PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA
الجمهورية الجزائرية الديمقراطية الشعبية
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي
TEACHER TRAINING SCHOOL – ENS – CONSTANTINE
المدرسة العليا للأساتذة بقسنطينة
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
قسم اللغة الإنجليزية

THE POWER OF THE WORD IN CONRAD'S *HEART OF DARKNESS*

Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Magister in Advanced Academic and Literary **Writing Studies**

Option:

Literature

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2015

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Malika REBAI MAAMRI, for her time, patience, invaluable assistance, critical insight and intellectual guidance. I am deeply indebted to her for all her help providing me with documents without which this work could have never been accomplished. I have been fortunate in having had the opportunity to work under her guidance.

I am also grateful to the members of the board of examiners, namely Prof. Zoulikha BEN SAFI and Dr. Khemissi BOUGHRARA, for their kind acceptance of reading my thesis despite their precious and tight schedules.

My further thanks also go to all my teachers at the Ecole Normale Superieure of Constantine (ENSC) and Djilali Liabes University of Sidi Bel Abbes. Their insightful guidance will always be remembered and acknowledged. Special thanks to my teachers, Dr. Doudja SLOUGUI and Mrs. Leila DJOUIMAÀ, for their remarkable kindness and support.

I would also like to thank the library staff of the following universities: ENS Constantine, Mentouri University of Constantine, and Badji Mokhtar University of Annaba.

I also want to extend my warm thanks to all my graduate and postgraduate classmates with whom I was so lucky to share unforgettable moments in the quest for knowledge.

Last but not least, I am so thankful to my family and friends for their unfailing support and encouragement. I would like to thank my parents, brothers and sisters whom I owe their devotion and commitment to offer me an education.

ABBREVIATIONS

HD: *Heart of Darkness*

ABSTRACT

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is considered one of the most contentious novels of the modern era. Readers and critics seem not to agree on the ultimate meaning of Conrad's novella. Indeed, the meaning of Marlow's account of his experiences in the wilderness is obscured by his impressionistic, hazy and hypnotic narrative style.

Hence, the purpose of the present research is to examine the power of the word in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. It analyses Conrad's narrative discourse in his 1899 novella. Thus, the first chapter presents the socio-historical context of the work. It casts light on the effects of Conrad's childhood experiences, the *fin de siècle* temper as well as the literary context on the shaping of Conrad's sceptical temperament. The second chapter scrutinises the different narrative techniques and stylistic devices. It investigates Conrad's adoption of the frame narrative voice, the impressionistic technique of the delayed decoding, the art(ifice) of covert plots, janiformity and the paradox of the virtue of evil, the Faustian narrative, the haunting *doppelgänger,* transtextuality, symbolism, irony, free indirect discourse, appositions and substitutions as well as words of estrangement. The third chapter discusses critical responses to *Heart of Darkness*. It uses the deconstructivist approach to literary criticism to highlight the novella's undecidability and indeterminacy.

As a result, we conclude that *Heart of Darkness* is much more than just a story about a voyage up the river. It is an exploration of good and evil, light and darkness, black and white, sanity and insanity. It is above all about the essential hollowness at the core of humanity and language.

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INTRODUCTION

> Literary language foregrounds language itself as something not reducible to meaning: it opens as well as closes the disparity between symbol and idea, between written sign and assigned meaning.[1]

Heart of Darkness is considered one of the most controversial novels of the modern era. Breaking most of the previous rules and conventions, it marks a transformation in the art of novel writing. Though written during the last decade of the nineteenth century, the novella carries many Modernist traits, which constitute its indeterminacies, its epistemological uncertainties and its mythic logic.[2] Conrad's innovation in both style and technique accredits his writings in general and *Heart of Darkness* in particular, for the Modernist novel and the Great Tradition.

In effect, *Heart of Darkness* is a turning point in English literature and the development of the novel. As a result, Conrad has become one of the most influential Modernist prose stylists. He is a prolific writer with a dogged devotion to his art. Though English was his third language, his rich store of exotic experiences as a merchant sailor helped him write many of his novels, namely, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* (1897), *Heart of Darkness* (1899), *Lord Jim* (1900) and *Under Western Eyes* (1911). Nevertheless, *Heart of Darkness* remains Conrad's most acclaimed and ambiguous work he wrote as the British Empire was in its heyday. The novella tells the story of a British sailor called Marlow who travels up the River Congo to find Mr Kurtz, a trader in ivory. In the Congo, a country in central Africa, Marlow discovers the bitter reality of the mysterious Mr Kurtz, who succumbed to darkness becoming a

[1] Geoffrey H. Hartman, in Harold Bloom's *Deconstruction and Criticism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1979), Preface, p. viii.
[2] Adrian Poole, *The Cambridge Companion to English Novelists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 297.

ruthless man. Hence, the choice of Africa as a setting to Marlow's story as well as the novella's misty narrative impressionistic style led to varied interpretations and aroused many a response.

Conrad's conception of his role as an artist is emphasised in his apostrophe to the reader in the preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"*

> My task, which I am trying to achieve, is by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel, it is, before all, to make you *see*.[3]

Thus, Conrad's view of literature as a verbal art, the power of the word, stresses the use of language and storytelling to dramatise observed actions. His dramatisation of the visible world is also manifest in a letter to his publisher William Blackwood claiming that *Heart of Darkness,*

> […] is not an endless analysis of affected sentiments but in its essence it is action […] nothing but action – actions observed, felt and interpreted with an absolute truth to my sensations (which are the basis of art in literature) – action of human beings that will bleed to a prick, and are moving in a visible world.[4]

Consequently, Conrad conceives of the word and the image as complementary means of representation and denotation. He combines the abstracting powers of the word with the immediacy of the image to write his sombre and gloomy novels. The power between word and sight, sound and colour, voice and gesture, form and substance is a stylistic trait of Conrad's novels.

Therefore, writing fiction is a symbiotic telling and showing activity, in which verbal and visual modes of representation collaborate to stimulate the reader into

[3] Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books LTD, 1963), Preface, pp. xi-ii.
[4] Joseph Conrad in a letter to William Blackwood, 31 May 1902, in Frederick R. Karl, *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives* (New York: Farrar, Strouss & Giroux, 1979), p. 468.

active and productive reading.[5] For fiction to be successful as an art it must, in Conrad's opinion, appeal to the senses: sight, smell, sound, touch and taste. Therefore, Conrad's narrative discourse has long been identified with impressionism, a term used to describe works of literature in which a few selected details suffice to convey the sensory impressions of an incident or an event. Impressionism, the first truly modern movement in all the arts because of its stress on fidelity to sense impressions, is connected everywhere in the literary world with the name of Joseph Conrad. Nevertheless, Conrad never considered himself an impressionist. His name became associated with the movement only after his death, when Ford Madox Ford, in several critical essays, claimed that the chief literary impressionists of his time were Conrad, Henry James, and Stephen Crane.[6] The artist thus becomes a *seer* whose supreme aim is to reveal the truth as it appears to him.[7] Henry James wrote in "The Art of Fiction" that a novel is, "in its broadest sense, a direct impression of life."[8] It is an allegorical painting in which Marlow narrates his visual experiences in the heart of darkness. There, Marlow observes scenes of "merry dance of death and trade"[9] that he likened to "a weary pilgrimage amongst hints for nightmares" (*HD*, 17). These descriptions of sensory oppositions are typical of Conrad's style wherein the intensity of first impressions is at its utmost.[10]

[5]Amar Acheraïou, *Joseph Conrad and the Reader: Questioning Modern Theories of Narrative and Readership* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 82.
[6] Eloise K. Hay, "Joseph Conrad and Impressionism," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Winter, 1975), pp. 137-144; 137.
[7] Ludwig Schnauder, *Free Will and Determinism in Joseph Conrad's Major Novels* (New York: Editions Rodopi, 2009), p. 98.
[8] Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," *Partial Portraits*, Ed. Leon Edel (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970), p. 383.
[9] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1994), p. 20.
[10] Vinson Haili Ann, *The Time Machine and Heart of Darkness: H.G. Wells, Joseph Conrad, and the Fin de Siècle* (USA: University of South Florida, Graduate School Theses and Dissertations, 2011), p. 67.

Throughout the novella, Conrad employs an array of narrative techniques typical of impressionism, modernism and the literature of *fin de siècle*. His emphasis on form is an attempt to make Marlow's sensory perceptions visible to the reader.[11] Nonetheless, the meaning of Marlow's account of his experiences in the wilderness is obscured by his hazy and hypnotic narrative style. The frame narrator asserts that the meaning of *Heart of Darkness* "[is not] inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze" (*HD*, 8). Hence, the novella's unintelligibility is due partly to its reliance on the frame narrative voice – a story within a story. Just like the novella's meaning, Marlow is invisible. To his auditors, he is no more than a voice. "[S]itting apart" (39) in the dark night air, he is consumed by darkness, completely obsessed with the strains of the untellable tale, by the darkness of his own memory. He becomes more remote, more exotic, more disturbing and no more than a voice.[12] As a result, the use of the frame narrative voice triggers uneasiness and ambiguity and epitomises the complexity of making meaning. Hence, critics seem not to agree on this quality of Conrad's writings. F. R. Leavis, for instance, saw Conrad's adjectival insistence as a stylistic "flaw" which serves to "muffle" rather than "magnify" the meaning behind the novella.[13] Achebe, too, does not consider the vagueness and impressionism as a stylistic flaw, but rather sees it as an evasion of a more direct denouncement of racism and imperialism.[14] Nevertheless, neither intrusive nor evasive in its adjectival insistence, and in its disparate voices, the novella's multiple meanings dramatise the complexities, in the events themselves and

[11] Yves Hervouet, *The French Face of Joseph Conrad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 191.
[12] Charles Eric Reeves, "A Voice of Unrest: Conrad's Rhetoric of the Unspeakable," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, Vol. 27, No. 3, (FALL 1985), pp. 284-310; p. 288.
[13] F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962), pp. 196-7.
[14] Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 9, No. 1, Special Issue on Literary Criticism (Spring, 1978), pp. 1-15; p. 9.

in Marlow's changing responses to them, and make of the simplistic adventure story a profound moral tale of Modernism and the Great Tradition.

Therefore, Conrad's impressionistic narrative discourse in *Heart of Darkness* renders meaning nebulous and undecidable. Deconstructionists desire that no work endorses a single meaning or message, and a variety of interpretations can accurately apply. Conrad's use of the adjective *unspeakable*, for instance, puts the reader's shoulders to the wheel trying to decode meaning. The adjective occurs three times in the novella in which meaning is fundamentally incomprehensible. The unspeakable rites that led to the disintegration of Mr Kurtz are unclear,

> But this must have been before his – let us say – nerves, went wrong, and caused him to preside at certain midnight dances ending with *unspeakable* rites, which – as far as I reluctantly gathered from what I heard at various times were offered up to him, do you understand? – to Mr. Kurtz himself.[15]

Such impressions of midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites lead us to *see* the degree of indeterminacy in Conrad's narrative discourse in *Heart of Darkness* and to question its effects on the reception and interpretation of the novella. Therefore, the present research examines:

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It endeavours to answer the following research questions: How did Conrad's socio-historical context affect his writings? What are the typical characteristics of Conrad's narrative discourse in *Heart of Darkness*? What are the different critical responses to *Heart of Darkness*?

[15] *Heart of Darkness*, p. 71. Italics mine.

CHAPTER I. SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The first chapter, **Socio-historical Context**, highlights the effects of Conrad's childhood experiences on the development of his temperament and personality. The first section, **Traumatic Years,** is divided into three subsections. The first subsection, **Conrad and the Melancholy Memories,** attempts to prove that the scepticism, pessimism and melancholy that we sense in the novella have roots in Conrad's painful early life. Furthermore, the second subsection, **A Passion for the Sea**, seeks to demonstrate that Conrad had an adventurous spirit reflected in his great desire to go to the sea and become a sailor. He moved to France and later to Britain. The third subsection, **From Seaman to Novelist**, expounds that Conrad's heap of exotic adventures as a merchant sailor in Africa and elsewhere in the world provide the primary material for the craft of his art. *Heart of Darkness* is no exception. It depicts Conrad's actual visit to the Belgian Congo Free State in 1890. As a result, the second section, **The *Zeitgeist* of the Era**, discusses the period of Imperialism and *fin de siècle* Europe. The first subsection, **Exploitation in the Name of Civilisation**, surveys the infamous scramble for loot and homicide in Africa. The Belgian atrocities changed Conrad's attitude towards civilisation and colonialism. This led him to write Marlow's sombre inconclusive tale. The second subsection, ***Fin du globe***, examines the political, social, philosophical and aesthetic crises in Europe during *fin de siècle* era.

In addition, the third section, **Conrad in His Literary Context**, elucidates that Conrad heralded many writers in the transition from the real to the symbolic, from the objective to the subjective and from the Victorian to the Modern. The first subsection, **Realism and Modernism**, highlights Conrad's debt to both traditions.

Though written in the late nineteenth century, *Heart of Darkness* is considered as a preface to Modernism. As such, this first subsection sheds light on the different Modernist traits evident in the novella. The second subsection, **Impressionism and Symbolism**, seeks to situate the work in the context of the Impressionist and Symbolist movements. The Impressionist movement marks the decisive shift from trying to depict what all men know to trying to depict what the individual person actually *sees*. To make the reader *see* is Conrad's stated aim in his famous preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus."*

Besides, this subsection endeavours to explain that the visible facts of the story are obscured by the frequent images of mist and shadow, what Marlow called the haze, the impenetrable adjectives as well as the different personifications of the darkness and the wilderness.

Moreover, this second subsection tries to connect Conrad's art in *Heart of Darkness* to the Symbolist movement. The novella's title, *Heart of Darkness*, originally *The Heart of Darkness*, echoes the symbolists' attempt to disclose the infinite in the finite. Thus, this second subsection is set out to prove that the novella's centrifugal meanings are manifest almost everywhere in its discursive intricacies.

CHAPTER II. NARRATIVE DISCOURSE IN *HEART OF DARKNESS*

The second chapter delves into narrative discourse in *Heart of Darkness*. First, **Narrating the Fascination of the Abomination**, tries to spot light on Conrad's adoption of the frame narrative voice, his major technical innovations in the novella. This section explores Marlow's confusion and uneasiness narrating his experiences in the heart of darkness. It shows that Marlow operates as a distancing device, which accredits the work aesthetic validity. **Conrad and Impressionism**,

then, expounds on the impressionistic features manifest in *Heart of Darkness*. It analyses the different representations of word, voice, sight, light, sound, gesture and colour which make the narrative cinematic. The story, for instance, dramatises the pilgrims' desperate absurd quest to penetrate darkness in red whiskers and pink pyjamas; this first subsection goes under the title: **Perceiving Darkness in Red Whiskers and Pink Pyjamas**. The second subsection discusses **The Swirling Mists and Doubtful Shadows**. It throws light on the *white* fog images which represent the impossibility of attaining epistemic truth.

This section also seeks to expound on the narrative technique of the delayed decoding. This third subsection is entitled **The *Cart-before-horse* Method**. It is the verbal counterpart of the impressionist painter's effort to render perceivable sensation instantaneously. It combines the forward temporal progression of the mind, as it receives messages from the outside world, with the much slower reflexive process of making out their meaning.[16] The ultimate decoding of meaning creates dramatic irony. As such, the delayed decoding technique is very crucial in decoding darkness.

Conrad's narrative discourse is also characterised by **The Art(ifice) of Covert Plots**. This section, thus, tries to 'uncover' the different covert plots employed within the main narrative. The novella weaves together different quests which would unquestionably make readers feel that some narrative enigma has been set into the fabric of the narrative and left unexplained. Decoding the covert plot would enable the reader to *see* the narrative as artful and suspenseful in exposition, themes richer in presentation, and the work more ironic.

[16] Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1980), pp. 175-6.

In addition, this research intends to probe into the novella's **Janiformity and the Paradox of the Virtue of Evil**. This is quite apparent in the "strange commingling of desire and hate," (*HD,* 101) which Marlow records in his reflective account of Kurtz's last cry. This chapter further attempts to enquire into the common characteristics between Conradian narrative and his Faustian counterpart. This section is entitled, **Souls for Sale: Mr Kurtz and Dr Faustus**. Thus, the metaphysical covert plots of *Heart of Darkness* and *Doctor Faustus* dramatise Mr Kurtz and Dr Faustus as souls for sale for both protagonists make a bargain for their souls with the devil.

Still another covert plot which this chapter seeks to highlight is that of **The Haunting *Doppelgänger***. This section, thus, focuses on the ghastly symbioses of Marlow and Kurtz as pursuer and pursued respectively. Furthermore, the also investigates Conrad's **Transtextuality and Fictional Symbiosis**, the act of presenting characters and places that transcend the text and create fictional symbiosis. By means of allusions to people and places, we sense behind the individual works meta-narrative, one large fictional world closely related to reality.

In addition to transtextuality and fictional symbiosis, the present chapter investigates the novella's symbolism. **Conrad's Symbolist Tinge** is clear from the very beginning of the novella. Marlow's journey to the heart of darkness can be read as a journey into the Dark Continent, the self, the underworld, civilisation, or most plausibly as a 'journey' in the failure of language to interpret Kurtz's experience at the heart of darkness. As such this section seeks to analyse how Conrad succeeds by the power of the word to represent the infinite in the finite.

Pilgrims, Apostles and a Hole in a Pail section deals with irony in the novella. It, thus, attempts to decode the different ironies and how they remain vague and undecidable. Still, **Free Indirect Discourse** is another stylistic device that Conrad uses in *Heart of Darkness*. It is a mode of narration to explore in a free way the character's state of mind. This section aims at explaining how FID is capable of producing effects of uncertainty, indeterminacy and distance.

Conrad's use **Appositions and Substitutions** of places and personal names by other nouns or nominal phrases is another stylistic device used to avoid repetition and to produce a form of stylistic variation. Kurtz, for instance, is given many titles such as "the poor chap," "a very remarkable person," "this shadow," "an emissary of pity and science and progress, and devil knows what else."[17] These variations add to the narrator-reader discursive dialogism. Attribution of such traits to characters or places also renders the work more ironic and open to many interpretations.

Last but not least, this chapter examines **Conjecture, Estrangement and Distancing**. Conrad's use of the different words of estrangement such as *as if, seem, appear, as* and *like* is manifest throughout the novella. *As if locution* introduces adverbial clauses indicating comparison with some hypothetical circumstances. It has an evident bias towards conjecture and guessing. In modalisations with *seem* and *appear*, the narrator withdraws into a distance and leaves it to the reader to pass judgement on a particular act, event, or character at a particular moment. Therefore, the character and the reader are faced with appearances and subjective sense impressions. These modalisations remain to the end inconclusive, behind the veil of darkness. Similes with *like* and *as* obscure meaning for they compare something dark to something

[17] *Heart of Darkness*, pp. 11, 27, 92, 36.

darker. Hence, Conrad's elusive style in *Heart of Darkness* spawned many interpretations.

