CHAPTER THREE

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3.1 Preliminaries

This chapter looks at Conrad’s life and work, section, and his use of colonialism in *Heart of Darkness*, where emphasis is made on instances of the use of colonial terms and binary opposites to which postcolonial literature seeks to respond in the next chapter.

3.2 Conrad's Life and Works

William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), in his prophetic poem, *The Second Coming* (1919), spoke of spiral shapes of history, but another writer – Joseph Conrad- seems to have anticipated his prophecy several years earlier, with the publication of his novel *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Where Yeats saw the falling apart of the centre –“the centre cannot hold”,¹ Conrad saw the emptiness at the centre of civilization and the atrocities of the margins. And, even though he has been criticized – by some critics – as both a racist and anti-feminist, Conrad seems to have “anticipated many twentieth [and twenty – first] century preoccupations”.²

A whole body of recent postcolonial criticism, in fact, has been devoted to the study of Conrad’s views about imperialism as articulated in his major novels. In the scope of this thesis, the researcher shall try to
contribute to this wide-ranging Conrad criticism by attempting to show the writer’s real attitudes towards imperial ideologies and colonial practices. Limiting the analysis to one of his novels, namely, *Heart of Darkness*, the researcher aims at showing how this work provides us with sufficient evidences for Conrad’s approval or/and disapproval of colonialist thought.

However, before starting to trace Conrad’s views and attitudes of imperialism and colonialism, it is necessary to understand certain historical – biographical sketches of his early life. In fact the researcher’s purpose in this biographical background is to show and highlight his personal experience of imperialism and the importance of this experience as a first foundation upon which assumptions will be built about Conrad’s imperialist or/and anti-imperialist attitudes.

**3.2.1 Conrad’s Life**

Joseph Conrad-born Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski (1857-1924) – was born a Polish citizen. In 1861, the elder Korzeniowski was arrested by the Russian authorities in Poland for his political activities and was exiled from Russian-occupied Poland to a Russian city with a very harsh climate. His wife, Evelina Bobrowska and their four-year old son followed him into forced exile. Four years later (1865) Conrad’s mother died of tuberculosis under the hardships of exile in a remote part of Russia, and his father four years later, leaving the boy Conrad orphaned at the age of twelve.\(^3\) Young Conrad spent the next few
years in the guardianship of his maternal uncle, Tadeusz Bobrowski, a more cautious figure than his parents. He gained from him a "practical, conservative approach to life" quite different from the "revolutionary fervour of Conrad’s father". His father was not only a committed Polish patriot but also a distinguished man of letters. Apart from his remarkable education in law and languages, Apollo was “a poet, playwright and translator”. It was as a translator, however, and not as a creative writer of pure fiction or poetry that Conrad’s father was best recognized. However, almost all his intellectual works underscore his steadfast patriotism and his ardent desire to liberate his country from Russian oppression. The significance of these translations was that they, on the one hand, introduced the young Conrad to an international literature, and, on the other, acquainted him with his father’s artistic talents as well as his political views.

When the future Conrad left land-locked Poland(1874) at the age of seventeen, it was to go to sea (he was fond of since childhood) to begin a career as a seaman, as well as to escape what he faced as the “son of a political prisoner, ------- a possible twenty-five-years conscription in the Russian army”. Even though it was suggested that he was betraying his home land by leaving, Conrad had no real home and truly had to manufacture a space for himself in the world.
He first left his homeland for Marseilles (France) and served as a mariner on a French merchant marine (1874) – French is “his third language, according to Norman Sherry, after Polish and Russian”\(^{(8)}\) – but was compelled to leave that service after four years because of “French immigration authorities”.\(^{(9)}\) By 1978, Conrad left France to England, took service on British Vessels, and learned his fourth language, English. In 1886, he gained his British citizenship, became an Englishman and changed his name to Joseph Conrad.

The youthful orphaned exile sailed almost continually, visiting many European colonies. He spent sometime in the South of France followed by a series of sea voyages to Australia, the Malay States, Africa, South America, the South Pacific islands, and the Indian Ocean. During these voyages, he was recording the atrocities he had witnessed in various colonies. In 1890, he went to Africa in the Belgian colonial service and sailed up the Congo River, where fever, malaria and dysentery undermined his health. This voyage to the Belgian Congo had the greatest impact on his life; its consequences influenced his life from being a seaman to a writer, and from a bachelor to a husband (1896). In 1894, aged about thirty-six, Conrad reluctantly gave up the sea, partly because of poor health and partly because he had become so fascinated with writing that he decided on a literary career.

Thus, Conrad visited many colonial ports, in the meanwhile, recording his observations and experiences. His years at sea have become part of literary folklore, as they provided him with a vast storehouse of
personal experiences to be drawn upon during his lengthy and prolific writing career which continued till his sudden death of a heart attack on August 3, 1924. That is why most of his fiction has the sea as a back-ground for the action.

As has just been said, in the early 1890s, i.e. in his mid thirties, Conrad had begun to think about a writing career. He set out upon writing fiction based on his experiences, in a new language (English) which he acquired as an adult. Conrad stories are primarily based on his adventures at sea.

### 3.2.2 Conrad's Works

Of his novels, *Almayer’s Folly* (1895) is the first. The setting of this novel is the East Indies coast of Borneo (Malay). Its complicated plot is concerned with intrigues among Europeans and natives. The author portrays Almayer, the hero, as a white man of superior race (Holland) who lives a life-long exile among an inferior race (the Malay). His marriage with a native woman is depicted as the cause of being degraded. Its successor, *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896), deals with the same milieu, and Almayer appears again in this work. In 1884, Conrad joined the ship Narcissus in Bombay, a voyage that inspired his third novel, *The Nigger of Narcissus* (1897). It describes a homeward voyage from India in winter, with the ship Narcissus being rocked down on her beam-ends. It is also a story of troubled inter-personal relationships. This story contains one of Conrad's great set
pieces, a wonderfully and vividly sustained account of a storm at sea. In his famous preface to this novel, Conrad, as an artist, believes that words themselves can never quite capture the sensations they seek to convey, and yet it also suggests that the creative-in prose-writer, nevertheless, aspires "by the power of the written word,..... to make you hear, to make you feel- it is, before all, to make you see."

Conrad’s childhood ambition to visit Africa – as it is the case for his protagonist Marlow – was realized in 1889, when he became captain of a Congo steamboat, in the Belgian colonial service. The atrocities he witnessed and his experiences formed the basis of his most acclaimed and ambiguous work, *Heart of Darkness* (1899), (the focus of this study). It is a story taken from life, of the conquest by the European whites of a certain portion of Africa, a story in particular, of the civilizing methods of a great European company face to face with the native negro. It is the story of the white man’s (the exploiter’s) relations with the exploited native, and how the idea of the white man as an emissary of light, eventually, proves to be profit making in his trade with the subject races. Sailing the Southeast Asian archipelago would also furnish memories recast in Conrad’s *Lord Jim* (1900). In this novel, the author depicts the hero Jim (European) as a man of high morals who feels guilty when deserting the passengers (*the pilgrims/Muslims*) on the ship (*Patna*), and who then comes to a remote area to help the natives in Patusan to manage their life as if they were living a chaotic life.
Among Conrad’s important works, which so-called political, are *Nostromo* (1904), *The Secret Agent* (1907) and *Under Western Eyes* (1911). Of these three novels, *Nostromo* is regarded as the most political one. It tells the tale of a silver mine, a buried treasure and revolutions. Its scene is South America. The silver mine was forced upon an English family living in Costaguana, a fictitious Latin American republic. Nostromo, the supposed hero, is an Italian sailor who has come to Costaguana to make his fortune. The main characters in the novel are caught up in the economic transformation of Costaguana. The chief agent of this transformation is Charles Gould, the owner of the silver mine. Having declared that capitalist enterprises in Costaguana would bring about social progress, the effects of Gould’s programme were the division of the country into two separate states, and the creation of an unstable and tyrannical social order. The very people whom Gould proposed to be better are eventually double oppressed by foreign economic interests and local tyrannical order. Thus even as the novel charges Western economic interests with the oppression and exploitation of Latin Americans, it presents an image of Latin America that has long been used to justify external domination and internal tyranny. Shifting the scene to the heart of British Empire, Conrad wrote *The Secret Agent*. This novel is based on actual events, the attempt to blow up the Greenwich Observatory in London in 1894. It tells about a bleak underground intrigue story of spies, terrorists, anarchists and murderers among some of the foreigners in London plotting— in the back streets of the
town– to bomb the Greenwich Observatory. The Secret Agent is considered one of the first modern novels dealing with the subject of terrorism, in the early twentieth century. Following on from his treatment of anarchists in England in The Secret Agent is Conrad's Under Western Eyes. These two novels are similar in subject matter, but the setting of the latter is St. Petersburg in Russia and Geneva in Switzerland. It is a story that deals with the Russian autocracy and revolutionaries in a Russian police–state under the Czar. This story is narrated by an English teacher living at Geneva and having some intimate knowledge of the Russian community living in that town. He narrates the tale of Razumov who symbolizes the Russians. The significance of the title lies, of course, in the fact that the Russian story is told by an English man; and though everything is observed under the eyes of the Western narrator, yet it seemed to him that the Russian character is very difficult to be understood by the Western mind, and it is absolutely unfathomable for any non-Russian – even if such a non-Russian should have seen it all happening under his very eyes.

