

## COLONIAL GAZE AND CULTURAL OTHER: A POSTCOLONIAL CRITIQUE OF *HEART OF DARKNESS*

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The terms colonialism and imperialism are interrelated. Imperialism is a system of governance in which a strong metropolitan centre rules distant territories. Imperialism is maintained with a mixture of power, tyranny and desire for a make belief just world. Colonialism is a political and historical reality in which a country is subjugated and politically controlled by a more powerful country, exercising exploitation, hegemony and violence, both physical and epistemic. Colonialism is an outcome of imperialism in which an imperial nation implants colonies in distant continents or territories and rule them by proxies or representatives. It is a politically turbulent system which divides the world into the binary opposites: the colonizer and the colonized. Culture is appropriated to validate the supremacy of the colonizers in colonial political structures. This is accomplished through constructing the colonized as the cultural Other of the colonizer in discourses. Thus, colonialism was established through systemic violence ad perpetuated through epistemic violence.

Postcolonialism is a theory and a perspective that looks at society and literature from two different angles: how a writer reflects on his/her colonial legacy and how he/she subverts the legacy to create and understand the society. The term is now used with parallel meanings. The first and the most obvious meaning is the direct historical/chronological meaning- after colonialism. This is referred to by the term post-colonialism. It refers to the state of culture in the former colonies after the political termination of colonialism called independence. It has a different meaning in the context of the double consciousness of the colonized in the context of continuing colonial inheritance. The impact of colonial legacy continues to operate within cultures and communities in a former colony. So the psychological condition or mental state of the people of the former colonies continues to be the same as that of the colonial period. They realize that physical or geographical decolonization is not sufficient to experience a true sense of the self or autonomy. They think that a decolonization of the mind or psychic structures is essential to truly experience the political ending of colonization. It is in this context that Ngugi wa Thiong’O wrote his treatise *Decolonizing the Mind*.

The term postcolonialism has more philosophical meaning denoting a space beyond colonialism and yet linked to it in a complex and problematic way. It refers to the state of the hybridized culture in the former colonies as a result of the interaction between the cultures of the colonizer and the colonized. As an analogue of nation, culture has strong centre and vulnerable margins. The vulnerability is usually termed porosity. The statement “culture is porous” means

that there are vulnerable points of contact in culture where cultural invasion is possible. So no culture is pure and pristine. Culture is always hybrid. A culture cannot be isolated or insulated from other cultures. Postcolonialism also refers to the study of colonialism as a pair of discourses of oppression and resistance in which the native cultures were erased or appropriated by the colonial hegemony. It also involves change of power relations/power transfer between cultures, communities and nations. It is in this context that postcolonial theories can be applied to explain all types of oppression including the contemporary neocolonialist/neoimperialist forms of hegemony. In contemporary literary and cultural critique postcolonialism refers to a terrain of discourses which illustrate how the former colonies “write back” to the former colonizers on the one hand and resist their hegemonic discourses of neocolonialism/neoimperialism which attempt to homogenize native cultures and erase indigenous identities.

Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson argue in *De-Scribing Empire* that imperial relations and colonial organizations have been maintained through interpellation of colonial ideologies mainly through textuality of the writings of the colonizers. They contend that colonialist discourses interpellate colonial subjects by transforming them into representations (3). They underline that colonialism eventually became an institution through interpellation of colonial ideologies. In this regard, Peter Hulme also observes in *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797* that colonialist discourse is an “ensemble of linguistically based practices unified by their deployment in the management of colonial relationships” (2). Hulme also underlines the significance of textual practices in constructing the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. The colonialist discourse seems to have fetishized and feared the races and places of the colonies. It is the reason why the colonialist discourses have constructed the colonized as the racial/cultural Other and target their racism and xenophobia on them.

The colonizers have conceptually nullified the native/indigenous population by relegating them to subhuman species. Later, they coveted their land by declaring it *terra nullius* (land belonging to none). They have thus legitimated the occupation of the land and dispossession of the natives. In this context, Hulme’s comment is appropriate: “The topic of land . . . dissimulated in the topic of savagery, this move being characteristic of all narratives of the colonial encounter” (3). The colonialist discourses have erased the presence and identity of the natives in ways parallel to the genocide and ethnocide practiced by the colonizers through deliberate creation of epidemics. Tiffin and Lawson also observe that native resistance was brutally suppressed first by force and then by discourse as “malignant treachery” and thus justified the “brutal suppression and even annihilation” of the natives (5). It is interesting to analyze how the colonizers have invented and attributed the characteristic of savagery to the colonized.