CHAPTER III. CRITICAL RESPONSES *TO HEART OF DARKNESS*

The third chapter, Critical Responses to *Heart of Darkness*, scrutinises the different critical responses to *Heart of Darkness*. It aims at exploring the varied critical readings of the novella. It starts by discussing **Achebe's Postcolonial Challenge to *Heart of Darkness***. The Nigerian writer denounced Conrad's depiction of Africa and Africans as derogatory and racist. His charge of Conrad as a bloody racist is still a subject of considerable debate. Francis B. Singh, Patrick Brantlinger and Edward W. Said, for instance, joined Achebe's bitter denunciation of Conrad's ethnocentrism and complicity with colonial evil. Others, such as V. S. Naipaul, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Wilson Harris and Cedric Watts, exonerate Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* emphasising the fact the novella should be read in its context. They put forward the idea that Conrad, instead of advocating such *fin de siècle* racist and imperialist ideologies, ironically erodes them. Indeed, Achebe's indictment of *Heart of Darkness*'s alleged racism called for a radical rethink. His view that Conrad failed to depict the African reality was based on the idea that a novel could and should portray reality. His view that Conrad sets Africa as the Other, the antithesis of Europe, is based on the assumption that a novel could and should have one primary meaning. However, the present study attempts to demonstrate that deconstructionist critics contend that undecidability lies at the heart of any work of art. They emphasise the ironic and figurative nature of literary language. Geoffrey H. Hartman, in the preface to Harold Bloom's *Deconstruction and Criticism*, stresses the power of the signifier "language" vis-à-vis the signified "meaning" that tries to enclose it. He maintains that,

> Deconstruction refuses to identify the force of literature with any concept of embodied meaning […]. We assume that […] the "presence of the word" is equivalent to the presence of meaning. But the opposite can also be urged, that the word carries with it a certain absence or indeterminacy of meaning.[18]

Therefore, deconstruction suggests that meaning and language do not coincide and that literary texts are fundamentally allegorical, they mean more than they say.[19] In his very influential essay, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences," Jacque Derrida criticises the French structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss's view of human discourse as a unified structure at the centre of which lies a fundamental, universal truth. Instead, Derrida affirms the free-play nature of the world, without truth or origin.[20] As a result, deconstructive critics assert that meaning is decentred and that language is a system of differences with arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified. Just like Derrida who once claimed that "there is nothing outside of the text,[21] J. Hillis Miller argues that contradictions and ambiguities are to be sought in the text itself and that it would be a mistake to locate the heterogeneity and indeterminacy of the novel outside it. He insists that, "indeterminacy lies in the multiplicity of incompatible explanations which the novel offers and in the lack of evidence justifying a choice of one over the others."[22] Hence, undecidability is a feature of the text and that it is strictly related to the extreme ambivalence of protagonists and actions. Miller points out that "all words are

[18] *Deconstruction and Criticism*, op. cit., Preface, p. vii.
[19] Ibid., Preface, p. viii.
[20] Jacques Derrida, ""Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, Trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 2001), pp. 351-370; p. 369.
[21] "Il n'y a pas de hors-texte." See Jacques Derrida, "The Exorbitant Question of Method," *Of Grammatology*, Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (London: Johns Hopkins University Press; 1976) pp. 157-164; p. 158.
[22] J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 40.

metaphors – that is, all are differentiated, differed, deferred. Each leads to something of which it is the displacement in a movement without origin or end."[23]

Thus, the second section **The Disappearance of Kurtz on the Periphery of Darkness** probes into Perry Meisel's response to *Heart of Darkness*. In his essay on "Decentering 'Heart of Darkness'," Meisel argues that meaning is hidden, absent and decentred. He maintains that both readers and critics are trapped in a play of language. They, mistakenly, presuppose to find a direct relationship between words and things. In fact, words are in a differential link with real states in the world. Hence, the meaning of Marlow's experience in the wilderness remains to the end inconclusive, decentred, short and wanting – just like language itself.[24]

The third section, **Revisiting the Horror: Deferring the Apocalypse** uses Miller's essay, "Should we read *Heart of Darkness*?" as a focal point for discussion. Miller argues that *Heart of Darkness* is a literary work and should be read as such. He maintains that readers should perform a close reading of the text which is active and responsible and which reflects on the intricacies of Conrad's narrative discourse. Miller expounds on the different stylistic devices manifest in the novella, such as the different personifications of the darkness and the wilderness, to prove that meaning is basically indeterminate.[25]

This section also examines Miller's famous essay, "*Heart of Darkness* Revisited," in which he contends that Conrad's novella is a parabolic apocalypse. Its meaning is

[23] J. Hillis Miller, "The Linguistic Moment in 'The Wreck of the Deutschland,'" in *The New Criticism and after*, Ed. Thomas Daniel Young (Charlottesville, Vai., 1976), p. 58.
[24] Perry Meisel, "Decentering 'Heart of Darkness'," *Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Autumn, 1978), pp. 20-28; p. 22.
[25] J. Hillis Miller, "Should We Read *Heart of Darkness*?," in Harold Bloom, *Joseph Conrad's Heart of darkness* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008), pp. 115-129; p. 115.

obscured in darkness and can only be perceived by the glow of Marlow's narrative. Darkness is fundamentally invisible and remains to the end invisible. Its meaning is subject to a never-ending process of veiling and unveiling which in turn represents the impossibility of the direct experience of its hidden truth.[26]

In a nutshell, the present research endeavours to demonstrate that *Heart of Darkness* is much more than just a story about a trip up the river. It is an exploration of good and evil, black and white, sanity and insanity. It is above all about the essential emptiness at the core of humanity and language, as would reveal this scrutiny of Conrad's power of the word.

[26] J. Hillis Miller, "*Heart of Darkness* Revisited," 1983. Rpt. in Ross C. Murfin. *Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness* (Boston: MacMillan, 1996), pp. 206-20; p. 214.

CHAPTER I. SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Intellectual and literary inspiration can indeed come from actual events and people not very far from the artist's life. Conrad concedes to the fact that a writer draws a lot upon his/her experience and upon the shades of his/her memories, too. Thus, experience, tradition, and individual talent would undoubtedly lead to an aesthetic use of the power of the word to tell the story of the self, the oppressed, the colonised, and the coloniser. Since *Heart of Darkness* is, as Conrad claimed, "an experience pushed a little beyond the actual facts of the case,"[1] this chapter attempts to delve into Conrad's Polish and French years, his life as a merchant seaman in the Congo and elsewhere, as well as his excellent fuse of seamanship and writing. The chapter also highlights the historical and literary context in which the novel sprang.

1.1. Traumatic Years

> A novelist lives in his work. He stands there, the only reality in an invented world, among imaginary things, happenings and people. Writing about them, he is only writing about himself. But the disclosure is not complete. He remains, to a certain extent, a figure behind the veil.[2]

Conrad's painful early life affected his temperament and personality. He witnessed his Poland's national defeat and exploitation by the Russian imperialist system. His parents died and left him under the guardianship of his maternal uncle. His plea for a sea carrier resulted in his desertion of Poland. Conrad moved to France and then to England. In 1894, Conrad left the sea and began writing his first novel, *Almayer's Folly*, on board the *Torrens*.

[1] Joseph Conrad, *Youth, a Narrative and Two Other Stories* (London: Blackwood, 1902), p. vii.
[2] Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record* (New York: Doran and Co., 1938), p. xv.

1.1.1. Conrad and the Melancholy Memories

Conrad's childhood was characterised by loneliness and grief. He grew up in the atmosphere of national defeat and frustration that followed the failure of the Polish insurrection of 1863. Tsarist Russia ruled Poland with an iron hand, crushing every token of patriotism. National self-expression and organisation was met by brutal punishment. Both Conrad's parents, Apollo Korzeniowski and Evelina Bobrowska, came from families which sacrificed property, liberty, and life for the Polish fight for independence. His father was exiled to Vologda in Northern Russia for suspected involvement in a secret national committee. Apollo's wife and son accompanied him on the trip which impaired Evelina's frail health. As a result, Evelina died of tuberculosis in 1865. His father succumbed four years later, leaving the boy in the care of Tadeusz Bobrowski, his maternal uncle. Conrad was orphaned at the age of twelve.[3]

Conrad's father has a tremendous impact on his life. His devotion to literature, interest in revolutionary politics, attitudes towards Russia, dislike for school, fascination with geography, adventurous spirit, love for freedom, and his sceptical view of the world all had roots in his childhood experiences.[4] Apollo's pessimism left a deep imprint on Conrad's tender mind. When Apollo died, Conrad was completely traumatized, "I had an awful sensation of the inevitable. I had also moments of revolt which stripped off me some of my simple trust in the government of the universe."[5] A streak of fatalism accompanied by a strong mistrust in God is evident in this utterance.

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[3] Adam Gillon, *The Eternal Solitary: A Study of Joseph Conrad* (New York: Bookman Associate, Inc., 1960), p. 16.
[4] Owen Knowles, "Conrad's life," in *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, Ed. J. H. Stape, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 1-24; p. 5.
[5] Suman Bala, *Joseph Conrad's Fiction: A Study in Existential Humanism* (New Delhi: Intellectual Publishing House, 1990), p. 31.

1.1.2. A Passion for the Sea

As early as 1872, Conrad expressed a desire to go to sea. This was met with stiff resistance from his relatives. However, his obstinacy, bravery and individualism led him to leave Poland and travel to Marseilles, France, at the age of seventeen. For the next twenty years, Conrad led a life of a sailor.[6] There is no doubt that Conrad's early readings were greatly responsible for his dream of the sea. He appreciated reading Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), Frederick Marryat's *Masterman Ready, or the Wreck in the Pacific* (1841), and Victor Hugo's *Les Travailleurs de la mer* (1866).[7]

Many critics saw Conrad's abandonment of Poland, moving to France, and later to England, as an act of betrayal that contradicted Conrad's inherited ideals of Polish nationalism. His preoccupation with the themes of betrayal, identity, fidelity, emigration, exile, and moral failure is but the result of his desertion of his native land and his feeling of guilt.[8] Nonetheless, Conrad's life in Marseilles was not much better than his Polish years. Conrad suffered financial and psychological problems which resulted in his suicide attempt on June 25th, 1875. This was essentially a desperate plea for help rather than a serious attempt to commit suicide.[9] Thereafter, Conrad suffered from fits of depression and nervous breakdowns.[10]

In 1878, Conrad joined the British Merchant Service, though, still officially a Russian subject and unable to speak English.[11] As a merchant seaman, Conrad sailed to the Caribbean, the Far East, Australia, and Africa. However, a critical turning point

[6] Zdzisław Najder, "Conrad in His Historical Perspective," in *Critical Essays on Joseph Conrad,* Ed. Ted Billy, (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1987), pp. 19-28; p. 20.
[7] *The Eternal Solitary*, op. cit., p. 17.
[8] Robert Hampson, *Joseph Conrad: Betrayal and Identity* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p. 8.
[9] "Conrad's life," op. cit., p. 8.
[10] Charles Cox Brian, *Joseph Conrad: The Modern Imagination* (London : J. M. Dent, 1974), p. 2.
[11] "Conrad's life," op. cit., p. 1.

in his later sea-career was a traumatic visit to the Belgian Congo Free State in 1890 where he underwent a physical and mental breakdown that weakened his health.[12] Despite its relative brevity, the voyage influenced his outlook on civilization and human existence itself. His criticism of the atrocities he witnessed there was relentless, as evidenced in his fiction.[13]

1.1.3. From Seaman to Novelist

Conrad's financial difficulties created a state of anxiety and boredom, which shaped his mind. This forced him to start writing fiction so as to earn a living. Writing in an alien third language was another factor that accentuated the polyglot's sense of solitude. In a letter to Arthur Symons, Conrad expressed the difficulty he encountered in writing in an adopted language, "I had to work like a coal-miner in his pit quarrying all my English sentences out of a black night."[14] Though within a short period of time, Conrad mastered the nuances of the English language and adopted it as a tool of artistic expression.[15] His mastery of English together with his important literary contacts namely Edward Garnett, H. G. Wells, Henry James, Cunninghame Graham, Stephen Crane, Ford Madox Ford, and James B. Pinker greatly contributed to his success as a writer.

Conrad's choice to write in English was criticised by some Polish intellectuals who believed that a prodigy like Conrad ought to have dedicated his talents to Poland and the Polish language.[16] In an article entitled *The Emigration of Talent,* Wincenty Lutosławski, a Polish philosopher, author and member of the Polish National League,

[12] "Conrad's life," op. cit., p. 8.
[13] John G. Peters, *The Cambridge Introduction to Joseph Conrad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 4.
[14] Gérard Jean Aubry, *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters*, Vol. II (London: Heineman, 1927), p. 82.
[15] *Joseph Conrad's Fiction*, op. cit., p. 34.
[16] *The Eternal Solitary,* op. cit., p. 34.

described Conrad as an "ex-patriot" Pole who favoured English as a means of artistic expression because of greater financial gains. The article resulted in the Polish novelist Eliza Orzeszkowa's withering attack on Conrad, in which she accused him of turning a traitor.[17]

1.2. The *Zeitgeist* of the Era

The era of the nineties was characterised by the systems of Imperialism and colonialism as well as the different social, political, philosophical crises that Britain witnessed during *fin de siècle*.

1.2.1. Exploitation in the Name of Civilisation

> 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 when you look into it too much. (*HD*, 10)

> To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe. (44)

Conrad grew up in the heyday and might of Imperialism. In Poland, he shared the life of a nation subjected to imperialism but in England he witnessed the might of the world's greatest empire.[18] The period between 1880 and 1914 especially saw an unprecedented international rivalry for colonies. As a result, the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 effectively partitioned Africa and created King Leopold's infamous so-called "Congo Free State." This "New Imperialism" was pursued by such newcomers to the "Weltpolitik" as Germany, Belgium, Italy, the United States, and Japan, while

[17] *The Cambridge Introduction to Joseph Conrad*, op. cit., p. 8.
[18] *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, op. cit., p. 2.

Britain intensified its efforts.[19] It was in such atmosphere of scramble over African colonies, the cutting edge of racist and social Darwinist ideologies, and the consequent spread of Jingoist fervour in England that Conrad explained in a letter to his publisher that, "The title I am thinking of is *The Heart of Darkness* but the narrative is not gloomy. The criminality of inefficiency and pure selfishness when tackling the civilizing work in Africa is a justifiable idea. The subject is of our time distinctly."[20] In *Heart of Darkness*, as in "Youth," Marlow's listeners consist of the anonymous frame narrator, an accountant, a company director, and a lawyer. Edward Said described the choice of the professions of Marlow's listeners as "Conrad's way of emphasizing the fact that during the 1890s the business of empire [...] had become the empire of business."[21] This new sentiment for empire building was promoted by some writers like Rider Haggard and Rudyard Kipling. Kipling's notorious poem *The White Man's Burden* justified the Imperialist policy as a noble enterprise undertaken for the cause of democracy.[22] Conrad, horrified by the conditions of King Leopold's colony, refuted Kipling's view of *la mission civilisatrice* and exposed the atrocities, exploitation, inefficiency, and hypocrisy of "the vilest scramble for loot that ever disfigured the history of human conscience."[23] When the Boer war broke in October 1889, it stirred a worldwide outcry of revulsion and resentment against the misdeeds of European imperialists in general and the British in particular.

[19] Andrea White, "Conrad and imperialism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, Ed. J. H. Stape (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 179-202; p. 182.
[20] Joseph Conrad, *Letters to William Blackwood and David S. Meldrum*, ed. William Blackburn (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1958), p. 37.
[21] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), p. 52.
[22] *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, op. cit., p. 158.
[23] Joseph Conrad, *Last Essays*, Ed. Richard Curle (London: Dent, 1926), p. 17.

1.2.2. *Fin du globe*

> "Fin de Siècle," murmured Lord Henry.
> "Fin du globe," answered his hostess.
> "I wish it were fin du globe," said Dorian with a sigh.
> "Life is a great disappointment."[24]

The last decade of the nineteenth century known as the *fin de siècle* was a period of cultural vigour and aesthetic productivity of Europe coupled with decadence, *ennui* and apocalyptic gloom.[25] Though marked by an age of industrial, scientific, and technological boom, this *bell époque* announced the death of the Absolute and put under scrutiny the traditionally held beliefs about the universe. It is an unprecedented era of social, political, epistemological, as well as philosophical crises.

In addition to the different difficulties that faced the Empire abroad, Britain's internal affairs underwent social, political and economic problems. This was the decade when Britain was troubled by political agitation as well as urgent violent demands for the improvement of the social conditions of the working class. Trade unions revolted against the government asking for higher wages and better working conditions. These social and political problems were ensued by an economic crisis owing to a decrease in growth rate, exports, and agriculture. Thus, the political, social, and economic situation of Britain by the *fin de siècle* threatened the future of the supreme world power.

Furthermore, the epistemological scientific crisis began with Charles Darwin's theory of Natural Selection. In his work, *The Origin of Species* (1859), Charles Darwin (1809-1882) postulated that individuals within a species compete for survival.

[24] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, in The Works of Oscar Wilde (London: Collins n.d., 1891), p. 205.
[25] Aris Mousoutzanis, *Fin de Siècle Fictions 1890-1990 Apocalypse, Technologies, Empire* (London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 19.

Furthermore, his theory contested the commonly held views concerning the origin of the earth and of human beings.[26] The earth, he asserted, was thus several millions of years older than most Christians believed; and human beings were the descendants of monkey. As a result, Darwin's revolution influenced many other fields of science and announced the emancipation of secular reason from revelation. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), on the other hand, revolutionised the field of psychology through his theories of the unconscious mind, the defence mechanism of repression, dreams, and psychoanalysis. In Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow concludes that "the mind of man is capable of anything because everything is in it, all the past as well as the future" (*HD*, 52). Moreover, the epoch of the turn of the century witnessed Lord Kelvin's discovery of the Second Law of Thermodynamics and Charles Lyell's geological revolution. These new scientific developments yielded a sense of acute epistemological uncertainty.[27] As a result, the new cosmology became an immediate presence in the narrative.

Besides, the era was also marked by another crisis in the philosophical *milieu* led by Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Schopenhauer's ideas of scepticism and pessimism influenced Conrad's thinking and temperament. His *The World as Will and Representation* (1819) greatly enhanced *fin de siècle* degeneration. Like Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, in his work *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), did not hesitate to express his existentialist attitude of *ennui* and proclaim that for all intents and purposes God is dead.[28] These changes that swept man's view of the universe in the nineties is expressed in one of Conrad's letters to Cunninghame Graham in 1897 comparing the universe to an impersonal machine,

[26] *The Cambridge Introduction to Joseph Conrad*, op. cit., p. 28.
[27] Daphna Erdinast Vulcan, *Joseph Conrad and the Modern Temper* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 12.
[28] *Joseph Conrad's Fiction*, op. cit., p. 22.

> There is a – let us say – a machine. It evolved itself out of a chaos of scraps of iron and behold! – it knits. […] It knits us in and it knits us out. It has knitted time, space, pain, death, corruption, despair and all the allusions – and nothing matters.[29]

Last but not least, the *fin de siècle* era paved the way to an aesthetic crisis directly related to the role of the artist. The era's *zeitgeist* prompted the shift from the Victorian to the modern. Art, exiled into the realm of the merely symbolic and banished from the serious business of "real life" into the realm of entertainment, no longer infuses reality with meaning or recreates it as it once had done.[30] This shift from the real to the symbolic, from objective to subjective, was represented by Decadence, Aestheticism and the Gothic novel. Decadents, like Oscar Wilde in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), believed that all art is immoral, and used the slogan of "art for art's sake" to stress the aesthetic values over the social, moral, and political themes in literature, fine arts, and music. Moreover, Conrad's dramatization of Marlow's journey in *Heart of Darkness* expressed his fears that the accelerating changes in the political, scientific, and spiritual view of the world during the last decades of the nineteenth century were preparing unsuspected terrors for the new.[31]

1.3. Conrad in His Literary Context

Conrad's art in *Heart of Darkness* can be located in the contexts of Realism, Modernism, Impressionism and Symbolism.

1.3.1. Realism and Modernism

To place Conrad in his literary context, one must consider his debt to the French and Jamesian nineteenth-century Realist tradition, as well as his later anticipation of

[29] Letter to Cunninghame Graham, 20 Dec. 1897, in Joseph Conrad, *Joseph Conrad's Letters to Cunninghame Graham* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 56-7.
[30] *Joseph Conrad and the Modern Temper*, op. cit., pp. 13-21.
[31] *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, op. cit., p. 148.

and connection to the twentieth-century Modernist one.[32] Conrad's admiration for Balzac, Flaubert, and Maupassant is clear in his advocacy of dramatizing "action observed," "in its essence [my work] is action […] action observed, felt and interpreted with an absolute truth to my sensations."[33] Thus, Conrad's artistic dramatization of the visible observable world, expressed in his Preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* stems from Maupassant's impressionistic elements. From Flaubert, Conrad took the idea of the novel as a laboriously shaped work of art as well as his programme of restrained objective realism. Therefore, a writer portrays objectively the reality behind the facts as perceived by the eye. "The writer," advised Flaubert, "should be like God: present everywhere, nowhere visible."[34] Besides, Conrad also developed a close intimacy with Henry James, his "greatest disciple," from whom he learned the last secrets of the novelist's craft.[35] This restrained objective Realism also points forward to some Modernist aspects. Its aim for detachment was greatly mirrored in the Imagists' focus on the objective image. Another modernist trait present in Conrad's fiction is his narrative intricacy through the use of internal narrators, narrative obliquity and distancing, and the technique of impersonality to provide a multiplicity of viewpoints that will conceal the artist yet express his Nietzschean sceptical view of the world's fragmentation and lack of fixed meaning. These new narrative elements are also manifest in the works of Ford Madox Ford, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, and T. S. Eliot.[36]

Modernism is known for its formal experimentation as well as its concern for larger philosophical issues. In fiction, formal experimentation took a number of

[32] Kenneth Graham, "Conrad and Modernism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad* Ed. J. H. Stape (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 203-222; p. 207.
[33] *Life and Letters* Vol. I, op. cit., p. 418.
[34] "Conrad in His Historical Perspective," op. cit., p. 20.
[35] *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, op. cit., pp. 202-03.
[36] "Conrad and Modernism," op. cit., p. 207.

forms: achronological narratives, multiple narrators, stream-of-consciousness narration, fragmented narratives, inconclusive endings, and unreliable narrators.[37] Conrad's innovation in formal experimentation was proclaimed in his "make see" aesthetic credo which was delivered in his 1896 *Preface to The Nigger of the "Narcissus."* Maria Dabrowska noted that "not with Proust but with Conrad began the writer's struggle to break the conventions of the novel."[38] It is noteworthy that these new narrative elements mirrored the general ideological crisis of the late nineteenth century.[39] Thus, Modernist writers were simply representing in form what they perceived in life. That is, the fragmented forms employed by these authors were meant to resemble the fragmented world they encountered.[40] It is a view of life as a text.[41] The major achievements of literary Modernism include Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and other works such as Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913), T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925).[42]

Besides, the philosophical issues which were recurrent in Modernist literature included its insistence on the futility of life in an indifferent universe, its transcendental view of the world, its alienation of modern man, its epistemological ambiguity and indeterminacy, and its emphasis on conceptions of the Self. These traits are actually the result of the atmosphere of uncertainty concerning traditionally held truths that arose late in the nineteenth century.[43] It was in fact the human hollowness which Marlow shared with the pilgrims which led T. S. Eliot to use the

[37] *The Cambridge Introduction to Joseph Conrad*, op. cit., p. 31.
[38] *The Eternal Solitary*, op. cit., p. 51.
[39] *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, op. cit., p. 168.
[40] *The Cambridge Introduction to Joseph Conrad*, op. cit., p. 32.
[41] *Joseph Conrad and the Modern Temper*, op. cit., p. 6.
[42] "Conrad and Modernism," op. cit., p. 203.
[43] *The Cambridge Introduction to Joseph Conrad*, op. cit., p. 32.

famous announcement of "Mistah Kurtz – he dead" (*HD*, 100) as the epigraph for *The Hollow Men* (1925) presenting Kurtz as a symbol for the faithlessness and inner emptiness of the modern world in general.[44] Modernist texts also opened new gates on a world haunted by horror. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* predicted the eclipse of Western civilization, which later witnessed the Great War (1914) as well as Francis Ford Coppola's film, "Apocalypse Now" (1979).[45] Thus, Kurtz's last pronouncement of horror, used as Eliot's epigraph to *The Waste Land* (1922), was but a verdict on the essential wickedness of man and his ultimate ruin.[46]

Last but not least, Modernism could have hardly existed without the great contribution of Sigmund Freud. He heralded many of the twentieth-century cultural obsessions. His emphasis on the divided self, on the striving, lustful, anarchic "Id" seeking fulfilment notwithstanding the countervailing pressure of the ego or super-ego, had been anticipated in the depiction of Kurtz's fierce gratifications in the Congo.[47] Freud's writings, from *Studies in Hysteria* (1895) and *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) through *Totem and Taboo* (1912-13) and *Civilization and its Discontents* (1920) influenced many Modernist writers namely Joseph Conrad, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, and D. H. Lawrence. These writers employed and developed many Freudian concepts and techniques in their works such as stream of consciousness and dream-effect to "make us see" the individual's subjective life. All in all, Freud's profound impact on Modernist writers was depicted in W. H. Auden's

[44] *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, op. cit., p. 234.
[45] "Conrad and Modernism," op. cit., p. 214.
[46] *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, op. cit., p. 236.
[47] Cedric Watts, "'Heart of Darkness'," in Harold Bloom, *Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008), pp, 19-36; p. 25.

