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HOLMES, ALICE, AND EZEULU: WESTERN RATIONALITY
IN THE CONTEXT OF BRITISH COLONIALISM
AND WESTERN MODERNITY

by

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ABSTRACT

HOLMES, ALICE, AND EZEULU: WESTERN RATIONALITY IN THE CONTEXT OF BRITISH COLONIALISM AND WESTERN MODERNITY

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Master of Arts

This thesis examines Western rationality, contextualizing that subject in British colonialism and Western modernity. Using Scott Lash's description of academic characterizations of modernity, I explore the "high" modernity of the social sciences represented in the books *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll and *The Hound of the Baskervilles* by Arthur Conan Doyle. I then explore the cultural studies critique of that characterization of modernity in the book *Arrow of God* by Chinua Achebe.

Using the theory of Jean Francois Lyotard, Martin Heidegger, and Theodor Adorno, I look at Western rationality through its manifestation in British colonialism. I argue that colonialism is a site where rationality's negative legacy is manifest, and that the paradoxical representations of rationality in the books by Carroll and Doyle indicate a

problem with the assumption that Western rationality was a universal epistemology. Contrary to the British's own ideas of their rationality, I find that Western rationality is ultimately a culturally-grounded discourse.

Using Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, I examine the intersection between Western rationality and other forms of cultural knowledge, an intersection that occurred through British colonialism. Achebe argues against the universal model of Western rationality and posits instead a relative valuing of each culture's methods of arriving at truth. I use his novel to illustrate the limits of Western rationality and its claim to universality.

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Introduction

I begin this thesis with a historical event that will contextualize the issues I treat in the following chapters—the issues of Western rationality and its manifestation in the British colonial practices of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The British and Indians both have multiple names for the conflict, but for my purpose it will suffice to note that British history refers to it as the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and Indian history calls it the First War of Independence. The event itself was actually a series of violent outbursts enacted by Indian soldiers in the pay of the British East India Company against their European leaders. The British colonial presence in India began with the British East India Company's establishment of trading outposts in India in the early seventeenth century. This capitalist enterprise actually controlled regions of India with its military presence. By the time of the mutiny / war of independence, the company had “34,000 European troops in that country, commanding a quarter of a million native soldiers” (Crichton 319). The company's administration of the regions it controlled was unpopular for many reasons, some of which are described by Rudrangshu Mukherjee:

The British had not only conquered India but had also, in the process of consolidating their power in the first half of the nineteenth century, violated all that was held sacred and dear by the people of India. *Social reforms based on the principles of reason*, land-revenue administration based on Ricardian theories of rent, a legal system imported from England, ... the dispossession of kings, their successors and landed magnates, had together brought about a major upheaval in north India. (128, italics added)

I use this quotation to point out the invasion of Indian culture by Western practices and institutions, founded in Western rationality. Reason-based social reform sought to change entrenched Indian practices (such as the ritual suicide of widows, which the British banned, and the caste system, which the Indians continually feared would be undermined by the British administration). The British legal system, an institution founded in Enlightenment rationality with tenets that seemed intuitive to British natives, were, of course, foreign to Indians. The world of modern Britain was not accessible to a person born in India—the British way of thinking was foreign, its policies were foreign, and its technology was foreign. According to a Wikipedia article, “Many of the company’s modernising efforts were viewed with automatic distrust; for example, it was feared that the railway, the first of which began running out of Bombay in the 1850s, was a demon” (Indian Rebellion of 1857).

I use this historical event to dramatize for the reader the issues at stake in this thesis, which examines the cultural grounding of Western rationality in the context of British colonialism. I will also examine colonialism through the lens of rationally-inscribed British modernity, a condition which the British, with the rest of the Western world, felt entitled or required them to undertake a “‘civilizing mission [to non-Western societies],’ which suggested that a temporary period of political dependence or tutelage was necessary in order for ‘uncivilized’ societies to advance to the point where they were capable of sustaining liberal institutions and self-government” (Kohn).

I attempt to critique the modernist/colonialist view of rationality as a monolithic and universal entity. This view sees rationality on the high end of a linear scale of progress and relegates anything beneath it on that scale to the realm of the pre-modern

and irrational. Postcolonial theory has critiqued this view of rationality, arguing for a pluralist rather than monolithic model of rationality. This approach sees rationality not as a universal epistemology that privileges Western thinking and is constituted by its separation from the realm of the irrational, which is everything non-Western, but instead argues that rationality is a production of culture and calls for a relative valuing of each culture's truth-claims.

In his book *Another Modernity, a Different Rationality*, Scott Lash identifies the two main modes of scholarly characterization of rationality via its involvement with the production of modernity. The first mode of treating modernity/rationality is that of the social scientist, the positivist, whose concept of modernity is inscribed in and is a culmination of the process of the Enlightenment (i.e. a process that began in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the legacy of which has impacted all Western history since) and the working of the rationality born in the Enlightenment. He says that “sociology and social science more generally have consistently understood modernity in terms of rationality, in terms of the rationality of Cartesian space and Newtonian time handed down from the Enlightenment: from the nineteenth-century sociology” (1). This entrenchment in nineteenth-century thought is most especially an attachment to the work of Max Weber, whose thought on rationality still forms the most comprehensive and authoritative sociological work on the subject. This mode of thought attempts to apply the concepts and methods born in the Enlightenment to the study of human society; literally to create a science of society (social science, or sociology, which will be used synonymously in this study). According to this science, the greater the development and implementation of rationality within a society, the more modern that society becomes.

The second mode of treating modernity/rationality is that of cultural theory. This mode can be seen mainly as a critique of the sociological one just described. Lash says that

cultural theory has shown how the modernity of dominant social and human science is inscribed in a rationality of 'the same.' This rationality of the same is a logic of a constitutive and constituting inside, a constitutive and constituting 'subject', which excludes, indeed extrudes, all otherness to the outside, where it is to be grasped and studied and controlled as an object. (1)

This mode of thought sees modernity as an exclusive category, one that imposes its own exclusionary boundaries, welcoming everything within those boundaries into the fold of modernity, and consigning everything without those boundaries to the categories of pre-modern, irrational, and other (and worthy or in need of being colonized). This theoretical stance is an inherently deconstructive one in that it attempts to take apart this paradigm, which it treats as arbitrary at best and evil at worst. The postcolonial argument is one form of this critique of the sociological concept of rationality. Using this argument, postcolonial theory has attempted to deconstruct the systems and assumptions that formed the foundational assumptions of colonialism by showing that its concept of modernity excluded and dehumanized those who didn't fit within its own limits. Hence, my thesis sees an important intersection between British colonialism, Western rationality, and the concept of modernity.

At this intersection, I will interrogate Western culture's assumptions about the universality of its own rationality. Postcolonial theory deconstructs the model of Western

rationality as the culmination of a unilateral progress towards modernity and sets up what Scott Lash calls an “anti-rationality of the other” (1). In this thesis, I will characterize this anti-rationality as a rejection of rationality only insofar as rationality makes a claim to universality. In reality, all cultures, whether they be dominant or subservient, modern or pre-modern, have developed their own unique rationality. Insofar as this is true, this “anti-rationality” is not a rejection of rationality, but a rejection of the monolithic universal rationality of Western Modernity. For the purpose of bringing the subject of rationality onto more objective grounds, I will examine the theoretical contrast between this Western universal approach to rationality and the postcolonial thought that argues for a rejection of the universal model of rationality in favor of a relative model, where each culture’s methods of constituting knowledge are valued equally.

II. Sociological Beginnings

Max Weber’s work explores and attempts to systematically categorize the presence of rationality in culture. He identifies religion as a major component of the process by which the peculiarly Western rationality developed, most especially Protestantism. While this origin in Weber’s work is important for his overall treatment of rationality, it is less relevant to my argument in this thesis than the ways he categorizes rationality in Western and other cultures. In his seminal work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber recognizes the presence of certain kinds of rationality in every culture, but makes the claim that Western rationality is peculiar. To arrive at this thesis, he starts with the immediately problematic question of why “in Western civilization, and in Western civilization only, cultural phenomena have appeared which (as we like to think) lie in a line of development having *universal* significance and value”

(13). Although Weber does qualify himself by noting that this question will be asked by a “product of modern European civilization” (13) and inserting the parenthetical “as we like to think,” his demarcation of the “peculiar” (26) rationality of the West from the rationality of all other cultures in history does group him in Lash’s first category of scholarly characterization of modernity, the “high modernity” model, one that sees Western rationality as the impetus of movement upward on a linear, hierarchical scale of progress.

Weber employs several different terms to describe different types of rational processes. Rationalism, which he defines as “an attitude of pragmatic orientation to the attainment of goals” (Swidler 35), is not the same as rationality. Weber grants that this more primitive thought process exists in all cultures, but maintains that rationalism is not equal to true rationality, which exists only in the West. “What distinguishes this attitude from that associated with rationality is not its purposive or goal-oriented character, but the larger context of meanings in which the goals are imbedded ... What distinguishes rationality from rationalism is that rationalism is oriented to immediate goals, while rationality involves goals which are ordered, arranged, and even chosen in relation to some larger, conscious system of meanings, ideas, and values.” (Swidler 35-36). What characterizes true rationality for Weber is its connection to a larger system in which the individual operates. Swidler interprets Weber to say that “the distinctive feature of rationality in whole societies, cultures, and institutions is the degree of control of life by conscious ideas” (39). The individual’s ability to act rationally is judged by the degree to which he is personally empowered with these conscious social ideas: “One of the most important aspects of the process of ‘rationalization’ of action is the substitution for the

unthinking acceptance of ancient custom, of deliberate adaptation to situations in terms of self interest” (39).

In creating the categories he uses in his work, Weber *invents* a standard of rationality according to which only the West can be classed as truly rational. In doing so, he enforces the attitude that the West has advanced beyond other cultures. According to Lash, this attitude, typical of sociological thought, sees the West as the only culture that has achieved modernity, an achievement driven by the development of rationality (1). This is the model that cultural theory has sought to critique—this notion that the modern West is the only culture inside its own categories (such as “modernity” and “rationality”), excluding all else to the realm of the outside, of the other. Those existing inside these categories see themselves as the thinking subject, while those outside are objectified and made eligible to be dominated by the inner subject. This model played a role in colonial practice in that it created a hierarchy wherein the West was positioned to exploit non-Western, pre-modern peoples, sometimes justifying itself as conducting a “civilizing mission” (Kohn) and sometimes without attempt at justification. In what is ostensibly supposed to be an objective, descriptive study, Weber has created a model which cultural theory critiques as subjective and ideological in the highest degree.

III. Cultural Studies Critique

One of the historical processes important to this topic is the emergence of modernism from classical humanism. Weber’s work is a product of this transition. Here in the introduction I will examine arguments that center around this transition, both celebrating it and arguing for its reversal. This will provide the groundwork for a better understanding of the roles of humanism and modernity in colonial practice. Classical

humanism may be seen as a product of the Enlightenment, a pre-cursor to the “high modernity” of sociological positivism. Part of the project of humanism was to rationally delineate a system of ethical/moral behavior in which the human being derived “certain inalienable rights” from a rationally-derived set of universal truths. Immanuel Kant, for example, “argued that moral requirements are based on a standard of rationality he dubbed the ‘Categorical Imperative’ (CI). Immorality thus involves a violation of the CI and is thereby irrational. Other philosophers, such as Locke and Hobbes, had also argued that moral requirements are based on standards of rationality” (Johnson). Humanism was thus a major cultural product of the Enlightenment’s rationality. Its place in colonial practice is extremely problematic, for the simple reason that, as Dipesh Chakrabarty says, “the European colonizer of the nineteenth century both preached this Enlightenment humanism at the colonized and at the same time denied it in practice” (*Provincializing Europe* 4). This paradox is one of the reasons postcolonial thought has attacked Western rationality for the role it played in colonialism. This inconsistency can easily be seen as rationality’s self-refutation of its claim to universality: humanism, which posited universal human rights, gave way to modernism and its positivistic approach, which conflicted with humanism by constituting the modern, rational inside and objectifying everything on the outside. Western rationality produced both models.