Though Conrad was recognized by the intellectual elite, as a man of great talent, his popular success has not been achieved till the publication of Chance (1913). Chance is a tale in two parts; it takes place partly on land and partly on sea. This novel is concerned with the story of a young girl, Flora, the abandoned daughter of an egotistical fraud father, and her relationship with him, and with an
idealistic sea captain. After a long and lonely struggle seeking happiness, she eventually achieves what she was longing for – happiness and dignity. This novel is unusual among its author’s works; for whereas Conrad previously, on the whole, been dealing with men’s actions in masculine situations (colonial adventures, seafaring, political intrigues), in Chance, the focus of attention is a female character, the heroine, Flora de Barral. Then, paradoxically, this novel is not regarded as the best or, at least, one of Conrad’s better novels, yet it seems to lend the work popular appeal and the author great financial success. Finally, coincidentally it may, as Chance was considered Conrad’s first commercial success as a writer, it is also his first novel to have a happy ending. As has been just said, Conrad gained success with the publication of Chance, but he did not achieve real popular success until the publication of Victory (1915), though, paradoxically enough, it is also - like Chance - not often considered alongside his earlier masterpieces such as Lord Jim or Nostromo. Nevertheless, in many ways, Victory is Conradian to the core: its exotic setting (the isolated island), its evocation of the sea and those sailing it, its acknowledgement of the possibility for human goodness but its acknowledgment as well of the evil – the heart of darkness. Coal in Victory symbolizes the corrupting power of wealth, as it was the case of ivory and silver in Heart of Darkness and Nostromo, respectively. Victory is an exploration of good and evil in which a man (Heyst) attempts to rescue a girl (Lenda) from the grip of a vicious gang (Schomberg, Jones, Ricardo and Pedro). Conrad lived an adventurous
life, taking part and involved in several gunrunning and political conspiracies; and later on, he used these experiences as the base for his novel *The Arrow of Gold* (1919). This story depicts the young hero, Monsieur George, who passes from boyhood to manhood through his adventures as a gunrunner.

As said earlier in this review, Joseph Conrad published his first novel in 1895; he went on, during his profuse literary career, to write about nineteen more as well as many short stories, essays and a memoir. Though he lived in France and afterwards became a British citizen, he could never wholly become French or English. He remained, throughout the rest of his life, a man apart. His personal experiences included a sense of isolation and the ethical conflict between his father and his uncle, as well as his sense of being linguistically and culturally multiple. This unique position is apparent in his writing. His novels are about men who are set apart from their fellows. According to Gene M. Moore,

> Canard is a figure of the crossroads, determined to portray and explore the conflicting loyalties and multiple identities of those who, like him, have been denied their cultural birth-right. Conrad writes with the passionate irony of an exile, from the necessarily false position of a cultural colonist who speaks, in a languages not quite his own, for both the dispossessed and their dispossessors.

To Geoffrey Harpham, Conrad’s experience "was truly comprehensive, a fact that confuses the moralizing mind and is, indeed, genuinely
confusing.\textsuperscript{(13)} According to Harpham, the confusion arises mainly from Conrad’s personal life experience: “Conrad’s experience of domination was not merely touristic: he had actually been dominated, but had also lived as a citizen and agent of imperial nations.”\textsuperscript{(14)} On the whole, if there is any difficulty a critic of Joseph Conrad may face, it is to decide whether his discourse supports the imperial effort or works against it. This is what the researcher will attempt to investigate throughout the remaining space of this Chapter.

\textbf{3.3 \textsc{Heart of Darkness}}

\textit{Heart of Darkness} is a short novel, and yet it is a masterpiece which, in its brief compass, deals with a number of important ideas. But the theme of imperialist exploration and exploitation of a little-known continent is the most obvious and the most central in the novel. Conrad’s treatment of the theme of white imperialism was influenced, mainly, by his own visit to and his exploration of that “dark” country. It was also based upon his own reactions to what he had himself witnessed in the course of his travels through the Congo. The novel focuses on the inefficiency and the atrocities of Belgian colonization and the horrors of exploitation led by the King of Belgium, Leopold II, and his political and commercial associates, and even by missionaries and “humanitarians” like Kurtz. Consequently we will look at the effects of European colonization and the distortion or the racial stereotypical representations of the native Africans. Therefore, before
turning to address the core of the novel, the researcher will first provide a brief historical survey of the developing science of anthropology, and specifically the theories of Darwin, or as it is called the social theory of racial development. And since the setting for Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* is based in part upon his experience in Africa, and particularly in Leopold’s private African domain, the researcher will also discuss the “*Scramble for Africa*” and Leopold II’s interests in Africa and his "justifications" to “open” the “Dark Continent”.

Conrad’s novel draws heavily upon a body of cultural texts rich in images and assumptions about Africa and the Africans which pervaded mid and late nineteenth-century European culture. Via such cultural texts, Africa and the Africans were being represented for the Europeans in ways which produced stereotypic images of this Other as primitive. One of the most important sources in the production of these representations was the biological science, and specifically the Darwinian theories, which generated a discourse on the primitive soon to be absorbed by the general public. Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859) greatly influenced most philosophers, thinkers, and scientists in the Western white world. This theory was used to support the ideology of colonial expansion. Darwin’s evolutionary theory was developed and adopted as a social theory of racial development and subsequently racial differences which were located by Darwin and his successors so far back in prehistory. According to this scenario
Europeans have adopted and evolved to a higher level, Africans have not evolved and then come to be seen as representing the earlier levels of human progress. In *The Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin himself spoke of “high” and “low” races, and of “stronger” and “weaker” nations. Accordingly, ‘primitive’, ‘savage’, ‘uncivilized’ Africans were (and still are) identified– by the Europeans– as the ‘children’ of the civilized, or as Herbert Spencer puts it: “the intellectual traits of the uncivilized ... are traits recurring in the children of the civilized ....”

It was also widely thought by Spencer, among other predecessors and successors, that the dominance of the white races was itself the result of inherited superiority.

By occupying or controlling most of the globe, with the help of their technological advantage, the Europeans, it was assumed, were the most fully developed on the evolutionary scale. This is exactly what Jules Harmand – French advocate of colonialism – in 1910 says:

> It is necessary then, to accept as a principle and point of departure the fact that there is a hierarchy of races and civilizations, and that we [Europeans] belong to the superior race and civilization ------ The basic legitimation of conquest over native peoples is the conviction of our superiority, not merely our mechanical, economic, and military superiority, but our moral superiority.

So the Europeans glorified themselves as the fittest to survive and to rule. To export their economic, political, and religious institutions was therefore a necessary step towards a higher form of human organization in the rest of the world, and subsequently a necessary
step for white civilization to dominate or destroy the “inferior” peoples. Such racial doctrines were widely accepted by the general public and furnished popular and political support for the imperialist adventures at the end of the nineteenth century. In other words, evolutionary argument supported the ideology of colonial expansion.

**Historical Context**

In response to the spirit of the age, although Britain and France dominated Africa economically and militarily in the late nineteenth century, a number of other European nations – including Germany, Italy and Portugal – hoped to establish themselves as powers in the “Dark Continent”. Furthermore, Leopold II, King of Belgium was looking for empire and had African ambitions: declaring at the Berlin Conference (1877) that he, too, wanted his “share of this magnificent African cake”.\(^{(19)}\) Leopold II was drawn to the Congo. Recognizing the values of philanthropy and anti-slavery propaganda, he organized ‘The International Association for the Suppression of Slavery’ and the ‘Opening up of Central Africa’, an agency dedicated to ending the “slave-trade,” establishing “free-trade,” and eventually “civilizing” Africa. Although Leopold declared that the mission of the Association and of the empire was “to open to civilization the only part of our globe which it has not yet penetrated, to pierce the darkness which enshrouding entire population,”\(^{(20)}\) but in reality, the Association’s concern with “free trade” and human betterment, and the ending of slavery was merely propaganda. Once he had secured control of the
Association and a firm grip on the Congo, he turned it into a profitable business and used shameless economic and political manipulation.

Leopold was then engaged in winning international recognition of his position as sovereign of his Congo Free State. It was, in fact, ratified as such by the Berlin Conference of 1885 which gave Leopold absolute personal rule over almost tens of millions of Africans and about a million square miles of the African territory. This was assigned “by regulations which guaranteed free trade among European nations and companies there [in Africa].”\(^{(21)}\) Thus in their “Scramble for Africa”, the competing European countries were planning to divide the spoils primarily with the aim of averting conflicts among them (rather than the civilizing mission in Africa).

What was remarkable and unusual about Leopold II’s imperial rule of the Congo was that he made himself not only the sovereign but also the sole owner of the Congo. It was treated as his personal fiefdom or property (rather than the Belgian State’s). According to him the Congo was created by his own efforts and should be uncontested of this ownership. He asserted that “The Congo has been, and could have been, nothing but a personal undertaking…… My rights over the Congo are to be shared with none; they are the fruit of my own struggles and expenditure”.\(^{(22)}\)

The researcher has introduced this background information, on one hand, to offer a historical context for the novel *Heart of Darkness*, and
on the other, to contextualize Kurtz and our reading of him. Leopold had been looked, by some critics, as a model that Conrad might have used. We are told by Marlow that the subjects of Kurtz’s occasional utterances, before death, were: "My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my ----- everything belonged to him".\(^{(23)}\) So, in his brutality and drive for self-aggrandizement and ownership, Kurtz is modeled like Leopold. King Leopold may thus have served as an inspiration for Kurtz.

Conrad went to the Congo in 1890, employed by the Belgian King’s company at the very time when Leopold and his company had extensive control over the Congo as well as great number of native peoples. But Conrad, purposely, did not mention King Leopold II or the Congo, because he wished to give his story an abstract character that would render it universal. However, *Heart of Darkness* leaves little doubt of the atrocities and exploitation of European colonialism in general and the inefficiency of Leopold’s rule in Africa in particular. It seems that, though these practices and actions were questioned and criticized by Conrad, yet he justified them, too. In a letter to his publisher, William Blackwood, outlining the idea of *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad talks of “the criminality of inefficiency and pure selfishness,” but "when tackling the civilizing work in Africa,” this criminality/colonialism "is a justifiable idea".\(^{(24)}\) On the idea or pretext of civilizing, colonial people were not only oppressed and enslaved by the late nineteenth century colonial machine, but they became almost
invisible. Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* surfaced in this context, and the theme of colonialism is the most obvious and the most central in the novel.