In Memory of Sigmund Freud (1939): "To us he is no more a person/ Now but a whole climate of opinion/ Under whom we conduct our differing lives"[48]

1.3.2. Impressionism and Symbolism

> Words, groups of words, words standing alone, are symbols of life, have the power in their sound or their aspect to present the very thing you wish to hold up before the mental vision of your readers.[49]

Impressionism, a movement which arose in the 1860[s], was a particularly vital movement to Conrad's work. It marked the decisive transition from trying to portray what all men know to trying to portray what the individual actually *sees*. Perhaps the most distinctive quality of Conrad's own writing is its strong visual sense. Conrad's insistence in the *Preface to The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* that art depended for its success on an "impression conveyed through the senses,"[50] was wholly consistent with Impressionist method. Though Conrad did not associate himself with Impressionism, it was Ford Madox Ford who gave wide currency to the view that Conrad, James and Crane, like Flaubert and Maupassant, had been influenced by the movement.[51] In addition, the Symbolist movement was very crucial in the development of Conrad's art in *Heart of Darkness*. In its simplest terms, symbolism involved a process whereby particular events or objects were assigned some larger, nonliteral meaning. The symbolic meaning of objects and events is established through the expansion of their inherent properties.[52] As such, *Heart of Darkness* belongs to a specifically symbolic tradition of fiction, and it is the only one of

[48] W. H Auden, "In Memory of Sigmund Freud, Selected Poems," in David Lehman, *The Oxford Book of American Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 508-511; p. 510.
[49] Joseph Conrad in a letter to Hugh Clifford, 09 Oct. 1899, in *Life and Letters*, Vol. I. op. cit., p. 280.
[50] *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, op. cit., Preface, p. x.
[51] *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, op. cit., p. 172.
[52] Ibib., p. 199.

Conrad's novels which does.[53] In his book, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, Ian Watt divided signification into two types: "centripetal" and "centrifugal." Drawing upon Conrad's nut analogy, Watt pointed out that the "centripetal" signification is typical of seamen's yarns wherein the story, the narrative vehicle, is the shell, the larger outside sphere which encloses a smaller sphere, the inner kernel of truth. Readers of the yarn are invited to seek inside it for a central core of meaning. On the other hand, in the "centrifugal" signification, that is characteristic of Marlow's tales, the relation of the spheres is reversed. The narrative vehicle is the smaller inside sphere. Its function is merely to make the reader go outside it in search of a circumambient universe of meanings which are not normally visible, but which the story, the glow, dimly illuminates. This is made even clearer by the frame narrator's passage,

> The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical […], and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine. (*HD*, 8)

The outer sphere of larger meaning, then, is presumably larger and infinite, since, unlike the husk of a nut, the haze lacks any ascertainable circumference. It is noteworthy that many of the characteristics of Modernist literature can be seen as the result of the convergence of the symbolist and impressionist traditions. Indeed, both the Avant-guard and the Imagist movements of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century were but developments of the symbolist and impressionist movements for their fundamentally symbolic tendencies. Ezra Pound expressed this in his ringing polemic affirmation when he defined his literary objective, the image, as

[53] *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, op. cit., p. 188.

"that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time, the natural object is always the adequate symbol."[54]

After highlighting the novella's socio-historical context, the second chapter attempts to examine Conrad's narrative discourse. It seeks to investigate the different impressionistic narrative aspects of *Heart of Darkness* namely the frame narrative voice, the delayed decoding technique, the art(ifice) of covert plots, janiformity and the paradox of the virtue of evil, the Faustian narrative, the haunting doppelgänger and transtextuality and fictional symbioses. Furthermore, the second chapter scrutinises the different stylistic devices employed by Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* such as symbolism, irony, free indirect discourse, appositions and substitutions as well as simile.

[54] Ezra Pound, "A Retrospect," *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1968), pp. 3-8; p. 4.

CHAPTER II: NARRATIVE DISCOURSE IN *HEART OF DARKNESS*

After relating Conrad's work to its socio-historical context, this chapter delves into the stylistic aspects of Conrad's narrative discourse in *Heart of Darkness*. It is an attempt to figure out the impressionist traits of Conrad's style, which encompass Conrad's reliance on descriptions of sensory perceptions fused together with images of mist and shadow. Besides, the chapter casts light on Conrad's development of the delayed decoding technique, which is considered very important in understanding the nature and originality of Conrad's art. Furthermore, the chapter expounds on Conrad's adoption of a variety of covert plots namely the Faustian and the *doppelgänger*. These covert plots reflect the work's complexity and Janiformity. Moreover, the chapter discusses Conrad's metanarrative technique of transtextuality and fictional symbiosis. Free Indirect Discourse is another stylistic device used by Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*. It is a window via which readers explore the characters' internal state of mind. In addition to its impressionism, *Heart of Darkness* is rich in symbolism and irony. Marlow's journey into the heart of darkness evokes many images which are very instrumental in interpreting the story. Still, Conrad's use of words of estrangement such as *as if, seem, appear* and *like* create an effect of revealing, through imaginative comparison, the inner truth obscured beneath external appearance. Last but not least, apposition and substitution of the characters' personal names by other nouns and nominal phrases is also another stylistic device Conrad uses to provide a form of elegant variation and to evoke verbal irony. All these stylistic elements weaved into the very fabric of *Heart of Darkness* are deemed indispensable to the understanding and interpretation of the novel.

2.1. Narrating the Fascination of the Abomination

> The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical […] and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine (*HD*, 8).

Conrad's main technical innovation in *Heart of Darkness* is his adoption of multiple narrators. It opens with an anonymous narrator's account of an evening spent aboard the yawl *Nellie* along with a group of four men waiting for the turn of the tide at the estuary of London. These four men, just like Chaucer's Pilgrims, are identified by their professions only: the Lawyer, the Director and the Accountant. They are retired seamen who spent their time in storytelling. The narrator unfolds to us Marlow's tale which was told to them that evening. Hence, the greatest portion of *Heart of Darkness* is the unnamed narrator's word for word reporting of Marlow's story as told to him that evening on board *the Nellie.* As such, Marlow's tale, actually told to us by the narrator, is recounted in Marlow's own voice. Consequently, Marlow's narrative, every single thing that he says throughout *Heart of Darkness*, is placed in ongoing quotation marks. Soon, the mediating narrative voice, actually always present, vanishes and we feel that we are left in absolute solitude with Charles Marlow.[1] Conrad uses Marlow not only as a narrator and a protagonist of the story, but also as a distancing device, his English alter ego.[2] Distance is the quality that gives fiction an aesthetic validity. In his 1920 seminal essay, Bullough defines distance as "the separation of personal affections, whether idea or complex

[1] Linda Costanzo Cahir, "Narratological Parallels in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*," *Literature Film Quarterly*, Vol. 20 Issue 3 (July, 1992), pp. 181-87; p. 181.

[2] Jakob Lothe, "Conradian narrative," in *The Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad*, Ed. J. H. Stape, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 160-178; p. 166.

experience, from the concrete personality of the experience."[3] Thus, Conrad's framed narrative in *Heart of Darkness* acknowledges the death of the traditional simple narratives. In the classic frame narrative, the frame narrator is often the most authoritative and knowledgeable of the narrators, which is not the case in *Heart of Darkness*. Although the frame narrator opens the narrative and further introduces us to Marlow, his vision is so limited compared to Marlow's.[4] This could be best illustrated in the dialogic interruptions of Marlow to the frame narrator,

> What greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown earth! The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires […] "And this also," said Marlow suddenly, "has been one of the dark places of the earth" (*HD*, 7).

Marlow's remark exposes the relative simplicity and limited insight of the frame narrator concerning imperialist rhetoric and prefigures the complex, sombre implications of the tale he is about to tell. The effect of Marlow's atypical complex narrative is confirmed by the frame narrator himself in the novella's last paragraph, contending that "the tranquil waterway *indeed* seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness,"[5] echoing Marlow's words in the above paragraph.[6] As a result, the decoding of Marlow as "the objective correlative"[7] of *Heart of Darkness* would undoubtedly lead us to see the moral and philosophical implications of his

[3] Edward Bullough, "Psychical distance," in *Aesthetics: Lectures and Essays*. Ed. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), pp. 124-145; p. 127.
[4] "Conradian narrative," op. cit., p. 166.
[5] *Heart of Darkness*, p. 11. Italics mine.
[6] "Conradian narrative," op. cit., p. 168.
[7] A term used by T. S. Eliot to assert that "the only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.

"inconclusive experience," (*HD*, 10) "the whole meaning of which lies *outside* the shell of a cracked nut."[8]

Besides, Conrad's narrative structure is inherently cinematic. The recording eye of Conrad's unnamed narrator in *Heart of Darkness* functions much in the same way as the camera functions in a film. Both the unnamed narrator and the camera interpose themselves between the teller and the listener; both control what we hear and what we see; and both are subtle, ongoing structuring presences which somehow fade from our consciousness. The recording eye of the camera and Conrad's interposed voice both function as narrative devices that create the illusion of an unmediated relationship between the taleteller and the tale hearer. Part of the cinematic nature of *Heart of Darkness* is Conrad's adoption of the effects of sound and lighting. The opening scene, with its considerable tranquillity, is a contemplative sunset moment. The brilliance and serenity of the day, the pacific shine of the water, and the benign immensity of the blue sky set a meditative scene with Marlow preaching in a Buddha pose. As such, the scene is a scheme of visual images, sounds, and lighting, which seems to have been created supra-verbally. The calm and quiet surrounding Marlow creates an effective contrast to the tempestuous chaos within him.[9]

The shift from the meditative to the expository mode of narration is apparent when Marlow comes to unfold the specific details of his river journey to find Kurtz, and relieve him of his post. The transition back in time, prompted by Marlow's narrative voice, takes us to a world, brightly lit, yet macabre, strange world of distorted, dark figures living in a deceiving world of light.[10] These macabre figures inhabit the "Company's offices," (*HD*, 14) a place of "desolation" (15) and "dead silence" (14).

[8] *Heart of Darkness*, p. 8. Italics mine.
[9] "Narratological Parallels," op. cit., p. 181.
[10] Ibid., p. 183.

We are told that the immense double doors of the inner office are guarded by two "women, one fat and the other slim, […] knitting black wool" (14) "guarding the door of Darkness" (16). The depiction of the company's doctor, who asks Marlow's consent, in the interest of science, to measure his cranium creates "something ominous in the atmosphere" (15) and adds to the morbidity of the situation. Marlow's first stop at the government seat unveils the horrors of imperialism where "black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom" (24). Amidst these horrific images, Marlow meets the Company's chief accountant "a white man […] in an unexpected elegance of […] a high starched collar, white cuffs, a light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clear necktie, and varnished boots" (25). Along his way to the Central Station, Marlow witnesses "empty land […] burnt grass" (28) and "several abandoned villages" (28). There Marlow learns that his steamer is wrecked and needs repair. The voyage becomes more strange and irrational. Marlow's journey to his final destination, Kurtz's Inner Station, occurs during a thick *white* fog. Behind "the blind whiteness of the fog," (60) the crew hears uncanny human yells, "modulated in savage discord" (56). Marlow asserts that "it seemed as though the mist itself had screamed, so suddenly, and apparently from all sides at once, did this – tumultuous and mournful uproar arise;" (56) and that the "sheer unexpectedness of it made [his] hair stir under [his] cap" (56). The natives' attack is an attempt to scare Marlow and the crew as they do not want to lose Kurtz who has "taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land" (70). The death of the black helmsman during the attack indicates that the initiation into fog and darkness cannot be accompanied by reason; no one can be at the helm on this journey.[11] The shrunken heads drying under Kurtz's window places Kurtz in the long line of the

[11] "Narratological Parallels," op. cit., p. 186.

hollow men. The horror of this world of hollow men is at the heart of *Heart of Darkness*. Marlow's ultimate identification with Kurtz implies that both men look full face at the great abomination, at the dark ambiguity of being. Both confront moral terror and both are profoundly altered by the experience.[12]

2.2. Conrad and Impressionism

> My task, which I am trying to achieve, is by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel, it is, before all, to make you see.[13]

Conrad famously insisted in his 1897 "Preface" to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* that his creative endeavour was "before all to make [us] see,"[14] with its eloquent suggestion that all we can see is the flux of sensations.[15] Conrad was influenced by a number of writers who emphasised the visual aspects of narrative namely Stephen Crane and Henry James. This artistic orientation had roots in the nineteenth-century impressionist movement in arts. Conrad's desire to "make us see" is also placed within the contextual framework of modernism, in which "showing" and "seeing" are often given special focus. For Todd K. Bender, for instance, it is perception rendered as "fragmented broken sequences of images"[16] and "the cinematic fluidity of time"[17] which most clearly mark Conrad's narrative. Thus, Conrad's attempt is to bring to his fiction both styles of *diegesis* and *mimesis* (telling and showing; hearing and seeing). Though Conrad did not want to associate himself with any literary movement lest that should impoverish the value of literature as art, many of his narrative techniques bear aspects of literary Impressionism. During the impressionist era, the novel underwent

[12] "Narratological Parallels," op. cit., p. 186.
[13] *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, op. cit., Preface, pp. xi-ii.
[14] Ibidem.
[15] Harold Bloom, *Joseph Conrad's Heart of darkness* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008), p. 2.
[16] Todd K. Bender, *Literary Impressionism in Jean Rhys, Ford Madox Ford, Joseph Conrad, and Charlotte Brontë* (New York and London: Garland, 1997), p. 51.
[17] Ibid., p. 56.

important refashioning. It was a genre overloaded with conventions. Writers like James and Conrad, taking their cue from the earlier French "realist" tradition of Flaubert and Maupassant, sensed a need for the novel's total reorientation. By means of a method that may have owed something to the impressionist painters, the emphasis was on showing the object rather than telling about it, on seeing it and making it seen.[18] Conrad, then, defined art as,

> a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect. It is an attempt to find in its forms, in its colours, in its light, in its shadows, in the aspects of matter and in the facts of life what of each is fundamental, what is enduring and essential, their one illuminating and convincing quality, the very truth of their existence.[19]

As such, the word and the image, signifier and signified, were simultaneously present and indivisible and the fictional world was made immediate and visible, just like the real world.[20] Hence, the most distinctive quality of Conrad's own writing is its strong visual sense and Conrad's insistence in the preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* that art depends for its success on "impression conveyed through the senses,"[21] is to that extent wholly consistent with impressionist movement.

In *Heart of Darkness*, as the steamer approaches Kurtz's station, a group of natives on the riverbank attack and Marlow's helmsman is killed. The fight scene is one of Conrad's most successful impressionistic passages, which at the same time attains an almost surrealistic force. Marlow is deeply moved by his helmsman's death and suppose that Kurtz must have also been killed.[22] But later in the story, through the

[18] Michael McKeon, *Theory of the Novel* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 708.
[19] *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, op. cit., Preface, pp. xi-ii.
[20] *Theory of the Novel*, op. cit., p. 708.
[21] *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, op. cit., Preface, pp. xi-ii.
[22] Carl D. Bennett, *Joseph Conrad* (New York: Continuum, 1991), p. 79.

delayed decoding technique, Marlow assures his listeners that he was wrong: the privilege of meeting "the gifted Kurtz" (*HD*, 69) is still possible. Thus, two main traits of Conrad's impressionism in *Heart of Darkness* are descriptions of sensory perceptions as well as insistence on mist and shadow.

2.2.1. Perceiving Darkness in Red Whiskers and Pink Pyjamas

Heart of Darkness presents an almost cinematic sequence of strong visual scenes.[23] Conrad's description of the pilgrim's dress amidst "a misty strip of water," (*HD*, 57) is one of the most striking instances of descriptions of sensory perceptions.

> [A] little fat man, with sandy hair and red whiskers, who wore side-spring boots, and pink pyjamas tucked into his socks. Two others remained open-mouthed a while minute, then dashed into the little cabin, to rush out incontinently and stand darting scared glances, with Winchesters at 'ready' in their hands (57).

The pilgrim's dress shows the absurdity of the situation, facing death and the unknown in pink pyjamas and red whiskers. Besides its sardonic irony, it also has two other functions. First, in its very absurdity, the description emphasises metonymically the absurdity of the characters' situation as a whole, which the Winchesters then complement because the men cannot even see the shooting because of the *white* fog. Second, the description of the pilgrim's dress and the specific brand of rifle are concrete facts and evidence of the sensory world.[24] Following these concrete facts is a metaphorical description of the steamboat, so that Marlow juxtaposes concrete and abstract:

[23] Regelind Farn, *Colonial and Postcolonial Rewritings of Heart of Darkness: a Century of Dialogue with Joseph Conrad* (Florida: Dissertation.com, 2005), p. 10.
[24] John G. Peters, "The Opaque and the Clear: The White Fog Incident in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness'," in Harold Bloom, *Joseph Conrad's Heart of darkness* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008), pp. 37-50; p. 41.

> What we could see was just the steamer we were on, her outlines blurred as though she had been on the point of dissolving, and a misty strip of water, perhaps two feet broad, around her—and that was all. The rest of the world was nowhere, as far as our eyes and ears were concerned. Just nowhere. Gone, disappeared; swept off without leaving a whisper or a shadow behind (*HD*, 57).

This passage is one of the most significant passages in the *white* fog incident in which Marlow completely severs the men from the concrete world. The rest of the world is gone, so the only reality is the steamer itself, which is man-made and hence not an organic part of the world. Although the steamer, which is most solid and concrete for them, is real, it has her outlines blurred as though she had been on the point of dissolving. It is becoming unreal, and with it reality itself is fades.[25]

2.2.2. Shrouded in Swirling Mists and Doubtful Shadows

> Between the idea
> And the reality
> Between the motion
> And the act
> Falls the Shadow[26]

Conrad's insistence on images of mist and shadow is another impressionist motif evident in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The indefinite contours of haze, mist, shadow, and fog are given a special significance. From the very beginning of the story, the frame narrator warns us against the "misty halos" (8) enveloping Marlow's tale, creating the effect of impressionistic paintings. He ensures that Marlow's tale is not centred on, but surrounded by its meaning; and this meaning will be only as tenuously visible as a hitherto unnoticed presence of dust particles and water vapour in a space that normally looks dark and empty.[27] When we reach part two of the story, Marlow

[25] "The Opaque and the Clear," op. cit., p. 41.
[26] T. S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men" in *Collected Poems 1909-1962*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1936), pp. 78-82; 81-2.
[27] Ian Watt, "Conrad's Impressionism," in Gene M. Moore, *Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness: A Casebook*, pp. 169-182; p. 169.

recounts an event whereby the pilgrims on the steamboat are caught in a thick white fog and attacked by the natives.