Lash describes the “emergence of modernism ... from classical humanism” like this:

Here a predifferentiated humanism – whether classical or Renaissance – develops into a modernism based on a machinic or systemic model. In pre-modernist humanism, humans circulate freely with non-humans, as

architectural columns are models of man, as nature is seen to be filled with signs, as semiotic and hermeneutic as humanity. With the rise of architectural-urbanistic and sociological modernism (positivism), a humanistic episteme yields to a machinic episteme. (7)

This machinic episteme is like the studies of Weber, the attempt to create a “system” for studying humans that is characterized by the absence of things human (such as error, variability, unpredictability), characterized by its purely scientific categorization of human beings and human societies. The rise of this episteme is very likely a contributor to the problematic location of humanism as a cultural value that is ignored in practice, for Lash argues that this very moment gives rise to several different forms of critique that attempt to recover “a notion of life to be pitted against the technological rationality of system” (7), to recover a view of the human as a human rather than an element of a machinic system.

The work of theorists thinking about this moment is varied in its response. The works I will use in this thesis are primarily those of Martin Heidegger, Theodor Adorno, and Max Horkheimer.

IV. Heidegger

Martin Heidegger’s ontology is inherently concerned with rationality. His concern with the nature of being, and his attempt to characterize the true Being, the *Dasein*, the only type of being who can be said to think and exist at his highest potential, is an attempt also to show the world how to think. It is an attempt to remove rationality that obstructs man’s view of his true being and put in its place the liberating rationality that reveals that being. His essay “Modern Science, Metaphysics, and Mathematics” is an

example of his attempt to delineate the type of thinking that leads to a true understanding of the nature of Being. In this instance, he examines the root of modern subjectivity in Descartes, arguing that with Descartes's declaration "I think, therefore I am" came a "reversal of the meanings of the words *subjectum* and *objectum* [which] is no mere affair of usage; it is a radical change of Dasein, that is to say, of the clearing of the Being of beings" (304). This change is inherently rational: "From then on epistemology is the foundation of philosophy" (297). While the essays I will use in this thesis do not rebel against the modernism of their time-period, and whatever Heidegger may overtly say about humanism or myth, these essays do contain an element of return to the mythological thinking of the pre-modern. For example, in his address titled "The Self-Assertion of the German University" (1933), Heidegger argues that leaders must be "led by the relentlessness of that spiritual mission that forces the destiny of the German people into the shape of its history" (1). He says later that

spirit is the primordially attuned, knowing resoluteness toward the essence of Being. And the *spiritual world* of a people is not the superstructure of a culture any more than it is an armory filled with useful information and values; it is the power that most deeply preserves the people's earth- and blood-bound strengths as the power that most deeply arouses and most profoundly shakes the people's existence. Only a spiritual world guarantees the people greatness. (Heidegger, "Self Assertion")

By linking the German people to a *beginning* (which he identifies as the "setting out of Greek philosophy") and to a *history* (whether future or past) and to a *destiny* that can only be accessed by an attunement to the beginning, Heidegger encourages his readers to think

mythically. In his attempts to describe the type of thinking necessary to understand true being, Heidegger frequently resorts to myth. The two essays used in Chapter 1, “The Origin of the Work of Art” and “Building Dwelling Thinking,” continually employ tropes that access Greek mythology and seek to return man’s thinking to the clarity of the Greek *world*, using the word “world” in Heidegger’s sense, which includes everything in that people’s awareness, including myth. More specifically, the reference to “earth- and blood-bound strengths” in the above quote smacks of Nazi ideology, which sought to institute a return to the mythical greatness of the Germanic people. Analyzed rhetorically, these are appeals to the kinds of emotions and abstractions involved in the mythical thinking which preceded modern systematic rationality.

In chapter one, I will use Heidegger’s two essays to show Sherlock Holmes in a state of unconcealment in which his true being appears. Surprisingly enough, Holmes is revealed not as a rational superman, but one whose connection to both the rational and the irrational enhance the aura of his portrayal as a rational superman. In this respect, he is much like Heidegger, whose rhetorical access of the irrational and pre-rational realms of myth serve to enhance and strengthen his attempts to show the way to a rationality that uncovers true being.

V. Adorno and Horkheimer

Adorno and Horkheimer’s book *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* critiques the process of modernization that began in the Enlightenment, arguing that although the movement began full of promise, it has failed to fulfill that promise and instead led to a decrease in the intellectual clarity of Western culture. Contrary to Heidegger’s approach (whose thought Adorno strongly opposed because of its tendency toward fascism), one of

the primary causes of this failure was that “however much rationality had sought to free man from mythic thinking, he remained caught in its nexus” (Jay 37). Seeing the European fascism in Europe behind World War II as a crisis of history, they argued that “fascism ... could in fact be partly understood as the return of man’s repressed mythic past...” (38), a contention that may have been directed at the Nazi use of Germanic myth noted in Heidegger’s quote above.

In particular, Adorno and Horkheimer saw in modernity two foundational problems: number one, that “instrumental reason was closely related to the [capitalist] exchange principle in which everything was reduced to an abstract equivalent of everything else in the service of universal exchange,” and number two, “instrumental reason’s ... link with the domination of nature” (Jay 37). Their introduction seeks to identify “a positive notion of enlightenment which will release it from entanglement in blind domination” (Horkheimer and Adorno xvi). They argue that this rationality in which originated modern, scientific progress has become entangled in these two problems, and that “what men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order wholly to dominate it and other men. That is the only aim” (4). In making this claim, Horkheimer and Adorno fall into Scott Lash’s second category of responses to modernity, those who see Enlightenment as the “logic of a constitutive and constituting inside, a constitutive and constituting ‘subject’, which excludes, indeed extrudes, all otherness to the outside, where it is to be grasped and studied and controlled as an object” (Lash 1).

The two problems of myth and domination combine to create what Horkheimer and Adorno see as the unfortunate state of Enlightenment progress. “Enlightenment has always taken the basic principle of myth to be anthropomorphism, the projection onto

nature of the subjective” (6). Yet, Horkheimer and Adorno argue, Enlightenment hasn’t escaped myth because myth and science are essentially the same, with science projecting its own subjective view onto nature, one in which everything becomes a tool for man’s use and domination, so that looking at nature one may say like Oedipus ““It is man!”” (7). The Enlightenment thus gives rise to this will to dominate: “Men pay for the increase of their power with alienation from that over which they exercise power. Enlightenment behaves towards things as a dictator toward men. He knows them in so far as he can manipulate them” (9).

This summary of Horkheimer and Adorno’s work shows one of the critiques that has been leveled at Enlightenment rationality, and serves in this introduction to lay the groundwork for my ensuing examination of colonial period rationality.

VI. Outline

I will use the principles described above in Weber’s characterization of rationality as a background for the exploration of the Western rationality at work in colonial Britain, and then explore the methods of cultural theory in critiquing the assumptions in colonial theory and literature. Chapter one will examine the subject of a universal rationality in two colonial-period works, Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Weber’s principles will be useful in making visible the way these two works approach the subject of rationality as well as in making visible the cultural assumptions in that approach. In my study of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, I will turn to Heidegger’s ontology and Lyotard’s characterization of postmodern knowledge to expose the limits of the progressive rationality Holmes and Watson represent. I will use Adorno’s thought that accesses art as a means to transcend

the limitations of rationality when I explore that subject in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

In Chapter two, I will use the postcolonial critique of the model of rationality constructed by sociology. This second chapter will explore the novel *Arrow of God* by Chinua Achebe, reading the implicit critiques of Western rationality in the book and using the work of cultural theorists to explore and enhance that critique. I will discuss the British colonial domination of the Igbo people in Nigeria, Africa, and the principles outlined in this introduction from Horkheimer and Adorno's work in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* will play relevantly into that discussion.

Chapter One

Representations of Rational Thought in Colonial English Literature

I. Traditional, Narrative Knowledge and Watson's Rational Odyssey

I am conscious always of power and design – Sherlock Holmes

The plot in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's novel *The Hound of the Baskervilles* pits the supremely rational Sherlock Holmes against a seemingly irrational force—a mysterious, supernatural hound. At its very core, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is a book about rationality. Watson, the book's narrator, proudly champions the rationality of Holmes, seeking to distinguish that rationality from the traditional and cultural types of knowledge he associates with the lower class. Through a confrontation with the irrational mystery of the Hound, the narrative threatens and then ostensibly restores the universal potency of rationality. I will argue, however, that Watson actually undermines this project by conflating the rational knowledge structure he attempts to arrogate and the traditional knowledge structure he attempts to dismiss, ultimately showing the rational knowledge to be a cultural contingent. Martin Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art" and "Building Dwelling Thinking" and Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* will provide the theoretical groundwork for my argument.

Recent critical work on *The Hound of the Baskervilles* or on Sherlock Holmes novels in general is part of a body of work that treats the detective novel as a genre and seeks to locate it within the cultural and social environment of late nineteenth-century England. Ronald R. Thomas's "The Fingerprints of the Foreigner: Colonizing the Criminal Body in 1890s Detective Fiction and Criminal Anthropology" and Nils

Claussion's "Degeneration, *Fin-de-Si cle* Gothic, and the Science of Detection: Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and the Emergence of the Modern Detective Story" do just that. Thomas explores the possibility that the detective novel is actually an authoritarian social tool that, by employing faulty and ideological rational systems to map identity onto individuals, denies the would-be self-determining individual the right to self-determination. He argues: "Whatever else Sherlock Holmes may have claimed to be, he should be understood as the literary personification of an elaborate cultural apparatus by which persons were given their true and legitimate identities by someone else" (655). He calls this "colonization" and links this domestic project to the political imperial project. Thomas views Sherlock Holmes as only one prong on a three-pronged authoritarian apparatus; the other two are the 1890 work by Havelock Ellis titled *The Criminal*, in which Ellis attempts to define the biological traits (such as ear-size) of pre-disposed "born" criminals, and Sir Francis Galton's 1892 book *Finger-Prints*, which actually initiated the well-known practice of police fingerprinting. Both were very influential works in their time, and both lapse into the racist practice of assigning an evolutionary hierarchy to the races of the world, with the British at the top. These works may be seen as faulty scientific systems, subsets of the overarching rationality. Importantly for my investigation, Thomas makes it clear that Sherlock Holmes accesses and acts according to these faulty rational systems, making him very much a product of his own rational environment. Thomas shows these systems to be not rationally detached ones, but ones in which "science conveniently comes to serve the interest of politics" (658).

While Thomas provides important details about the intellectual/rational environment in England during the time *The Hound of the Baskervilles* was written, and links the story and its protagonist to that environment, Clausson's article on the genre of detective fiction is even more useful to my investigation. Clausson challenges the notion that *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is a traditional detective story, a "'fable' that dramatize[s] a struggle of scientific reason against superstition and irrationality (60). After summarizing that argument, Clausson argues that the novel is instead a product of two genres: the traditional detective story and the gothic fin-de-siecle novel. This form, unlike the unmixed traditional detective story, does not affirm the traditional assumptions of the status-quo, but instead allows for unsettling questions to arise that ultimately remain unanswered, such as the nature of evil and the reality/illusion of human progress. He argues that the presence of the Gothic genre, with its typical "questioning of the power of late-nineteenth-century positivist science" and other postulates of modern progress, counteracts the originally apparent detective novel genre and its rationally optimistic tendency to contain all chaos and disorder within rational explanation.