At the very beginning of his narrative, the narrator, Marlow, makes his position clear by comparing two systems of colonialism or imperialism: that of modern Western imperialism and that of the ancient Roman imperialism. He identifies the invasion of Africa with the Roman conquest of England. Although some critics suggest that Marlow likens Western imperialism to Roman imperialism in order to condemn the former, the words with which he introduces the Roman conquest make clear the connection he sees between conquest and civilization: ”I was thinking of very old times, when the Roman first came here, nineteen hundred years ago– the other day….. light came out of this river since ……. But darkness was here yesterday”.(25) By reducing the 1900 years that separate the Roman conquest from Victorian England, to a single day, Marlow suggests that there is a direct relationship between the two: that England was yesterday full of darkness and the other day became a source of light, this is because of conquest. By associating the modern European with the ancient Romans, Marlow implies that the conquest of Africa, despite its brutality, will ultimately lead to the civilization of that continent, just as the Roman conquest led to English civilization. Even though the Roman conquest itself was ”merely a squeeze,” and nothing more than “robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale,” according
to Marlow, “what redeems it is the idea only…….. and unselfish belief in the idea –something you can set up and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to ……..”(26) (the last ellipses are Marlow’s). So, Marlow does not condemn Roman conquest unequivocally, because the civilized ideals behind such a process justify its excesses, and since, in his view, it led ultimately to civilization. Doing so, Marlow gives British imperialism an advantage over the Roman on the ground that there is a difference between colonialism and conquest. For Marlow, the Romans were not colonizers but conquerors: “They were no colonists ..... they were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force........ They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got,” (27) implying that colonization is a process that demands more organization, incentive, tact and respect from the colonizer for the colonized than conquest does.

Comparing British and Belgian imperialisms, Marlow praises and justifies the former on the grounds that it was efficient and conducted according to some unspecified “ideas”: “what saves us [the British] is efficiency – the devotion to efficiency”.(28) But in the case of Belgian imperialism, Marlow cites many inefficiencies: the best example is the building of the railway, where Marlow discovers that machinery and tools that could improve working conditions and promote greater efficiency were frequently neglected and set aside. He finds “a railway-truck lying there on its back with its wheels in the air. One was off. I came upon more pieces of decaying machinery, a stack of rusty
Inefficiency and hypocrisy permeate through the whole hierarchy of the company.

**Inefficient Colonizers**

The manager of the central station, who represents the company in the Congo, is the embodiment of inefficiency. What does one expect of such a manager who, Marlow states,

> had no genius for organizing, for initiative, or for order even. That was evident in such things as the deplorable state of the station. He had no learning, and no intelligence. His position had come to him – why? Perhaps because he was never ill ... He originating nothing, he could keep the routine going – that is all.\(^{(30)}\)

Another inefficiency of the Belgian administration was that of the brickmaker’s job; Marlow notices a notable negligence, or rather a laziness and incompetence. He records:

> The business entrusted to this fellow was the making of bricks ... but there wasn’t a fragment of a brick anywhere in the station ... and as it was not likely to be sent from Europe, it did not appear clear to me what he was waiting for.\(^{(31)}\)

However, the brickmaker was not alone in his idleness, but the whole colony of expatriates – “all the sixteen or twenty pilgrims of them” spent their time in “backbiting and intriguing against each other.” Their real concern was the “desire to get appointed to a trading post where ivory was to be had.”\(^{(32)}\) According to Marlow, “You would think they were praying to it”\(^{(33)}\)
Philanthropic Pretext for Colonialism

Thus, the “Civilizing” missions remained only as ideas and ideals. The whole colony of expatriates pretended that they were in the Congo for “Philanthropic” reasons. Kurtz, as “an emissary of pity, and science, and progress,” (34) is the kind of man sent by the Europeans to the Congo for enlightenment – if indeed it is enlightenment intention at all – but once there, he becomes an absolute ruler over the natives. Robert F-Haugh says of Kurtz:

[Kurtz] is a personal embodiment, a dramatization of all that Conrad felt of futility, degradation and horror in what the Europeans in the Congo called “progress”, which meant the exploitation of the natives by every variety of cruelty and treachery known to greedy men. (35)

At Marlow’s return of his journey from the Congo, he meets Kurtz’s “Intended,” he finds that “her engagement with Kurtz had been disapproved by her people.” This is because he “wasn’t rich enough or something.” Kurtz himself had given Marlow some hints which lead the latter “to infer that it was his impatience of ……… poverty that drove him out” to the Congo. (36)

Generally speaking, all the Europeans assure of doing philanthropic work for the peoples of the Third World. But, in fact, they came with the intention of working to improve themselves (rather than the natives). All are obsessed with the Third World’s natural resources and wealth; in Almayer’s Folly, it is gold; in Heart of Darkness, ivory; and in Nostromo, silver. Thus, the real motives of the supposed
philanthropists Europeans (colonialists) seem to have been the desire to make money, get rich, return home happy, and to rise in their social scale. This last point is of the greatest importance for the colonizer, and should be given more attention.

**Identity and Culture**

According to postcolonial and psychoanalytic theory, human subjectivity is split and dependent on a dialectical relationship with the other; that means identity and culture are not stable but formed and reformed according to the surrounding environment. The French psychologist Octave Mannoni, in his study of the psychology of the European colonialists, discovered that his subjects had gone to Africa to compensate for their feelings of inferiority due to the very structure of their European society. Once among the weaker peoples, these Europeans acquired high ranks. So the "colonizing subject" is apparently tempted by his new environment itself to seek a new personality, as Trotter sees it: “The colonizer becomes a colonizer by re barbarising himself, by immersing himself in an alien culture …… There can be no mistaking the violence with which an old identity is stripped away and a new one forged”.

*Heart of Darkness* emphasizes this instability of identity by pointing to the construction in culture of the narrators and characters. Conrad presents us with these narrators and characters (the frame narrator as well as Marlow and Kurtz) who are fashioned by their cultures in profound ways. Conrad thus reveals the arbitrary nature of cultural
codes regarding difference. Marlow finds it difficult to explain or capture the nature of his experience as he would like to, this is because his knowledge and desire to communicate are complicated by psychic fragmentation as well as the limits of language. He senses his psychic fragmentation and accentuates the instability of his words and perceptions. He makes frequent pronouncements that it is impossible to explain or even to know the whole story. Consider this famous passage:

.... No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one’s existence, that which makes its truth, its meaning – its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream – alone ...

This type of parataxis (at the start and end of the construction) demonstrates Marlow’s instability to fully explain. He also makes frequent references to his inadequate grasp on things. “We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings ... We would not understand because we were too far and could not remember, because we were traveling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign – and no memories”. Similarly, Marlow’s use of vague words like inscrutable, incomprehensible, implacable, unspeakable and inconceivable points to this kind of paralysis. The jungle becomes “an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention” (italics added).
**Loss of Communication**

Marlow uses inconclusive language (frequently, ruptured by silence or obscurity); and we see that he does not know completely and his inability to fully explain – even at the close of the novel – because “the inner truth is always hidden”.\(^{(43)}\) This obscurity or ambiguity is the distinctive mark of colonial discourse in general; and it is what Homi Bhabha calls the “ambivalent” attitude “a complex mix of attraction and repulsion”.\(^{(44)}\) Bhabha states that colonial discourse wants to produce subordinate subjects who reproduce its assumptions, values and behaviours, but it does not want to create subjects that are too similar to the colonizer as this would be too threatening. This desire to create copies that are “almost the same, but not quite”\(^{(45)}\) compel colonial discourse to be ambivalent or ambiguous. But what is clearly seen or understood and not hidden is that the civilizing missions remained only as ideas and ideals. The colonizer revealed the desire to civilize the colonized but at the same time be was afraid of achieving this goal. According to Abdul R. JanMohamed, the colonizer tries to resolve this inner truth/ambiguity/dilemma by 

> developing a theory of the white man’s burden. But this creates another contradiction for him: if he genuinely pursues his manifest destiny [namely, democracy, liberty, humanism and fraternity] and civilizes the native, then he undermines his own position of social privilege ... [and] then the colonizer can no longer retains his superior status.\(^{(46)}\)
Inferiority of the Natives/labeling as Savages

Perhaps the only “truth” universally acknowledged by the white colonizer was his inherent belief in the inferiority of the “unhappy savages;”[^47] and in his search for truth in the land of “darkness,” Kurtz makes no attempt to challenge any established colonial belief in his own superiority amongst those less powerful than he is. In his analysis of the European colonial, Mannoni says: "what the colonial in common with Prospero lacks, is awareness of the world of Others – a world in which Others have to be respected …… Rejection of that world is combined with an urge to dominate."[^48] Edward Said, also, emphasizes this fact and adds that both imperialism and colonialism are “impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people require and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination”.[^49] Since Mr. Kurtz is seen by fellow Europeans on similar missions as the model most worthy of emulating, it is significant that his treatment of the people in his life is startlingly true to these formulae, and his urge to dominate is clearly displayed in his dealings with those weaker than he– his native followers and his woman.

Possibly, it has been difficult for the reader to react positively to Kurtz in the midst of the overwhelming darkness of his conduct in the Congo. His little job, in the vast machinery of the Empire in Africa, had been “the making of a report”[^50] for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs; but he had transformed himself
simultaneously into a monster with a savage greed for ivory and a God of the native Africans. He believes that Europeans are not brutal enough, recommending in his report to “Exterminate all the brutes,” suggesting that the “savages” must be destroyed whether or not their customs can be “suppressed” (italics added). In his report to the International Society Kurtz believes that,

...We whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings – we approach them with the might as of a deity. By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded. (italics added).