> When the sun rose there was a white fog, very warm and clammy, and more blinding than the night. It did not shift or drive; it was just there, standing all round you like something solid (*HD*, 56).

One of the men on the steamer expresses his fear of being butchered in this fog. Hence, the image of the fog presents man's inability to see through, which would determine his ultimate demise. These mists, hazes, and fogs serve several purposes.[28] Said asserts that Conrad aims at depicting the complexity of attaining epistemic truth through the image of the *white* fog which triggers confusion and obscurity.[29] Of the white fog incident H. M. Daleski argues that,

> the steamboat is enveloped in "a white fog, very warm and clammy, and more blinding than the night," (56) with the result that the travellers" eyes are "of no more use" to them than if they "had been buried miles deep in a heap of cotton wool."[30]

For Daleski, the white fog obscures sight which is Conrad's primary artistic goal. Both Daleski and Said see the fog's obscuring quality as one of its primary purposes. The fog that appears in the *white* fog scene in *Heart of Darkness* does obscure – but it does more than merely obscure. In many ways, it actually clarifies certain issues for Marlow and his listeners and perhaps his readers as well: the fog in fact uncovers – rather than obscures – issues concerning Western civilisation and Western world view.[31]

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[28] "The Opaque and the Clear," op. cit., p. 37.
[29] Edward W. Said. *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1966), 143.
[30] H. M Daleski, *Joseph Conrad: The Way of Dispossession* (London: Faber, 1977), p. 52.
[31] "The Opaque and the Clear," op. cit., p. 38.

However, in a review of Conrad's essay collection, E. M. Forster took the opportunity to remark on Conrad's works as a whole, famously commenting that Conrad "is misty in the middle as well as at the edges, that the secret casket of his genius contains a vapour rather than a jewel."[32] This in turn reminds us that one of the most characteristic objections to impressionist painting was that the artist's ostensive subject was obscured by his representation of the atmospheric conditions through which it was observed. Claude Monet, for instance, said of the critics who mocked him, "Poor blind idiots. They want to see everything clearly, even through the fog!"[33] For Monet, the fog in a painting, like the narrator's haze, is not an accidental interference which stands between the public and a clear view of the artist's real subject. The conditions under which the viewing is done are an essential part of what the pictorial, or the literary, artist sees and therefore tries to convey.[34] A similar idea is expressed in Virginia Woolf's classic characterisation of "Modern Fiction" where she believes that writers should focus on depicting the complexity, the awkwardness and the unknown of life. Her basic objection to traditional novels is that if we "look within ourselves we *see* 'a myriad impressions' quite unrelated to anything that goes on in such fiction; and if we could express this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit of life freely, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it." Woolf finally affirms,

> Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent

[32] E . M. Forster, "The Pride of Mr. Conrad," *The Nation and Athenaeum*, 19 (March 1921), p. 881.
[33] Quoted by Jean Renoir in *Renoir, My Father*, trans. Randolph and Dorothy Weaver (Boston and Toronto, 1958), p. 174.
[34] "Conrad's Impressionism," op. cit., p. 170.

> envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.[35]

Therefore, Woolf asserts that images of haze and halo are quite essential to the nature of modern fiction.[36]

Above all, in addition to its dramatisation of the visual universe through descriptions of sensory perceptions and fragmented images of mist and shadow, *Heart of Darkness* is characterised by the delayed decoding, covert plots, free indirect speech, and transtextuality.

2.2.3. The *Cart-before-horse* Method

In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad develops one narrative technique which is the verbal equivalent of the impressionist painter's attempt to render visual sensation directly. In his seminal book on *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, Ian Watt coined this narrative device delayed decoding, since it combines the forward temporal progression of the mind, as it receives messages from the outside world, with the much slower reflexive process of making out their meaning. Through this device, Conrad presents the protagonist's immediate sensations, and thus makes the reader aware of the gap between impression and understanding; the delay in bridging the gap enacts the disjunction between the event and the observer's ultimate decoding of it.[37] In the terminology of Conrad's contemporary, Viktor Shklovsky, this is a defamiliarisation device, and many writers have employed it for a variety of serious, comic and

[35] Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction," *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: The Twentieth Century and Beyond*, Ed. Joseph Black, 2006, p. 227, Print.
[36] "Conrad's Impressionism," op. cit., p. 170.
[37] Ibid., pp. 176-7.

philosophical purposes, but few more repeatedly and variously than Conrad has.[38] Conrad's delayed decoding was a precursor of the stream-of-consciousness technique.

The sequence of delayed decoding has three stages. The first stage presents the effect of the experience upon the observer's senses. The second stage triggers false or incomplete decoding. Finally, the third stage unveils true or largely complete decoding.[39] Ian Watt has referred to the moments of delayed decoding as moments when incorrect first impressions must be corrected – "sticks" soon appear as arrows, the "cane" that kills the helmsman becomes a spear, "balls" become shrunken heads, "cipher" becomes Russian script, and the "clinking" becomes a chain-gang.[40]

In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad uses this method for the most dramatic action of the story, when Marlow's boat is attacked, just below Kurtz's station. Marlow, terrified of floating the steamer aground, anxiously watches the cannibal sounding in the bows just below him,

> I was looking down at the sounding-pole, and feeling much annoyed to see at each try a little more of it stick out of that river, when I saw my pole-man give up the business suddenly, and stretch himself flat on the deck, without even taking the trouble to haul his pole in (*HD*, 64).

Marlow's initial inexplicable visual impression is accompanied by his irritation at an apparently gratuitous change in the normal order of things.[41] Here, however, the effect is duplicated, "At the same time the fireman, whom I could also see below me, sat down abruptly before his furnace and ducked his head. I was amazed" (*HD*, 64). Only now does the cause of these odd changes in posture begin to emerge,

[38] Cedric Watts, *The Deceptive Text: An Introduction to Covert Plots* (Brighton: Harvester, 1984), p. 44.
[39] Ibid., p. 122.
[40] Bruce Henricksen, *Nomadic Voices: Conrad and the Subject of Narrative* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, c 1992), p. 62.
[41] "Conrad's Impressionism," op. cit., p. 178.

> Then I had to look at the river mighty quick, because there was a snag in the fairway. Sticks, little sticks, were flying about – thick: they were whizzing before my nose, dropping below me, striking behind me against my pilot-house (*HD*, 64).

But it is only when Marlow negotiates the next snag that his understanding can finally decode the little sticks, "we cleared the snag clumsily. Arrows, by Jove! We were being shot at!" (64) Next, Marlow is navigating and catching occasional glimpses of "vague forms of men" (65) through the shutter hole of the pilothouse, when his attention is suddenly deflected,[42]

> Something big appeared in the air before the shutter, the rifle went overboard, and the man stepped back swiftly, looked at me over his shoulder in an extraordinary, profound, familiar manner, and fell upon my feet. The side of his head hit the wheel twice, and the end of what appeared a long cane clattered round and knocked over a little camp-stool. […] The thin smoke had blown away, we were clear of the snag [...] but my feet felt so warm and wet that I had to look down. The man had rolled on his back and stared straight up at me; both his hands clutched that cane. It was the shaft of a spear [...] He looked at me anxiously, gripping the spear like something precious, with an air of being afraid I would try to take it away from him (*HD*, 66).

First, Marlow sees his helmsman quickly fall and stretch on the deck; he then infers that the man has seized a cane and over-balanced at a most inappropriate time, and finally at the third stage Marlow recognises late that the man is slain by a thrown spear.[43] This last stage of the decoding reveals sudden and unfamiliar action enacted through the protagonist's consciousness, and the delay in his decoding of it makes the reader simultaneously experience horror and sardonic amusement. Amusement, because one feels a certain patronising contempt for those who do not understand things as quickly as they do, and because there is a gruesome comedy in the mere

[42] "Conrad's Impressionism," op. cit., p. 178.
[43] *The Deceptive Text*, op. cit., p. 44.

visual impression of the helmsman's "air of being afraid I would try to take [the spear] away from him" (*HD*, 66). This macabre note has already been prepared for: if the pole-man lies down, and then the fireman sits down, it is only natural that Marlow should assume that the dead helmsman's recumbent posture must be just a third example of the crew's deserting their duty just for their personal safety.[44]

Another example of delayed decoding is when Marlow narrates his sensory perception of the clinking chain and the meaning he subsequently deduces from it.

> A slight clinking behind me made me turn my head. Six black men advanced in a file, toiling up the path. [...] the clink kept time with their footsteps. […] each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain […] rhythmically clinking. [...] They were called criminals, and the outraged law … (*HD*, 22)

The artistic decoding of the clinking source, the iron collar on their necks, adds to Conrad's ability to expose the coloniser's atrocities and our ultimate sympathy with the colonised.

John G. Peters highlighted the different purposes of this narrative technique. First, the delayed decoding technique places the reader in the position of the character viewing the event so that the reader experiences what the character does at the very moment that character experiences it, thus providing realism and immediacy to the reader's experience. Second, the delayed decoding emphasises the tenuous nature of human perception, demonstrating that what one experiences filters through one's consciousness and hence is subjective and not objective. Furthermore, by emphasising the subjectivity of perception, Conrad calls into question the certainty of knowledge obtained through perception, and hence, because so much knowledge results from

[44] "Conrad's Impressionism," op. cit., p. 179.

empirical experience, by extension, this technique also calls into question the certainty of knowledge in general. Delayed decoding appears again and again in the course of Conrad's career and becomes one of his most important narrative innovations.[45]

Moreover, the concept of delayed decoding applies not only to Conrad's most vivid descriptive passages but also to longer narrative sequences. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow attempts to decipher and comprehend the meaning of his journey, in which the reader must overcome moral myopia by ordering and reconciling the achronological patters of Conrad's narrative discourse. It is clear that a novelist who is interested in modes of delayed decoding will also be interested in covert narrative sequences. Often the two go together and entail kindred scrutinies.[46]

2.3. The Art(ifice) of Covert Plots

Conrad is a master of covert plots. Indeed, part of his narrative Janiformity is his adoption of the covert plot. Several of his novels and tales are characterised by employing smaller or larger plot sequences within the main narrative. These covert plots are so delicately and implicitly presented with elisions or hiatuses that they may be overlooked on a first or even second reading. Hence, readers of *Heart of Darkness*, for example, would undoubtedly sense that some narrative enigma has been set and left unsolved. Decoding the covert plot would enable the reader to see the narrative as artful in exposition, themes richer in presentation, and the work more ironic. The mode of covert plots is largely enacted through the eyes or over the shoulders of a protagonist or a narrator who is slow to perceive, if he perceives at all, the web that

[45] *The Cambridge Introduction to Joseph Conrad*, op. cit., p. 48.
[46] Cedric Watts, "Conrad's Covert Plots and Transtextual Narratives," in *Critical Essays on Joseph Conrad*, Ed. Ted Billy (Boston, Mass.: G.K. Hall and Co., 1987), pp. 67-78; p. 68.

others are weaving around him. The author, like a painter or a movie director, remains in the background controlling what we *see*. Hence, Conrad's covert plots are concealed both from a central observer and also from the reader.[47]

In *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz and Marlow are deemed to be victims of covert plotting. The former fails to see the Company's manager's conspiracy against him; and Marlow in turn is slow to unveil the story's narrative obliquities which would ultimately lead to the reader's confusion. The manager's motivation to destroy Kurtz is ambition. Kurtz, an influential and remarkably successful ivory-hunter, is the manager's main rival for promotion. The manager, thus, succeeds in delaying Kurtz's relief from the Inner Station by wreaking Marlow's steam-boat. He further defers Marlow's request for rivets to repair the steam-boat for three months. Marlow's rescue operation fails and Kurtz dies during the journey downstream. Marlow seems to be gradually recognising the extent of the manager's Machiavellism and political Darwinism planning ruthlessly to delay Kurtz's rescue mission who in turn represents a threat to their ambitions.

> I did not see the real significance of that wreck at once. I fancy I see it now, but I am not sure, not at all. Certainly the affair was too stupid, when I think of it, to be altogether natural (*HD*, 30).

As such, Marlow himself was fundamentally a victim of the manager's cruel plan. The main reason is that the narrative employs first-person narration: the hero is also the story-teller, so that the reader, looking through his eyes or at least over his shoulder, must largely share the hero's unawareness or bewilderment. Hence, the delayed decoding of the covert plot by the narrator would unarguably lead to its delayed decoding by the reader.

[47] "Conrad's Covert Plots," op. cit., p. 67.

Covert plots greatly contribute to the tale's themes. Recognition of a covert plot entails recognition of a change in the thematic nature of the work. Previously perceived themes gain greater emphasis and new contrasting themes are introduced (*HD*, 38). For instance, through the elliptical presentation of the manager's plot against Kurtz, which initially conceals the plot's logic from the reader, Conrad is able to give the initial impression that Marlow has entered a region of irrationality and purposelessness. Thus, the theme of the futility of imperialism is highlighted, while the broader theme of the dangers of crossing the threshold from the familiar to the unknown is also maintained. Among Conrad's complex covert plots in *Heart of Darkness* is the dramatisation of the paradox of the virtue of evil in the character of Kurtz.

2.4. Janiformity and the Paradox of the Virtue of Evil

> As Janus is the two-headed god, a Janiform novel is a two-faced novel: morally it seems to be centrally or importantly paradoxical or self-contradictory.[48]

Janiform novels are fundamentally characterised by their complexity. The term janiform is derived from Janus, the double-headed god of gates in Roman mythology. In his seminal book, *The Deceptive Text: an Introduction to Covert Plots*, Watts adopted the term to refer to complex paradoxical novels which are self-divided and which lack organic unity. Janiform novels are then characterised by their hidden narrative or covert plots. The idea of moral paradox is reflected in the readers' solidarity with a corrupt protagonist.[49]

Conrad's Kurtz can be considered the quintessential example of a janiform fictional protagonist. He almost comes to resemble Janus himself. Deceived by the

[48] *The Deceptive Text*, op. cit., p. 13.
[49] Ibidem.

hidden narrative, readers and commentators alike seem not to agree on the nature of Kurtz. Some see him as a hollow sham, while others consider him as a remarkable full man.[50] The reader of *Heart of Darkness* identifies himself first with the anonymous narrator who introduces the setting and the characters, then with Marlow who interrupts and refutes the narrator's claims. Through Marlow's peculiar fascination with Kurtz, readers are headed towards complicity with the tale's major symbol of vice.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz is two-faced. To Marlow, he is a "hollow sham," (*HD*, 98) since the wilderness "echoed loudly within him" (83). His "standing jump,"[51] just like Conrad himself, to Africa as Europe's promising musician, political leader, and idealist, is quite revelatory and ironic. It indicates the Europeans' hypocrisy and lack of restraint facing the test of the wilderness. Thus, disintegrated by the jungle, Kurtz takes his place in the long line of hollow men we meet during the narrative.[52] Kurtz, on the other hand, is depicted as a "gifted creature" (*HD*, 21). The text definitely suggests that though corrupt, ambitious, and immoral, Kurtz is different from all hollow men. Kurtz commands admiration rather than disdain. Marlow feels that he had a "choice of nightmares," (89) a choice of evils. The janiformity of the text is so evident since *Heart of Darkness* does not illuminate the nature of the "midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites" (71) offered to Kurtz himself. The text evokes the possibility of interpreting this conduct as tribal deity, as a grotesque parody of the civilised leader as well as surrender to the inner savage impulses of the white man's Id. Watts pointed out that through its dramatisation of Kurtz as Janus, *Heart of Darkness* suggests two distinct views of civilisation. On the one hand, it views

[50] *The Deceptive Text*, op. cit., p. 23.
[51] *A Personal Record*, op. cit,. p. 121.
[52] *The Deceptive Text*, op. cit., p. 23.

civilisation as invaluable achievement which has to be protected from perils. On the other hand, it depicts it as ruthless and hollow and hollow at the core.[53]

Our complicity with Kurtz is achieved through Conrad's artistic adoption of a confused narrator who remains loyal to the tale's villain.

> It was an affirmation, a moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions. But it was a victory! That is why I have remained loyal to Kurtz to the last, and even beyond (*HD*, 101).

Marlow's inability to convey in words the meaning of Kurtz's pronouncement of horror, in turn, implies Conrad's difficulty and ultimate self-censorship in exposing the atrocities of the imperialists he witnessed during his Congo experience. Unfortunately, this would lead to solidarity with Kurtz's as well as complicity with imperial evil.

2.5. Souls for Sale: Dr Faustus and Mr Kurtz

> He had taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land.
> I mean literally (*HD*, 70).

One of Conrad's major influences among the classics of European literature is Christopher Marlowe whom Conrad read very widely. The name of Conrad's most important transtextual protagonist-narrator, Charles Marlow, echoes the name of Christopher Marlowe, and the discursive evidence of *Heart of Darkness* indicates that Conrad in fact read Marlowe's play *Doctor Faustus* and the German legend of Faust as well. Both the play and the legend imply a situation in which an ambitious person surrenders moral integrity in order to achieve power and pleasure.[54]

[53] *The Deceptive Text*, op. cit., p. 22.
[54] Ibid., p. 75.

In *Heart of Darkness*, the supernatural covert plot stems from Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus. Marlow's tale is full of words and phrases such as "weak-eyed devil," "bargain," "shade," "initiated wraith" and "eloquent phantom."[55] This vocabulary may seem a metaphorical and often an ironic way of referring to the secular by invoking the actually non-secular. However, many such references achieve an effect of generating a literal element. Indeed, we see that Kurtz has in fact made a pact with some forces of evil.[56] The analogies between Marlowe's Dr Faustus and Marlow's Mr Kurtz are various. They both yield to temptation by the Lucifer who once was believed to be an angel in the Christian legend of Lucifer; his name signifies 'light-bearer.' *Heart of Darkness* evokes the ironic theme of light-bearers heading into darkness. Explorers and colonisers are described as men "bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire" (*HD*, 7). The recurrent image of light versus darkness is further highlighted by Kurtz's painting "representing a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The background was sombre – almost black" (36). Kurtz himself is ostensibly a Lucifer, a fallen angel. In his report for "the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs," (71) he posited that white men "must necessarily appear to [the savages] in the nature of supernatural beings" (71-2). Kurtz's eloquence is "the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness" (68). Ruling as a Prince of Darkness over a savage tribe in darkest Africa leads to his downfall.

Throughout the novel, Mr Kurtz is much like Dr Faustus. They both make a bargain for their souls with the devil. Dr Faustus is a talented man in various fields of science. He is a source of admiration and respect for his colleagues and students. He

[55] *Heart of Darkness*, pp. 23, 70, 71, 71, 90.
[56] *The Deceptive Text*, op. cit., p. 75.

resorts to black magic so as to extend his power. He sells his soul to Mephistopheles, Lucifer's agent, and makes a twenty-four-year pact with the devil. Marlowe creates dramatic suspense and hope that Dr Faustus may repent and be saved. These hopes are kept active throughout the main action. The pact, nonetheless, prevents Dr Faustus from salvation. He further commits the sin of fornication with a devil in the image of Helen of Troy.[57]

Just like Marlowe's Faustus, Kurtz "was a universal genius" (*HD*, 40). He is immensely talented and a promising musician, a journalist and an European idealist in darkest Africa. He is characterised by his zealous thirst for power. Marlow says that he "sends in as much ivory as all the others put together," (27) "he had taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land," (70) he "made a bargain for his soul with the devil," (70) the wilderness has "beguiled his unlawful soul beyond the bounds of permitted aspirations," (95) and thus he is an "initiated wraith" (71). When Kurtz pursues his return to his tribe,

> A black figure stood up, strode on long black legs, waving long black arms, across the glow. It had horns, antelope horns, I think, on its head. Some sorcerer, some witch-man, no doubt: it looked fiendlike enough (94).

Furthermore, Kurtz's love is reflected in the form of the black mistress, an embodiment of the wilderness.[58] The wilderness, Marlow says, has "loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, and sealed his soul to his own" (*HD*, 69).

Conrad makes at least one, explicit reference to the legend, when the manager's assistant is described as a "papier-mâché Mephistopheles" (37). This suggests that the manager himself is the counterpart to the Devil. As the covert murder-plot shows, the

[57] *The Deceptive Text*, op. cit., pp. 76-7.
[58] Ibid., p. 79.

manager is largely responsible for Kurtz's long isolation in the region of temptation and thus for Kurtz's demise.[59]

In a nutshell, the tale is not only an indictment of Belgian, or European Imperialism. It is also a dramatisation of the civilised man's grip to conquer, which in the long run inflicts destruction on the environment and self-destruction on the moral nature of that civilisation itself. At the most effective scenes of the narrative, the covert metaphysical plot blends with the overt plot, and the symbolic implications are grounded in close observation of the plausibly familiar.[60] In addition to the Faustian narrative, Conrad employs the narrative technique of the haunting doppelgänger embodied in the characters of Marlow and Kurtz.

2.6. The Haunting *Doppelgänger*

> And it is not my own extremity I remember best […]
> No! It is his extremity that I seem to have lived through
> (*HD*, 101).