Similar to my argument, Clausson argues that elements of the story undermine the overt moral of the story: that modern rational progress will win. However, while Clausson argues that the critique of that moral is built into a genre that Doyle knowingly accesses, I argue that the critique of that moral is an *unintended* result of the internal limit of Western rationality and its privileged place in the colonial English world. I also agree with Clausson that Holmes's duality as a symbol of rationality and a symbol of irrationality in part causes the disruption of the story's rational agenda. However, I argue that that duality is less a matter of genre and more a matter of a literary convention

unsuccessfully employed to imbue Holmes's rationality with greater supremacy. While I agree that Watson's narrative is the disrupting element in the novel's story of an absolute rationality, I argue that the subversion in Watson's narrative is less a matter of his own identity as a narrator of a subversive genre than it is a matter of his naïve acceptance and reproduction of the flawed cultural values of his time that placed so much faith in the Western rational model.

My argument that rationality is less an intellectual than a cultural entity shouldn't be startling. Contemporary intellectual theory has spent thirty years questioning the assumptions behind the epistemological processes of Western rationality. A casual glance at the situatedness of rationality in social class during the colonial period, during which *The Hound of the Baskervilles* was written, suggests that its purpose has as much to do with social class as it has to do with an objective uncovering of facts and truth. Watson's heartfelt, morally-impassioned remark that to believe in a superstition like the hound would be to "descend to the level of these poor peasants" (146) shows very clearly that rationality forms an important boundary between the lower and middle class. When one thinks about the influences that permitted the middle class to develop and differentiate itself from the lower, rationality becomes evident everywhere. Both economics and science are sturdily grounded in Western rational structures. Watson's remark comes after his discussion of the logical impossibility that the hound that has haunted the Baskervilles is truly supernatural. He says that "it is incredible, impossible, that it should really be outside the ordinary laws of nature" (146). This rational assertion, however, is fragile and incomplete, until Watson swears he will never believe in superstition because

it is below his social standing. Only after this nod to class supremacy does the reader feel the confidence in Watson's assertion that a rational conclusion must and will be reached.

Watson's participation in this class categorization based on rationality fits with Scott Lash's description of social theory's version of modernity (1). According to social theorists, modernity is inscribed in Enlightenment rationality, culminating in an apex of "high modernity." Watson's treatment of those "poor peasants" as irrational believers in superstition not only subjugates them to the lower class, but also groups them with the pre-modern past. Victorian theories such as those in Galton's and Ellis's books literally "classed" these people with "the lower races" colonized by the British. On the other hand, Watson treats Holmes as the opposite of that past, as the ultimate modern man at the height of modern progress. This past becomes something of a character in the novel, a foil to the rationality the story subverts and then ultimately restores.

Holmes, Watson, and the reader are introduced to the story of the hound early in the novel. It is a superstitious "old world narrative" (20), written by a member of the Baskerville family over a century before its retelling to Holmes and Watson. In a nutshell, it explains the origins of a family curse. A progenitor of the Baskervilles was killed by a supernatural hound in the midst of his efforts to kidnap and rape an innocent woman. His curse seems to have been passed on to many of his descendents; they too have died "sudden, bloody, and mysterious" deaths. The story's narrator, recounting the narrative for his sons, remonstrates with them that "I would have you believe, my sons, that the same Justice which punishes sin may also most graciously forgive it ... be circumspect in the future, that those foul passions whereby our family has suffered so grievously may not again be loosed to our undoing" (21). In his categorization of this

superstition as irrational, Watson takes a position similar to David Hume, who argues for rational rather than superstitious explanations of events. Speaking of his work in his *Political Discourses*, the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* summarizes:

Adopting a causal, descriptive approach to the problems he discusses, Hume stresses that current events and concerns are best understood by tracing them historically to their origins. This approach contrasts sharply with contemporary discussions, which treated these events as the products of chance, or -- worse -- of providence. Hume substitutes a concern for the "moral causes" -- the human choices and actions -- of the events, conditions, or institutions he considers. This thoroughly secular approach is accentuated by his willingness to point out the bad effects of superstition and enthusiasm on society, government, and political and social life. (Morris)

Hume, known for his indomitable skepticism, also characterizes all religion as a remnant of an irrational past that created deities to “account for frightening, uncontrollable natural phenomena” (ibid).

Jean-Francois Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* examines rational concepts in the modern world and argues against the view of rationality as an unimpeachable epistemology. Starting with the premise that rational tools such as science and learning exist as hierarchical subsets to knowledge, Lyotard argues that knowledge itself is circumscribed in social and cultural processes. Science is such a process that produces a certain limited type of denotative knowledge. However, knowledge was not invented in the Enlightenment with the birth of science. Knowledge

has been produced in other broader and less exclusive forms throughout the history of civilization. The broader type of knowledge is circumscribed in cultural values, such as efficiency, justice, happiness, or beauty, and is transmitted through narrative. Lyotard describes this process of transmission like this:

Another characteristic meriting special attention is the relation between this kind of knowledge and custom. What is a 'good' prescriptive or evaluative utterance, a 'good' performance in denotative or technical matters? They are all judged to be 'good' because they conform to the relevant criteria ... accepted in the social circle of the 'knower's' interlocutors. The early philosophers called this mode of legitimating statements opinion. The consensus that permits such knowledge to be circumscribed and makes it possible to distinguish one who knows from one who doesn't (the foreigner, the child) is what constitutes the culture of a people. (19)

Lyotard makes the case for an impassible distinction between scientific, rational knowledge and traditional, narrative knowledge, but also notes the similarities between the way both types of knowledge are developed and transmitted (note the way the quote above can be seen to define either a scientific circle or a traditional one). The distinction between rational knowledge and the traditional form of knowledge, and the privileging of the scientific over the traditional, is the condition that created the concept of an unimpeachable rational epistemology.

As Watson's earlier remark about peasants and superstitions indicates, this split was popularly believed to have occurred at the site of a class boundary between the lower

and middle class. Induction into the circle of adherents of rational knowledge was only available to those with the means to obtain education. The “peasants” Watson refers to are characterized in his statement by their adherence to traditional, cultural, narrative knowledge. Watson attempts to characterize his class by an adherence to scientific, rational knowledge.

However, Watson’s narration clumsily conflates these two types of scientific and cultural knowledge to create a *mystified rationality*. This mystified, seemingly supernatural rationality is what the reader finds in Holmes—the rationality that, despite its pervading practicality, could rarely if ever be reproduced in the reader’s own actions or judgments. Watson conflates the two types of knowledge in several ways. First, Watson is a *narrator*. His dramatization of rationality exists in narrative form. The privileged place rationality comes to inhabit in the story is a result of the narrative conventions Watson uses to tell the story. *Telling a story* is a convention of traditional/narrative, not scientific/rational, knowledge. Science at least *purports* to avoid absolutely any type of narrating in its methodology. As Lyotard says, “The scientist questions the validity of narrative statements and concludes they are never subject to argumentation or proof. He classifies them as ... backward ... Narratives are fables, myths, legends, fit only for women and children” (27). Despite Watson’s attempt to portray the rationality of his own class through contrast with the peasant class and its traditional narrative type of knowledge, the very act of portrayal undermines the attempt.

Indeed, Watson’s narrative mystification of rational knowledge associates him with the knowledge structures of cultures or classes Watson would dismiss as primitive, because this mystification belongs to the realm of traditional knowledge. The

unapproachable priest in Achebe's book *Arrow of God*, which is examined later in this thesis, offers a good example of mystified knowledge in pre-rational cultures or classes. Knowledge can be considered "mystified" any time an insider structure exists that makes certain knowledge familiar to some and mysterious to others. This insider structure of traditional knowledge is found in all cultures—think of the outsiders such as the "children" and "foreigners" that Lyotard makes reference to. Any time a body of knowledge is guarded by initiation rites (whether they be coming of age rites or assimilation rites), the operation of traditional narrative knowledge becomes visible. The standard University model, which has been the gateway to all rational/scientific knowledge for centuries, has, like Watson, conflated rational and traditional knowledge, and has thereby mystified rational knowledge—think of the graduate's cap and gown, which don't serve any rational function, but rather a ceremonial one.

The passage in Watson's narration that perhaps best embodies the mystification of rationality is the scene where Watson sees the figure of a man standing on a granite tor at night with the moon behind him. The tor is an outcropping in the moor, a place in Watson's narration that represents chaos, the antithesis of rationality. The question of whether rationality will be able to finally make order of the chaos in the moor, that dwelling place of an ancient, primitive, irrational people, creates the main thematic tension in the book. However, the stranger's identity, which the reader eventually learns, is the element that conflates rational and traditional knowledge, and thereby creates a mystified rationality. The passage reads like this:

And it was at this moment that there occurred a most strange and unexpected thing. We had risen from our rocks and were turning to go

home, having abandoned the hopeless chase. The moon was low upon the right, and the jagged pinnacle of a granite tor stood up against the lower curve of its silver disc. There, outlined as black as an ebony statue on that shining background, I saw the figure of a man upon the tor. Do not think that it was a delusion, Holmes. I assure you that I have never in my life seen anything more clearly. As far as I could judge, the figure was that of a tall, thin man. He stood with his legs a little separated, his arms folded, his head bowed, as if he were brooding over that enormous wilderness of peat and granite which lay before him. He might have been the very spirit of that terrible place. (143)

This brooding apparition turns out to be Holmes, although Watson doesn't discover the fact until much later. The figure continues to be a mysterious one until Watson and Holmes meet again and Holmes reveals that it was himself standing on the tor. Watson says only a few pages later as he sums up what he knows, that "if I could lay my hands upon that man, then at last we might find ourselves at the end of all our difficulties. To this one purpose I must now devote all my energies" (147). He discovers that the man he saw on the tor has been living in a stone hut on the far side of a barren hill, one of the surviving dwellings of the primitive race that had lived on the moor centuries before. He ponders "what passion of hatred can it be which leads a man to lurk in such a place at such a time!...I swear that another day shall not have passed before I have done all that man can do to reach the heart of the mystery" (158). Watson finds Holmes in the hut, and the mystery is apparently defused with a rational explanation. Watson and Holmes begin from that hour to set the mystery of the Baskerville hound in order.

But what about Holmes on the tor? Watson's narration seems to be content with the fact that Holmes had a rational explanation for being there. At the moment when he saw the unknown Holmes upon the tor, however, Watson was under the power of the irrational. Writing to Holmes, he writes about the Holmes he didn't know as Holmes as "the very spirit of that terrible place," and imagines him "brooding over that enormous wilderness" (143). This very irrational portrayal of Holmes mystifies the rationality Holmes represents. The mist clears as the story resolves, but the literary convention that conflated the rational Holmes and the irrational spirit of the moor, and that confounded the thematic tension that had pitted the rational Holmes against the irrational chaos of the primitive moor, remains in force. Holmes, the representation of rationality, emerges from his dwelling in the ancient hut with an added dimension of untouchability. The Holmes on Baker Street was somewhat approachable; the Holmes that can sleep in the hut of an ancient hunter/gatherer on an inhospitable moor and appear in front of the moon on a tor while piecing together the logical premises of a case that only he can solve is not approachable. As Watson's awe of Holmes grows, the conflation of traditional and rational knowledge is also advanced.