Kurtz words in his report to the 'International Society of the Suppression of savage Customs' are no less imperialist and racist than the sentiments and statements of King Leopold’s explication of the “sacred mission of civilization”. Moreover, these words of Kurtz are an echo of Leopold’s when the latter, previously, condemned the Africans and their customs, calling them the “sanguinary habits” of the ‘wretched negroes”, yet he proclaimed the nobly civilizing mission of the Belgians in the Congo. In his welcoming speech at the conference that organized the 'International Association for the Suppression of Slavery and the Opening up of Central Africa’, Leopold Said, for instance:

When our directing will is implanted among them [the inhabitants of the Congo] its aim is to triumph over all obstacles [so] we count upon the means of action which [shall] confer upon us dominion. (italics added).
Using advanced European technology on the Third World, both Leopold and Kurtz recommend tyranny and terror in the service of boundless good, and instructing the colonialists to behave as god-in-the presence of the “savages”-that avenges and strikes whenever it pleases him, or as the young Russian, in the novel, puts it “there was nothing on Earth to prevent him [Kurtz] killing whom he jolly well pleased”. (54)

Symbol of Imperialism
In *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz functions as the embodiment of the highest ideals. If as Marlow concludes, “Mr. Kurtz was a universal genius”, (55) and that “All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz”, (56) then Kurtz may be regarded as the symbolic representative of the imperialist mission and intention. Some Conradian Scholars think that Kurtz's intent in going to the Congo was noble; and Marlow also affirms that Kurtz ”had come out equipped with moral ideas of some sort”. (57) How can one read someone else’s intentions if not by actions, and Kurtz’s actions do not indicate good intentions, noble intentions, or idealistic goals. Introduced as the embodiment of the highest ideals of the imperial mission, Kurtz turns out to have a good deal in common with those who hired him. They all had gone out “to tear treasure out of the bowels of the land [Africa], and that was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe”. (58) The fact, as aforesaid, is that
European forces requested that Kurtz write a report recommending their future action in the Congo. His recommendation, as we knew, called for the extermination of the brutes. No one questioned the morals of a man who proclaimed that savage customs required savage treatment. So, Kurtz is not only like his companions in the company who all lust for wealth but pretend to be restrained. He exceeds them in that he organizes an army to raid the natives and assemble as much ivory as possible. In his raid he exterminates a tribe of natives for opposing him. Worse, he collects the heads of his victims and hangs on poles under the windows of his hut. Is this what Kurtz, as an idealist, was initiated to in the Jungle? If he had good intentions, what then changed him? Marlow suggests that primitivism had "got into his veins, consumed his flesh and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation". Then, for Marlow, it is the African jungle and its inhabitants that changed and corrupted Kurtz.

**Primitivism**

Primitivism in *Heart of Darkness* is shaped by Marlow’s account of a journey into what he calls the heart of “primeval” savagery where civilization is constantly threatened because the “wilderness” of the Congo or the Third World closes upon white men "as the sea closes over a diver". In his description of the effect of the landscape of the Congo, Marlow suggests that Kurtz is swallowed up by the jungle of Africa. It is then, according to Marlow, a corruptive and lawless jungle.
that corrupts the colonizers and releases their depravity as it did with Kurtz. But what is so corruptive and lawless in the African Jungle? The land or the people? Marlow seems to suggest both, (as shall be seen later on in this chapter, when Marlow describes the people and landscape of the Congo). He (Marlow) and other colonizers seem not to acknowledge that order existed in other cultures, or in colonial societies before the coming of the Whites. Primitive societies, in spite of lack of written legal documents, were highly organized. They had their courts and their systems of attorneys, (as seen in the next chapter). Sanctions and punitive actions did exist in these societies which were highly moral. But colonialists, not knowing the moral principle of the native people, presumed that Africans were “evil” and therefore it is the whites’ moral superiority and moral duty to conquer and direct them. Moreover, the ‘idea’ to which Conrad refers means that ‘the conquest of the earth”, the greed for geographical exploration and expansion, can be veiled under such a “sentimental pretence”\(^{(62)}\) as ”the White Man’s Burden” or “the civilizing mission”.

The narrative of *Heart of Darkness* tends to support this “idea” of civilizing ”those ignorant millions from their horrid ways”.\(^{(63)}\) It clearly emphasizes the central role of the European hero in the social order. The textual emphasis on the path of action is presented right away as Marlow confesses to having a passion for maps since his childhood. He makes clear his desire to explore -almost possess- the Congo. This
fixation of the imperial eye on Africa predates his contract with the Belgian Company, as Marlow reveals to his audience:

.... when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the [map], and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting .... (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, When I grow up I will go there .... But there was one [space that was] the biggest, the most blank, so to speak – that I had a hankering after (italics added).\(^{(64)}\)

His early interaction with the map suggests a desire to capture an Africa that is apprehended as mysterious yet acquiescent. This impulse to capture is emblematic of the imperial quest throughout Western history and certainly the age of the Empire. This type of manoeuvre projects an image of Africa as a wild zone ripe for Western intervention and domination. Achebe notes that this is “the dominant image of Africa in the Western imagination”.\(^{(65)}\) This gesture of mapping the unknown as if to possess reveals the desire to explore. Conrad’s young Marlow is not so far removed from the eighteenth century and Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe who also envisions an essential and heroic Europe mapping a rudimentary world. He is also not very far removed from his creator, Joseph Conrad. The Congo had apparently been the object of fascination for Conrad since childhood. We can read Marlow’s same childish dream in Conrad’s A Personal Record:
It was in 1868, when nine years old or thereabouts, that while looking at a map of Africa at the time and putting my finger on the blank space then representing the unsolved [unexplored] mystery of that continent, I said to myself with absolute assurance and an amazing audacity ...."when I grow up I shall go there" (italics added).\(^{66}\)

**Allegorical Pointers in the Novel**

Such a passage is thus highly allegorical of *colonialism as a system* driven by commercial interests to establish colonies where land and people can be exploited for conquerors’ purposes. And it is also from this extract that the reader, meant to face the theme of imperialism/colonialism, gets aware that its consequences may be negative, too.

Marlow comes of age and makes use of the Belgian company “a big concern, a company for trade on that river” \(^{67}\) to explore the Congo. Marlow sees the **Congo via the imperial eye**. And he first encounters it via his map: "there was in it one river especially, a mighty big river, that you could see on the map, resembling an immense snake uncoiled".\(^{68}\) The snake has long been associated with the earth as well as inscrutability in Western iconography; and the natural world has often been mystified and demonized in the Christian West – so the snake imagery in this passage contributes to Marlow’s characterization of the **Congo as a mysterious and demonic natural world** pervaded by the savagery of rudimentary souls. The African Congo becomes an enigma to Marlow. He both fears and struggles to
understand this enigma, yet his struggle takes place in the context of conquest. Marlow is accepted by many readers as a compass in *Heart of Darkness*. Yet he is not merely an innocent observer of all the horrifying things that occur in the Congo. He is a cog in the colonial machine. He accepts a role in the Belgian project and he is not without some knowledge at the fore regarding this economic process, which is fueled by rapine and exploitation. He observes that “they were going to run an overseas empire and make no end of coin by trade”.\(^{69}\) However, the Belgian company principally operates for one thing: ivory. So, in this sense, Marlow is just one more imperialist eager for icon. Kurtz and the other devils of the trade are obvious and much castigated examples of the Western obsession with the material spoils of conquest and the suffering that such gain is based upon.

However, Marlow does not become what Kurtz becomes, yet there are many moment in the narrative when Kurtz is portrayed by him as “an exceptional man,\(^{70}\) “a remarkable man”.\(^{71}\) Marlow is also critical of Belgian colonialism in the Congo; yet his participation in the imperial project is not contested at the end of the story. This participation is demonstrated by his presence on a British vessel on the Thames – where, as the frame narrator notes,

> The old river [Thames] in its broad reach rested unruffled ... after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its bank, spread out ... leading to the uttermost ends of the earth ... The tidal current runs to and fro in its unceasing service, crowded with memories of men and ships it had borne .... whose names are like jewels
flashing in the night of time, from the *Golden Hind* returning with her round flanks full of treasure, to be visited by the Queen’s Highness and thus pass out of the gigantic tale, to the *Erebus* and *Terror*, bound on other conquests … adventurers and settlers⁷² (underline added).

Does the Thames as described not point to a path of action implicated in capitalism and colonialism? A path, which spans from the sepulchral environs of the imperial hub – London, which is steeped in darkness – to the “uttermost ends of [Empire]”? If Marlow is not like the frame narrator who extols the joys of empire – in the above passage – and paints a pretty picture of “the adventurers and the settlers [and] the hunters for gold or pursuers of fame [who] had gone out on that stream bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire,”⁷³ then what is he doing on the Nellie? Is he once again participating in the project of empire – which continues to push “into the mystery of an unknown earth” in order to impose “the dreams of men [and] the germs of empires”?⁷⁴ Marlow knows that colonization is “an unending process of expansion”; yet, we assume, he keeps this “whole process in motion”.⁷⁵ He discovers that darkness is everywhere, even in the centre of empire – London; yet his position on the Nellie contributes to the impression that, like Tennyson’s Ulysses, Marlow “is always roaming with a hungry heart” in ways that compromise his strong critique of imperialism. This stance of Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* is Conrad’s which can best be expressed by
Edward Said’s argument, which points out that despite a distinctive critique of the ideological premises of imperialism in his fiction, "Conrad does not give us the sense that he could imagine a fully realized alternative to imperialism," since he thought that “the natives he wrote about in Africa, Asia, or America were incapable of independence". These are also Achebe’s concerns – and Marlow’s vexed position on the Nellie at the end of the story is ambiguous at best.

**Gloom and Darkness**

This ambiguity and contradiction of Conrad and his narrator, Marlow, will be elaborated later on. For the time being let us turn again to Marlow’s upstream journey and the way he describes and represents the African landscape and its inhabitants. As a matter of fact, everything concerning nature in *Heart of Darkness* is described as mournful, gloomy and horrible. Marlow introduces his jungle story as follows:

> Going up that river [Congo] was like traveling back to the *earliest beginnings* of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an *impenetrable forest* ... There was *no joy* in the brilliance of sunshine ... You lost your way on that river as you would in a desert ... trying to find the channel, till you thought yourself *bewitched* and cut off for ever from everything you had known once somewhere – far away– in another existence perhaps *(italics added).*
Marlow is describing his trip up river as a trip into the darkest part of the world, a journey during which nature has nothing pleasant to offer, not even the sunshine. The passage shows that Marlow is moving into the unknown, he regards the African Congo as extraordinary. Yet the power of the natural landscape frightens him. The word ‘bewitched’ exposes his fear of this world and thus his impulse to fix and demonize. As aforesaid, Marlow sees the Congo via the imperial eye. He uses the unknown and remote jungle landscape, its unseen dangers and its unexpected obstacles, in a mythic manner that carries us back to the beginning of time and the human origins to emphasize the primitive state of the land:

We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness ... We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil ... The earth seemed unearthly ... a thing monstrous (italics added).