The dimension of epistemic violence committed through colonialist discourses becomes evident in Edward Said’s critique of Orientalism. Said considers Orientalism as “political doctrine” in his *Culture and Imperialism*: “As a cultural apparatus Orientalism is all aggression, activity, judgment, will to truth, knowledge” (204). He argues that Orientalism operates as “representations . . . in a specific historical, intellectual and even economic setting” (204). He finds that the discourse of Orientalism operates on the binary of the Orient and the Occident bracketed as the uncivilized and the civilized. A hard and fast line was drawn earmarking the boundaries between the two for the political purpose of affirming the white European supremacy. Said states in *Orientalism* that “the relationship between the Occident and the Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (5). The Europeans’ appropriation of the cultural Othering of the Orient marks the best example of discourses being subordinated to political authority. This practice is still followed in the west,

especially in the context of the post 9/11 discourses on terror. The European culture has gained strength and solid identity through its juxtaposition with the Orient. In this process the Orient becomes a historical discourse with a set pattern of imagery and vocabulary of its own.

Frantz Fanon unravels the psychological violence that the colonization has produced in the colonized in his work *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon explores psychoanalytically the identity crisis encountered by colonial subjects. He presents the problematic and complexity of the uneasy relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Fanon observes that the colonial culture identifies the skin colour of the colonized with impurity and contempt and the colonized internalize this assumption and despise themselves. The assuming of the white mask by the colonized is called “affective eratheism” by Fanon (44). The white colonizers observe that the black colonized offer “no ontological resistance” (Fanon 90). The problematic relationship between the colonizer and the colonized as two oppositional races results in a massive psychoexistential complex. Racism is only a symptom of this complex which works on the assumption: “There is but one destiny for the black man. And it is white” (Fanon 202). Fanon’s work is an analysis of racism and a critique of the naturalization of race. His attempt at decolonizing is to “consciousnessize” his unconscious (Fanon 206). Fanon concludes his critique of colonialism by attacking the colonialist bourgeois of African academies and the national parties of Africa which imitate the system of colonization. He observes that the life of common people like peasants and workers do not change because the power was peacefully transferred to the native bourgeois which is as parasitic and corrupt as the Europeans.

Albert Memmi’s *The Colonizer and the Colonized* also contributes copiously to the analysis of the problematic relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. He observes that colonialism results in the loss of memory, history, culture and language of the colonized. The colonizers introduced their language for administrative and practical discourses. The colonial institutions used the hegemonic language of the colonizer for all practical discourses. This ultimately resulted in the forced exit of native languages from the domain of practical discourses. Memmi observes that “man is a product of his objective situation” (8). He also maintains that collapse of colonialism is inevitable as it naturally ends in revolt. Like Fanon, Memmi also focuses on the psychological effects of colonialism.

The term colonial gaze comprises of the matrix of viewpoints, representations and textual practices of the colonizer through which the colonized is imaginatively constructed as the cultural Other. The colonial gaze is reflected in the variety of textual forms in which “the west produced and codified knowledge about non-metropolitan areas and cultures, especially those under colonial control” (Williams and Chrisman 5). European colonial expansion was assisted by cultural technologies which constructed and circulated the knowledge of Europe’s encounters with the Orient. This rapidly expanded knowledge was riddled with stereotypes based on Eurocentric hierarchies. The power to represent the colonized was integral to their subjugation and as narratives of backwardness and primitivity these representations justified the colonial rule. Adventure narratives and colonial travelogues romanticized the Orient. By representing the non-European Other as a definable object of visual deformity, the Europeans established a sense of cultural supremacy within the emerging global order. This supremacist consciousness enabled them to organize colonial expansion. European practices for viewing and representing colonial realities made cultural differences rigid and petrified racial and gender hierarchies. The colonial gaze played an important role in defining gender relations by marking out colonial women as objects of particular interest, either as targets of official sympathy or casual lust. Spivak refers to the manner in which the practice of *sati* being constructed by the colonial rulers as an example of

“white man’s burden”: the colonial abolition of *sati* is represented as “a case of white men saving brown women from brown men,” which justified the colonial rule (Williams and Chrisman 93). Racial distinctions are also produced and enforced by colonial gaze. Fanon refers to the psychological trauma of being identified as an object of white gaze. Devoid of the chance of being a full-fledged subject, a person of colour is determined from the outside as an object of cultural scrutiny. In this context, it is worthwhile to recall Kipling’s infamous phrase describing a native: “half savage half child” (Tiffin and Lawson 5). The colonial gaze, determined by a set of technologies and conventions for viewing colonial realities, underestimated colonial power and turned people into observed objects and authorized discourses of European viewers whose representations determined the status and stature of colonial subjects.