Conrad also uses narrative technique of the double in *Heart of Darkness*. Its main conventions include the weird symbiosis or interdependence of two apparently antagonistic characters. These characters may share the roles of pursuer and pursued, victimiser and victim. Notwithstanding the different obstacles, they are repeatedly joined. Their risks overlap, and sometimes death for one involves death for the other. This antagonistic division is linked with the Faustian metaphysical theme in the quest for forbidden knowledge or power.[61]

Marlow and Kurtz are the embodiment of the double narrative technique. Marlow feels an enduring fascination, and a kind of complicity with Kurtz. Both Marlow and

[59] *The Deceptive Text*, op. cit., p. 80.
[60] Ibid., p. 82.
[61] Ibidem.

Kurtz are men of ideals. They are differentiated from the pilgrims, the other members of the "gang of virtue;" (*HD*, 36) their attitudes towards the Company are different from those of the other white men. Marlow is fascinated by the talents and gifts of Mr Kurtz. He pursues him despite the horrors. The double narrative technique makes Marlow identify with a corrupt character and accept the idea of the virtue of evil.[62]

Furthermore, the convention of "the death for one of 'double' implies the death or near-death for the other"[63] is also maintained. The rescue operation to save Kurtz has a perilous psychological impact on Marlow. He describes his presence at the Inner Station as if he, "were buried in a vast grave full of unspeakable secrets" (*HD*, 89). After Kurtz dies, Marlow, like Conrad himself, suffered from fever and deadly illness. What remains, Marlow explains is "only his memory and his Intended" (104).

During his conversation with the Intended, Marlow again hears Kurtz's deathbed cry of horror, which seems to haunt Marlow even after Kurtz's death. Marlow has been chased by what it appears to be Kurtz's ghost.

> The vision seemed to enter the house with me. […] I would have to keep back alone for the salvation of another soul […] while I waited he seemed to stare at me out of the glassy panel, stare with that wide and immense stare embracing, condemning, loathing all the universe. I seemed to hear the whispered cry, 'The horror! The horror!' (*HD*, 104)

Marlow's reference to the salvation of another soul can be seen as a metaphor to the preservation of the Intended's faith in Kurtz and, thus in life; since the double's souls have already been embraced by "a conquering darkness" (105). This, in turn, implies that the Faustian theme of supernatural evil, of selling souls to the devil of darkness, is also maintained. This theme is significantly developed when Kurtz "seemed to stare

[62] *The Deceptive Text*, op. cit., p. 82.
[63] Ibidem.

at [Marlow] out of the glassy panel" (106). This further suggests that the 'haunting' is reciprocal and symbiotic.[64] During his journey up-river, Marlow yearned to see Kurtz. Now, the chase is reversed, Kurtz came back to haunt Marlow. During the interview with the Intended, we constantly feel Kurtz's presence not only through Marlow's memories but also through vivid descriptions.[65]

> She put out her arms as if after a retreating figure, […] resembling in this gesture another one, tragic also, and bedecked with powerless charms, stretching bare brown arms over the glitter of the infernal stream, the stream of darkness (*HD*, 109-10).

Thus, it seems that Kurtz haunts not only Marlow, but the black mistress, the Intended, and the reader too.[66]

2.7. Transtextuality and Fictional Symbiosis

A transtextual narrative is one which exists in, across and between two or more texts. It is covert in proportion to the reader's unawareness of the relevant material. The reader needs both a microscopic and macroscopic eye, an eye for small significant detail and an eye for vast patterns. Transtextual narratives may be small, medium, large or vast in scale.[67] In *Heart of Darkness*, the anonymous narrator reminds us that the same group of men including a lawyer, an accountant and a company director has listened to Marlow telling the tale of "Youth": "Between us there was, *as I have already said somewhere*, the bond of the sea;"[68] and the "somewhere" was the opening of that earlier tale.[69] Charles Marlow is the most

[64] *The Deceptive Text*, op. cit., p. 84.
[65] Ibidem.
[66] Ibidem.
[67] Ibid., p. 143.
[68] *Heart of Darkness*, p. 5. Italics mine.
[69] *The Deceptive Text*, op. cit., p. 141.

engaging of Conrad's transtextual characters.[70] He frequently appears in Conrad's fiction starting from "Youth" (1898) to *Heart of Darkness* (1899), *Lord Jim* (1899-1900) and *Chance* (1912).

Conrad's transtextual fictional symbiosis serves four main purposes. First of all, the network enhances the realism, for such reappearances are likely to happen when an author is evoking actual journeys and actual meetings. Sometimes the reason for the recurrence is indeed that Conrad is remembering a real person. For example, Georges Antoine Klein is believed to be the Mr Kurtz's real-life counterpart. He was an employee of the Société Anonyme Belge pour le Commerce du Haut-Congo and was saved by the steamboat Conrad was piloting. Sometimes Conrad is re-using a convenient fictional construct based probably on several acquaintances such as the adoption of Charles Marlow as the name his protagonist-narrator alluding to Christopher Marlowe whom Conrad had read widely. Second, fictional symbiosis gives a peculiar spaciousness to the fictional world. For, as tale is linked to tale, novel to novel, tale to novel and novel to tale by means of these frequent characters and locations, we sense behind the individual works a meta-narrative, one large imaginative territory closely related to actuality and from which all the individual existing fictions can be seen as selections. Third, transtextuality provides a gain not only in realism but also in economy. Thus, Conrad can invoke in one tale a recollection of matters expounded in a previous tale. The opening of *Heart of Darkness*, for instance, refers us to the character-descriptions at the opening of "Youth," which suggests in turn that any reading of a single Conradian work, which is not related to other works its range, is likely to impoverish that work unjustly.[71]

[70] Cedric Watts, *Joseph Conrad* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1994), p. 18.
[71] "Conrad's Covert Plots and Transtextual Narratives," op. cit., p. 78.

2.8. The Conradian Symbolist Tinge

> All the great creations of literature have been symbolic. A work of art is very seldom limited to one exclusive meaning and not necessarily tending to a definite conclusion. And this is the reason that the nearer it approaches art, the more it acquires a symbolic character.[72]

Heart of Darkness shares many characteristic preoccupations and themes with the French symbolists. It echoes the Symbolist attempt to reveal in in Baudelaire's phrase about Delacroix, "the infinite in the finite."[73] Harold Bloom asserts that the novel's title, *Heart of Darkness,* originally *The Heart of Darkness,* adds to its ambiguity and thus to its complexity. The eponymous phrase evokes on the one hand the unexplored depths of the darkest continent as well as the darkness of the ruthless impulses of the self and its capacity for evil.[74] Marlow's journey into darkest Africa evokes the traditional descent into the underworld such as that in the sixth book of Virgil's *Aeneid* and in Dante's *Inferno*. Alluding to the location of the company's headquarters as a whited sepulchral city creates a feeling of death, decay and hell. Marlow's visual description of its "deserted streets, high houses, innumerable windows, dead silence, grass sprouting beneath the stones, immense double doors" (*HD*, 14) adds to the ghastly atmosphere of the place and raises a latent criticism of the hypocrisy of civilisation and imperialism. Marlow's encounter with the two women knitting black wool recalls the classical Fates guarding the door of darkness. They are revelatory of what the trading company does to its agents.[75] To Marlow, the whole atmosphere seems eerie and fateful.[76] When Marlow meets the company's doctor for a medical check-up, the latter expresses a morbid interest in the fate of

[72] *Life and Letters.* Vol. I. op. cit., p. 205.
[73] Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Ruff (Paris, 1968), p. 404.
[74] Cedric Watts, "'Heart of Darkness'," op. cit., p. 32.
[75] *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, op. cit., pp. 190-91.
[76] *Joseph Conrad's Fiction*, op. cit., p. 98.

those persons who go out there to the heart of darkness. The doctor's valedictory advice to Marlow, to avoid irritation and to keep calm, is quite significant, "Du calme, du calme, Adieu" (*HD*, 17). Thus, Marlow should exercise restraint facing darkness. Otherwise, he will become mad. Marlow leaves the office totally disillusioned about the value of his journey and with a feeling that he has been led into some conspiracy.[77] His leave-taking encounter with his aunt is also revelatory. Marlow finds her ecstatic under the mistaken notion that he is "something like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle" (*HD*, 18). She believes that he is going to Africa as the envoy of a society that would wean "ignorant millions from their horrid ways" (18). Marlow reminds her that things are run for profit. He meditates how out of touch with truth women are, living in a world of their own.[78] At the Central Station Marlow meets the company's chief accountant whom he admires for the keeping up of his appearance in the great demoralisation of the land. The company's chief accountant symbolises the company's hypocrisy and indifference towards the suffering of the natives. It also epitomises the wide disparities in the standards of living between the natives and the white men.[79] In the brickmaker's room, Marlow notices a small oil painting "representing a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The background was sombre – almost black" (36). He is told that Mr Kurtz painted it while awaiting appointment to his trading post. The painting is a symbol of the evil of the whole project of Imperialism and its civilising mission. The painting makes Marlow very enthusiastic about Mr Kurtz, the dying chief of the Inner Station. Kurtz is a representative symbol for a decaying hollow European civilization for "his mother was half-English, his father was half-French. All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz" (*HD*, 71). The "heads drying

[77] *Joseph Conrad's Fiction*, op. cit., p. 98.
[78] Ibid., p. 99.
[79] Ibid., p. 100.

on the stakes under [his] windows" are, as Marlow puts it, "not ornamental but symbolic" (*HD*, 83). They are an evidence of Kurtz's savagery and lack of restraint.[80] Marlow precedes that, "they only showed that [he] lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts" (*HD*, 83). T. S. Eliot's use of the fiercely disdainful pronouncement, "Mistah Kurtz – he dead,"[81] as the epigraph to "The Hollow Men" presents Kurtz as a symbol of the spiritual void and darkness within the hearts of mankind.[82]

Besides, the symbolic dualism of light/darkness and white/black is maintained throughout the novel. Conrad's narrative dismantles the stereotypical contrast between black as bad and white as good through the depiction of London, the centre of the mighty empire, as also capable of embracing darkness.[83] Marlow tells us that, Britain "has been one of the dark places of the earth (*HD*, 7). The luminous estuary is contrasted with the brooding gloom. This sets the ominous tone of the novel. The location of the company is likened to "a whited sepulchre" (14). The company's chief accountant's light dress is juxtaposed with "black shadows of disease and starvation" (24). The white ivory represents the "imbecile rapacity" (33) of ivory trade deep in the black jungle. The blindfolded woman Kurtz painted carries a lighted torch. The background of which was sombre – almost black. When Marlow arrives to meet Kurtz's Intended, "she came forward, all in black, with a pale head (106). Furthermore, the white thick fog represents the difficulty of attaining epistemic

[80] *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, op. cit., p. 231.
[81] T. S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men," op. cit., p. 78.
[82] *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, op. cit., p. 134.
[83] Cedric Watts, "'Heart of Darkness'," op. cit., p. 32.

truth.[84] These symbolic images evoke the moral and psychological conflict between light and darkness which goes on inside the individual.[85]

2.9. Pilgrims, Apostles, and a Hole in a Pail

Heart of Darkness is a masterwork of irony. Kurtz, whose name "means short in German," (*HD*, 85) is depicted as a European idealist with the aim of abolishing the so-called savage customs and "weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways" (18). Nonetheless, he himself yields to acts of savagery which lead him to "preside at certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites" (71). His eloquent report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs ends up with the appalling cry: "Exterminate all the brutes!" (72). Thus, Kurtz's airy eloquent idealism is represented as equivalent and opposite to his base cruelty, a tension neatly captured in the disparity between his eloquent pamphlet and its barbaric postscript.[86] Kurtz came to the wilderness seeking adventure and advancement, but soon his skills, attributes, and cultural advantages prepared him to assume eminence, wealth, and wanton power.[87] He begins as a Quixote and ends as a megalomaniac. When Marlow returns to Europe, he recognises that the stable, civilised world is no longer a satisfactory arbiter of value and knowledge.[88]

> I found myself back in the sepulchral city resenting the sight of people hurrying through the streets to filch a little money from each other, to devour their infamous cookery, to gulp their unwholesome beer, to dream their insignificant and silly dreams. They trespassed upon my

[84] *Joseph Conrad and the Fiction of Autobiography*, op. cit., p. 143.
[85] *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, op. cit., p. 215.
[86] A. Michael Matin, *Heart of Darkness and Selected Short Fiction* (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003), p. 133.
[87] Birgit Maier-Katkin & Daniel Maier-Katkin, "At the Heart of Darkness: Crimes against Humanity and the Banality of Evil," *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Aug., 2004), pp. 584-604; p. 588.
[88] Gerard O'connor, *Three Types of Irony in the Novels of Joseph Conrad* (England: University of Canterbury, 1986), p. 61.

> thoughts. They were intruders whose knowledge of life was to me an irritating pretence (*HD*, 102).

Thus, Marlow makes his journey to the heart of darkness to expose the sham of the philanthropic pretence of civilisation and imperialism. Besides, Marlow's interruption to the frame narrator's glorification of the Thames suggesting that Britain also "has been one of the dark places on the earth" (*HD*, 7) is another verbal irony implying that darkness lies fundamentally at the heart of man. On the other hand, dramatic irony is also evident in the fact that all what happened in Marlow's narrative occurred after the composition of Kurtz's report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs and before the addition of its hastily appended postscript.[89] Furthermore, the ironic description of the European "pilgrims" in the wilderness strengthens Conrad's dramatization of the hypocrisy of imperialism. The pilgrims are involved in the terrible work of imperialist conquest, the "merry dance of death and trade" (*HD*, 20). Marlow says that, "They wandered here and there with their absurd long staves in their hands, like a lot of faithless pilgrims bewitched inside a rotten fence" (33). In his seminal essay, "*Heart of Darkness* Revisited," Rino Zhuwarara points out that the whites in Africa are not pilgrims of progress. Often they are actors in a ferocious and destructive drama which inflicts unspeakable chaos. Far from being pilgrims, apostles, and emissaries of light, they are ironically faithless, hollow, and ruthless conquerors driven by the sordid motives of greed and power.[90] Marlow's description of the miraculous accountant is very ironic. His appearance "was certainly that of a hairdresser's dummy; but in the great demoralization of the land he kept up his appearance" (*HD*, 26). Marlow's enthusiasm is aroused by his recognition that, unlike Kurtz, the accountant has survived in the

[89] John Tessitore, "Freud, Conrad, and 'Heart of Darkness'," *College Literature*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Winter, 1980), pp. 30-40; p. 32.
[90] Rino Zhuwarara, "Heart of Darkness *Revisited*: The African Response," in Gene M. Moore, *Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness: A Casebook*, pp. 219-242; p. 225.

wilderness with the European ideal of civilisation. Marlow's irony depends on the disparity between that ideal and the facts of the primitive environment.[91] The accountant holds to his ideal of clerical accuracy to the point where he is intolerant of the atrocities occurring around him, "'the groans of this sick person,' he said, 'distract my attention. And without that it is extremely difficult to guard against clerical errors in this climate"' (*HD,* 27). Moreover, the futility of the civilising work in Africa is ironically depicted in the character of the white stout black-moustached trader who is absurdly trying to extinguish the flames with water in a pail having a whole in the bottom. Marlow realises that no activity of any kind is going on there, not even waste and exploitation.[92] Last but not least, Marlow's lie to the Intended creates a dramatic irony. While back in Europe, Marlow tells Kurtz's intended that Kurtz's last words where her name when the reader already knows that Kurtz's last words were in fact "The horror! The horror!" Thus, Marlow's lie is revelatory of the ambivalence and complicity which is rendered visible in the novella, demonstrating the concealment of the demonic and rapacious face of colonialism.[93]

2.10. Free Indirect Discourse

Free Indirect Discourse is a mode of narration in which the narrator tells us in an unfiltered way what a character is thinking and feeling.[94] In *Transparent Minds*, Dorrit Cohn defines free indirect discourse as, "the technique for rendering a character's thought in his own idiom while maintaining the third-person reference and

[91] *Three Types of Irony in the Novels of Joseph Conrad*, op. cit., p. 97.
[92] *Joseph Conrad's Fiction*, op. cit., p. 103.
[93] Fetson Kalua, "Locating the Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa,* Vol. 26, No. 1, (Mar, 2014), pp. 12-18; p. 7.
[94] Peter J. Rabinowitz, "Reader Response, Reader Responsibility: *Heart of Darkness* and the Politics of Displacement," 1996. Rpt. in R. C. Murfin (Ed.), *Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness* (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press), pp. 115-147; p. 123.

the basic time of narration."[95] Free indirect discourse, henceforth FID, serves a double purpose, "On the one hand it evokes the person, through his words, tone of voice, and gesture, and on the other, it embeds the character's statement or thought in the narrative flow, and even more importantly in the narrator's interpretation, communicating also his way of seeing and feeling."[96]

Through the use of FID, Conrad merges both subjective and objective accounts adopting different points of view of the same character. Hence, many of Conrad's FID-statements tend to be highly judgemental. They play on the level of the character's consciousness and point of view. Hence, FID-statements render truth as complex and multifaceted involving the meaning of events as well as their impression on the characters.[97] Marlow's conversation with the brickmaker is an excellent example to illustrate Conrad's use of FID in *Heart of Darkness*.

> He did not make bricks – why, there was a physical impossibility in the way – as I was well aware; and if he did secretarial work for the manager, it was because 'no sensible man rejects wantonly the confidence of his superiors.' Did I see it? I saw it. What more did I want? What I really wanted was rivets, by heaven! Rivets. To get on with the work – to stop the hole. Rivets I wanted. There were cases of them down at the coast – cases – piled up – burst – split! You kicked a loose rivet at every second step in that station yard on the hillside. Rivets had rolled into the grove of death (*HD*, 40).

In this extract, Marlow is reporting a conversation in which he himself took part. The use of FID increases the degree of subjectivity as well as complexity of Marlow's report about the rivets. Hence, the reader must be able to distinguish between what Marlow said to his narratees and what he said to the brickmaker. However, it is

[95] Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 100.
[96] Wernes Senn, *Conrad's Narrative Voice: Stylistic Aspects of his Fiction* (Bern : Francke Verlag, 1980.), p. 160.
[97] Ibid., p. 160.

difficult for readers of *Heart of Darkness* to see where the break comes between represented speech, what Marlow said then to the brickmaker, and authorial narrative comment, what Marlow says now to his narratees. "As I was well aware" could be represented speech: the brickmaker is saying, "As you are well aware;" or it could be Marlow's narrative interpolation, "I, Marlow, was aware that this was the case." Banfield asserts that Conrad's Marlow stories resemble the Eastern European *skaz*[98] genre, in which the whole tale or, as in Conrad's case, a very large part of it is deemed to take the form of an oral narrative.[99]

The following passage illustrates perfectly Conrad's artistic use of free indirect speech (FIS) in *Heart of Darkness*.

> "Will they attack, do you think?" asked the manager, in a confidential tone. 'I did not think they would attack, for several obvious reasons. The thick fog was one. […] But what made the idea of attack inconceivable to me was the nature of the noise – of the cries we had heard. […] The glimpse of the steamboat had for some reason filled those savages with unrestrained grief. The danger, if any, I expounded, was from our proximity to a great human passion let loose (*HD*, 61).

The reader would interpret the above passage as a record of Marlow's thoughts in response to the manager's question, free represented thought (FIT). However, it is until we read the last sentence of the passage, and exactly the word "expounded," that we discover that it is free represented speech (FIS), what Marlow actually said to the manager and the pilgrims. Therefore, the deictic function of the word "expounded" works as a clue to distinguish between free represented thought (FIT) and free

[98] *Skas* is a narrative related by a fictitious narrator rather than by the author directly. Such a device allows the author considerable scope in the use of speech forms, which give a naturalistic vigour and colourfulness which might not be attainable in a more conventional narrative told solely from the author's viewpoint.

[99] Jeremy Hawthorn, *Joseph Conrad: Narrative Technique and Ideological Commitment* (London: Edward Arnold, 1990), p. 23.

represented speech (FIS). The following extract provides us with the pilgrims' startled response to Marlow's "regular lecture."

> You should have seen the pilgrims stare! They had no heart to grin, or even to revile me: but I believe they thought me gone mad – with fright, maybe. I delivered a regular lecture (*HD*, 62).

Thus, the deictic function of the sentence as well as Marlow's "regular lecture" concerning the attack helps readers distinguish between what Marlow thought and what Marlow actually said.

FID is of a paramount importance to the presentation of the narrative. First, it is a convenient and an economical device for rendering speech without using dialogues. It is also capable of highlighting dominant and submissive roles in social intercourse.[100] Moreover, Chatman explained that FID is a device employed by the mediated narrator to express narrative sympathy with his narratees. It also suggests irony and satire and conveys humorous detachment. By combining the voices of narrator and character, FID is also capable of producing effects of uncertainty, indeterminacy and distance. Indeed, FID is a crucially important technique whereby narrative flexibility and mobility is not only enormously refined and extended, but also linked to the author's evaluative and moral commitments.[101]

In addition to FID, Conrad also used appositions and substitutions of places and personal names by other nouns or nominal phrases to avoid repetition. Appositions and substitutions are also used to create a kind of narrator-reader discursive dialogism.