This representative passage epitomizes the ethos of the Western imperial quest which based upon violence. The language here adds force to the metaphors of penetration and domination of the Congo, of Africa which is described as “an accursed inheritance, to be subdued” and this problematic portrayal suggests that the African Congo requires some form of Western intervention and domestication. The use of words such as “accursed inheritance” and “subdued” reflects
Conrad’s inability to transcend the Western popular belief of the Bible’s anecdote of Ham and his cursed descendants (which is not correct), that, according to one missionary, P.P. Aurogard, “The black race is certainly the race of Ham, the race cursed of God…” (80) The earth here had nothing similar to that of Europe. Marlow here echoes Milton’s *Paradise Lost* in the description of the fall of man and his expulsion from Eden and the curse borne by Adam and his descendants.

To inscribe the landscape as monstrous and exotic, then what characteristics does Marlow ascribe to its inhabitants? As suggested earlier, the natives are in no way distinctive. They, too, are monstrous and attractive, like the wilderness. In the description of the African woman, for example, Marlow identifies her with the wilderness. He says of her: "She stood looking at us without a stir, and like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose" (81) (italics added). By describing the woman in terms of the wilderness, Marlow does not make any distinction between the darkness, the implacability, the savagery of the jungle and that of the woman, because earlier in the text, he observes that the stillness of the jungle was the “stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention, which looked at you with a vengeful aspect” (82) (italics added).
If the land is seen by Marlow as a site of return to prehistory, then its native Africans, bodying forth this primal wildness, are in no way differentiated from it. They, too, according to Marlow, are prehistoric beings. They were anterior to history. Consider the following famous passage and the way Marlow regards the Africans:

The *prehistoric man* was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us – who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings ... We were traveling in the night of first ages ... The earth seemed unearthly ... a thing monstrous and free ..., and the men were – No, they were *not inhuman*. Well, you know, that was the worst of it – this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled, leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but *what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity – like yours*, the thought of your remote *kinship* with this wild and passionate uproar. *Ugly.* Yes, it was ugly enough----- *(83) (italics added).*

The connection between the 'inhuman' wilderness and the 'inhuman' Africans has been alluded to before. Marlow applies this word to the Congo many times. What is remarkable about this passage is the use of parataxis. The ellipses create pauses which are seen as an act of self-censorship, as if Marlow is about to use the word 'inhuman' in the affirmative: they were inhuman. This is just the type of dehumanization and depersonalization that Achebe takes issue with. He sees *Heart of Darkness* as a text “in which the very humanity of black people is called into question”. *(84)*
Dehumanizing of the Natives

In *Heart of Darkness*, Africans are not given any principal role. As some critics say, Conrad was certainly expressing their actual puppet-like role during the colonial period. But when he describes the black workers as animals, Conrad has confessed his biased attitude towards the Africans. Marlow describes one of these native Africans as “one of the creatures” who, like animals, “rose to his hands and knees, and went off on all four towards the river to drink” (italics added). The native fireman looks like a “dog” as the narrator puts it: "to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and feather hat, walking on his hind legs". The helmsman looks “like a reined-in-horse” (italics added). Conrad/Marlow calls the Africans cannibals. In his search for Kurtz, Marlow travels with a group of natives that he calls “a crew of cannibals”. He says that “they did not eat each other before my face,” inferring that although they did not eat human flesh in his presence, among themselves they would. Although later on in the novel Marlow contradicts himself by saying that the cannibals’ restraint surprised him, he cannot find better examples than that of comparing their feelings to that of an animal. He says: "..... And these chaps too had no earthly reason for any kind of scruple. Restraint! I would just as soon have expected restraint from a hyena prowling amongst the corpses of a battlefield. But there was the fact facing me...." (italics added). For Marlow the hyena would show as much restraint as the starving natives of the Congo.
The moments surrounding the death of the African helmsman are revealing. It appears that his death holds significance to Marlow beyond that of the passing of a mere savage, for “it was a kind of partnership. He steered for me [Marlow] – I had to look after him, I worried about his deficiencies, and thus a subtle bond had been created of which I only became aware when it was suddenly broken”.\(^{(90)}\) Marlow is, at least momentarily, moved by the impossibility of kinship amongst the human race. However, it is not the helmsman’s deficiencies that worries Marlow “but the lurking hint of kinship, of common ancestry”.\(^{(91)}\) Marlow does not even say that the dying helmsman has a “distant kinship” with whites, but that he lays a claim to it;\(^{(92)}\) and Marlow finds this claim to a common humanity frightening and “ugly”.\(^{(93)}\) It is the human form of the native Africans that compels the Europeans to accord them a measure of humanity, but it is a troubled measure that impelled this thought of their remote kinship. The Africans might be human but – Marlow finds this claim “ugly” – they were “ugly” to look at. With a description such as this, would any reader doubt of Marlow’s racist feelings? He is reflecting the mid-nineteenth century view on race. The view produced protracted discussion of African physical characteristics. Physical appearance was rated on a scale which placed the Europeans’ features high and the Africans’ low, or as a sub-category of humanity and *Heart of Darkness* reinforces this belief. Achebe argues that *Heart of Darkness* is an offensive book that intends to “set Africa up as a foil to Europe,
as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest”.(94) These are also Said's concerns. He argues that Africa is forced to yield a space in which the European can define himself. According to Said, “European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self”.(95) Africa becomes this type of space for both Marlow and Kurtz.

**Racism in the Novel**

Conrad reduces the Africans to the barest basics of human representation in the text. This representation of the Africans do smack of racism – especially Marlow’s descriptions of the Africans as “black fellows” who have "faces like grotesque masks",

(96) “niggers” yet who are “fine fellows- cannibals-in their place". (97) Marlow’s language is revealing. For example he uses words like (savage, brutal, monstrous, vengeful, implacable, evil, accursed, dark and pitiless) frequently in talking about Africa and the Africans. Therefore, we can say that *Heart of Darkness* endeavors to fix the binary opposition of West and non-West in order to establish the Western subject as central and the indigenous as Other – thus naturalizing difference. This is achieved via the capture and representation of alterity in problematic and dangerous ways. There are many Orientalist tropes in *Heart of Darkness* that is marked by a sense of difference between West and non-West and this dynamic is clear in the narrative's
characterization of Africa and the Africans- as detailed earlier. Strong narrative evidence suggests that *Heart of Darkness* positions the Africans as savage and Africa as a place immersed in savagery. Marlow sees the Africans as primeval who are too busy engaging in “fiendish” activities like the howl and the dance. He does not know very much about the Africans. He does not go ashore for a howl and a dance, so he does not discover the cultural reason for such praxis. African tribal cultures have sophisticated systems of myth and belief which (like most systems of myth and belief) require ritual; yet Marlow (like the other flabby pilgrims) sees only savagery in these practices. If Marlow is seen as the moral compass of the text, we see a very problematic imposition of the imperial eye here. Marlow is constantly fixing and reinscribing the old juxtapositions of West and other. He calls the African rituals and ceremonies “unspeakable rites” and later declares, “I don’t want to know anything of the ceremonies used when approaching Mr. Kurtz”.

His refusal to try to understand the significance of the rites of Africans originates from his personal bias. Here Marlow joins the colonialists in his refusal to know the “Otherness”.

Marlow does not communicate a great deal that is positive about Africans; he views them in a positive light only when they stay “in their place”, such as the offshore paddlers at the beginning of the novella and Kurtz’ mistress who stays behind when he leaves. He distances himself from the “blacks”, judging their souls to be
rudimentary and their minds as belonging to the beginnings of time and hearing their speeches as “incomprehensible frenzy”. \(^{(100)}\) Africans are denied the faculty of speech, communicating even among themselves with “short grunting phrases”. \(^{(101)}\) It is by denying them the faculty of human speech that Marlow delineates his recognition of the unbridgeable gap. It is language that draws Marlow to Kurtz, the man who has disobeyed every tenet of his creed but to whom he feels bound through the ties of culture or language. Elaborating on this idea of speech and Otherness, Anthony Fothergill puts it clearly that “Thinking of Africa as represented by a blankness slowly filling up, an 'absence', an unknown ...... enables Conrad, Marlow ...... to construe it ....” Fothergill finely adds that there might be “a structural analogy between this kind of spatial 'absence' and the 'otherness' of its black inhabitants who are similarly and powerfully construed by Marlow, who are spoken for, but almost never speak. They too are 'absences'”\(^{(102)}\) or be absented and can be filled with meaning by Marlow.

**Treatment of Women**

Women are also marginalized via discursive space as well as explicit commentary. They are – like the Africans – portrayed as rudimentary in *Heart of Darkness*. Marlow objectifies and dismisses the few women that surface in the text. He declares that “the mind of man is capable of anything”, \(^{(103)}\) but what of woman’s? The narrative implication and Marlow’s descriptions of women suggest that he feels that they lack
the strength to face hard truths—like the pervasive violence in the world. This explains why Marlow lies to Kurtz’s intended about the nature of Kurt’s end. Marlow declares that “It’s queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own......... It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset.”[104] He, later in the novel, ensures that women remain outside the masculine world “They – the women I mean – are out of it – should be out of it. We [men] must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse”.[105]

The three women sketched lightly into Heart of Darkness are Marlow’s aunt, Kurtz’s native African mistress and his European fair Intended. A distinct racial demarcation is made between the inspiring, devoted fair goddess whom Kurtz leaves behind at home and the “savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent”[106] native woman who despairs over his departure from the Congo, though neither of them appears to have his respect nor is empowered in any way, just as Marlow’s aunt is. However, the aunt and the Intended are somehow redeemed by their benevolent spirit and their unquestioning faith in the activities of the men they admire and love, while the Congo woman is left standing on the shore amid the silence that surrounds her. She is the exotic and erotic other and thus the subject of colonial desire. Marlow confesses that the African woman is “superb” but couples that with “savage” so that her distinctiveness is coupled with her otherness. It is possible that this differentiation hinges on some of the basic tenets of
the colonial narrative, that real communication between colonizer and colonized races is difficult if not undesirable, that the mystery and darkness of native lives is impenetrable. As it stands, then, the Congo woman is the repository of a few more negative characteristics than are Marlow’s aunt or Kurtz’s Intended, though eventually it seems that race and gender boil them all down to precisely the same identity-less state.