The Heideggerian implications of this situation are also important to this discussion. Martin Heidegger's work is a very prominent critique of Western rationality, often employing mystified language and unique methods of inquiry that attempt specifically to avoid the common processes of rational thought and circuitously arrive at unconventional conclusions. The world/earth passage in his essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" is such a passage. That passage describes the strife between two realms, world and earth, and in the locus of that strife there opens a clearing in which true being

appears. Rather than simply allowing the set of objects that exist to circumscribe the possibilities of what *is* (a normal rational process), and also rather than dismissing that set of objects as fundamentally inaccessible and allowing what *is* to be circumscribed by the thought world (a traditional metaphysical approach), Heidegger argues that the world of objects and the abstractions of the thought world enact strife in their interaction, opening between them a “clearing,” a space where true being occurs. Heidegger calls the set of objects “earth,” and the set of thoughts and abstractions “world.” His example describes the strife between these two realms in a Greek temple. The *earth* of the temple is manifestly present—the rock from which it is built, the ground on which it stands, the sky behind it. The formation of the *earth* into a temple gestures towards a people’s culture, their religion, their thoughts, their *world*. The strife between the *world* and *earth* opens up a *clearing* in which true being is manifest.

This method of inquiry is relevant to *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in an examination of the hut on the moor. In the hut, there is a similar strife to that occurring in Heidegger’s Greek temple. The hut’s earthly materials, bare as they are, make present the world of the primitive man, emphasis on primitive. That world, through its pre-rational inscrutability, pushes back to emphasize the bareness of the earthly materials. In the clearing opened up in the strife between world and earth, the being of the primitive man enters the story—a being that is, in any story narrated by Watson, categorically “other.” The irruption of the primitive being into the narrative provides Watson with the foil he needs for Sherlock Holmes.

It is at this point that the situation moves beyond the world/earth conflict in Heidegger’s “The Origin of the Work of Art” to the fourfold gathering of “Building

Dwelling Thinking,” a later essay that re-thinks the clearing in which true being is manifest. The clearing in “Building Dwelling Thinking” has changed from “The Origin of the Work of Art” to exist at the center of a peaceful gathering of four elements, rather than at the strife-ridden center between two elements. This gathering brings together four elements that “by a *primal* oneness ... belong together in one” (351). The four things that gather are divinities, mortals, earth, and sky. Heidegger describes each of these elements, none of which can be removed from the concept of dwelling, and ends each description with the statement “when we say [element], we are already thinking of the other three along with it, but we give no thought to the simple oneness of the four” (351). To say “mortals” proposes immediately the existence of divinities, of the earth on which mortals dwell, and of the sky in which divinities dwell, which exists as the opposite of earth. None of the four can be mentioned without also gesturing towards its three counterparts.

These two sets of binaries gather together at a four-way crossroads where dwelling occurs, and in dwelling one can see and experience true Being. Dwelling in the hut, therefore, where this crossroads occurs, Holmes becomes the ultimate Dasein, who sees and experiences the true nature of Being.

How does the hut become a Heideggerian “dwelling?” It is the crossroads between a fourfold gathering in Holmes that correlates with Heidegger’s divinities, mortals, earth and sky. Holmes’s fourfold are: the irrational, the rational, primitive man, and enlightened man (Holmes). None of these four can be spoken without also gesturing towards the other three. To say “rational” is to propose immediately the existence of the irrational, its opposite, of enlightened man who is rational, and of the primitive man who is irrational. The hut, having been built in a previous age, represents the primitive

civilization from centuries past. And yet it also represents the enlightened Holmes, because Holmes has dwelt there. The uninhabited hut represents the irrationality and chaos that exists on the moor. And yet it also represents the rationality of a logical superman who uses the hut as a base of operations to debunk the superstition of the Hound of the Baskervilles. Holmes makes the hut the locus of this fourfold gathering by his very presence, which unites the rational with the irrational, and the primitive man with Holmes, creating the crossroads where true Being takes place. Dwelling in the hut, Holmes is a true Dasein, one who by virtue of his “dwelling” can understand the essence of true Being.

This fourfold gathering that reveals Holmes as Dasein has strong tie-ins to the point above, that as Holmes becomes more untouchable, and as Watson’s awe of Holmes grows, the conflation of rational and traditional knowledge in Watson’s portrayal of Holmes also becomes more advanced. To understand why this is so in the case of this fourfold gathering, one must understand that Heidegger’s gathering is not to illustrate a contrast between the poles of two related binaries. In the original four elements that form the crossroads in Heidegger’s theory, mortals and divinities, earth and sky, are not brought into contact to show how different they are from each other, but to *gather* those elements into a unity (remember, he says that they “belong together in one” by a “primal oneness”). In their gathering, the uncovering of true Being occurs. This uncovering occurs not because they differentiate themselves from each other in this crossroads, but because they compliment and pervade each other. Likewise, in the case of Holmes and the four elements (irrational, rational, primitive man, and enlightened man), the rational and enlightened man elements are not simply enhanced by a contrast with what they are

not, but are part of a gathering that unites the four elements and opens a space where true Being is uncovered. Holmes as Dasein is, therefore, not simply a man who *is not* irrational or primitive, but he is rather a man whose status as Dasein is enhanced by the gathering of those two elements into his being with the enlightened man and rational elements.

The reader, however, initially accepts the binary contrast between Holmes and the primitive man whose dwelling he borrows, primarily because he is a reader, a reader of fiction, and as such, he is participating in the discourse of narrative rather than scientific knowledge. I mentioned earlier that Watson welcomes the irruption of that primitive man into the narrative as a foil to the supremely rational Holmes, a foiling that appears not to conflate, but to distinguish rational knowledge from traditional knowledge, which is Watson's purpose. That foiling appears to serve Watson's purpose if it is accepted without scrutiny. The reader accepts the foiling as the probable cause of the heightened esteem he suddenly feels for Holmes upon Holmes's emergence from the hut on the moor. However, when the reader takes a *critical* stance towards Watson's narrative position and examines it in terms of the type of discourse it uses as its medium, it becomes evident that this foiling is a convention of storytelling, a convention belonging to traditional/narrative knowledge, as Lyotard noted when he said "the scientist questions the validity of narrative statements" (27). Watson's positioning of Holmes and the primitive man as binaries is not a rational/scientific action, but is rather an irrational, emotional, and social action. It contributes to the mystification of rational knowledge, and it contributes to the conflation of the two types of knowledge that ultimately frustrates Watson's project. Lyotard, "drawing a parallel between science and

nonscientific knowledge,” says that “both are composed of sets of statements; the statements are ‘moves’ made by the players within the framework of generally applicable rules; these rules are specific to each particular kind of knowledge, and the ‘moves’ judged ‘good’ in one cannot be of the same type as those judged ‘good’ in another” (26). Put simply, this quote indicates that Watson’s conflation of scientific and narrative knowledge is unacceptable because it breaks the rules that differentiate those two discourses from each other.

Watson’s attitude towards rationality can be seen as a culturally current one during the time in which the book was written. Watson is, in fact, meant to represent the average man, and to be a narrator with whom the average reader can feel a kinship. Watson’s hubris regarding the rationality he believes characterizes a member of the middle class was not an uncommon attitude during his time. As I will show in the other examples in this thesis, that hubris displays itself in both reflexive examination of itself and in the confrontation with other rationalities.

II. Subversion of Rationality in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*

Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* tells the story of a young Victorian girl who falls down a rabbit-hole and finds herself in something of an alternate reality whose inhabitants don’t think according to Western rational standards, and where the objects behave differently than the objects in Alice’s Victorian world (the first scene in *Wonderland* demonstrates this, where a bottle labeled “drink me” makes Alice shrink and cake labeled “eat me” makes her grow, and a fan makes her shrink again (5-11). Alice’s experiences in Wonderland go on to reveal a world where the normal stasis between the subject and the objects of the world is severely disrupted.

In contrast to Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* points more obliquely to questions of rationality by creating an alternate reality which functions on its own unique but nevertheless fixed set of rational principles. The amusement with which the British public greeted this book indicates a cultural hubris regarding the epistemological infallibility of their own rational model, in that it also reflects their reaction to real-life "others" whose cultural epistemological models presented an "other" rationality. However, by the very creation of this alternate reality with its alternate rationality, Lewis Carroll implicitly suggests the possibility of an "other" rationality that functions for its disciples in the same way Western rationality functions for the British.

The way this other rationality operates is important to my argument. Carroll's alternate realm is not simply a place where people think differently about things; Carroll has created a world where the behavior of the objects themselves and the function of natural law are different than in Britain. This difference will be an essential part of my analysis of the rationality of Wonderland. Whereas the question of rationality in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* revolves around a *rumor* of events that opposes natural law and the ensuing attempt to rationalize those events, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is about a place where the behavior of objects really does oppose the natural law the reader knows and a Westerner whose encounter with the place frustrates her customary rational processes. Theodor Adorno's theory about the subject/object split in Western rationality will be the primary tool I use to determine what the conditions of Wonderland demonstrate about rationality itself.

By bringing Adorno into the discussion, I include a discussion of aesthetics and art. Adorno was particularly interested in the Avant-Garde movement. This art was characterized by, among other things, its departure from traditional representation. This early twentieth-century art divorced itself from society and social forms. It left the mimesis of that social world, and the representation of that social world's perception of the natural world, and withdrew into itself. It left behind the referentiality of traditional art and became art about art, art that reflected on, cast light upon, or called into question its own conventions. It was essentially art that divorced itself from the rationality of a society that thought art should represent something in the real world. Clement Greenberg described this shift as an attempt "to imitate God by creating something valid solely on its own terms, in the way nature itself is valid, in the way a landscape—not its picture—is aesthetically valid ... the work of art or literature *cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself*" (8, emphasis added).

For Adorno, this kind of art provides, as a function of its existence outside of empirical and rational structures, "its own novel structures of meaning, independent of any worldly content" (Cazeaux 202). Art, in other words, creates meaning outside the box of rational thought. Therefore, an engagement with art allows for a process which will not be content to rest upon the epistemological assumptions of rational thought as it exists inside the box, but rather critiques those ways of knowing, seeing them as misleading if they are uncritically relied upon.

Critics have found similarities between Carroll, the author of nonsense, and the later artists of the early twentieth century Avant-Garde movement in their shared ambition to "create something valid solely on its own terms ... [that] cannot be reduced

... to anything not itself.” One critic sees in one of Carroll’s works the premier attempt of an author “to insure through the structure of his work that the work could be perceived only as what it was, and not some other thing; the attempt to create an immaculate fiction ... that resists the attempts of readers ... to turn it into ... a system equatable with already existing systems in the non-fictive world” (Holquist 102). While Holquist’s remark refers specifically to *The Hunting of the Snark*, I include the *Alice* books in the implication of his analysis. All three books belong to the genre of “Nonsense,” and another critic sees the nonsense work in general as “an autonomous enclosed field ... governed by absolute rules, insulated in time and space” (Sewell 61). To Sewell, nonsense is a “system” which functions independent of any system in the real world. Holquist, partially quoting Sewell, defines the system on these terms:

Nonsense, in the writings of Lewis Carroll ... is not chaos, but the opposite of chaos. It is a closed field of language in which the meaning of any single unit is dependent on its relationship to the system of the other constituents. Nonsense is ‘a collection of words and events which in their arrangement do not fit into some recognized system,’ but which constitute a system of their own. (104)

In the *Alice* books, Alice, with her childhood logic which is immature, yet mostly grounded in the logic of the adult real-world (she has at her command a long list of Victorian platitudes), is the anomaly which makes the system visible. Her incompatibility is so pronounced that at one point she is unable to identify herself. “*What are you?*” said the pigeon. ‘I can see you’re trying to invent something.’ ‘I—I’m a little girl,’ said Alice rather doubtfully” (38). As is evidenced by her treatment in each sphere she enters, the

system which encounters an anomaly must either integrate or eliminate the anomaly. The system in the *Alice* books attempts both, the characters often trying to teach Alice the logic of Wonderland in an effort to integrate her, and both the Duchess and the Queen order Alice's head chopped off in an effort to eliminate her.