[100] *Conrad's Narrative Voice*, op. cit., p. 173.
[101] Ibid., p. 173.

2.11. Appositions and Substitutions

Conrad effectively employs the linguistic forms of apposition and substitution in *Heart of Darkness*. The former is the qualification or modification of personal names and the latter is the substitution of personal names by other nouns or nominal phrases. Substitution is a stylistic device which functions as a means to avoid monotony and to provide a form of "elegant variation."[102] It thus contributes to the dynamics of the narrator-reader relationship at a discursive level. These substitutions are mostly anaphoric. They involve attributing certain traits to some characters and places. Referring to the Russian as "Kurtz's last disciple" (*HD*, 84) or "the man of patches," (88) draws our attention to distinct qualities of the character: his major preoccupation and his odd dress respectively. Kurtz, for instance, is given many titles such as,

> the poor chap; first-class agent, a very remarkable person; the Chief of the Inner Station, a prodigy; an emissary of pity and science and progress, a special being; an enchanted princess sleeping in a fabulous castle; all Europe contributed to [his] making; that atrocious phantom, that apparition; that pitiful Jupiter; a vapour exhaled by the earth; this shadow, the nightmare of [Marlow's] choice; this wandering and tormented thing; that shadow; kicked himself loose from the earth; a remarkable man; [and] an extremist.[103]

Such substitution of some of the character's features under his personal or generic name is more specific, concrete and vivid; yet they are also more limited and very subjective because they are wrapped and edited by the narrator's point of view.[104] Thus, appositions and substitutions create a multiplicity of points of view, verbal irony and distance.[105]

[102] *Conrad's Narrative Voice*, op. cit., p. 112.
[103] *Heart of Darkness*, pp. 11, 27, 36, 61, 71, 85, 86, 92, 93, 94, 95, 101, 104.
[104] *Conrad's Narrative Voice*, op. cit., p. 113.
[105] Ibid., p. 125.

2.12. Conjecture, Estrangement and Distancing

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* explores not only the reality of the world but also man's ability to understand it and to see in it the truth "underlying its every aspect."[106] In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow speaks of the "mere incidents of the surface" (*HD*, 49) that hide the reality, the inner truth, but he also sees in this attention to the surface facts, as in daily work, "the chance to find yourself. Your own reality, for yourself, not for others what no man can ever know. They can only *see* the mere show and never can tell what it really means."[107] Thus, the artist's role is to illuminate this perceptual reality and to "reveal the substance of its truth, disclose its inspiring secret [by showing] its vibration, its colour, its form."[108] In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad employs words of estrangement such as *as if, seem, appear, as* and *like* "to translate the description of an internal state into an objective description."[109] These words usually describe visual facts, revealing through imaginative comparison the inner truth concealed underneath the outward appearance.[110] Thus, the narrator takes an external point of view in describing some internal state that he is not sure about.[111]

As if locution introduces adverbial clauses indicating comparison with some hypothetical circumstance and can carry an unreal or a potentially real truth value.[112] As its grammatical function suggests, the *as if* locution has a striking bias towards conjecture. It drives the narrator and thus the reader towards a process of guessing and inference, which entails the impossibility of a direct representation of the real

[106] *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, op. cit., Preface, pp. xi-ii.
[107] *Heart of Darkness*, p. 41. Italics Mine.
[108] *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, op. cit., Preface, pp. xi-ii.
[109] *Conrad's Narrative Voice*, op. cit., p. 129.
[110] Ibid., p. 133.
[111] Ibid., p. 129.
[112] Ibid., p. 130.

thing. As a result, modifications, through *as if* locutions, may be said to "set up in the reader's mind some hesitancy between the real and the illusory, the true and the imaginary."[113] Furthermore, they involve the reader in the evaluative process and as well as control his evaluation.[114] In this context, Guerard points out that many similes in Conrad, "work visually and morally at the same time."[115] The reader is reduced to the status of spectator and forced to conjecture about the character's inner life from his observation of externals.[116] Marlow's comments on the African coast reflect his state of mind at the beginning of the journey. The coast continues to arouse his curiosity, "the coast looked the same, as though we had not moved" (*HD*, 19) and "the formless past bordered by dangerous surf, as if Nature herself had tried to ward off intruders" (20). In all three examples the *as if* locutions provide visual images of the coast as well as an account of how these visual images affect Marlow.[117] Throughout *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow uses *as if* locutions to modify elements about his own impressions, feelings, emotions and thoughts, frequently in collocation with a verb of perception or cognition in clauses where he appears either as the recipient subject or the (sometimes elliptical) object:[118]

> It was just *as though* I had been let into some conspiracy [...] I stood appalled, *as though* by a warning [...] It looked *as though* he would presently put to us some question [...] There was a sense of extreme disappointment, *as though* I had found out I had been striving after something altogether without a substance [...] What made this emotion so overpowering was [...] the moral shock I received, *as if* something altogether monstrous [...] had been thrust upon me.[119]

[113] *Conrad's Narrative Voice*, op. cit., p. 131.
[114] Ibid., p. 132.
[115] Albert J. Guerard, *Conrad the Novelist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 122.
[116] Ibid., p. 132.
[117] *Conrad's Narrative Voice*, op. cit., p. 134.
[118] Ibidem.
[119] *Heart of Darkness*, pp. 15, 23, 66, 67, 92. Italics Mine.

None of these expressions includes a transfer of meaning from the literal to the figurative level, but in each of them the narrator-protagonist reflects on his own state of consciousness as if that, too, are only to be inferred and not directly accessible to him.[120] This also implies that the effect of an event on an individual consciousness is as important as the event itself.[121]

In conclusion, we can say that *as if* locution is a highly useful technical device for establishing point of view and perspective by conveying information about other characters as impressions received, or conjectures entertained by the narrator or character whose point of view is adopted. At the same time, their function is not confined to the structural level but extends into theme as well. It is in this area that their main import lies, for they introduce comparisons with hypothetical circumstances which, under certain conditions, may become real. More concretely, they offer conjecture on, and interpretation of the significance of perceived facts and objects of the extraordinary world and point to alternatives that have varying degrees of truth value (from the real to the unreal), and thus have to be seen also in relation to the problem of the hard task of perceiving truth, an epistemological problem that lies at the heart of *Heart of Darkness*.

In modalisations with *seem* and *appear*, the narrator withdraws into a distance and leaves it to the reader to pass judgement on a particular act, event, or character at a particular moment. Therefore, the character and the reader are faced with appearances and subjective sense impressions, a situation that reflects the basic epistemological situation of man in Conrad's sceptical view of the world. Hence, Conrad is usually

[120] *Conrad's Narrative Voice*, p. 135.
[121] Ibid., p. 140.

less interested in giving essential facts about the characters than in making us share in the imperfect imagination of the characters through human eyes.[122]

Conrad's most complex persona, Marlow, is fascinated by the inconclusive enigmas and uncertainties, but he is also obsessed with expounding them. Words of estrangement, which emphasise the subjective nature of all cognition, relieve the narrator of part of the responsibility for the truth of his statements. Marlow, affected by all the uncertainties and doubts typical of a post-Victorian man, and with something like Conrad's own "conscientious regard for the truth of [his] own sensations,"[123] finds that a true account of the effect his African journey had on him must also convey the doubts and uncertainties of his emotive and cognitive experience.[124] The following are instances of outward description of observed events and attitudes whose significance is imperfectly apprehended from their external manifestations and therefore invites speculation:

> They did not *seem* aware; the elder man [...] *seemed* very vexed; the two fellows there *seemed* astounded; a gesture that [...] *seemed* to beckon [...] a treacherous appeal; the man did not *seem* capable of a whisper.[125]

All these examples from *Heart of Darkness* summon conjecture from the part of the reader.

The frequency of the use of the "seem-modalisation" increases during Marlow's interview with the Intended, who "seemed ready to listen without mental reservation" (*HD,* 104). Her unshaken belief in the hollow Kurtz brings back Marlow's experience in the heart of darkness with overwhelming force. Even before he enters the house,

[122] *Conrad's Narrative Voice*, p. 152.
[123] Joseph Conrad, *Typhoon and Other Stories* (London: Digireads.com Publishing, 2009), p. 6.
[124] *Conrad's Narrative Voice*, op. cit., p. 153.
[125] *Heart of Darkness*, pp. 44, 45, 46, 47, 86.

his retrospective vision of Kurtz lying on the stretcher becomes agonisingly powerful. When he rings the doorbell, Kurtz's face "seemed to stare at [him] out of the glassy panel" (104). Marlow's retrospective image of Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* echoes Scrooge seeing dead Marley's face in the knocker of his door in Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*.[126] It also echoes Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher."[127] Marlow's interview with the Intended ends with "it seemed to me that the house would collapse before I could escape, that the heavens would fall upon my head" (*HD*, 111). In both of these literary instances, the supernatural event is presented as real, but the point of Conrad's modalisations is precisely that such experiences of the uncanny, the mysterious and the inexplicable are internalised as subjective imaginations, or speculative and interpretative analogies of impressions and emotions that it is impossible to express directly.[128] The effect of these traumatic recollections on Marlow is so powerful that the boundaries between seen reality and subjective imagination become blurred. Conrad goes beyond that all to suggest that Kurtz is an actual presence, a revenant.[129]

With the like-simile, the object of comparison often needs to be described before it can be compared, "The voice of the surf [...] was a positive pleasure, like the speech of a brother;" (*HD*, 19) "a taint of imbecile rapacity blew through it all, like whiff from some corpse;" (33) "the fact dazzling, to be seen, like the foam on the depths of the sea, like a ripple on an unfathomable enigma" (60).

All in all, the aim of the exploration of the main functions of the different words of estrangement in different contexts is to show their wide range and flexibility as well

[126] Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (London: Aladdine Classics, 2004).
[127] Egar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1989).
[128] *Conrad's Narrative Voice*, op. cit., p. 154.
[129] Ibid., p. 155.

as their importance in Conrad's narrative strategy of distancing the reader while making him *see* and re-live the character's own experience.

The third chapter discusses the variety of critical responses to *Heart of Darkness*. It focuses on the deconstructivist approach to literary criticism which highlights the literary text's undecidability and indeterminacy.

CHAPTER III. CRITICAL RESPONSES *TO HEART OF DARKNESS*

Heart of Darkness as a very controversial novel demands careful examination and scrutiny. As seen earlier, the stylistic aspects of its narrative discourse, such as impressionism, symbolism, irony and Janiformity, to name but a few, are considered pivotal in the interpretation of the novel. Any disregard of such discursive ploy would undoubtedly lead readers and critics astray. The present chapter therefore investigates the different critical responses to *Heart of Darkness*. First, it examines Achebe's momentous judgement of the novel's depiction of Africa and Africans as offensive and racist. Achebe's accusation of Conrad as a bloody racist was and is still a subject of considerable debate. Many writers, such as Francis B. Singh, Patrick Brantlinger and Edward W. Said, seem to conform to Achebe's view, attacking Conrad's ethnocentricity and complicity with colonial evil. Others, such as V. S. Naipaul, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Wilson Harris and Cedric Watts defended Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* stressing the fact that the Polish writer, instead of embracing such *fin de siècle* racist and imperialist ideologies, undermines and subverts them. This miscellany of interpretations stems from the complexity of Conrad's narrative style, which is fundamentally very suggestive and paradoxical. It denies the view that a novel should have only one primary meaning. Deconstructionist critics contend that language is a system of differences with no positive terms, and with only arbitrary links between signifier, signified and referent. Thus, meaning is a lateral event within the language system. Perry Meisel, for instance, argues that meaning is hidden, absent and decentred. It is in the haze or on the periphery, or simply, it falls in a myth of presence. The meaning behind the veil of Kurtz is shadowy and wanting, just like language itself.

Likewise, the American deconstructionist literary critic, J. Hillis Miller, states that, "Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text, but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself. Its apparently-solid ground is no rock, but thin air."[1] Therefore, Miller gives a close analysis of the veiling and unveiling forces in *Heart of Darkness*. His paper, "Should We Read *Heart of Darkness*?" is a strong argument in favour of the close reading of the novel as a literary work. He also emphasises the parabolic and apocalyptic nature of Conrad's work. No one can figure out the meaning of Marlow's experience except those who have crossed over the threshold of the horror.

3.1. Achebe's Postcolonial Challenge to *Heart of Darkness*

> It was unearthly, 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 and 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 (*HD*, 51).

One of the most fateful events in *Heart of Darkness* criticism is Chinua Achebe's 1975 scathing attack asserting that Conrad is a "bloody racist"[2] and that *Heart of Darkness* is racist. Thus, it cannot be considered a great work of art. In his polemical essay "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," which was published in 1978, Achebe argued that the text's depiction of Africa and Africans was offensive. He pointed out that "*Heart of Darkness* projects the image of Africa as 'the other world,' the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization."[3] He further explained that, "white racism against Africa is such a normal way of thinking that its

[1] J. Hillis Miller, "Stevens' Rock and Criticism as Cure," *Georgia Review* Vol. 30 No. 2, (Summer, 1976), pp. 330-348; p. 341.
[2] "An Image of Africa," op. cit., p. 9.
[3] Ibid., p. 3.

manifestations go completely undetected."[4] Hence, Achebe's charge of racism enlivened Conrad's studies and sparked an ongoing controversy and debate.[5] Between the two poles of vivid denunciation and fundamental reinterpretation an array of other positions emerged.

Indian Francis B. Singh assaults Conrad's complicity with colonialism. In his 1978 essay, Singh claims that "Marlow's ethnocentricity leads him to side with the colonizers against the Africans and […] this attitude is shared by Conrad as well."[6] V. S. Naipaul and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, however, hold a very different view of Conrad.They find a kindred spirit in Conrad, whom they consider as a non-British-born novelist whose absorption into the English tradition does little to dispel his sense of cultural dislocation. The Guyanese novelist Wilson Harris however, expresses his sympathy for Achebe's view resting on "an appreciation of his uneasiness in the face of biases that continue to reinforce themselves in post-Imperial Western establishments," he, however, concludes that Achebe's judgement of *Heart of Darkness* is as a racist work is "a profoundly mistaken one."[7] Harris sees Conrad as an important precursor and *Heart of Darkness* as a threshold text, poised on the verge of dismantling European monolithic prejudices.[8] Writing at the zenith of Empire, the age of Joseph Chamberlain and Cecil Rhodes, Conrad undermines mainstream imperialist attitudes and opinion from the beginning, illuminating a feature of his modernity. Harris, then, contends that though Conrad seems to construct and reinforce racist binaries, he actually questions their prevalence during the *fin de siècle* era and

[4] "An Image of Africa," op. cit., p. 3.
[5] John Thieme, *Postcolonial Con-Texts: Writing Back to the Canon* (New York: Continuum, 2001), p. 15.
[6] Krajka Wieslaw, *Beyond the Roots: the Evolution of Conrad's Ideology and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 84.
[7] Wilson Harris, "The Frontier on Which 'Heart of Darkness' Stands," *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Special Issue on Chinua Achebe (Spring, 1981), pp. 86-93; p. 86.
[8] *Postcolonial Con-Texts*, op. cit., p. 13.

this is very apparent in the imagery he uses to uncover Kurtz's "liberal manifesto of imperial good and moral light."[9] However, for Harris, like for Achebe, Conrad's fiction lacks a feasible alternative. His work remains locked in a form of parody that unveils the delusions on which the social order is grounded, but is unable to offer a different vision of consciousness.[10]

In response to Achebe's critique of *Heart of Darkness*, Cedric Watts wrote an essay entitled "'A Bloody Racist': About Achebe's View of Conrad" which was published in *The Yearbook of English Studies* in 1983. Watts's central point is that writers, such as Conrad, were subject to some important nineteenth-century biases and preoccupations like racism, but that their best work "seems to transcend such prejudices."[11] Thus, Cedric Watts answers Achebe by defending the authenticity of Conrad's subjective response, "Conrad is offering an entirely plausible rendering of the responses of a British traveller of c.1890 to the strange and bewildering experiences offered by the Congo."[12] Edward Said, an admirer of many aspects of *Heart of Darkness*, maintains that culture and imperialism are inextricably linked and genres such as the novel "were immensely important in the formation of imperial attitudes, references, and experiences."[13] In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said foregrounds the implication of culture in the imperial enterprise. He also protests against "unitary or monolithic or autonomous"[14] structuring of cultures. Said further asserts that imperialism is a veiled metanarrative in much Western cultural creation.[15] In his essay "Two Visions in *Heart of Darkness*," Said points out that Conrad's

[9] "The Frontier on Which 'Heart of Darkness' Stands," op. cit., p. 88.
[10] *Postcolonial Con-Texts*, op. cit., p. 32.
[11] Peter Childs, *Postcolonial Theory and English Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 187-8.
[12] Cedric Watts, " 'A Bloody Racist': About Achebe's View of Conrad," *Yearbook of English Studies* 13 (1983), pp. 196-209; p. 199.
[13] *Culture and Imperialism*, op. cit., p. xii.
[14] Ibid., p. 15.
[15] *Postcolonial Con-Texts*, op. cit., p. 16.

novella epitomises contemporary attitudes in the West to the world outside Euroamerica. He concludes that the darkness of the book needs to be read as anti-colonial resistance.[16] Said claims that colonialism gave rise to hierarchic power relations in which the coloniser was always and inevitably the Self to the marginalised Other, the colonised. By identifying the Other, the coloniser avows his right to decide what that Other could or should be. Thus, the colonised is moulded into whatever best served the economic and political interests of the coloniser.[17] In this regard, Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, maintains that the uneven power relations between coloniser and colonised create the structural relation of mutual degradation. Fanon drew his insights from his work in Algerian psychiatric hospitals, where he found that the colonial situation turned the French into torturers and the Algerians into dehumanised sufferers: a Manichean struggle between light and dark, good and evil, echoed throughout in the very language of Conrad's novella.[18]

Moreover, Patrick Brantlinger's article "Kurtz's "Darkness" and *Heart of Darkness*," from *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914*, examines Achebe's argument and the dispute over the novel's pro- and anti-imperialist messages. It also offers an indispensable overview of the historical scene in terms of the Belgian Congo and Conrad's sources.[19] Confirming Achebe's criticism, Brantlinger argues that the novel's rendering of Africa bears striking similarities to popular traveller's tales – to the best-selling accounts of nineteenth century explorers and missionaries.[20] Brantlinger notes, "[t]he more that Europeans

[16] *Postcolonial Theory and English Literature*, op. cit., p. 188.
[17] Bruce King, *New National and Post-colonial Literature: An Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 165.
[18] *Postcolonial Theory and English Literature*, p. 189.
[19] Ibid., p. 188.
[20] Patrick Brantlinger, "Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985), pp. 166-203; 175.

dominated Africans, the more savage Africans came to seem."[21] Romanticising such orthodox tropes as primitive savagery and the Dark Continent, *Heart of Darkness* recovers the myth of darkness that sustains the prevailing ideology.[22] In another essay (1885) entitled "*Heart of Darkness*: Anti-Imperialism, Racism, or Impressionism?," Brantlinger maintains that Kurtz's dying words denote the lying idealism of European civilisation. He argues that, in his death, Kurtz is redeemed because he realises the real horror of hiding behind the nobility of bringing the light of civilisation to the African heathen, veiling the true cruelty of what really happened. He interpreted much of the horrors depicted in the novel as the actual atrocities of King Leopold's bloody colonial system in the Congo.[23]

Nevertheless, Marlow's role in this debate is fundamental, since he seems to be the focal point in the so-called dehumanisation of the Africans, by mainly consigning them to the role of flitting shadows glimpsed in the prehistoric forest.[24] Marlow recounts the story as if it were first-hand experience. Although Achebe is aware of the likelihood of distance between author and narrator, pointing out that Marlow's narrative is itself framed by a "second, shadowy person," he nevertheless thinks that Conrad fails

> to draw *a cordon sanitaire* between himself and the moral and psychological malaise of his narrator [...] because he neglects to hint, clearly and adequately, at an alternative frame of reference by which we may judge the actions and opinions of his characters.[25]

[21] "Victorians and Africans," p. 184.
[22] Bette London, "Reading Race and Gender in Conrad's Dark Continent," *Criticism*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Summer, 1989), pp. 235-252; p. 241.
[23] Patrick Brantlinger, "*Heart of Darkness*: Anti-Imperialism, Racism, or Impressionism?," *Criticism*, Vol. 27, No. 4, (Fall, 1985), pp. 363-385; p. 381.
[24] *Postcolonial Con-Texts*, op. cit., p. 29.
[25] "An Image of Africa," op. cit., p. 7.