Orientalism, as already explained, illustrates the working of colonial gaze: how the cultural Other is constructed in colonial discourses. But Said’s reading of colonial encounter is unidirectional. It points to a simple relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, implying a stable and fixed identity. The fixity of identity makes the colonial discourse “a paradoxical mode of representation . . . [signifying] rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition” (Bhabha 66). Bhabha’s concepts of mimicry and ambivalence illustrate the currency of stereotypes. According to Bhabha, the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is continually changing; identity is continually negotiated in the process. Colonial power is maintained through the creation and constant repetition of the stereotypes of the colonized. The need for repetition suggests the lack of certainty from the viewpoint of the colonizer as well as the lack of colonial identity itself. The colonizer can construct his identity only through the stereotype of his Other, the colonized. The stereotype which substitutes the real object enables the formation of the colonial reality and makes it unstable and dependent. This gives rise to Bhabha’s concept of ambivalence in colonial discourse in which the colonizer at once desires and fears the Other, the colonized. The colonial power requires the natives to mimic his colonial master. The mimicry is therefore a kind of defense fraught with resistance against the colonial master. As the natives mimic the masters, he returns the colonial gaze, reversing the colonial process and making mimicry a site of active resistance. The colonized uses the colonizer’s language to return the colonial gaze. The appropriation of colonial authority is the source of anticolonial resistance. It creates a contested liminal space in which cultural differences articulate and produce imagined constructs of cultural and native identities across race, class and gender. As there is no pure Other, identity is relational and the Other always exists in relation to the discourse that creates it as the Other. This is how the colonial gaze functions as a reversible discourse.

Novel is a colonialist discourse that consolidates colonialism and legitimates colonial hegemony and colonial interventions euphemistically called the “white man’s burden” of civilizing the “savage” natives of the colonies. The novel with its structure of a long narrative with adequate narrative space for characterization and development of plot is best suited to justify the dispossession and forceful subjugation of indigenous communities throughout the world. The novel has served a great deal in maintaining the colonial rule and the imperial relations. Its textual practices serve to create a surface structure with aesthetic harmony, thematic unity and coherence. This surface structure apparently conceals the undercurrents of racial and cultural conflicts that saturate the deep structure. The poetics of novel apparently relegates the politics of colonial hegemony represented in the novel. The tension between the poetics and the politics of novel is produced and circulated in such a way as to legitimate colonial domination and to accept colonial intervention as services to sophisticate the colonized. It is in this context

that Said regards the novel as a discourse that participates in the project of England's overseas empire building: "A picture was built up in these narratives of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with England at the centre and overseas territories at the peripheries" (*Culture and Imperialism* 88). This description is a virtual structure of colonial system of governance. The British novelists were eager to textualize Britain's imperial policies: "The continuity of British imperial policy throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century is actively accompanied by this novelistic process, whose main purpose is to keep the empire in place" (*Culture and Imperialism* 88). Thus novel has contributed a great deal as a colonialist discourse and has become the pivotal element in the consolidated vision of the globe as a virtual commonwealth.

Joseph Conrad, the British novelist of Polish descent, is often regarded as one of the early modernist writers. Nautical settings, antiheroes, trials of the human spirit, imperialism and colonialism are some of the major themes in his works. The most striking characteristic of his writing is its narrative style, which is indirect, tautological and ambiguous. Stutteringly placed adjectives, awkwardly positioned punctuations, elements of 19<sup>th</sup> century realism and poetical prose are some of the other features of his narratives. He was the first English writer to incorporate a non-English sensibility into English literature. *The Nigger of 'Narcissus'*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, *The Secret Agent*, *Typhoon*, *Nostramo* and *Under Western Eyes* are some of his major works. Conrad is noted for his moral elusiveness and cultural ambiguity. Eloise Knapp finds Conrad's works didactical in imperialist context (301). But F.R. Leavis is skeptical of Conrad's style which he termed "adjectival insistence" (177). J. Hillis Miller argues that Conrad overtly discusses the kind of nihilism covertly dominant in modern fiction. But critics like Benita Parry refer to the ideological implications of *Heart of Darkness* (170). Thus Conrad is the object of myriad forms of criticism.