These remarks are given in order to identify Lewis Carroll with the Avant-Garde movement in which art withdrew from a referential affiliation with the world. The attributes of the nonsense system that Sewell defines and that system's similarity to modern literature, noted by Holquist, establish a clear theoretical tie between Lewis Carroll and the early twentieth-century art that left off mimesis for art about art's own conventions. Lewis Carroll is not, however, writing about the conventions of art or literature. The avant-garde movement of the early twentieth century that did that was grounded in a historical/cultural moment entirely different from Lewis Carroll's. I cannot suppose that Lewis Carroll anticipated this moment; "he does not appear to have troubled himself to any significant degree over the direction of the arts during the Victorian period, nor to have entered into any dialogues with literary people" (Henkle 68). Lewis Carroll, in other words, was not an aesthete. He was, however, a logician. His art may be seen as a logical rather than an aesthetic manifestation of the phenomenon observed by Greenberg. Carroll's work is, in a sense, rejecting the logical conventions of his society at-large, and withdrawing into its own logical standards, the way early twentieth-century art rejected traditional aesthetic standards and withdrew into itself. Both attempt to create a world severed from any referentiality with the world outside of the work.

Holquist makes this point for *The Hunting of the Snark* as he argues against the impulse to interpret the poem as an allegory, an interpretation that would make the poem

correlate in a direct way to existing systems of meaning. He points out that the poem has its own built-in epistemology: “What I tell you three times is true” (110). Holquist refers to an instance in the poem where this epistemological tool is used to establish the truth of a proposition: the Butcher wishes to prove that the cry he has heard was that of a Jubjub bird, so he says three times “‘Tis the voice of the Jubjub!” (110), thereby establishing the truth of his statement. Holquist identifies this structure as the poem’s own form of syllogism, which is as true inside the poem as a normal syllogism is outside of it. This “[indicates] that the intrinsic logic of the poem is *not* that of extrinsic logic which operates outside the construct of the poem” (111)—there is an absolute break between the two rational systems.

One of the best critical approaches to *Alice in Wonderland* is, on these terms, through an examination of rationality in the book. The dialogue of the book is rational discourse, differentiated from other types of discourse by its inherently rational structure. The dialogue is like this because of the radical difference between the rationale possessed by Alice and the one possessed by the Wonderland creatures who speak to her. Regardless of what the characters mean to converse upon, because of their divergent rationalities, the subject of the conversation is inevitably rationality. There is very little, if any, dialogue in the book that doesn’t speak to the subject of rationality. There is no purely conversational dialogue, no small-talk that remains untouched by the question of rationality. Alice attempts such innocent conversation, but always the difference between the logic she uses and the logic of Wonderland is immediately illuminated by the resulting discord. “You don’t know much, and that’s a fact,” Alice is told by the Duchess when she tries to make some small-talk on the subject of cats that grin (43), which

statement invokes the concept that's really at stake in any form of rationality—namely, knowledge.

The centrality of rational discourse in *Alice in Wonderland* is what makes it relevant in a dialogue with Adorno. As mentioned earlier, a major theme in Adorno's project was a critique of Western, Enlightenment rationality. According to summaries of Adorno's work by Cazeaux and Martin Jay, Adorno claims that the Western concept of knowledge is constructed on the binary relationship between the cognizant subject and the objects available to his perception. "Knowledge, on this account, is idealized as the subject consuming, mastering, or identifying himself with the object; in other words, the subject arranging his categories so that they 'capture' the object" (202). Jay points out that according to Adorno, subjects can never capture their objects adequately: "any adequate theory of knowledge must recognize the impossibility of finding concepts perfectly congruous with the objects they attempt to describe" (60). In one of Adorno's works, "The particular 'error' of contemporary epistemology that Adorno addresses ... is the radical separation of subject and object, which has been a fundamental assumption of Western thought since at least Descartes" (Jay 61). This base for knowledge is inherently problematic for Adorno. The world as subjects consuming objects, becoming or being identified by the objects they consume, is inextricable from the logic of capitalism. This inextricability exposes the limit of Enlightenment rationality, then, by rendering its view of truth as a cultural imperative. Like Lyotard's criticism, which says that rational discourse is limited because it is inextricable with cultural discourse, Adorno argues that rational discourse is limited because of its origin in an economic structure that is very

culture-specific. Both situations expose rationality as a product of culture rather than a purely transcendent way of knowing.

Hence the importance of aesthetics and art for Adorno. Art in this context of Western culture attains its self-contradictory (or self-negating, to use Adorno's term) status: on the one hand, an artwork is outside the box of Western thought, as an object which refuses to be objectified, whose meaning comes not from its consummability as an object but which meaning, as Cazeaux says, "exceeds its material origins" (202). On the other hand, an artwork is a thing, and must be seen as such to be accessed.

If it is essential to artworks that they be things, it is no less essential that they negate their own status as things, and thus art turns against art. The totally objectivated artwork would congeal into a mere thing, whereas if it altogether evaded objectivation it would regress to an impotently powerless subjective impulse and flounder in the empirical world.

(Adorno 175)

In its self-negating existence, art is problematized by Western rationality, which is problematized by art. This self-negating status is what places art outside the limits of pure rationality, and what makes accessing it important for those who are otherwise subject to a rational paradigm. Its nature is that of something that rationally can't be, and yet it is. It is an embedded part of a rational structure, but it undermines that structure by nature—its existence cannot be explained by that structure.

Adorno's theoretical work weighs most heavily in an examination of the subject/object relation in *Alice in Wonderland*, because, as mentioned earlier, the behavior of objects in Wonderland, and therefore the relation of thinking subjects to those

objects, is different. Part of Alice's confusion results from the refusal of the material objects she encounters to function the way she expects them to, which expectation comes from her experience in a Western rational context. In the episode with the key, the small door, the bottle that says "drink me" and the cake that says "eat me," an entirely different relation exists between Alice and these objects in Wonderland than would exist in a familiar context. The key does indeed open a door, but Alice is unable to get through the door because of the lack of stasis between her and her material surroundings. The drink makes Alice too small to reach the key, and the cake makes her too large to fit through the door. The resistance of the materials of Wonderland to the rational process of a Western mind is maddening. The Cheshire Cat, the only inhabitant of Wonderland able for short moments to converse with Alice on a level which she's capable of understanding, tells her "we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad" (47). It is difficult to determine from this statement alone whether it is a comment regarding the lack of a binding rationale in Wonderland, in which its objects are ordered categorically for the subjects, or refers to the presence of a rationale of subject/object ordering different than Alice's, which is therefore, to Alice, "mad."

Because of the centrality of art in the subject/object relation, and the centrality of the subject/object relation in art, a clearer understanding of the status of the subjects/objects in Wonderland may be gained by understanding the status of art in Wonderland. For Adorno, art's very possibility, in the context of Western thought, is contingent upon the split between subject and object. Because of this split, "mimesis of what is not administered by the subject has no other locus than in the living subject"

(169). In a context where the subject/object split informs the rationality of the subjects, art can only exist as the subject's mediation of that which is not the subject.

The status of art in Wonderland is alluded to in a very brief comment from the conversation Alice has with the Gryphon and the Mock Turtle. The Mock Turtle, describing the classes he took in school, mentions "uglification." When Alice asks what uglification is, the Gryphon responds "Never heard of uglifying! You know what to beautify is, I suppose?" Alice says she does, and the Gryphon says "Well, then, if you don't know what to uglify is, you *are* a simpleton" (73). This conversation reveals the existence of a beauty/ugliness binary in Wonderland, and, apparently, a strangely equal valuation of both binaries. This equal valuation raises questions in an Adornian context which will reveal a very different subject/object relation in Wonderland than in the Western world. Adorno admits that beauty and ugliness do exist as binaries, but renders that relation problematic because of its inherence in a rational aesthetic context founded on the rationality of the division of subject and object. Both are a result of the subject's domination of the object. Beauty seems to exist in the subject's self-pleasing categorization and ordering of objects, while ugliness exists as the unsettling critique of that action. Its disruptive presence problematizes the insular comfort of the subject surrounded by the beauty of his own rational ordering.

The equal valuation of beauty and ugliness in Wonderland is, therefore, strange. It suggests a different subject/object relation entirely. The pleasure of what in a Western context is objects ordered according to subjective taste seems to have no advantage in Wonderland over the disruptive critique from its opposite. But why do the categories exist at all? One may, upon asking this question, begin to see a strange post-rational

element in Wonderland, with refugee elements of a failed Western rationality floating in a chaotic void, elements like beauty and ugliness, which exist in a binary devoid of all meaning after the failure of the rational system.

Other floating post-rational elements in Wonderland include the organized activities recognizable to any Westerner. Thought of in these terms, they take on an eeriness one didn't notice before when they were seen as pure nonsense. Tea-parties, banquets, croquet games, are conducted in Wonderland seemingly for no end whatsoever. It is in these settings that the principle behind the collapse of the rational system becomes visible. The proceedings in these settings are disrupted by the lack of a subject/object distinction. Subjects are relegated to the place of objects, and objects often possess a novel subjectivity. This circumstance renders the organized activity cacophonous with its surroundings.

The Queen's croquet game models this observation perfectly. The objects in this scene do not seem to adhere to the expectations of the subjects. For mallets, the players use flamingoes. Instead of croquet balls, they use hedgehogs. The wickets are soldiers bent over backwards resting on their hands. The balls walk away, the flamingoes refuse to be used as mallets, and the wickets wander, making the game impossible. The Queen's rage is heightened as the game progresses. Although there is a rational system behind the objects' organization, they refuse to fit in it. More importantly, perhaps, the objects are not objects, but *subjects*, especially the soldiers who are supposed to be the wickets. The lack of a "disjoint" between subject and object is apparent here.

The Queen's rage seems to suggest further a post-rational context. What is the purpose of the game? It must have some purpose, to justify the Queen's rage at its failure

to fulfill that purpose. But she herself seems to be as ignorant as to what that purpose is as everyone else, although she seems to think it is important. These organized activities are, therefore, like the persisting beauty/ugliness binary that seems to have its origin in a rational context which no longer exists. The collapse of the subject/object binary and the rational system it informs left behind these refugee forms which serve as indicators of its departure.

This concept of a post-rational element in Carroll's work brings us back to the Greenberg's treatment of early twentieth-century art. The post-rational elements in Wonderland, the refugee elements from the collapsed rational system that seems to have preceded it, can be seen as conventions of the world that accompanied the system.

Greenberg describes the period in which art dramatized and called into question its own conventions:

In turning his attention away from the subject matter of common experience, the poet or artist turns it in upon the medium of his own craft. The nonrepresentational or 'abstract,' if it is to have aesthetic validity, cannot be arbitrary and accidental, but must stem from obedience to some worthy constraint or original. This constraint, once the world of common, extroverted experience has been renounced, can only be found in the very processes or disciplines by which art and literature have already imitated the former. These themselves become the subject of art and literature. (9)

The post-rational elements in Carroll's work, detached and solitary conventions like a croquet game, tea-time, and ideas of beauty and ugliness, stand out in relief from the post-rational world in Wonderland the same way art's own conventions stand out when

they are detached from the world they originally mingled with. “This is not a croquet game,” the chapter on the croquet game might be titled. It is a convention now more visible because of its removal from its normal context. Additionally, “art about art,” by making its own conventions its subject, made not only those conventions more visible, but also the old assumptions to which they were attached. Carroll’s *Wonderland*, by dramatizing the conventions detached from the rational context they normally inhabit, also brings into relief and calls into question that rational sphere.

Without going so far as to attribute a political motive to Lewis Carroll’s writing *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, once I have arrived at this point in my analysis of the book’s treatment of rationality, it is difficult not to see a critique of British colonialism embedded in the story. Its way of structuring Western rational conventions to overlay an environment where the subjects’ participation in those conventions is ignorant to any purpose behind them, and where the objects used in those conventions resist being compelled to fill the roles the conventions require, and where subjects are confused with objects, seems to create a parody of British colonialism. A monarchical ruler insists that unwilling subjects/objects (one could argue that the Empire treated its colonial subjects as either one) participate in a rational game. The procedures of that game seem arbitrary to all but the power figure directing the game. The game is founded on a rational structure with a manifestly questionable claim to universality.