Some basic points remain regarding Kurtz’s two women and the European bias. The two women in Kurtz’s life that we see in Heart of Darkness are left to mourn their tragic loss, but it is the European fiancée who is allowed the “luxury” of voicing her grief and who receives what is in effect the last of Kurtz’s belongings— a packet of letters. She does enjoy the privilege of telling her story to one who has been with the man she mourns till the end, and of listening to him speak. Though she says that she has “mourned so long in silence”,


she does now break it, even though only to be swamped by words that mock and tease and play with truth and lies. However her African counterpart, who is also left to mourn but helplessly and hopelessly in the Congo, is the one who gets nothing at all in actual terms – except that, ironically enough, she gets to hold on to the truth in “a formidable silence”.


Marlow tells us that the African woman is "tragic and fierce" but that her pain is "dumb" for she does not speak.
The question of voice was raised by Gayatri Spivak in her influential essay, *Can The Subaltern Speak?* (1988). The subaltern in question is the African woman who has been Kurtz’s mistress. Spivak attributes the muteness or silence of the woman as subaltern to a failure of interpretation and not a failure of articulation. Spivak emphasizes that the subaltern does cry out in various ways— but acknowledges that her "words cannot be properly interpreted".\(^{(110)}\) John Mcleold sums it up that “It is not so much that subaltern wom[e]n d[o] not speak, but rather that Other[s] d[o] not know how to listen, how to enter into a transaction between speaker and listener”\(^{(111)}\). The African woman cries out via gesture, but her gesture is not registered by the pilgrims. Are her protestations registered by Marlow? Or does the word “dumb” indicate that Marlow fails to hear her? She is after all – a mystery to Marlow. He says that she “shouted something [in a] breathless utterance”,\(^{(112)}\) but, of course, had he asked her about her cry or about Kurtz, things might have been different. Though present in the narrative, the African woman is not allowed to speak, only to be represented and spoken for by Marlow. She is kept at a distance and be “a sort of absence, which Marlow can fill with his meanings”\(^{(113)}\). The African woman – for Marlow – is trapped in her biology as well as her difference. Patriarchy and the imperial dynamics of racism fuse in this complex representation which is based on the marginalization of woman and the eroticization of race (weak races are feminized also).
Black Vs White Dichotomy

However, though there are many indications that the text of *Heart of Darkness* can be read in gendered terms, the actual tension in the text is centred on the racial confrontations: white/black, light/darkness and in the colonizer/colonized encounter that deprives the natives of their wealth. European imperialists were better able to justify the exploitation of Africa and Africans by constructing an ideological model based on the light/dark scheme which privileged everything associated with Europe over everything associated with Africa. They privileged not only light over darkness but white skin over black, white civilization over dark savagery, and advanced white technology over the primitive technology of Africa. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow’s participation in the exploitation of Africa and the Africans goes beyond his duties as a steamship’s pilot. He uses imagery that privileges light over darkness, white over black, in an attempt to legitimate the colonization of Africa by whites. According to Benita Parry, such imagery is traditional in Western culture:

> It is a commonplace that in Western thought the contrast between black and white has for centuries stood for the good, true, pure and beautiful as opposed to the evil, ignorant, corrupt and atrocious. When the actions of modern imperialism brought the white world into organized confrontations with the other continents, the existing accretions of dark and black were thickened and extended to establish an equivalence between “primitive”, “barbaric”, or “savage” societies and moral perversity, and by inference between black people living amidst jungle,
forest and wilderness and a condition of aboriginal
depravity.\(^{(114)}\)

Marlow’s imagery does not merely reflect European’s imperialism extension of “darkness” along racist lines, however, light, too as a category is extended to include not only whiteness but the “white” race and European civilization in general. As an agent of imperialism, Marlow, then, extends not only a category within a system but the system itself in order to justify the invasion of Africa. Accordingly, Europeans are called “whites” in his narrative while Africans are referred to as “black fellows,” “black shapes,” “black shadows,” and “black figures”. Moreover, whereas whites wear white clothes, the Africans are mostly black and naked”. The chief accountant, for example, is described as “a white man” who wears “white cuffs,” a light alpaca jacket,” and “snowy trousers” in contrast to the "dusty niggers" who pass through the Station where he works.\(^{(115)}\)

Marlow also uses light as a metaphor for things like civilization, reason, and discourse. He suggests, for instance, that since the Roman conquest, “light” has “come out of” the Thames,\(^{(116)}\) meaning that the once “dark” Britain is now a source of civilization. Although Marlow refuses to see himself as an “emissary of light”\(^{(117)}\) personally, he believes that it is the duty of Europeans to bring “light” to Africa just as earlier the Roman had brought light to England. Light is also associated with language. Marlow describes Kurtz’s speech as “illuminating,... the pulsating stream of light”,\(^{(118)}\) and his writing as “a
flash of lighting”. He relates darkness, on the other hand, to savagery: Africans, according to Marlow, are not men and women but howling “black shadows” that inhabit the “dark-faced” forest. Rather than speak, the Africans shout “string of amazing words that resembled no sounds of human language”. Moreover, the continent itself is an area “impenetrable to human thought”, a “lightless region of subtle horrors”. For Marlow, Europeans are like the torch-bearing woman in Kurtz’s oil-sketch who walks, “blindfolded,” through a dark background – they bring light to a ”lightless” region. Furthermore, like the figure in Kurtz’s painting, the Europeans are both “sinister” and “stately” – if the conquest itself is ugly, it is redeemed by the light that accompanies it.

The light/dark model was also extended to include the opposition between advanced and primitive technology since Europeans associated their relatively advanced technology with white civilization and primitive technology with dark savagery. In *Images of Africa*, Philip Curtin writes that Westerners have the “tendency to emphasize technology as the principal measure for the “advancement” of any society”. For whites, their unquestionable technological superiority seemed to confirm their belief that they were superior mentally, physically, culturally and morally. In Africa, where indigenous civilizations had been disrupted by wars and the slave trades, the gap between Western and African technology, at that time, could hardly be greater. The technology gap was probably most apparent in weaponry.
for, as Curtin notes, “A repeating rifle is clearly superior to a bow and arrow for its purpose in hunting and warfare”. (125) Missions, too, were important symbols of white "civilization". Even though some missionaries criticized King Leopold in Africa for mismanagement and cruelty, they themselves justified their work in terms of light and darkness, privileging light over darkness and, by extension, whites over blacks. According to one Christian missionary, one of the age’s “spiritual fathers”, P.P. Aurogard, “The black race is certainly the race of Ham,… These black pagans are lazy, greedy, thieves, liars, and given over to all kinds of vice”. (126)

Whereas armies and missions represented the white’s sense of their own military and moral superiority, the stations represented their economic power. With the establishment of stations, Leopold’s investment quickly becomes profitable. Other symbols of white superiority included railways, steamers, and even clothing. To show the supposed opposition between European technology and African primitivism, Marlow matches every sophisticated European tool with a primitive African counterpart, for instance, steamer to canoe, (127) rifle, gun, revolver-carbine to spear, shield, knives, arrow and bow, etc. (128)

Marlow does not “see” things as they are but as imperialist ideology would have them – in black and white. He is, in a sense, but not literally, colour-blind: he does, at times, describe things in terms of colour, but in such cases, however, he tends to polarize it,
emphasizing shade rather than hue: “blue” for example, becomes “dark blue,”\(^{(129)}\) and “green” becomes “dark green” and even “so dark green as to be almost black”\(^{(130)}\). Such polarization is not only perceptual but conceptual for Marlow; everything he associates with Africa is dark: the natives, the jungles, the rivers, the villages, and even the sun “a blinding sunlight”,\(^{(131)}\) while things he associates with Europe are bright. Such privileged oppositions reinforce imperialist ideology and therefore Marlow is, at best, a liberal critic, one who supports the system as a whole even as he criticizes its excesses.

Finally, Marlow even differentiates between European “science” and African “magic”. For the Europeans, science is the product of reason which, in turn, is associated metaphorically with light; accordingly, in Marlow’s narrative it comes to represent European superiority. Marlow’s Africans, in contrast, believe in magic rather than science; in fact, according to Marlow, they can understand technology only in terms of magic as his description of his fireman makes clear:

> He was an improved specimen; he could fire up a vertical boiler .... He ought to have been clapping his hands and stamping his feet on the bank, instead of which he was hard at work, a thrall to strange witchcraft... He was useful because he had been instructed; and what he knew was this-- that should the water in that transparent thing disappear, the evil spirit inside the boiler would get angry through the greatness of his thirst, and take a terrible vengeance ....\(^{(132)}\)
In fact, to Marlow, by the end of the narrative, darkness itself seems supernatural, an evil from which he must protect the Intended. When darkness threatens to become “triumphant”, Marlow lies to the Interned in order to protect her from it; it is no longer the absence of light but its enemy. If “sunlight can be made to lie,” as Marlow concedes in the last scene of his narrative, it is because darkness has corrupted the bearers of light.

Marlow’s treatment of darkness as an antagonist at the end of his narrative indicates that he is indeed a liberal rather than a radical critic of Western imperialism, for while he is critical of the company and its employees, he shares their belief that darkness is an evil that must be dispelled.

**Imperial/Colonial Atrocities**

Nevertheless, to be fair, Marlow is certainly appalled by European atrocities in Africa. During his journey from the first station to the central, Marlow witnesses the most horrible atrocities he has ever seen in his life. He reveals that the Belgians are callous, oppressive, and destructive; he also shows us how the Europeans have reduced and enslaved the Africans. Conrad thus subverts and challenges the foundations of King Leopold’s claim that European “refined” society “attaches to human life (and with reason) a value unknown to barbarous communities” and that the Europeans’/Belgians’ “ultimate end [in Africa] is a work of peace”. As Marlow wanders around the first station he sees the chain gang of Africans and then writes:
A slight clinking behind me..... six black men advanced in a file.... Black rags were wound round their loins..... I would see every rib, the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope; each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain whose bights swung between them, rhythmically clinking.  

This image evokes past and colonial slavery as well. What efficiency could one expect from workers working with chains attached to their ankles or necks!

On his way down the African coast, Marlow passes on an “incomprehensible” French man-of-war “firing into the continent”. The "French had one of their wars going on thereabouts,” but since no “enemies” were in sight, the firing, according to Marlow, had “a touch of insanity”. Marlow refers to the atrocities in the French ports as a “sordid farce acted in front of a sinister back cloth”, and a “merry dance of death and trade”.  