*Heart of Darkness* is an 1899 novella about a voyage up the Congo River into the Congo Free State. The plot centers round Charles Marlow, an English sailor, whose journey up the Congo River to meet Kurtz, an ivory trader who went mad. Marlow is appointed as the captain of a steamboat for an ivory trading organization called Company. While travelling up the river he encounters inefficiency and brutality at the Company's native stations. He also witnesses the exploitation and oppression of the natives under the Company's agents. The novel is a white man's imaginative narrative of Africa, at once repulsive and desirable. Africa is a stereotypical landscape evolved from white man's ambiguous attitude to it. Conrad's Africa is a land of impenetrable forests, throbbing drums, primitive customs, sudden sunsets, vultures and black water fever. He describes an Africa without meaning, coherence and order where rational human beings end up confused, overcome with obscurity and wilderness. The physicality of Africa is incomprehensible and maddening, creating a "heart of darkness" which is a site for various kinds of conflicts.

Conrad's Africa is a landscape without people. The natives are portrayed as irrational and terrible, without any trace of "humanity" or "culture." This stereotype of Africa extensively dehumanizes the Africans. Conrad exploits the stereotypical dimension of Africans to its fullest extent: they are a bunch of limbs, bodies and eyes, as meaningless as the forests, the river and the silence. The narrator Marlow denies Africans humanity: "Well you know that was the worst of it-this suspicion of them being inhuman" (Conrad 63). This denial makes easier the legitimization of colonial intervention. The African landscape in the novel is a structured experience expressed in terms which are alien to culture and topography. The images of Africa gather around the concept of the Dark Continent. The white man's tryst with Africa takes place at the coast lines and his desire to penetrate into the interior remains largely unfulfilled. The

transportation of the Africans from West Africa to the New World was justified on the strength of natural inferiority of the Africans propagated by the racists. The slave trade fostered conflicts and mistrust between African tribes and disrupted traditional warfare. Dehumanization of the Africans and the devastation of their land created a kind of culture shock in the Europeans.

*Heart of Darkness* is noted for its ambiguous representation of colonial ideology and race relations. In spite of its apparent anticolonial posture, the novel is noted for its imperialist and racist undertones. That is why Chinua Achebe condemns Conrad and his novel: “Conrad was a bloody racist . . . And the question is whether a novel which celebrates this dehumanization which depersonalizes a portion of the human race, can be called a great work of art” (35). Achebe’s outburst notwithstanding, it is still difficult to state clearly whether Conrad supported the empire through his fiction. In the Author’s Note to *Almayer’s Folly*, Conrad defended his choice of the locales of his novels in far off regions: “. . . there is a bond between us and that humanity so far away. I am content to sympathize with common mortals, no matter where they live” (*Collected Works* 8). His ambivalence to colonial ideology is the result of the inherent conflict in Conrad’s identity. He seems never to have reconciled himself to his naturalized host culture. He has never chosen Eastern Europe or his native country Poland as the setting of his novels. It is quite natural that the memory of the native land lingers in his mind. It is practically impossible to make a precise statement regarding his treatment of colonial ideology in the context of so ambivalent a text as *Heart of Darkness*.

The story is told by Marlow as he sits in a boat on the Thames. It is the story of a voyage up the Congo River in search of a mysterious Kurtz whose cruelly exploitative methods in ivory trade made him a class apart from other Europeans. Kurtz is the representative of colonial barbarity. In one perspective the novel is a censure of European colonialism. But Edward Said argues that the novel assists the imperialist projects, “restoring Africa to European hegemony by historicizing and narrating its strangeness” (*Culture and Imperialism* 198). Said suggests that the novel functions in an imperialist manner: its tone is that of a white man finding himself or his steadily disintegrating self. At one instance, Marlow observes a chain-gang and comments: “. . . they were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now—nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom” (Conrad 44). Marlow’s stereotyped Africans are denied humanity. The novel is punctuated with more brutal stereotypical images. Marlow’s narrative is based on his initial abhorrence of the devastation brought out by European travelers. The “unspeakable” darkness associated with landscape is metaphorical or allegorical where language itself is ambiguous. In this regard, the novel self-contradicts its realist imperative and challenges its ability to express truth. This perception of self-contradiction is the meaning of the novel. Thus at one level the novel exposes colonial exploitation and at another level the novel meditates on the inadequacy of language to communicate truth.