III. Conclusion

As I have shown in this chapter, the portrayal of rationality in colonial period literature contains gaps that manifest a problem with the overall cultural opinion towards rationality. These works show the sometimes crude seams in what represents itself as a

seamless truth. These seams manifest Enlightenment rationality as not an unimpeachable epistemology, but as a discourse with its own internal tensions and contradictions that open it to critique.

Chapter Two

Lewis Carroll, Chinua Achebe and 'Rationalities'

Rationality is an invisible undergirding of every person's and every culture's value system, morality, economy, material practice, pragmatic habits—it is a process and a practice that informs almost everything any culture or member thereof thinks or does, although the rational system itself is not often reflected upon, because of its invisibility. The intersection of two cultures, however, does make the rational structure of each culture visible; these structures are exposed by contrast. The purpose of this chapter is to engage the issue of rationality in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, making the workings of rationality in the colonial structure he portrays more visible. Specific elements in Achebe's book that I will use to draw out the positions of the conflicting rationalities are the Native Court, the road the British build, and the context of "indirect rule" in which those two institutions are administered.

To understand the hubris of the British colonizers in their subjugation of their colonial subjects, it's useful to explore the assumptions behind the Enlightenment. One justification of the Colonial administration was the premise that the colonial subjects were inferior to their Western colonizers (Brooker 135). The way they defined the nature of that inferiority ranged from race, to religion, to rationality, and often was a construct in which all three of those characteristics were linked. The premise of inferiority as a function of race and religion are familiar enough. The premise of inferiority as a function of rationality was couched in rhetoric which used words such as "backward" to describe the cultural and mental condition of the colonial subjects, a term that survived in unofficial political usage into the mid-nineteenth century (as in the case of Kennan's

Long Telegram, available on a web-search, which used the word interchangeably with “dependent” to describe third-world countries). The British found this backwardness substantiated 1. in the subjects’ brutality (in *Arrow of God*, one of Winterbottom’s cardinal justifications for his authority in Nigeria is the brutality he witnessed in the Igbo people leaving a man in the desert to die), and 2. in their lack of modernization. Both of these lacks are offences against cherished Western values that had their origins in the Enlightenment. The colonial subjects’ brutality transgressed the values of Enlightenment humanism’s rationally constructed concepts of human rights, social justice, and the individual (Chakrabarty 4). The “primitive” condition of the colonized existed, in the minds of the colonizers, as a binary opposite to their own condition of modern progress, a condition founded on scientific progress, which was in turn founded upon the principles of the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason, which had established a logical vehicle that facilitated the West’s departure from its own primitive condition in the Dark Ages. The Western view of its own Enlightenment-based progress was of a movement upwards on a linear, hierarchical scale. The irony in these two categories of colonial disapproval, however, is evident in the replacement of the “humanist episteme” with the “machinic episteme” in the West that occurred when humanism was replaced by modernism (Lash 7). In essence, the British object to their colonial subjects on the grounds of the subjects’ lack in two incompatible areas.

Max Weber’s work, outlined in the introduction of this study, effectively characterizes the ways Western culture thought about its own progress. Weber’s work creates the categories by which a truly rational culture can be identified. These categories, of course, include the West and exclude all other cultures. Weber’s categories,

or those of his colleagues in social science, have been used further to inscribe the limits of modernity, of what conditions a society must meet to be “modern” (Lash 1). Most relevant to this chapter is Weber’s differentiation between rationalism and true rationality. All societies have developed forms of rational behavior, behavior designed to accomplish a certain end. Such behavior is what Weber calls rationalism. Weber argues that this type of behavior is different from the peculiar type of rationality found in Western culture. “What distinguishes rationality from rationalism is that rationalism is oriented to immediate goals, while rationality involves goals which are ordered, arranged, and even chosen in relation to some larger, conscious system of meanings, ideas, and values” (Swidler 35-36). This systematization of rationality denies the validity of a non-Western culture’s truth claims and relegates that culture to the realm of the irrational and pre-modern.

Humanism / Modernism

Dipesh Chakrabarty describes humanism as a group of categories and concepts, the genealogy of which go deep into the intellectual and even theological traditions of Europe. Concepts such as citizenship, the state, civil society, public sphere, human rights, equality before the law, the individual, distinctions between public and private, the idea of the subject, democracy, popular sovereignty, social justice, scientific rationality ... all bear the burden of European thought and history. (4)

These values that normally carry positive connotations are a part of the Western mindset that led to the outrages of colonialism. The colonialist subjection of the colonized,

justified by the colonizers' possession of and the colonized subjects' lack of this humanist inheritance, is one of the great hypocrisies of modern history. As Chakrabarty observes, "The European colonizer of the nineteenth century both preached this Enlightenment humanism at the colonized and at the same time denied it in practice" (4). Part of the colonizers' justification for this paradox was in a very limited definition of the term "human." "European imperialism had reduced that idea to the figure of the settler-colonial white man," Chakrabarty says (5). The view of modernity described by Lash, in which a "machinic episteme" comes to replace a "humanist episteme," which was "inscribed in a rationality of the same" with a "constitutive and constituting inside ... which excludes ... all otherness to the outside, where it is to be grasped and studied and controlled as an object" is contrary the tenets of humanism (7). I argue that the rise of this modernist episteme contributes to both the paradoxical role of humanism in colonialism and to the justification of colonialism on the grounds of the lack existing in the colonized.

The longevity of this concept of "colonial white man as human" lasted into the mid-twentieth century as a Eurocentric model of history that ignored or glossed over non-European history and centered European history in "world history." This Eurocentrism is another manifestation of the cultural attitude that led Max Weber to say that only the West has true rationality, and only the West has progress that is universally desirable. Chakrabarty, whose project is to "provincialize Europe," notes the recent passing of the construction of European history as a "universal human history" that sees the history and progress of humanity and the history and progress of Europe, or the West, as equivalent (3). Seven years earlier, apparently of the opinion that this concept of European history as human history still flourished, Chakrabarty said that "[I]nsofar as the academic discourse

of history ... is concerned, 'Europe' remains the sovereign theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call 'Indian,' 'Chinese,' 'Kenyan,' and so on. There is a peculiar way in which all these other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called 'the history of Europe'" (Hawthorn 108). This tendency for Europeans/Westerners to place themselves at the center is a practice linked to the humanist definition of "human" as the "settler-colonial white man."

Rationality and humanism are both products of the Enlightenment. Humanism was largely a product of the Enlightenment application of rational inquiry into non-empirical, abstract, human subjects, such as justice, rights, etc., in an effort to produce a universally valid system of ethics. This effort is embodied most famously in Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*, in which Kant argues for reason's ability to provide a standard of universal moral behavior. Robert Johnson summarizes Kant's approach, saying that he "argued that moral requirements are based on a standard of rationality he dubbed the 'Categorical Imperative' (CI). Immorality thus involves a violation of the CI and is thereby irrational. Other philosophers, such as Locke and Hobbes, had also argued that moral requirements are based on standards of rationality" (Johnson). The origins of the humanist values that recoiled at the condition of the non-Western peoples and reacted by defining them as inferior are, therefore, inherently tied to Enlightenment rationality.

As I noted above, humanism at some point gave way to modernism, as Lash notes:

Here a predifferentiated humanism – whether classical or Renaissance – develops into a modernism based on a machinic or systemic model. In pre-modernist humanism, humans circulate freely with non-humans, as

architectural columns are models of man, as nature is seen to be filled with signs, as semiotic and hermeneutic as humanity. With the rise of architectural-urbanistic and sociological modernism (positivism), a humanistic episteme yields to a machinic episteme. (7)

This machinic episteme contains what Horkheimer and Adorno attacked in their critique of the Enlightenment, namely fascism and the domination of nature and other men (Horkheimer and Adorno 4). If it is understood that the rational system that provided the foundation for the morality of human rights and equality became a system in which everything (nature and humans) became a resource for man's progress, it becomes easier to understand how the colonialist could preach his Enlightenment humanism while at the same time denying it in practice.

I have suggested that Lewis Carroll's work is groundbreaking in that it proposes, whether purposely or not, that the rational system which structured the British world may be arbitrary—that it may be just one way of structuring the world. Carroll's work in his British context was amusing, not threatening, because of the firmness of the British belief that Western rationality was the *only* rationality—that to think in a different manner was *ir*-rational, located lower on the hierarchical scale of progress mentioned above. It was to be *un*-Enlightened, and therefore inferior. That view sees Enlightenment rationality as a movement on a linear scale that elevates the Westerner above the rest of the world. For example, see Kant's "What is Enlightenment," in which he defines enlightenment as "man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity" (Kant). Carroll's creation of an autonomous "other" rationality calls that view into question and suggests that perhaps rationalities inhabit parallel and equally legitimate planes—that the scale of

“enlightenment” may indeed be non-linear. The colonial/imperial view claims the privileged position of “Rationality;” *Wonderland* and Achebe’s *Arrow of God* suggest that there is no such thing, only “rationalities.”

Arrow of God takes place in colonial Nigeria, a site of colonial conflict. The conflict is framed mainly in the relationship between the British Administrator, Captain Winterbottom, and the Chief Priest Ezeulu of Umuaro, an Igbo village under Winterbottom’s colonial jurisdiction. The conflict also exists in the Igbo’s internal dissonance, which is heightened as a function of the British Administration’s presence in Nigeria. Ezeulu is challenged by other would-be leaders of Umuaro who voice opposition to Ezeulu’s policy of dealing with the British Administration. The conflict comes to a head when Ezeulu is summoned to Winterbottom’s headquarters, which appears to all of Umuaro as an insult. Ezeulu’s resulting conflict with the people in his village culminates in his refusal to initiate the harvest ritual, an action which leaves the villagers starving and the village’s economy seriously impaired. It is unclear whether this refusal on Ezeulu’s part is prompted by the village’s deity, as Ezeulu wants to believe, or whether it stems from Ezeulu’s own pride and stubbornness. Ezeulu loses his mind at the end of the book when his son dies, an event for which the cause, like Ezeulu’s refusal of his ritual duty, is ambiguous.

Recent critical work on Achebe’s book has focused on the postcolonial aspect of the book and situated that aspect in contemporary conversations about the postcolonial state. All three critical writers I cite in this chapter agree that Achebe’s work, despite being written in 1964, remains relevant for its trenchant critique of the faulty colonial project. The book’s longevity as a relevant statement is remarkable because of the

internal dissonance in postcolonial politics and the massive revisions the field of study has undergone, all since the writing of the book.

The three articles I use treat several themes that are useful to my investigation, namely the foreign nature of Western institutions in Africa and the important difference between the absolutism at work in Western rationality and the relativity at work in the Igbo rationality. Like Dipesh Chakrabarty above, Olakunle George and Tejumola Olaniyan note that Western institutions are not a natural part of Africa. George argues that “If understood simply as a project of replicating the nation-state form inherited—through colonial imposition—from Western Europe, the nationalist project of translation was doomed from the outset” (345). Olaniyan complains that “rarely was it pondered that the problem might be primarily a crisis of institutions in their entirety in relation to context, not simply of their performance” (22). Both writers recognize the fact that to blame the failure of Western government in Africa on poor execution is to blame the Africans and to continue to categorize them as backward, while placing the blame on the original imposition of the institutions is to critique the assumptions of the colonial and post-colonial nationalist projects. Both Olaniyan and George praise Chinua Achebe as a smart and successful writer for his recognition that the blame lies not on the Africans’ inability to adopt foreign institutions but rather on the assumption that those institutions belong in Africa, and for his successful portrayal of that fact.

