"The Non-European Setting in Modern Western Fiction: A Study in Cultural Encounter"

Awf Abdul-Rahman Mahmoud

thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of master of arts (literature & criticism) at Yarmouk University.

Committee

Dr. Mufeed Hawamdeh Chairman
Prof. Dr. Mahmoud Kharbutli Member
Dr. Ibrahim H. Farhan Member

August, 1998
Abstract

Inter-cultural encounter has been tackled in so many studies which have tried to figure out the reasons behind such encounter and what makes the gap between any given nations expand. Unfortunately, the studies in this field do not diagnose the real causes behind this cultural clash. On the contrary, it is clearly noticed that most of the studies have gone astray and become unable to find an exit that leads to the solution. Nevertheless, the endaevores to unlock this riddle are still hard at work to reach a convincing reason which hides the truth of this encounter.

This study is another attempt to investigate the issue of inter-cultural encounter. The study has put a preliminary end for the long dispute between cultures through figuring out the main reasons behind the cultural encounter. The thesis aims at saying that the cultural encounter does not necessarily have to be restricted to such grand issues as colonialism and subjugation; rather, it is merely related to some cultural elements which
stand between a person and a foreign setting. In fact these elements are closely related to the setting where the characters find themselves. Hence, culture in this case refers to isolation, race, colour, sex and climate. These cultural elements will be called, throughout the study, as “setting”, since “setting” means the surroundings or the environment as well as the place and time of the events. To examine these elements from a literary point of view is to offer fresh insights into how culture penetrates literary works.

The study discusses three novels which are modern classics. Each novel enjoys a tantalizing obliqueness and, more importantly for our immediate purpose, each novel sheds some light on the concept of culture and its relation to the setting. The novels are: Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Forster’s *A Passage To India* and Camus’s *The Stranger*.

The study is divided into six chapters. Chapter one is an introduction about the issues that are going to be discussed in the thesis and a review of related literature. Culture and its definition
and what has been said about the cultural encounter are discussed in chapter two. Chapter three discusses Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, where we see the cultural encounter between Kurtz and Africa. Chapter four tackles Forster's *A Passage To India* which deals with Miss Quested's fantasies in India. Camus's *The Stranger* and the alien culture which hunts Meursault and drives him to murder are discussed in chapter five. Chapter six is a conclusion.