"[94].

Exile for Africans often comes in the form of spiritual exile from one's own community, following the imposition of different values or the experience of radical change, particularly for the older generations. Anna Stearns terms such "uprooted"[95] people as the "*spiritually* estranged"[96]. In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo learns from Obierika that a land dispute has now been decided upon by the District Commissioner's court. He asks, ""Does the white man understand our custom about land?""[97]. The erosion of tradition is one of the troubling corollaries of the encroaching colonisation, as is the subsidence of tribal authority and the break up of the village. For Okonkwo, this is "not just a personal grief"[98], but a death knell for the clan and the values which have nurtured him: he therefore "mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably become soft like women"[99].

The same colonial process of inexorable disenfranchisement from a tribal community occurs in *The River Between*, where Waiyaki and Nyambura suddenly find themselves ostracised from a people helplessly riven by tribal, religious and colonial pressures: "in his loneliness he struggled with strange forces ... forces that he had felt in the air all over the country. And he was afraid"[100]. In practical terms, the spread of taxation and therefore feudalism is also a

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92[92] id. line 16.
93[93] id. line 20.
94[94] id. line 1.
95[95] Professor Anna Stearns, letter to Paul Tabori, (Montreal, March 22nd, 1968), *The Anatomy of Exile*, (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd, 1972), p. 409.
96[96] id.
97[97] *Things Fall Apart*, (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1986), p. 126.
98[98] id., p. 131.
99[99] id.
100[100] Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *The River Between*, (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1965), p. 140.

literal exile from one's own land which Waiyaki realises: "the shame of a people's land being taken away, the shame of being forced to work on those same lands"[101]. When, in *Time of the Butcherbird*, Hlangeni's tribe is to be physically exiled from it's ancestral land, the effect of this upon the insecure chief-made-headman is to dwindle his authority and his self-esteem even further. Mma-Tau conversely recognises that it is "the dignity of the people"[102] which is at stake; and in preparing to defend that dignity, she shows that ideologically at least, she has not yet been exiled from identification with her people. These situations illustrate perhaps one of the more insidious and effective forms which colonisation takes: the exile of the native people from their tribal identity.

Were I to choose one writer from those discussed above, who conveyed the mental labyrinths of the exiled self most vividly to me, I would choose Joseph Conrad. Marlow expounds his state of mind to us near the start of his journey "Nowhere did we stop long enough to get a particularised impression, but the general sense of vague and oppressive wonder grew upon me"[103]. However, it is not long before the oppressive texture of Conrad's writing structures layers of dense obfuscation around the reader, immersing them in the very jungle which Marlow seeks to describe: "Trees, trees, millions of trees, massive, immense, running up high, and at their foot, hugging the bank against the stream, crept the little begrimed steamboat like a sluggish beetle crawling on the floor of a lofty portico"[104]. F. R. Leavis noted Conrad's "adjectival insistence upon inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery"[105] and I would contend that it is this insistent and overwhelming mantra of the

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101[101] id., p142.

102[102] Alex La Guma, *Time of the Butcherbird*, (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1987), p. 46.

103[103] *Heart of Darkness*, (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), p. 17.

104[104] id., p. 37.

105[105] Quoted here from: Chinua Achebe, 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*', *Heart of Darkness*, (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), p. 253.

incomprehensible, combined with a density of language and multiplicity of metaphor, as well as the discord of the "two antithetical sentences"[106] which Achebe categorised - "one about silence and the other about frenzy"[107] - which successfully makes vivid the different cultural value systems, the foreign truths and hence the semiotic disorientation, that Marlow undergoes in his self-imposed exile from the familiar.

However, rather than pay homage to Conrad's individual stylistic achievement, it is arguably of more consequence to conclude by recognising the differing psychological aspects of exile which each writer illuminates. Emotionally, we have seen how sorrow, loss and isolation are common hallmarks of the exiled self, sometimes mixed with feelings of guilt and an impatience to be elsewhere. I have hoped to convincingly demonstrate how change - with some loss of native identity - is often inevitable for the exile; and how such change can offer the exile self-knowledge and possibilities for greater integration into their host community. Ultimately, I have sought to show that exile is about more than just land and that the pain of spiritual exile occurs when one can no longer identify with what the homeland, or the home community has become.

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106[106] Chinua Achebe, 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*', *Heart of Darkness*, (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), p. 252.
107[107] id.

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