Conrad presents Marlow as a narrator who partially understands his experiences. Thus, the major irony of the tale is that Marlow relates experiences whose full import – as it arises through its symbolism and irony as well as through the fine selection and arrangement of scenes – he (and his immediate circle of listeners) is unaware of. This enhances Marlow's value as a narrative vehicle. To echo the *Four Quartets*,[26] he had the experience but missed the meaning. Conrad secures the objectivity he needs partly with the help of his ironic method, partly by employing a narrator, and partly by making Marlow relate his tale in retrospect. Conrad's detachment has to be particularly firm in this tale because he deals with imperial realities which he finds both profoundly alarming and illuminating. Thus, the ironic method is one of exposure and also one of detachment. Its subtlety half-conceals the tale's meanings which otherwise would have been too appalling for the majority of his readers, the readership of the pro-imperial *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* which originally published it, its first part appearing in the thousandth anniversary number. In the heyday of Empire, its critics, a tiny minority, criticised the particular ways of running an empire rather than empire itself, but Conrad, in *Heart of Darkness*, does both and more than that.[27]

Achebe's accusation of Conrad's failure to justly depict the African reality was based on the idea that a novel could and should truly portray reality. His challenge to *Heart of Darkness* for its alleged racism took it for granted that a novel could and should have only one primary meaning. In addition, his criticism about the lack of any clear and adequate clue of a stable "frame of reference by which we may judge the

[26] T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (New York: Mariner Books, 1968).
[27] D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke, *Joseph Conrad: Beyond Culture and Background*, (London: Macmillan, 1990), p. 75.

actions and opinions of [the] characters"[28] depended on the assertion that a novel could and should provide such a frame of reference. Nevertheless, deconstructionist critics contend that no literary text could truly portray reality, possess one final primary meaning, or provide a stable "frame of reference by which we may judge the actions and opinions of [its] characters."[29] The idea that such things were possible was a philosophical error and an ideological mystification. Even the classic realist texts of the nineteenth century, when read closely, revealed themselves to be contradictory, fissured, and unstable. That instability was foregrounded in the great texts of modernism.[30]

3.2. The Disappearance of Kurtz on the Periphery of Darkness

> Language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique.[31]

Psychoanalytic critics read *Heart of Darkness* as a psychological novel representing the "journey into self," or "a night journey into the unconscious."[32] The deconstructionist view of *Heart of Darkness* came as a reaction to the psychoanalytic counterpart. Deconstructionists assert that *Heart of Darkness* dramatises no confrontation with a psychological truth but recognition of the futility of truth-seeking.[33] In his essay, "Connaissance du Vide," Tzvetan Todorov affirms that *Heart of Darkness* deals with a problem of interpretation rather than action. Musing about the nature of knowledge, the tale determines that knowledge is fundamentally inaccessible. Todorov highlights that we know very little about Kurtz, who is eagerly

[28] "An Image of Africa," op. cit., p. 7.
[29] Ibidem., p. 7.
[30] *Beyond the Roots*, op. cit., pp. 85-6.
[31] Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *The Structuralist Controversy*, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), pp. 247-265; p. 254.
[32] *Conrad the Novelist*, op. cit., pp. 33, 39.
[33] J. Hillis Miller, *Poets of Reality* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1965), pp. 20-26

projected and vividly remembered but hardly ever present. Marlow's query about the enigma of Kurtz discloses that "knowledge is impossible; the entire text tells us that the heart of darkness is itself dark," Marlow goes to the centre only to learn that "the centre is empty."[34] An evocative early example of a deconstructionist approach to *Heart of Darkness* is provided by Perry Meisel in his 1978 essay "Decentering 'Heart of Darkness'." Meisel focused on the implied epistemology of the novella stating that the novel enacts a crisis in knowledge. Epistemology means the theory of the method and/or grounds of knowledge. Meisel examines the ways in which *Heart of Darkness* represents Marlow's quest for knowledge, a futile quest though. Conrad persistently frustrates Marlow's attempts, and also those of the reader, to find a fixed and final meaning, a definite centre that can provide semantic stability.[35] Meisel explains that both readers and critics of *Heart of Darkness* are trapped in a play of language. As noted earlier, he put forward the idea that meaning is a lateral event within language. Critics, he argued, mistakenly presuppose to find in *Heart of Darkness* a direct or symbolic relationship between words and things. For instance, Conrad's use of the word *Kurtz*, which means short in German, to refer to the enigmatic character of the story confirms this play of language. Undoubtedly, it is Conrad's fundamental conception of how language itself fashions and controls the sort of knowledge we have that represents Marlow's profound realisation, one which he finds, in Conrad's words, "altogether monstrous, intolerable to thought and odious to the soul" (*HD,* 92). Meisel cites Karl Abel's, Freud's and Saussure's views of meaning as an antithetical formation suggesting that signification takes place in a sphere apart from those states of the world to which it arbitrarily refers. He expounds that if language means by

[34] Trans. Mine, "Que la connaissance soit impossible, que le cœur des ténèbres soit lui-même ténébreux, le texte tout entier nous le dit. Le centre est vide." Tzvetan Todorov, "Connaissance du Vide," *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse*, 11 (Spring, 1975), pp. 145-154 ; p. 145.
[35] *Beyond the Roots*, op. cit., p. 86.

virtue of differential or oppositional relations within the system it constitutes, then meaning is the product of internal resonances within the system itself, rather than the effect of actual links between the system and real states of the world.[36]

In pursuing Conrad's epistemology, Meisel focuses on Marlow's main conclusion about Kurtz, one based upon the evidence of the shrunken heads displayed under Mr Kurtz's windows in the Inner Station:

> They only showed that Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts, that there was something wanting in him – some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence (*HD*, 83).

It is the likelihood of finding "some […] matter," in the sense of substance that Marlow argues "could not be found," even in its effect of producing nothing concrete to judge the actions of Mr Kurtz. Meisel asserts that the differential meaning of "wanting" suggests that language, the inescapable medium of Marlow's interpretation of Kurtz, is in no position to discover the "matter" which Marlow, like all interpreters, wishes to assign to the indefinable object of his quest. Because language is a differential or lateral phenomenon, it is not in a subject/object, or surface/depth, relationship to the states of the world its signs appear to designate.[37]

Meisel turns to explain the process of decentring in the novel. He pointed out that every discovery of a centre or an origin is subject to a decentring.[38] In other words, every disclosure of a ground is subject to the recession of that ground. First, Meisel reads Marlow's parable of the Roman officials who came to Britain long ago as a caution he brings to bear on his own notions about the centrality of the Congo. To the

[36] Perry Meisel, "Decentering 'Heart of Darkness'," *Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Autumn, 1978), pp. 20-28; p. 22.
[37] "Decentering *'Heart of Darkness',*" op. cit., p. 23.
[38] "Structure, Sign, and Play," op. cit., p. 254.

Roman, he explained, Britain is the edge of a circle whose centre is Rome. Centuries later, Britain became itself the centre of another circle whose edge includes African colonies. As a result, the Congo will necessarily make up the centre of still another, newer circle, whose edge will in turn make up the centre of still another new circle, and so forth. Meisel concludes that the model is epistemological as well as political. That is, Marlow's reference to the past of Britain is an evidence of a continuous recession of power and knowledge. Second, Conrad's narrative discourse helps to explain the problem of Marlow's search for Kurtz, and the forever recessive object, or centre, which Kurtz comprises. It is just this shift or recession of centres that makes up the drama of Marlow's quest. Pursuing Kurtz to the Central Station, Marlow finds that there is still another centre, the Inner Station. And having found Kurtz there, Marlow still finds the essential Kurtz to escape him again, since the object of his quest is a "shadow," "unsteady, […] pale, indistinct, like a vapour" (*HD*, 86, 93). All Marlow has to work with is "a voice," "discoursing," (67) nothing but language. In this way, Kurtz has, in the Saussurean implications the text seems to affirm, "kicked himself loose of the earth" (95). In fact, Kurtz has "kicked the very earth to pieces" (95). As a piece of language, Kurtz is "wanting" the "earth" or "matter" that Marlow wishes him to comprise, so as to make him an object concrete enough to seize upon. Kurtz is twice described as long: "he looked at least seven feet long," (85) "he rose […] long […] like a vapour" (93). But because the recessive Kurtz is a mere series of contradictory, differential utterances: his ground, his objecthood, cannot be located.[39] "There was nothing either above or below him," says Marlow, "and I knew it […] did not know whether I stood on the ground or floated in the air" (*HD*, 95). This recession of presence, this decentring, is in evidence throughout the novel and constitutes the

[39] "Decentering 'Heart of Darkness'," op. cit., p. 23-4.

book's active epistemological principle. It is closely related to the famous definition of meaning attributed to Marlow at the beginning of the story:

> the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine (*HD*, 8).

Conrad's frame narrator rejects the notion of meaning as a core or "kernel" without misgivings. He, instead, sets up a more delicate definition that plays upon the meanings of "spectral illumination." Meisel maintains that "spectral" simultaneously signifies "prismatic" and "phantom-like." Thus, the narrator defines meaning as threefold: without substance in the sense of "spectre," multiple and prismatic in the sense of "spectrum," and at a distance from an original source of illumination of the "moonshine." Besides, it is exactly these requirements that Marlow meets again at the close of the sentence of the truth about Mr Kurtz: "[…] some […] matter which […] could not be found under his magnificent eloquence" (83). Meisel contends that just as there is no "kernel" inside, so there is nothing to "be found under Kurtz's "eloquence." The reason has nothing to do with Kurtz being a liar, but with the inevitable conditions of meaning itself. Marlow misses the "matter" of Kurtz's meaning not because it is difficult to trace or, as the psychological critics might argue, because it must remain repressed, but because it simply does not exist. Meisel concludes that the geology of surface/depth meaning must reveal, in Marlow's understanding as well as in our own, a lateral or surface topography, a map perhaps, of differential relations within a system of representations or signs.[40] Conrad is concerned with representations throughout the text. Marlow says that truth "could not be found under his magnificent eloquence" (*HD*, 95). Kurtz's eloquence is figured im-

[40] "Decentering 'Heart of Darkness'," op. cit., p. 24.

plicitly as a fabric or raiment. The word "under" makes "eloquence" a shell, a covering of some kind, elsewhere in the text it is described directly as "folds of eloquence," (*HD*, 98) similar to the "diaphanous folds" (6) of the narrator's own discourse. Like the novel's descriptions of maps, documents, dress, ciphers, and so on, the numerous images of fabric constitute representations of representations, each one signifying a network of relations much like the one presented by the text itself. Meisel claims that these are Conrad's alternative and interchangeable metaphors for the structure of language that we, just like Marlow, interpret in the quest of discovery. The horror that assails Marlow, Meisel suggests, has to do with the impossibility of unveiling a central core, a kernel, even a ground to Kurtz's actions and identity. So when critics ponder over Kurtz's absence from his cabin, Meisel offers the alternative inference that Kurtz's absence is itself a sign for his meaning, one which is "short" or "wanting" (85).

Last but not least, Meisel acknowledges, in a proper deconstructive fashion, that his own reading of *Heart of Darkness* "falls into a myth of presence," (26) and that his use of such terms as "key" or "layer" (26) contradicts "the very deconstruction and decentring of presence and depth" (26). His approach is one that aims to reveal the hidden truth of the text, even if its hidden truth is that there is no hidden truth, its only revelation that of an endlessly absent centre, an infinite postponement of final meaning.[41] Thus, just like Marlow's listeners, "we are fated […] to read about one of Marlow's inconclusive experiences."[42]

[41] *Beyond the Roots*, op. cit., p. 93.
[42] *Heart of Darkness*, p. 10. Italics mine.

3.3 Revisiting the Horror: Deferring the Apocalypse

> One way to define the darkness is to say that it is incompatible with language.[43]

Another deconstructive critic who delved into the intricacies of *Heart of Darkness* is J. Hillis Miller, a literary theorist from Yale school. In his seminal essay, "Should we read *Heart of Darkness*?," Miller gives a strong argument in favour of close reading. He maintains that readers of *Heart of Darkness* should perform a reading which is active and responsible and which renders justice to the novel by generating more language in its turn, the language of attestation, even though that language may remain silent or implicit. Miller refers to Paul Celan's aphorism that "[n]o one bears witness for the witness."[44] That is, readers should read Conrad's novella themselves and should testify afresh.[45] Miller argues that *Heart of Darkness* has received harsh criticism. It has been read by many critics as racist, sexist, and Eurocentric. Miller scrutinises Achebe's charge that "Conrad was a bloody racist,"[46] and Bette London's assertion that "the novel […] promotes a racial as well as gender ideology,"[47] as well as Edward Said's severe statement in Culture and Imperialism that "the cultural and ideological evidence that Conrad was wrong in his Eurocentric way is both impressive and rich."[48] These are powerful critical charges. Nonetheless, no one bears witness for the witness. Readers should read closely the novella to render justice to its writer.[49]

Miller examines the different ways in which *Heart of Darkness* presents itself as literature. First of all, Miller appreciates Conrad's reliance on two imaginary

[43] J. Hillis Miller, *Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth Century Writers*, op. cit., p. 36.
[44] Paul Celan, "Aschenglorie," in *Atemwende* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967), 68; trans. by Joachim Neugroschel in Celan, *Speech-grille and Selected Poems* (New York: Dutton, 1971), p. 240.
[45] "Should We Read *Heart of Darkness*?," op. cit., p. 115.
[46] "An Image of Africa," op. cit., p. 9.
[47] "Reading Race and Gender," op. cit., p. 238.
[48] *Culture and Imperialism*, op. cit., p. 30.
[49] "Should We Read *Heart of Darkness*?," op. cit., p. 116.

narrators, neither of whom is to be identified with Conrad. A second criterion which renders *Heart of Darkness* a work of art, not a historical account nor an autobiography, is Conrad's use of the different rhetorical devices which make up the texture of the text. For example, Conrad employs the "like" and "as-if" similes to compare something to something else. This 'something else' forms a regular subtext defining the facts of the story as a veil burying something more truthful behind. Irony is another literary figure typical of *Heart of Darkness*. For instance the reference to the Europeans at the Central Station as pilgrims is pregnant with meaning. Since such ironies thrive into great crowds of little contradicting ironies, they are fundamentally indeterminate or undecidable in meaning. Last but not least, the different personifications of darkness, or prosopopoeias, are another distinctive literary feature of *Heart of Darkness*. This is very apparent in the novel's title in which darkness has a "heart." Furthermore, in *Heart of Darkness*, prosopopoeias are a chief means of naming by indirection what Conrad calls, in a misleading and inadequate metaphor, "the darkness,"[50] "the wilderness,"[51] or, simply "it" (69). The wilderness destroys Kurtz by a kind of diabolical seduction:

> The wilderness had patted him on the head […] it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation (69).

As such, the wilderness or the darkness remains something unknown, unknowable, and unnameable.[52] All in all, these stylistic features, the narrative frame, the simile, the irony and the prosopopoeia create a demand that *Heart of Darkness* be read as a piece of great art rather than a simple mimetic or referential work that would allow

[50] *Heart of Darkness*, pp. 8, 9, 10, 12, 16, 26, 31, 47, 50, 68, 70, 70, 89, 91, 97, 98, 99, 101, 105, 108, 108, 109, 109, 110, 111.
[51] Ibid., pp. 9, 9, 19, 33, 34, 43, 46, 48, 50, 59, 69, 70, 79, 83, 87, 87, 89, 91, 94, 95, 98, 106,.
[52] "Should We Read *Heart of Darkness*?," op. cit., p. 119.

the reader to hold Conrad himself directly responsible for what is said as if he were a journalist or a travel writer (121). The frame narrator's famous passage about the nature of Marlow's narrative is very decisive in trying to assimilate the meaning of *Heart of Darkness*,

> The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical […] and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine (8).

The frame narrator distinguishes two types of tales. The first is the sort of seaman's yarn. Its meaning lies within, like the shell of a cracked nut. This sort of tales, Miller asserts, names a realistic, mimetic, referential tale with an obvious point and moral. Marlow's tales, on the other hand, have a different way of making meaning. Their meaning is invisible and never named in itself. It is not inside the tale but outside, "brought out" (8) indirectly by the things that are named and recounted, thereby made visible.[53] As a result, all the visible representational elements and facts, all that the tale makes us *see*, according to Conrad's famous assertion that his task was "above all to make [us] see,"[54] have as their function to make something else visible, the "unseen," (89) perhaps even the unseeable. Kurtz's whispered words of horror, for instance, are obscure, spectral and apocalyptic,

> The dusk was repeating them in a persistent whisper all around us, in a whisper that seemed to swell menacingly like the first whisper of a rising wind. 'The horror! The horror!'(110).

[53] "Should We Read *Heart of Darkness*?," op. cit., p. 122.
[54] *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, op. cit., Preface, pp. xi-ii.

Thus, the illumination, the "light" (11) provided by the tale is "spectral" (8). It turns everything into a ghostly phantom. Miller points out that the frame narrator's distinction between seaman's yarns and Marlow's tales is an impressive aesthetic distinction between mimetic literature and apocalyptic, parabolic, or allegorical literature. Therefore, the meaning of Kurtz's words can only be inferred and displaced into something larger, spectral and apocalyptic.[55]

Unfortunately, many critics of *Heart of Darkness*, such as Achebe, make the fundamental mistake of taking the story as an instance of the first kind of seaman's yarn. Critics, such as F. R. Leavis, disapproved Conrad's adjectival insistence on the "unspeakable,"[56] "impenetrable,"[57] and "inscrutable,"[58] which he saw as a stylistic flaw which served to muffle rather than magnify the meaning behind the tale.[59] Miller praises Leavis's in-depth reading of *Heart of Darkness*, "At least such critics have taken the trouble to read carefully and have noticed that there are important verbal elements in the text that must be accounted for somehow and that do not fit the straightforward mimetic, descriptive paradigm."[60] Miller concludes that the "darkness," the "wilderness," the "it" remain to the end unnameable, inscrutable and unspeakable. Their meaning is deferred. It can only be revealed to those who have crossed over the threshold of death. The reader is told that "it" is "The horror!" but just what that means is never explained except in hints and indirections.[61] Thus, *Heart*

[55] "Should We Read *Heart of Darkness*?," op. cit., p. 122.
[56] *Heart of Darkness*, pp. 71, 89, 111.
[57] Ibid., pp. 48, 61, 68, 79, 89, 99.
[58] Ibid., pp. 8, 31, 48, 87.
[59] *The Great Tradition*, op. cit., pp. 196-7.
[60] "Should We Read *Heart of Darkness*?," op. cit., p. 123.
[61] Ibid., p. 123.

of Darkness is governed by what Derrida calls "the exemplary secret of literature"[62] that is the infinitely postponed promise of a conclusive unveiling that never ensues.[63]

In "*Heart of Darkness* Revisited," (1983) Miller asserts that the novella is both parabolic and apocalyptic, explaining that a parable is the use of a realistic story to express concealed reality. The narrative of *Heart of Darkness* is grounded on the facts of history and on the facts of Conrad's life but Conrad uses these facts to express something transhistorical and transpersonal, the evasive truth underlying both historical and personal experience.[64] Thus, the parable is an act of unveiling an unseen reality. Likewise, apocalypse means unveiling. It is a narrative unveiling or revelation. Apocalyptic literature comprises prophetic or quasi-prophetic stories which tend to present doom-laden visions of the world as well as sombre and threatening predictions of mankind's destiny.[65] Therefore, both parable and apocalypse are the act of narrative unveiling of the things that were unseen and unknown before. Hence, they shed light, penetrate darkness, clarify and illuminate. Marlow says of his experience in the heart of darkness, "It was sombre enough, […] and yet it seemed to throw a kind of light" (*HD,* 11).

As a matter of fact, Miller distinguishes two different ways in which the narrative maybe related to its meaning: simple tales and parables, what Conrad's frame narrator called "seamen's yarns" and "Marlow's tales" (*HD,* 8). The meaning of the stories of most seamen is inside the kernel of a cracked nut. The story itself, its characters and narrative details represent the shell which must be removed so that meaning maybe

[62] Jacques Derrida, *Passions,* trans. David Wood, *On the Name,* Ed. Thmas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 29.
[63] "Should We Read *Heart of Darkness*?," op. cit., p. 126.
[64] J. Hillis Miller, "*Heart of Darkness* Revisited," 1983. in Ross C. Murfin, *Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness* (Boston: MacMillan, 1996), pp. 206-20; p. 214.
[65] J. A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p. 48.

revealed. Unlike simple tales, parables have their meaning outside, enveloping the tale. The meaning contains the tale. The latter is in correspondence to or in resonance with the meaning. The tale mysteriously brings the unseen meaning out and makes it visible.[66] The haze is there all around on a dark night, but, like the meaning of Marlow's tale, it is obscure, silent, and ambiguous, just like the darkness or like "something great and invincible" (*HD,* 33). Describing the Director of Companies, the frame narrator observes that, "it was difficult to realize his work was not out there in the luminous estuary, but behind him, within the brooding gloom" (5). The haze is also like the dark name for the truth, the enveloping meaning of the tale "the horror."[67] The haze represents the impossibility of making the reader see the meaning of the darkness. In his famous passage in the Preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus,'* Conrad tells his readers that "[his] task which [he is] trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make [us] hear, to make [us]feel – it is, before all, to make [us]see."[68] Conrad intends to make the reader *see* not only the vivid facts of the story but the elusive truth behind them, "that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask."[69] To *see* the facts, out there in the sunlight, is also to see the dark truth that lies behind them. In Miller's words, "if we see the darkness already, we do not need *Heart of Darkness*. If we do not see it, reading *Heart of Darkness* or even hearing Marlow tell it will not help us."[70] Marlow makes this clear in an extraordinary passage in *Heart of Darkness*,

> This simply because I had a notion it somehow would be of help to that Kurtz whom at the time I did not see – you understand. He was just a word for me. I did not see the man in the name any more than you do. Do you

[66] "*Heart of Darkness* Revisited," op. cit., p. 208.
[67] Ibid., p. 209.
[68] *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, op. cit., Preface, pp. xi-ii.
[69] Ibidem.
[70] "*Heart of Darkness* Revisited," op. cit., p. 210.