It is worthwhile to note that the novel begins with a eulogy of Britain’s imperial explorations. The narrative invokes the great milestones the river Thames marked in the history of British Empire (Conrad 4). Marlow distinguishes between colonialism and conquest. He denounces conquest as barbaric and justifies colonialism as a matter of efficiency (Conrad 8). Marlow’s attempt to offer an acceptable definition of colonialism is potentially pro-colonial. But the complexities of the narrative in both content and form render the text ambiguous. This ambiguity can be vicariously attributed to the hybridity of western culture consequent to the colonial interactions. An analysis of *Heart of Darkness* demonstrates the inherent weakness of European culture: the cruel exploitative and irrational activities of the colonial powers subvert or

even trivialize the concept of modern European culture as rooted in rationality and moral order. Benita Parry also refers to this aspect of colonialism in her analysis of Conrad. She finds Conrad's narrative duplicitous and paradoxical. She describes Conrad's writing as a "contrapuntal discourse where the authentic rendering of imperialism's dominant ideological categories is undercut by illumination of the misrecognitions and limitations in a form of cognition which saw the world in black and white" (2). Contrapuntal reading is a technique of theme and variation by which a counterpoint is established between the imperial narrative and the postcolonial perspective. It is a "counter narrative" that keeps penetrating beneath the surface of individual texts to elaborate the ubiquitous presence of imperialism in canonical texts. As a compassionate man of deep insight and understanding, Marlow is at once a defender and a critic of colonialism. Conrad's novel consistently brings out what Marlow himself feels but only imperfectly comprehends.

The disturbing inconsistencies of Marlow's role point to the hollowness of the rhetoric of civilizing mission. Conrad obliquely acknowledges the abomination of King Leopold's Congo: ". . . all Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz" (Conrad 117). Marlow initially becomes uneasy when confronted by the chain-gang. But he becomes relaxed when the "reclaimed" native guard gives a "large, white, rascally grin" and he recognizes that he is also "a part of the great cause of these high and just proceedings" (Conrad 65). Marlow's journey to find Kurtz is in fact a white European's quest to find his true self. During his voyage, his experiences and his convictions come into conflict with each other. Marlow and Kurtz are influenced by colonial experiences and they reached Congo for different reasons: a boyhood fantasy for Marlow and a Christian altruism for Kurtz. The novel represents Marlow's loss of innocent credulousness with respect to the civilizing mission and his aborted quest for redeeming the concept. The structure of the novelistic narrative with obscure origins and borders and inconclusive plot itself is expressive of the ambiguity of the colonial ideology it attempts to reproduce. Marlow is paralyzed by Kurtz's final nihilistic statement: "The horror! The horror!" He overcomes his cultural shock by lying directly to Kurtz's fiancée and indirectly to Europe. Conrad shows that Marlow's liberal hopes and Protestant ethics are hollow. Marlow thus becomes "a colonizer who refuses" (Memmi 44). He discovers that his redeeming tale turns out to be "a great and saving illusion" (Conrad 159).

As an impersonal artist, Conrad distances himself from Marlow. There is hardly any intentional fallacy committed by Conrad to transfer his voice to Marlow. Ironically, Marlow is a narrator who does not fully comprehend the meaning of the narrated text. That is why the two distinct narrative threads, the representative bourgeois gathering on the *Nellie* and Marlow's journey up the Congo, refuse to converge. The inconclusiveness of the latter matches the incomprehensibility of the former. The meaning of the novel is located within these intratextual conflicts which account for its "profound ambiguity" that characterizes the synthesis of its aesthetics and politics. The ambiguity of the novel originates from the lack of fidelity of experiences which confuses myths with history and confronts the quest for truth with a self-conscious deception created through the fantasy of poetic language. Conrad begins the narrative with Marlow invoking a remote past in a poetic language which is subtly equivocal: "What greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown earth . . . The dreams of men, the seed of common wealth, and the gems of empires" (Conrad 47). Marlow seems to rehearse the familiar progressivism of nineteenth century historians. Although they benefit mankind, they become tools for oppression and violence. Marlow's rhetoric seems to

celebrate imperial expansion. But as a narrative of desire it represents Europe's pathogenic penetration to the heart of darkness which is Africa.