Marlow finds the presence of Europeans and their warships “insane”. By this he implies that the Africans are at peace at home and the Europeans had come as violent invaders. This thought represents Conrad’s fundamental political objection to imperialism. Even Achebe recognizes this fact and acknowledges that “Conrad saw and condemned the evil of imperial exploitation but was strongly unaware of the racism on which it sharpened its iron tooth”. While Conrad’s Marlow is clearly implicated in this racism, he does expose many of the intersections between racism and colonialism. Actually, Marlow’s opening words,
“The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing….. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it”,\(^{(138)}\) show his disapproval of that form of imperialism/racism which is contemptuous of the other on account of physical differences. Whatever might be the philanthropic reasons behind the colonialist venture, the deprivation of the inalienable rights of the natives, be they Indians with long hair or Africans with flat noses remains an abomination against nature. Moreover, Marlow makes it clear that imperialism can only be justified by having an “idea” behind it. However, even the idea that European values or methods can improve the lives of indigenous peoples is shown to be false because, to Marlow, there is “no moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe”. Marlow, here, compares imperialists to a band of thieves, and even characterizes them as “sordid buccaneers.”\(^{(139)}\)

**Exploitation by the Imperialists/Colonialists**

Marlow is extremely critical of the Belgian and French military, political and economic control and exploitation of the Congo and Congolese whom, he recognizes, the West has labeled them as “enemies” and “criminals”. "But," Marlow reports, “These men could by no stretch of imagination be called enemies. They were called criminals, and the outraged law;” and Marlow emphasizes, “they were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly
Marlow’s exposures further document the inefficiency of the imperial system whose army fired at the bush without any target in view. Marlow’s denunciation of imperialism is not centred only on Belgium and France. He rails at and condemns universal imperialism of all types be it efficient or wasteful, benevolent or malevolent, British or non-British. Early in the novel, though admiring the efficiency of British imperialists and calling them (by the frame narrator) the “bearers of a spark from the sacred fire,” Marlow acknowledges that “darkness was here yesterday.” He implies that evil is universal even in the nation that pretends to be the “light” of the world. Marlow here interrogates and condemns the project of empire which the frame narrator so conventionally celebrates: (the vision of a heroic England bearing the torch into dark and unknown lands.) Then, we may venture and say that *Heart of Darkness*, in a sense, questions the juxtapositions of 'West' and 'non-West' as well as the idea of Western subject as central and indigenous subject as ‘Other’. This is what Jan Mohamed calls “Manichean Opposition”. The juxtaposition of the West as the realm of reason and Africa as the realm of savagery is in many respects deconstructed in the novel. Marlow is not unbiased – but he is more profoundly shocked by European savagery than African savagery in the Congo. Consider, for example, the fabricated assumptions about the African cannibals and the subversion of this image (next paragraph). In this episode, Conrad encourages us to interrogate the pilgrims’ unreasonable fears regarding the Africans.
Marlow reviews his own fabricated assumptions about Africa and the Africans. He interrogates not only the behaviour of the pilgrims – but also his own behaviour. The restraint of the cannibals forces him to reflect on his own racism. Cannibalism is seen as the epitome of savagery, and in *Heart of Darkness* it is manifest in “unrestrained grief”. According to Marlow, the savages who have attacked the steam-boat are filled with unrestrained grief. So his attitude toward cannibalism reveals his condescension, fear, ignorance, and contempt. But later on in the novel he contradicts himself by saying that the cannibals’ restraint surprised him, as they did not eat the white men on board. The Africans traveling with Marlow do not resort to basic instincts even though they are desperately hungry. They are more evolved than the pilgrims on the boat who kill for pleasure. Marlow exclaims,

> Why in the name of all the gnawing devils of hunger they didn’t go for us – they were thirty to five … They were big powerful, with not much capacity to weigh the consequences … And I saw that something restraining … had come into play there … Restraint! What possible restraint? Was it superstition, disgust, patience, fear – or some kind of primitive honour? No fear can stand up to hunger, no patience can wear it out, disgust simply does not exist where hunger is … Don’t you know the devilry of lingering starvation …? Well, I do. It takes a man all his inborn strength to fight hunger properly … Restraint! I would just as soon have expected restraint from a hyena prowling amongst the corpses of a battlefield. But there was the fact facing me… (142)
This part of the text reveals a change in Marlow’s understanding of Africa and the Africans. He realizes that the Africans are not the savages he thought them to be. In this moment he disengages from and upsets the idea of the Western subject as central or superior and the indigenous as Other or inferior. This does not mean that Marlow breaks completely from all forms of racism – for, even though he sees the Africans, in this episode, as a marvelous example of restraint, yet, once again, he cannot find better example than that of comparing their feelings to that of an animal (hyena); moreover, he was expecting much more restraint from the hyena than from the starving natives of the Congo whose hunger blackens their thoughts and incites their ferocity. Yet in this episode, Marlow deconstructs or calls into question the construct of the African savage (stereotyped and popularized by Europeans). Marlow recognizes that he has underestimated the Africans; he marvels at the strength of character that enables them to fight hunger in ways that he could not.

In this reflecting attitude, Marlow fits what Edward Said notes – that, “Conrad’s narrators are not average unreflecting witnesses of European imperialism. They do not simply accept what goes on in the name of the imperial idea; they think about it a lot ----- they are actually quite anxious about whether they can make it seem like a routine thing. But it never is”. Marlow fits this profile and he interrogates assumptions which can be associated with hegemonic systems of thought and thus undermines consent for those ideas. The
idea that European values or methods can improve the lives of indigenous peoples, for example, is shown to be false. Consider the oil sketch (painted by Kurtz) of a woman “draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch”. This image is a metaphor for some of the Europeans’ blind acceptance of a civilizing mission that cloaks the real purpose of colonialism. Marlow shows us that the Belgian company (a metonymy for corporate colonialism) is ready to exploit and terrorize anyone (Africans, Africa and even its employees) to turn a profit. Marlow is certainly shocked by European atrocities in Africa. In the “grove of death” scene, for instance, he condemns European labor practices by describing a living graveyard of discarded African workers. And as a character in his own narrative, he even acts at time to prevent such ugliness, blowing the steamer’s whistle, for example, in an attempt to scatter Kurtz’s African followers before the “pilgrims” can shoot them "on a jolly track".

However, Marlow attacks the means but not the end of imperialism, he condemns the “flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly” rather than the civilizing ideals that led that devil to Africa. Marlow observes that colonialism is an inherently rapacious practice that gives a free rein to the colonizer; yet he fails to speak or act against the colonization effort in general or to question its legitimacy; in fact, it would seem that as the captain of a river steamer, he participates in its serving not only his own interests but those of the company and European imperialism at large.
Contradictory Stereotypical Representations

What is perhaps the most confusing feature of *Heart of Darkness* is Marlow’s ability to switch between positive and negative stereotypes, or between a stereotypical and a personal view of an African. His statements are sometimes contradictory. Sometimes he lets us feel that Africans are the innocent victims of the white man’s heart of darkness, and other times he would have us believe that Africans have the power to turn the white man’s heart black. This is where he equates the primitives with evil and their complexion with spiritual evil. He, for example, feels that to appreciate the common humanity of black and white, the European traveler “must at least be as much of a man as these [Africans] on the share”, while a few sentences earlier he has stated that they [the Africans] belong to “the night of the first ages”. With the African woman, contradicting stereotypes alternate within one and the same sentence: "She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent". Kurtz is seen by Marlow as a man of "magnificent eloquence" yet in (a double turn) he sees him as “hollow at the core”.

This crossing of diametrically opposed views, i.e. Marlow’s humane and advanced views as a liberal and his depersonalization of the Africans he meets, can be accounted for by the novelist’s own ambivalence on the issue of colonialism. Many critics rightly ask this question: “To what extent are Marlow’s attitudes Conrad’s?” And John Saveson suggests that “Marlow’s disillusionment is Conrad’s
disillusionment”.

Conrad’s attitudes towards colonialism are ambivalent and contradictory. Jonah Raskin argues that contradictions reveal the nature of Conrad. He says two things at the same time, “affirming and denying” at the same time. He apparently seem to have supported colonialism, though his writings seems ambiguous. Avrom Fleishman better expresses Conrad’s attitudes in these terms:

Conrad tried to please the two currents of opinion. For those who advocated colonization, Conrad supported their view by his negative depiction of the natives. And for the ones who opposed the institution, he joined them by his apparent criticism of it. As Africa, at the time, had no voiced opinion, and while man tried to hide anything positive about Africans, their dark racial pigmentation was then exploited by writers such as Conrad. But in order to better understand Conrad’s views and attitudes on imperialism/colonialism, it is important to remember his early life background (as shown in section A) and that he was not “English” by birth. This move, of course, left Conrad in an unusual position, as Eloise Hay notes:
Born a Pole who was legally a Russian citizen, Conrad became a Pole who was legally British. Although his British naturalization was wholly deliberate, and although it reflected a common Polish sympathy with the English way of life, Conrad was never allowed by the British to forget that he was an alien or allowed by Poles to forget that he was an emigre.\(^{(155)}\)

Conrad’s position was difficult. He was unwilling to support imperialism in his writings, though he was careful not to alienate or put off his British readers. In Hay’s view, Conrad, in his writing, avoided offending his British readers; he had a “conviction that men’s instinctive loyalties must not be violated”.\(^{(156)}\) Accordingly, in works like *Heart of Darkness*, he attempts to denounce “imperialism and racism without damning all men who through the accident of their birth in England were committed to those public policies”.\(^{(157)}\) Conrad has Marlow defend British imperialism as preferable to continental imperialism. Even though criticism of "other" imperialisms by the English were common at the time, Conrad still felt compelled to justify Marlow’s liberal critique to his conservative publisher William Blackwood in a letter, explaining that he was against the “inefficiency” and “selfishness” of certain imperialists rather than the “civilizing work” itself.\(^{(158)}\)

Thus, as suggested earlier, Conrad has Marlow criticize only the excesses of imperialism. Marlow clearly opposes some of the norms of the imperial quest. Yet his rebellion against the “idea” and practice of imperialism is complicated by his role in this project of epistemic
violence which destroys and corrupts. He does not recognize that he is, in a sense, “blinded” by ideology. Therefore, we can say that *Heart of Darkness* both reinscribes and subverts European imperialism. It is a vigorous attempt at dialogue with an imperial West that is squeezing Africa. There is also an attempt at dialogue with an Africa that is enslaved by the violent forces of colonialism - but the African voice is not heard. Sandya Shetty aptly describes this situation, arguing that, Marlow’s narrative certainly disturbs the conventional association of Europe and Africa with light and darkness, civilization and savagery, revealing the “blackness” of Europe’s imperial activities in the Congo. Nonetheless, no corresponding sense of the “whiteness” (or even “grayness”) of Africa emerges ...... Thus in seeking to readjust Europe’s flattering colonial image of itself, Marlow’s narrative fails to effect a corresponding readjustment in Europe’s distorting image of Africa – the bizarre other against which it self-righteously defined itself.\(^{(159)}\)

So, it is right to say that this dialogue or attitude in *Heart of Darkness* is marked by double turns that, simultaneously, reinscribe and subvert imperial dichotomies of West/non-West, civilization/savagery .... etc. Conrad calls these European norms into question by deconstructing the idea/propaganda of the “civilizing mission” and by exposing the gruesome reality of colonialism in Africa.