Perhaps more importantly for my argument, George, Olaniyan, and Suzanne Scafe all discuss the problematic intersection between the absolute rationality of the West and the relative rationality of the Igbo people in *Arrow of God*. Scafe, commenting on Achebe’s frequent return to this subject in his writing, says that “[Achebe] interprets the

Igbo proverb ‘Wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it’ to mean: ...that there is no one way to anything. The Ibo people who made that proverb are very insistent on this—there is no absolute anything” (119). Olaniyan describes how the relativist Igbo rationality, a “polyvocal,” “delicately structure contingency,” is dominated by its encounter with absolute Western rationality in *Arrow of God*:

To a large extent, the crisis in the text results from attempts to unduly tame a delicately structured contingency, to force a monologue upon a polyvocal terrain ... [Igbo characters, even those engaged in serious internal conflicts] *without distinction are consumed by colonialism and its Christianity whose main distinguishing feature is systemic parochialism.* Here, finally, is the vacuum into which is inscribed, simultaneously, the fall of the indigenous, and the rise of the colonial, episteme. (26, italics in original)

There is a fundamental difference between the way Carroll and Achebe engage the concept of rationality. While Carroll’s *Wonderland* is an alternative rationality that contrasts that of the “real world,” which truly makes the book’s world a “wonderful” and strange creation, Achebe’s work *begins* with the assertion that no such singularly valid “real world” rationality exists. *Arrow of God* exposes the conflict between the rationalities of two cultures in the larger conflict for dominance, and disputes the dominance of Western ‘reason’ over the forms of rationality that form its “other.” In this context, rationality is seen to be more than an innocuous epistemological tool—it becomes very clearly a vehicle for the attainment and exercise of power.

The average Western reader may very well expect, in encountering a novel written about Africa, to encounter a sort of Wonderland—a place which introduces him to irrational, incorrect, “immature,” and amusing ways of thinking. Such readers respond to such a novel the same way the Victorian Englishman responded to *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. Achebe himself relates the tendency for Westerners to approach non-Western literatures from this Orientalist perspective in his famous diatribe against Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*:

I received two very touching letters from high school children in Yonkers, New York, who -- bless their teacher--had just read *Things Fall Apart*. One of them was particularly happy to learn about the customs and superstitions of an African tribe. (251)

Achebe goes on to make a statement that levels the field between New York and the Igbo people by asserting the equal validity of the Igbo rationality and the one existing among the school children in Yonkers:

The young fellow from Yonkers, perhaps partly on account of his age but I believe also for much deeper and more serious reasons, is obviously unaware that the life of his own tribesmen in Yonkers, New York, is full of odd customs and superstitions and, like everybody else in his culture, imagines that he needs a trip to Africa to encounter those things. (251)

Clearly, Achebe argues here with an assumption with which Westerners are fluent and which Olaniyan, Scafe and George point out in their critiques, namely the assumption that the West is the only culture whose rationality has any validity since the Enlightenment elevated it out of the primordial superstitions that keep the non-Western

world in darkness. This absolutism assumes that only the modern, Western world thinks properly and, unlike the Igbo rationality, characterized by the proverb quoted by Scafe, denies the truth-claims of other cultural epistemologies. By referring to the 'enlightened' practices of New Yorkers as "odd customs and superstitions," he disputes that assumption and places the rationality of the West on a plane with all the other rationalities of the cultures of the world.

Achebe's *Arrow of God* is framed to reveal two different rationalities encountering each other. Some examples are as simple as the instance where Winterbottom inhibits the efficiency of the grass-cutters outside his window who sing and swing their machetes in time with the song by telling them to "shut up there!" The result of his interruption: "the blades went up and down haphazardly thereafter" (56), with less efficiency than before, it may be assumed. Some examples of rational conflict, on the other hand, contain deeper implications into structures of power. For example, Winterbottom complains to Clarke about one of the villages, Abame: "In the whole division they are the least co-operative with their Native Court. Throughout last year the court handled less than a dozen cases and not one was brought to it by the natives themselves" (108). The British have apparently established a judicial institution and filled its offices with native people. That the villagers don't use it is an indication, firstly, of the foreignness of that institution, of the villagers' inability to incorporate it as part of their system of living. Indeed, from the perspective of the reader, the establishment of a court among the villagers seems absurd. Captain Winterbottom recognizes, at least, that there is a slippage between the British institutions and the native people who are expected to use them. When he recounts the episode of the "Breaking of the Guns," in which he settled

the dispute between Okperi and Umuaro, he notes that “every witness who testified before me—from both sides without exception—perjured themselves. One thing you must remember in dealing with the natives is that like children they are great liars” (37). Of course, perjury is not a concept with which any of the villagers would be familiar. Their rational structure does not include such a thing.

The issue of the villagers not using the court is, secondly, an indication of their ultimate rejection of British authority. It is more than a normal reaction to an obtuse institution that won't fit within a native rationality. The court's existence is a British assertion of the pervasiveness of British authority, authority that is specifically grounded in Western rationality. The imposition of the court into the village's non-Western system of justice is an assertion that the rationality of the British judiciary structure is superior to any system designed to dispense justice that the natives possess. The court's very presence there in the Abame village is a daily act of intellectual force, making present, by the representation of the physical structure, a superior power that holds the keys to moral justification. This assertion harkens back to the rationally-produced system of moral behavior in Enlightenment projects such as Kant's, whose past assertions of the universality of their rational projects justified the later arrogation of the Westerner above the non-Westerner on a linear scale of morality. Winterbottom frequently expresses his opinion that the natives are unable to expedite their own justice by making mention of an instance where he had “rescued a man buried alive up to his neck, with a piece of roast yam on his head to attract vultures” (57). He sees this experience especially as the avenue to his unique understanding of the “elemental cruelty in the psychological makeup of the native” (58). Congruent to this opinion is the implicit one that any native form of justice

will be backward because of its grounding in “elemental cruelty” rather than in a rational legal process. That the villagers ignore the court is therefore, in addition to being a sign that the court doesn’t fit within the rational system of the village, a rejection of British authority that derives from a rational ‘due process.’

I would be remiss if I only saw the intersection of these rational systems as illuminating the Igbo rationality. The conversation between Winterbottom and Clarke also brings some strange assumptions embedded in Winterbottom’s Western rationality into relief. His complaint is that the Abame village had only twelve cases in a year, and that those twelve had been brought to the court by administrators rather than natives. While one interpretation of this statement could imbue Winterbottom with a practicality that understands that disputes and criminal behavior occur on a regular basis everywhere, and that the lack of activity in the court is a sign not of a peaceful community but rather a lack of submission to British sovereignty, it could also be viewed as an indication of a blind progress-based mentality that sees an empty court as an unsuccessful court regardless of its location and the cause of its inactivity. Such a rationale would also say that a jail is built to be used, and a half-empty jail is a half-failure. When this type of mentality is exposed by an intersection of Western rationality and an Other rationality, even a Westerner can see a weakness in the Western rational structure.

In concert with the Native Court, the British Administration is in the process of implementing a new policy of “indirect rule,” a policy which contains the same implicit assumptions of the Native Court, namely that the Igbo people are ‘backward,’ and that by converting the Igbo to the structures of Western rationality, the British will be able to most effectively rule Nigeria and enlighten the Igbo people. The letter from headquarters

that Winterbottom receives states the goal of “build[ing] a higher civilization upon the soundly rooted native stock ... moulding it and establishing it into lines consonant with *modern ideas* and higher standards” (56, italics added). The attempt to indoctrinate the villagers into Western rationality is evident in the words “modern ideas.” The concept of “indirect rule” involves the promotion of certain individuals from the village to a status imbued with British authority, giving them the title of “paramount chief.” That authority is grounded in their conversion to the British rational structure, and the paramount chief’s job would be to work towards modernization and Westernization within his jurisdiction. Winterbottom recognizes from past experience the folly of promoting “some mission educated smart-alec” (59), one who, through his education-based conversion to Western rationality, was already dissimilated from the villagers. However, it is evident from the letter from headquarters that such a recognition does not stem from questioning the propriety of converting the villagers to that rationality, but from the recognition that such a conversion must be accomplished through the gradual process of “moulding” in which the whole village is slowly elevated, rather than indoctrinating one man and giving him power over the whole unenlightened village. Although Winterbottom is ambivalent about the whole concept of appointing paramount chiefs, he believes that he has in Ezeulu a candidate who will fit into the British structure. ““As far as Umuaro is concerned I have found their chief,’ he said with one of his rare smiles, ‘and they will live happily ever after’” (108).

Of course, Umuaro’s happiness is only marginally at stake for the British Administration. The real issue, stating it again, is power—the goal is to convert Umuaro to Western Rationality in order to keep them subject to it, to raise them to a more

privileged level (from a British viewpoint), and a more maintenance-free level, of subjection. The court, by existing to impose the structure of Western rationality on the cultural concept of propriety, of morality, is an extremely invasive colonial tool. It “blesses” the colonized villagers with order, justice, etc., all the while ensuring that the villagers act in accordance with the rationally acceptable framework of Britain. At least that is the ideal. Winterbottom’s frustration with the court at Abame is with its ineffectiveness in accomplishing those ends.

The idea of a Western court set within the framework of an incompatible rationality has a precedent in Carroll’s *Wonderland*. The symbols of Western Rationality are there: much like the court messenger who has converted to the West in *Arrow of God*, the jury members in *Wonderland*’s court make use of writing tablets purely for display purposes. Alice takes Bill the Lizard’s pencil because it squeaks, after which “he was obliged to write with one finger for the rest of the day, and this was of very little use, as it left no mark on the slate” (85). The court messenger in *Arrow of God* comes from a Nigerian village, but more importantly, he is in the pay of the British Administration as a “Chief Messenger” (135). His errand to Ezeulu’s hut is to summon Ezeulu to appear before Winterbottom. The exchange between the messenger and Ezeulu and his friends is full of posturing for power and authority, including the messenger’s taking “a very small book from his breast pocket and open[ing] it in the manner of a white man” (137). The reader gets the feeling that the messenger’s paper is as functional as the Lizard’s. Functionality, however, is not the point. The pen and paper’s true function in both cases is to represent a rational structure, which is to represent power. The Okperian messenger’s pen and paper grant him a certain air of authority through association with

Western rationality—they have no other context in Ezeulu’s tent. It is the same with the authority of the court in Wonderland—the pen and paper, the jury itself, the judge’s wig that Alice overtly recognizes as a symbol of power, all exist to assert the authority of the court. It can be assumed that the effect is similar in Umuaro to that in Wonderland—the representation of authority is effective, despite its lack of relevance to the rationality of the people over whom the authority is exercised.

The court is not the only Western form that has been transplanted into Nigeria to assert British authority. Another highly visible example is the road—more subversive, perhaps, because of the likelihood that even the British are unaware of its subversiveness. The British Administration has built a road “to connect Okperi with its enemy, Umuaro” (76). The subtle irony in that sentence is evident even to a Westerner reading the book. It is enhanced by the statement that “as the new road did not point in the direction of a stream or a market, [one] did not encounter many villagers, only a few women now and again carrying heavy loads of firewood” (81). The road that the British Administration constructs seems to take a very prominent place on their list of priorities. However, the irrationality of the road from the perspective of the Nigerians is evident. The Administration’s difficulty in enlisting workers to construct the road, and the foreman’s inability to manage the workers he has, indicate the incompatibility of the project and the world of the Igbo people. Furthermore, the road connects two enemy villages, enabling an interaction that neither village is very accustomed to having, and does not give either village access to the things that they regularly leave their villages for.