Conrad questions imperialism's claim to be the agent of universal progress and rationality of knowledge. Marlow expresses the imperial expansion in paradoxical combination of words: ". . . the forerunner of change, of conquest, of trade, of massacres, of blessings" (Conrad 98). This paradoxical syntax marks the ambiguity of the text. The colonial rhetoric freely uses phrases like "heavenly mission to civilize," "the noble, exalted cause" and "magnificent dependencies" to interrogate the very propriety of the discourse. Marlow refers to the condition of morally depraved colonialism: "I foresaw that in the binding sunshine I would become acquainted with a flabby, pretending, weak eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly" (Conrad 23). The racist idiom of the text remains fascinating. Marlow perceives the Africans as uncanny doubles bound by a sense of "distant kinship." He affirms his inviolable identity and cultural authority in no uncertain terms: "Very well; I admit, but I have a voice too, and for good or evil, mine is the speech that cannot be silenced" (Conrad 52). Marlow's categorical assertion seems to converge with Conrad's object of writing a realist fiction to defend the empire even while exposing the evil practices of colonial rule.

Conrad's diction in *Heart of Darkness* stands apart as a stylistic device. This has been noticed by F.R. Leavis, Jeremy Hawthorn and Ian Watt. F.R. Leavis coined the phrase "adjectival insistence" particularly in the context of Conrad's style in *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad profusely uses adjectives not only to qualify the nouns but also to draw the reader's attention to the adjectives themselves (180). Hawthorn argues that adjectival insistence is not a stylistic flow but a means to captivate readers' shifting attention (31). Watt coined the term "delayed decoding" to express the distinct quality of Marlow as a character and his mode of narration as an art (177). Watt argues that Marlow uses an impressionistic narrative which forges links between his past experiences and the new ones in the context of his African expedition. In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad parodies the new accents of colonial discourse with its consuming ambition reflected in Marlow's memory of Kurtz's opened jaw: ". . . voraciously . . . as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the men before him" (Conrad 85). Conrad always likes to create definite images in his narratives. The groan of the "nigger" beaten for his "responsibility" for the fire is an example. In these images, the colonial authority is eroded and the binary structure of the colonial language is turned against the colonizer. Ngugi wa Thiong'O regards the skulls on the poles facing Kurtz's house as another example of a definite image which is "so ironic, apt and powerful an image" that it explicitly represents the moral failure of European colonization (285). The image at once provokes political and ethical questions and exposes the brutal and abominable aspects of the civilizing mission. The grotesque nature of the image is further enhanced by the figure of an emaciated Kurtz crawling towards the lights and drum beats of the black ritual going on beyond the colonial compound. These images construct Africa as a place of mystery and degradation in European imagination. The image of skulls registers a view of how Africa has naturalized the monstrous and the terrible. Marlow is not shocked by the sight of severed heads in Kurtz's garden. This fact points to Conrad's familiarity with Africa as a source of received opinions and rumours.

The novel celebrates a mysterious and morally depraved Africa, a combination of primordial and metaphysical landscapes, a world devoid of history and culture. Conrad writes: "Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world" (48). He adds: "We were wanderers on prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet . . . we were travelling in the night of first ages" (51). The narrative harmonizes a



symbiotic relationship between the depravity of the empire and the moral dangers of the Dark Continent. Kurtz's downfall is caused by the uncanny influence of the exotic land. He forgets himself among the lakeside tribe whom he subjugated with his guns. Kurtz is a dedicated agent of imperialism with a greed for possession: ". . . my Intended, my ivory, my river, my\_ everything belonged to him" (Conrad 70). It seems that Africa beguiles and intoxicates even the rational and sophisticated white man. So colonialism is corrupting, the process of civilizing the Other corrupts him. Kurtz's psychic and moral disorder is linked to his identity as a colonialist. It has a parallel in the Christian belief of redemption: Christ descended on the earth and became a martyr to save the world.

In the novel the anti-imperial comments are yoked with racist idioms endorsing European supremacist ideology. Conrad conveys the idea that the white man reconciles his moral superiority to civilize the cultural Other. He points out that colonialism corrupts and demoralizes the white man who tries to subjugate the colonial subjects in demonic ways. The colonialist discourse founded on progress and enlightenment is therefore viewed with suspicion. Conrad uses inexhaustible adjectives to underline the "exotic and incomprehensible Africa." The exotic land fails Kurtz by challenging his colonial authority and destroying his psychic equilibrium. The incomprehensible land fails Marlow to understand himself and his tale. Conrad's aesthetic remains at the surface structure of the novel bringing harmony and coherence. But the deep structure of the novel is entangled with ideological and cultural conflicts which elude resolution. The novel is therefore an artistically commendable representation of the ambivalence inherent in European colonial ideology.

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