By switching rapidly between contradictory views and fantasies, Conrad keeps alive the reader’s unconscious need to find a closed order or principle, giving it no satisfaction. Conrad takes this
switching to a bewildering limit, creating a tension that may partially explain the intensity of *Heart of Darkness* - and the difficulties critics have had in tackling his treatment of “race” and “colonialism”. This technique may add intensity and greatness to the novel and its novelist but it does nothing to readjust "Europe's distorting image of Africa". However, Said notes, Conrad exposes the discrepancy between the orthodox view and his own view of the empire by drawing attention to how ideas and values are constructed and deconstructed through dislocations in the narrator’s language. Marlow unsettles the reader's sense of the idea of the empire by showing, at the end of the tale, that the all-pervading darkness is the same in London and in Africa. Both Marlow and Conrad are aware of the discrepancy between the ideals and the deeds of imperialism, but they are also creatures of their time and cannot take the next step, which would be to recognize that what they saw, disablingly and disparagingly, as a non-European darkness was in fact a non-European world. Consequently, despite his severe critique of imperialism, Conrad could not conclude that imperialism had to end so that the natives could lead lives free from European domination.\(^{(160)}\)

Despite the critique of imperialism Conrad offers in *Heart of Darkness*, since the 1970’s it has become increasingly popular to conclude that Conrad was simply an apologist for British imperialism if not an imperialist himself. In an article entitled *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness*, for example, Chinua Achebe argues that
Conrad was a “purveyor of [the] comforting myth”\(^{(161)}\) which helped legitimize European imperialism in Africa. Furthermore, Conrad is compared by Achebe with “men in Nazi Germany who lent their talent to the service of virulent racism whether in science, philosophy or the arts.”\(^{(162)}\) Although Achebe is willing to admit that, to some extent, Conrad insulates himself from Marlow and his opinions by filtering his narrative through an anonymous narrator, he concludes that Conrad was an imperialist as well as racist since “he neglects to hint subtly or tentatively at an alternative frame of reference by which we may judge the actions and opinions of his characters.”\(^{(163)}\) Achebe suggests that Conrad does not provide an alternative frame of reference because he could not imagine an Africa populated by human beings. However, there has been a great deal of debate following Achebe’s charge of racism against Conrad. While it is unnecessary to equate Conrad with the European colonial presence in the Congo, the text clearly shows this discomfort on the part of colonizers, so Achebe’s comment may be partially accepted as a criticism of imperial attitudes to race.

Twenty years later Edward Said, in Culture and Imperialism, tells us more about Conrad’s supposed prejudices and blind spots, arguing that Achebe’s criticism “does not go far enough”.\(^{(164)}\) According to him, Conrad “writes as a man in whom a Western view of non-Western world is so ingrained as to blind him to other histories, other cultures, other aspirations”: 
All Conrad can see is a world totally dominated by the Atlantic West. What Conrad cannot see is an alternative to this cruel tautology. He could [not] understand that India, Africa, and South America also had lives and cultures with integrities not totally controlled by the gringo imperialists and reformers of this world. (165)

Said goes on to say that “Conrad does not give us the sense that he could imagine a fully realized alternative to imperialism: the natives he wrote about in Africa, Asia or Africa were incapable of independence, and because he seemed to imagine that European tutelage was a given, he could not foresee what would take place when it came to an end”. (166) Although Said focuses less on Conrad’s “racism” than Achebe does, both suggest that Conrad was a bigot who was unwilling and unable to represent non-European points of view. In truth, the stereotypical perception of the indigene in colonial discourse, when it refers to the West’s view and colonization of what it calls the Other, is revealed to be more of a Western invention than a genuine rendition of what the indigene really is. And the past distorted representations, deletions and the unexamined assumptions by novelists such as Conrad about Africans, have been formed into collective stereotyped images of African patterns of behavior which appear to be intact in the minds of the great majority of Westerners.

In spite of critics’ objections about its reputed racism, Conrad’s Heart of Darkness is largely revolutionary for it does expose and deconstruct the colonizer and the colonial machine. It exposes “the machinery
behind the apparent naturalness and inevitability of the imperial
endeavour and makes visible the conqueror’s face hidden behind
the mask of a civilizing mission’s protestations of benevolence”.(167)
While Conrad spoke from within the patriarchy, from within his
position among the colonizers, it was his intention to expose the
brutality and the futility of the imperial enterprise – and he did just
that in Heart of Darkness in which Africa is posed as other, but is also
perceived to reveal inexorable truths which had not been observed
before. So, Heart of Darkness had a polemical intent, both towards the
white man’s moral meanness and the jungle’s “crew of cannibals” with
suspect rites. But in assessing Conrad’s position, we must admire his
boldness in treating the problem of imperialism at a time when the
notion of anti-imperialism was not articulated and the general public
strongly supported colonialism and imperialism. As Sarvan puts it,
“Conrad too was not entirely immune to the infection of the beliefs
and attitudes of his age, but he was ahead of most in trying to break
free”.(168)

Conclusion

It is true that Heart of Darkness lays bare the European conqueror’s
face and behavior by deconstructing the hidden intention behind the
mask of the philanthropic missions in Africa; yet, it, too, constructs a
distorted image of Africa and the African’s face and behavior to the
extent that it has become one of the Western clichés about Africans.
Whatever African writers may write about their continent, the cliché
will never fade away from—at least—the majority of Western general public. The deconstruction of such stereotypical perception and representation of the indigene will constitute the subject matter of our next chapter by dealing with Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, which is seen by many critics, and by Achebe himself, as a direct response to such colonial novels as *Heart of Darkness*. With this end in view, what the researcher will try to investigate, as a matter of fact, is the white image of the black skin.
Notes:


7. ibid.

8. Daniels, p.52

9. ibid.


14. ibid.


18. Jules Harmand (a French advocate of colonialism), cited in Kenneth N. Addison, "We Hold These Truths To Be Self-Evident..." An Interdisciplinary Analysis of the Roots of Racism and Slavery in America, Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, Inc., 2009, p. 06.


23. Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness, New Delhi: Rupa Classics, 2003, p.75. (All the subsequent references to this text are to this edition).


27. ibid.

28. ibid.

29. ibid, p.26.

30. ibid, p.36.

31. ibid, pp.39-40.
32. ibid, p.40.

33. ibid, p.38

34. ibid, p.41


40. Parataxis is a form of textual capture or fragmentation.


42. ibid, p.54.

43. ibid.


47. Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, p.27.


51. ibid, 78.

52. ibid, 77.


55. ibid. p.45.

56. ibid, p.77.

57. ibid, p. 49.

58. ibid.

59. ibid, pp. 86-88.

60. ibid, p.75.

61. ibid, p.53.

62. ibid,p.14.

63. ibid, p.22.

64. ibid, pp. 15-16.


68. ibid.
69. ibid, p.18.

70. ibid, p.37.

71. ibid, p.107.

72. ibid, pp. 10-11.

73. ibid. p.11.

74. ibid.

75. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.27.

76. ibid, p.28.


78. ibid, pp 56-57.

79. The several heads of the natives on the slim poles near Kurtz’s dwelling in the jungle, and the robbery of the natives’ wealth speak of this violence of the West.


82. ibid, p.54.

83. ibid, pp. 56-57.


86. ibid, p. 58.

87. ibid, p.70.
88. ibid, p.55.
89. ibid, p.66.
90. ibid, p. 78.
92. Conrad, Heart of Darkness, p. 79.
97. ibid, p. 55.
98. ibid, pp. 57-58.
99. ibid, p. 89.
100. ibid, p. 56.
101. ibid, p. 63.
104. ibid, pp. 22-23.
105. ibid, p.74.
106. ibid, p.93.
107. ibid, p. 117.
108. ibid, p.94.

109. ibid, p.93.


113. Anthony Fothergill, p.78.


116. ibid, p.12.

117. ibid, p.22.

118. ibid, p.73.

119. ibid, p.78.

120. ibid, p.91.

121. ibid, p. 102.

122. ibid, pp. 85-89.

123. ibid, p.41.


125. ibid.
126. Gail Fincham and Myrtle Hooper, p.100.


128. ibid, pp. 91-92.

129. ibid, p. 63.

130. ibid, p.23.

131. ibid, p. 26.

132. ibid, p. 58.

133. ibid, p. 111.

134. Wayne Morrison, "*Leopold II and the Civilizing of the Congo*", p. 139.


136. ibid, pp. 24-25.


139. ibid, 49.

140. ibid, pp. 27-29.

141. ibid, pp. 11-13.

142. ibid, pp. 65-67.

143. ibid.

144. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p.32.

146. ibid, pp.31-33.

147. ibid, p.103.

148. ibid, p.28.

149. ibid, 57.

150. ibid, p.93.

151. ibid, p.89.


156. ibid, p.112.

157. ibid.


162. ibid, p. 215.

163. ibid, p. 214.


165. ibid, p. xix.

166. ibid, p. 28.