In fact, the building of any road anywhere seems a foreign and incomprehensible thing to the people of the villages, considering that as a non-industrial people they don’t

use so much as a wheeled cart to travel. They travel on foot, and their pattern of travel seems to be less established than it would be for Westerners. Early in the story, Ezeulu's dinner is late because of the distance that his wife has to travel for water, one of the things that the people from the villages do travel daily for: "the nearer stream, Ota, had been abandoned since the oracle announced yesterday that the enormous boulder resting on two other rocks at its source was about to fall and would take a softer pillow for its head" (7). The villagers' regular travel to the nearest stream has been diverted to a stream farther away. When the travel patterns of a people can be changed so easily, the construction of a road, a project that makes the travel patterns permanent, takes on a ridiculous cast...

Or perhaps an authoritarian cast. The road is a point of reference for conversion to British authority, as when the native messenger who comes from Winterbottom to summon Ezeulu to Government Hill armed with his notebook and the very self-conscious sanction of the road on his lips: "Fortunately the new road makes even a cripple hungry for a walk. We set out this morning at the first cock-crow and before we knew where we were we had got here" (138). Those who use the road mostly do so for government purposes; therefore the road becomes a part of British rationality that stands as a symbol of conversion to and complicity with British authority. Ultimately, the British ideal for the road would be the complete conversion of the villagers to the road; travel would only occur on the circuits sanctioned by British road construction, the rationality that underlies the villagers' concept of movement would be destroyed, and Western rationality would be one step closer to validation. As Olaniyan said, here is an attempt "to unduly tame a

delicately structured contingency, to force a monologue upon a polyvocal terrain” (26). A system of roads would tame and destroy the delicate structure of Igbo rationality.

That rationality really is at stake in the existence of the road can be seen through a simple examination of the circumstance involving the rock and the stream mentioned above. With no roads, the villagers are free to change their travel routes according to the prophecies of their oracle. The oracle, of course, is a very important part of the rationality of Umuaro. Their logic says that the oracle has power to predict, or at least to foreshadow, the future. When the oracle has spoken, or when any spiritual phenomena have occurred, the message it contains is paramount in the villagers’ decision-making process. At least it is so when they have the freedom to make decisions. The ability to travel on unestablished routes is important in the case of the stream and the rock. With the construction of roads, however, comes dependency. As the messenger said, “the new road makes even a cripple hungry for a walk” (138). Once the new level of ease is established in travel, the old difficulty of traveling off-road is unacceptable. In this circumstance, the freedom of the villagers to change travel patterns is removed, and along with it, any power the oracle had to direct those patterns. The rationality of the village is consequently undermined by Western rationality.

In ways such as these, the work of writers like Carroll and Achebe demonstrates the idea that rationality is not Rationality; that one group’s way of reasoning with events in the world has equal validity as another’s. Achebe’s work is involved in a critique of the imperial notion that the West’s rational structure is the only “enlightened” one. He does not argue for the dominance of the villagers’ rationality either; he recognizes the parallel nature of different rationalities. To repeat the proverb cited earlier, “Wherever

something stands, something else will stand beside it” (Scafe 119). He argues against the imposition of one rationality upon another. The book’s ending illustrates the inconclusiveness of either rationality’s claim to supremacy. The events that close the narrative—Ezeulu’s refusal to perform his ritual duty, the death of his son Obika, and Ezeulu’s ensuing madness—frustrate the attempt of either rationality to conclusively explain or ‘rationalize’ their causes. Although the story’s narrator is clearly writing from an Igbo perspective, his own tacit ambivalence about the true explanation of and cause for the disaster at book’s end is shown in his overt avoidance of the question. This passivity is, in fact, a characteristic the narrator displays throughout the book. The events that end the narrative are the last in a chain of events that could be possibly rationalized by either of the intersecting rationalities, but which actually can’t be rationalized by either, because to do so would dismissively exclude the possibility of the *other’s* possible explanation. For example, although a Western reader may be extremely skeptical about Ezeulu’s claim to divine guidance in actions that seem very clearly to be selfish and childish, the reader’s position is not privileged enough to conclusively rule out such possibilities. While it seems that Obika’s death is easily explained by the fact of his physical exertion during his sickness, the unlikely timing of his death, as well as the possibility of its symbolic purposiveness in relation to the other events at the end of the story, make it impossible for the reader to rule out the hand of a deity in the event. Ezeulu’s madness could be explained psychologically by things like stress, but it is impossible to rule out the explanation of the village people, whose inherited wisdom said that “their god had taken sides with them” and that “no one ever won judgment against his clan” (230).

Ezeulu's fate of madness can also be seen as the fate of one who attempts to keep one foot in his relative rationality and the other in an incompatible, absolute rationality. Olaniyan, although overtly speaking of religion, in reality speaks of rationality when he says "Christianity, unlike Igbo religions, is monotheistic and therefore selfish, jealous, violent (its military arm is the colonial administration), absolutist, tyrannical and univocal. It is not a religion you can "share" with other religions" (23). Putting Olaniyan's own parochialism and misunderstanding aside, what he describes in this quote is more a Western mindset than a religious doctrine. He writes these words to explain the disaster that results from Ezeulu's attempt to live in both worlds by sending one of his sons to attend a Christian school, a mistake Olaniyan contextualizes as political, with the short rant quoted above as somewhat of an aside. That aside, however, identifies the central problem in Ezeulu's situation: he tries to occupy a place in two worlds. The new world he attempts to hold a place in is not willing to share with the old; Western rationality is absolute.

Ezeulu's madness, so contextualized, would be a result of his foolhardy attempt to have a prolonged existence in two rationalities at once. He sent his son, Oduche, to Christian school *ostensibly* to act as Ezeulu's spy into the British world, but in reality to provide Ezeulu a window into a world from which he can strengthen his power. His attempt to use his understanding of the workings of the British administration to place himself in a position of greater power in his village is a project that parallels the colonial project. Unlike the story's narrator, who refrains from drawing conclusions on either side of the rational divide, Ezeulu attempts to live on both sides of that divide. His fate is a message about the incompatibility of the two rational structures.

Conclusion

Holmes, Alice, and Ezeulu have all suffered through varying degrees of discomfort during the writing of this thesis. Before I rehash my argument and suggest ways for that argument to be extended in further study, I want to relieve some of that discomfort. As with any theoretical approach to studying literature, this thesis has ignored major facets of three very multi-faceted works of literature. Ezeulu has suffered the least, as *Arrow of God* was written to be a part of the postcolonial discourse on rationality. Holmes has suffered the most, as *The Hound of the Baskervilles* was written as part of the colonial discourse that I have critiqued here. Alice's discomfort, however, has simply been a result of being placed in a strange and unfamiliar situation. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* has never been explored as a representation of colonial-period attitudes towards rationality. Various commentators, such as those quoted in chapter one, have studied the book as a manifestation of a unique and coherent strain of logic, but they have never connected that logic to the larger issue of the culture's rational structure. Regardless of their treatment in this thesis, all three books are much more than sterile essays on rationality. All three are eligible as subjects for academic approaches completely unrelated to the one I have pursued here. More importantly, all three are eligible for non-academic reading.

In this thesis, I have examined Western rationality in the context of British colonialism and Western modernity. By using colonialism to interrogate the origins and assumptions of Western rationality, I have brought to the forefront the negative legacy of Western rationality, and have probed its weaknesses with a rather unforgiving instrument. Only enough attention has been given to the positivistic model of rationality and

modernity to make possible the understanding of the critique leveled at that model by cultural studies. While the conclusions reached in this thesis are valid, I must note that these conclusions may always be mediated by a study which gives more attention to the positivistic characterization of rationality and modernity than I have given here.

In truth, this thesis is not a philosophical study, and the problems I mention are not problems with rationality itself, an entity which is itself beyond the limits of this thesis, but rather with its implementation. Any product of Western culture, such as myself, is certainly unable to claim absolute objectivity in a study of the rational process of his own culture. Such a person can, however, recognize the negative legacy that rationality has produced, and that is what this thesis has done. I would be remiss, however, to not note that rationality has created a positive legacy also. Very few critics of Western rationality would prefer a return to life before the Enlightenment. Although such critics have little tolerance for the negative legacy of the Enlightenment, there is equally little nostalgia for what the Enlightenment differentiated itself from. Academic criticism of Western rationality is a reflexive exercise, one that seeks to redefine the parameters of its own models in order to avoid such negative outcomes in the future.

Opportunities to take the study of my topic beyond what I have done in this thesis abound. The link between rationality, theories of evolution (both Darwin's and also any popular interpretations thereof), the concept of modernity, and the oppression of non-Western peoples is one very fertile subject that I was unable to address here. Ronald Thomas's article "The Fingerprint of the Foreigner: Colonizing the Criminal Body in 1890s Detective Fiction and Criminal Anthropology," quoted in relation to *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in chapter one of this thesis, provides a good launching pad for such a

study. Thomas critiques faulty rational systems that start with the assumption of evolution, and outlines the way such systems “colonized” the colonial or even the British subject. He explores Havelock Ellis’s system of criminal anthropology, represented in his work *The Criminal*, and finds that Ellis’s attempt to define the biological traits that identify a pre-disposed criminal are also the traits of non-Western peoples:

The signs of criminality are interpreted as signs of underdevelopment which are in turn associated first with children, and then with the less than human: the partially formed foetus, the lower apes, and the “lower races.” Through the most precise of scientific explanations ... the native inhabitant of many of the colonies is not only made into the equivalent of a criminal, but into something that is not quite or not completely human. The criminal suspect, like the colonial subject, is placed a little bit lower than the English on the evolutionary chart and on the political hierarchy as well. He is not a political criminal, but a biological one. (662-663)

Thomas’s study illuminates the faultiness of these rational systems, and argues that such studies were in fact politically motivated. His study provides an opening to the subject of British claims to superiority over their colonial subjects when those claims were made based on evolutionary superiority—based in a theoretical model that is categorically a product of Western rationality.

The link between Sherlock Holmes’s inherently irrational identity and one part of Weber’s work on rationality is another possible avenue that this thesis opens but doesn’t explore. According to Ann Swidler,

It was the genius of Weber's sociology of ideas to show that rationality is at its basis irrational. . . . rationality, as Weber understands it, depends upon strong irrational motives, such as the Protestant doctrine of proof or the idea of the "calling" in capitalism. Bringing all action under control by conscious ideas requires active effort, and must be powered by concentrated emotional energy. It is this need for an irrational spur to rationality which gives the problem of rationality its particular poignancy. Just as the top of a bureaucratic hierarchy is always non-bureaucratic, the values which motivate rationality, the control of ideas over action, must themselves be non-rational. There is always a sphere of social life which is non-rational, and it is on the preservation of this sphere that the rationality of the rest of the system depends. (41)

Further study of my topic may examine more deeply the nature of this irrational "spur" to the rational system, and see in Holmes a manifestation of this particular paradox. In the first chapter of this thesis I examined Holmes's characterization as a rational superman, concluding that this characterization was accomplished by Watson's mystification of Holmes, which was in turn accomplished by his inclusion of rational and irrational elements in his representation of Holmes. Like Weber's rationality, Holmes is not Holmes without the pronounced existence of the irrational. Like Weber's rationality, Holmes is not defined simply as the opposite of the irrational, but as one whose location in one realm presupposes his location in the other.

In writing this reflexive thesis, I have attempted to explore the connections between Western rationality, Western modernity, and British colonialism. Identifying the

limits of Western culture's rational structure, which limits are manifest in the negative legacy of colonialism (although they may also be manifest in other places also), provides an avenue for the critique of the way Western culture views and implements its own rationality. As with any such study, I hope that the effect of this thesis will be a culture more aware of the identified limits, and either that culture's modification of its practice to work within those limits, or its modification of the limits themselves.

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