> see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream – making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation (*HD*, 39).

In this passage, Marlow makes explicit his sense of the impossibility of his enterprise. He tells his auditors on the *Nellie* that he did not *see* Kurtz in his name any more than they do. The auditors of any story are forced to *see* everything of the story in its name, since a story is made of nothing but names and their adjacent words. There is nothing to see literally in any story except the words on the page, the movement of the lips of the teller. Unlike Marlow, his listeners never have a chance to see or experience directly the man behind the name.[71] Marlow proceeds,

> … 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 … (*HD*, 39).

Here, Marlow makes a vibrant distinction between experience and the interpretation of written or spoken signs. The sensation may only be experienced directly and may by no means, oral or written, be communicated to listeners or readers.[72] When this passage is set against the one about the moonshine, the two together bring out into the open, like a halo in the mist, the way *Heart of Darkness* suggests the impossibility of achieving its goal of revelation, or, in other words, the way it is a revelation of the impossibility of revelation, so to speak. Besides, Marlow's auditors could not see Marlow either. He presents himself as a voice. It is a "narrative that seemed to shape itself without human lips in the heavy night-air of the river" (39). This voice cannot be related to any individual speaker or writer as the ultimate source of its messages,

[71] "*Heart of Darkness* Revisited," op. cit., p. 212.
[72] Ibid., p. 213.

not to Marlow, nor to Kurtz, nor to the first narrator, nor even to Conrad himself.[73] Marlow says of Kurtz's voice as well as other voices,

> A voice. He was very little more than a voice. And I heard – him – it – this voice – other voices – all of them were so little more than voices – and the memory of that time itself lingers around me, impalpable, like a dying vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage, or simply mean, without any kind of sense. Voices, voices (*HD*, 69).

The story echoes thus a cacophony of dissonant voices. It is as though it were spoken or written by the powers of darkness itself, just as Kurtz's last words seem whispered by the circumambient dusky air when Marlow makes his visit to Kurtz's Intended, and just as Kurtz presents himself to Marlow as a voice, a voice which exceeds Kurtz and seems to speak from beyond him, "Kurtz discoursed. A voice! a voice! It rang deep to the very last. It survived his strength to hide in the magnificent folds of eloquence the barren darkness of his heart" (98). Kurtz has "the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness" (68) His report to the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs was "eloquent, vibrating with eloquence" (71) Kurtz, however, is "hollow at the core…." (83) The darkness or the wilderness or both can speak through him.[74]

The witness-about-witness mode of narration is also manifest in *Heart of Darkness*. Miller argues that the thriving relay of witness behind witness, voice behind voice, each speaking in ventriloquism through the one next farther out, each revealing another truth, is a typical feature of the genre of the apocalypse.[75] In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow bears witness to Kurtz's experience and passes it to the primary

[73] "*Heart of Darkness* Revisited," op. cit., p. 216.
[74] Ibidem.
[75] Ibid., p. 214.

narrator who relays it to the readers. The novel is a sequence of episodes, each structured according to the model of appearances, signs, which are also obstacles or veils. Each veil must be lifted to reveal a truth behind which always turns out to be another episode, another witness, another veil to be lifted in its turn. Each such episode is a "fact dazzling, to be seen, like the foam on the depths of the sea, like a ripple on an unfathomable enigma" (60).

Thus, to borrow Marlow's words, *Heart of Darkness* is like a "sordid farce acted in front of a sinister back-cloth" (19). The truth behind the last veil, behind Kurtz, for example, is death, which is another name for "the horror."[76] Marlow says, "the inner truth is hidden – luckily, luckily" (*HD*, 49). Mallow recounts his encounter with Kurtz in his dark room,

> Anything approaching the change that came over his features I have never seen before, and hope never to see again. Oh, I wasn't touched. I was fascinated. It was as though a veil had been rent. […] He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision – he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath: "The horror! The horror!' 'I blew the candle out and left the cabin (*HD*, 100).

For Miller, *Heart of Darkness* is obviously apocalyptic in declaring the end, the downfall of the Western civilisation, or of Western imperialism, the reversal of idealism into barbarism. The idealistic suppression of savage customs becomes "Exterminate all the brutes!" (72). This is not just word play but actual fact of extermination, as the history of the white man's conquest of the world abundantly demonstrated. The conquest means the end of the brutes and, in Conrad's view of history, the end of the Western civilisation with its ideals of progress, enlightenment, and reason, its goal of carrying the torch of civilisation into wilderness and wringing

[76] "*Heart of Darkness* Revisited," op. cit., p. 214.

the heart of the darkness. Or it is the imminence of that end which has never quite come.[77]

In a nutshell, Miller maintains that Kurtz's mystery, the "it," is not only the embodiment of the ideology of European capitalist imperialism but also of its dark shadow, a ghost that cannot be laid. Neither Kurtz nor Marlow, nor Conrad, nor Miller are able to lift the last veil. The process of unveiling always remains yet to come.[78] By unveiling the lack of unveiling in *Heart of Darkness*, J. Hillis Miller says, "I have become another witness of covering over while claiming to illuminate."[79] His *Aufklärung* or enlightenment too has been of the continuing impenetrability of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.[80]

[77] "*Heart of Darkness* Revisited," op. cit., p. 218.
[78] Ibid., p. 127.
[79] Ibid., p. 220.
[80] Ibidem.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we explored the power of the word in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Though Conrad based his story on his experiences in the Belgian Congo, he used these experiences to write an ambiguous story which is fundamentally dubious and controversial. Conrad's narrative discourse has proved to be very intricate and janiform, which renders meaning indeterminate. The recurrence of the different images of mist and shadow is a sign of the impossibility of attaining epistemic truth.

The first chapter examined the socio-historical context of the novel. It highlighted the historical and literary context in which Conrad wrote *Heart of Darkness*. His early Polish life as well as his French years influenced his temperament and personality. The scepticism, pessimism and melancholy that both readers and critics detect in his fiction have roots in his childhood. Conrad's life as a merchant sailor provided a rich store of exotic experiences which he used as the very material of his fiction. His first-hand traumatic experience in the Belgian Congo Free State constituted indeed an invaluable substance for *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow's sombre, gloomy and inconclusive experience.

Though English was his third language, Conrad skilfully fused between seamanship and literature. Moreover, *Heart of Darkness* echoes a number of issues basically related to colonialism and Imperialism. The novel undoubtedly alludes to the infamous scramble for loot and homicide in the name of civilisation and progress. Besides, *Heart of Darkness* captures the spirit of the age. It was written in the last decade of the nineteenth century, the *fin de siècle*, a period of cultural vigour and aesthetic productivity of Europe coupled with decadence, *ennui* and apocalyptic gloom. This *belle époque* announced the disappearance of the Absolute and put under

scrutiny the traditionally held views about the universe. It was also an unprecedented era of social, political, epistemological, as well as philosophical crises. The *fin de siècle* era also witnessed an aesthetic crisis directly related to the role of the artist. Conrad, then, can be regarded as a pioneer. His *Heart of Darkness* marks the shift from the real to the symbolic, from the objective to the subjective and from the Victorian to the Modern. Conrad's narrative intricacy through the use of unreliable narrators, narrative obliquity and distancing, inconclusive endings and the technique of impersonality provide a multitude of viewpoints that conceal the artist behind the veil, yet express his sceptical view of the world's fragmentation and lack of fixed meaning. The novel's indeterminacy is thus fundamentally due to its impressionism and symbolism. The impressionist movement marks the decisive transition from trying to portray what all men know to portraying what the individual actually *sees*. To make the reader *see* is Conrad's avowed aim expressed in his famous preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus."*

However, the observable facts of the story are obscured by the frequent images of mist and shadow, what Marlow dubbed the haze, the impenetrable adjectives as well as the different personifications of the darkness and the wilderness. *Heart of Darkness* is also rich in symbolism. It has roots in the symbolist movement. It is an excellent example of art's attempt to reveal the infinite in the finite. Its centrifugal, larger and infinite meanings are manifest almost everywhere in the novel's discursive ploy.

The second chapter analysed the stylistic aspects of Conrad's narrative discourse in *Heart of Darkness.* It expounded on the narrative impressionistic features of the novel. In fact, Conrad's main technical innovation in *Heart of Darkness* is his adoption of the framed narrative voice. The mediating narrative voice, actually

always present, vanishes and we feel that we are left in absolute solitude with Charles Marlow. Marlow functions, not only as an intradiegetic narrator and a protagonist of the story but also as a distancing device. This distancing quality of Marlow gives *Heart of Darkness* an aesthetic validity. Conrad's framed narrative reflects the death of the traditional simple narratives where the frame narrator is often the most authoritative and knowledgeable of the narrators. *Heart of Darkness*, however, is different. Although the frame narrator opens the narrative and further introduces us to Marlow, his vision is so limited compared to Marlow's. Therefore, Marlow is the objective correlative of the story. *Heart of Darkness* dramatises Marlow's narrative style as the ultimate theme of the novella.

In addition to its narrative obliquities, *Heart of Darkness* exhibits many impressionistic traits. Conrad's endeavour to dramatise the observable world, to make the reader *see*, can also be placed within the contextual framework of modernism, in which "showing" and "seeing" are often given special focus. The artistic blend of *mimesis* (telling and hearing) with *diegesis* (showing and seeing) indicates that Conrad's narrative structure in *Heart of Darkness* is inherently cinematic. The interplay of word, voice, sight, light, sound, gesture and colour is evident in Marlow's narrative. The world Conrad depicts in *Heart of Darkness* is brightly lit and paradoxically, it is a macabre, strange world of distorted dark figures living in a deceiving world of light. Conrad portrays pilgrims heading towards darkness in red whiskers and pink pyjamas. He likens the beat of the drums far in the wilderness to the sound of bells in a Christian country. As a result, these distorted images of colour and sound are fundamentally ironic and undefinable.

Other images of mist and shadow add to the ambiguity of Conrad's hazy narrative. Conrad's characters are shrouded in swirling mists and doubtful shadows. The indefinite contours of haze, mist, shadow, and fog are given a special significance. The *white* fog image represents man's inability to *see* through, which would determine his ultimate demise. It also triggers confusion and obscurity and epitomises the complexity of attaining epistemic truth. These images of haze and halo are quite essential to the nature of modern fiction.

Besides, Conrad develops the delayed decoding narrative technique which is the verbal equivalent of the impressionist painter's attempt to render visual sensation directly. It combines the forward temporal progression of the mind, as it receives messages from the outside world, with the much slower reflexive process of making out their meaning. The sequence of delayed decoding has three stages. Conrad first presents the effect of the experience upon the character's senses and, thus, the reader. The second stage triggers false or incomplete decoding. Finally, the third stage unveils true or largely complete decoding. This technique places the reader in the position of the character viewing the event so that the reader experiences what the character does at the very moment that character experiences it, thus providing realism and immediacy to the reader's experience. By emphasising the subjectivity of perception and observation, Conrad questions the certainty of knowledge.

The art(ifice) of covert plots is another narrative characteristic of *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad employs smaller or larger plot sequences within the main narrative. The whole narrative of *Heart of Darkness* is composed of covert plots inducing other covert plots and stations leading to other stations. Hence, readers of *Heart of Darkness* would undoubtedly sense that some narrative enigma has been set and left

unsolved. Decoding the covert plot would enable the reader to *see* the narrative as artful and suspenseful in exposition, themes richer in presentation, and the work more ironic. Failure to decode the truth behind Kurtz's last experience adds to the complexity of the novel and raises many questions concerning its reception and interpretation.

Heart of Darkness also presents the paradox of the virtue of evil embodied in the character of Kurtz. This is due to the novella's janiformity. Janiform novels are primarily characterised by their complexity. The term janiform is derived from Janus, the double-headed god of gates in Roman mythology. As a result, janiform novels are characterised by their hidden narrative or covert plots. Conrad's Kurtz can be considered the quintessential example of a janiform fictional protagonist. He almost comes to resemble Janus himself. Deceived by the hidden narrative, readers and commentators alike seem not to agree on the nature of Kurtz. Some *see* him as a hollow sham, while others consider him as a remarkable full man. Complicity with Kurtz is achieved through Conrad's artistic adoption of a confused narrator who remains loyal to the tale's symbol of vice. Marlow's inability to convey in words the meaning of Kurtz's pronouncement of horror leaves the reader confused as though one piece of the jigsaw is still missing. Moreover, the supernatural covert plot of Dr Faustus is dramatised in the character of Mr Kurtz. The analogies between Marlowe's Dr Faustus and Marlow's Mr Kurtz are various. They both make a bargain for their souls with the devil. Still another covert plot is that of the haunting *doppelgänger*. Its main conventions include the weird symbiosis or interdependence of two apparently antagonistic characters. Marlow identifies himself with Kurtz. He is fascinated by his talents and gifts. He pursues him despite the horrors and he feels an enduring

complicity with him. Hence, Marlow is but a mirror through which we can *see* Kurtz, his double.

Furthermore, Conrad's narrative discourse in *Heart of Darkness* is transtextual i.e. one which exists in, across and between two or more texts. Charles Marlow is the most engaging of Conrad's transtextual characters. He frequently appears in Conrad's fiction starting from "Youth" (1898) to *Heart of Darkness* (1899), *Lord Jim* (1900) and *Chance* (1912). This quality of Conrad's narrative enhances realism. Transtextuality also gives a peculiar spaciousness to the fictional world. As tale is linked to tale, novel to novel, tale to novel and novel to tale by means of these frequent characters and locations, we sense behind the individual works meta-narrative, one large imaginative territory closely related to fact.

Symbolism is another quintessential stylistic device manifest in *Heart of Darkness*. The eponymous phrase, *Heart of Darkness*, originally *The Heart of Darkness*, is very ambiguous. It evokes an infinite number of interpretations such as the unexplored depths of the darkest continent, the darkness of the ruthless impulses of the self and its capacity for evil, the traditional descent into the underworld, the hypocrisy of European civilisation and imperialism or most plausibly the failure of language to explain the horror at the heart of darkness.

In addition, *Heart of Darkness* is a masterwork of irony. Irony depends on the disparity between the ideals of civilisation and the facts of the primitive life. Marlow's lie is revelatory of the ambivalence and complicity which is rendered visible in the novella, demonstrating the concealment of the demonic and rapacious face of colonialism. The Europeans at the Central Station are depicted as pilgrims and apostles. They are nevertheless faithless and hollow at the core. The futility of the

civilising work in Africa is ironically depicted in the character of the white stout black-moustached trader who is absurdly trying to extinguish the flames with water in a pail having a whole in the bottom. Kurtz's eloquent pamphlet for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs is undercut by his subsequent call for brutal extermination.

Conrad also uses free indirect discourse (FID) as a mode of narration to explore in an unfiltered way the character's thinking and feeling. Through the use of FID, Conrad merges both subjective and objective accounts adopting different points of view of the same character. By combining the voices of narrator and character, FID is also capable of producing effects of uncertainty, indeterminacy and distance. Indeed, FID is a crucially important technique whereby narrative flexibility and mobility is not only enormously refined and extended, but also linked to the author's evaluative and moral commitments.

Conrad also employs appositions and substitutions of personal names by other nouns or nominal phrases as a stylistic device to avoid monotony and to provide a form of elegant variation. These appositions and substitutions are mostly anaphoric. They involve attributing certain traits to some characters and places. Therefore, they tend to be very ironic, evaluative and, thus, subjective.

Last but not least, Conrad employs words of estrangement such as *as if, seem, appear, as* and *like* for comparisons. The *As if locution* introduces adverbial clauses indicating comparison under some hypothetical circumstance. It has a striking bias toward conjecture. It drives the narrator and thus the reader towards a process of guessing and inference, which entails the impossibility of a direct representation of the real thing, setting up in the reader's mind hesitancy between the real and the

hypothetical or the illusory. Consequently, the *as if locutions* are inextricably linked to the hard task of perceiving truth, an epistemological problem that lies at the heart of *Heart of Darkness*. In modalisations with *seem* and *appear*, the narrator withdraws into a distance and leaves it to the reader to pass judgement on a particular act, event, or character at a particular moment. Therefore, the character and the reader are faced with appearances and subjective sense impressions. Hence, Conrad is usually less interested in giving essential facts about the characters than in making us share in the imperfect imagination of the characters through human eyes. These modalisations remain to the end inconclusive, behind the veil. Similarly, similes with *like* and *as* compare something to something else. Nonetheless, such similes obscure meaning for they compare something dark to something darker. Hence, the process of unveiling meaning remains to the end impossible.

All in all, the impossibility of arriving at a precise meaning in *Heart of Darkness* is due to the nature of Conrad's narrative discourse. Its discursive ploy renders meaning very complex and indeterminate. Conrad's goal to make the reader *see* is, in effect, an invitation to reflect upon the novella's meaning, a meaning that lingers to be profoundly invisible and elusive for it is unspeakable and lies behind the power of the word: language. Conrad's elusive style sparked off many interpretations.

The third chapter thus examined the different critical responses to *Heart of Darkness*. Achebe momentously judged the novella's depiction of Africa and Africans as offensive and racist. His accusation of Conrad as a bloody racist was and is still a subject of considerable debate. Between the two poles of livid denunciation and fundamental reinterpretation an array of other positions emerged. Francis B. Singh, Patrick Brantlinger and Edward W. Said seem to conform to Achebe's

scathing attack on Conrad's ethnocentricity and complicity with colonial evil. Others, such as V. S. Naipaul, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Wilson Harris and Cedric Watts defended Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* stressing the fact that instead of embracing such *fin de siècle* racist and imperialist ideologies, he undermines and subverts them. Above all, Achebe's accusation of Conrad's failure to justly depict African reality was based on the idea that a novel could and should truly portray reality. Deconstructionist critics assert that language is a system of differences with no positive terms, and with only arbitrary links between signifier, signified and referent. Thus, meaning falls in the myth of presence and absence at the same time. In effect, the novella's meaning is hidden, absent and decentred. It is in the haze or on the periphery, or simply, it falls in a myth of presence. The meaning behind the veil of Kurtz is shadowy and wanting, just like language itself. The veiling and unveiling processes are indeterminable and never-ending. They take the form of a parable or an apocalypse. As a result, everything in the novel is an allusion to something else. Readers should perform a reading which is active and responsible and which reflects on the intricacies of Conrad's narrative discourse. Thus, the variety of responses to Conrad's novella stems from the illusion of Conrad's power of the word, which is fundamentally very suggestive and paradoxical.

Conrad's avowed artistic intention to make us *see*, by the power of the word, implies *seeing* not only the vivid facts of the story but also the elusive truth that lies behind them. Conrad's narrative discourse is ambiguous, obscure and hazy. The haze represents the impossibility of making the reader *see* the meaning of darkness.

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الملخص

تُعْتَبَرُ رِوايةُ "قلبُ الظُّلماتِ" "لِجوزِيف كُونْرَادْ" واحدةً من أَشْكَلِ الرِّواياتِ في العصرِ الحديثِ حيثُ لاقتْ خِلافًا كبيرًا بَيْنَ القُرَّاءِ والنُّقادِ. والواقعُ أنّ معنى قِصّةَ "مارلو" في البرِّيةِ يبقى غامضًا مُبدَّدًا خلفَ أُسلوبِهِ السَّردي الانْطِباعي. وعليه تَهدفُ هذهِ الدّراسة إلى البحثِ في الخطابِ السّردي للكاتبِ ودراسةِ خَبايا النّص. الفصلُ الأوّلُ مِن البحثِ يضعُ الرّوايةَ في إطارِها السُّوسيولوجِي والتّاريخي حَيثُ يُلقي الضَّوء على الآثارِ التي خلّفتها تجارب الكاتب في بدايةِ حياتِهِ على نظْرتِهِ الشَّكِّية تُجاهَ الكون. كما يُركِّز هذا الفصل على الحِقْبةِ التاريخيّة (نهاية القرن التاسع عشر) وتَدَاعِيَاتِها على مواضِيعِ السَّرْد القَصَصِي، وكَذَا تَأَثُّر الكاتب بالحركات والمدارسِ الأدبيّة التي زامَنت ظُهور الرِّواية في 1899 كالواقِعية، الحديثة، الانطِباعية والرَّمزِية. فِيمَا يَتَنَاوَلُ الفصل الثاني مِنَ البحثِ دِراسةً أُسلوبيّةً معمَّقةً لِلْخِطابِ السَّردي للكاتب وتَبَنِّيهِ "لِلْسّرْد القَصَصِي المُوَطَّر"، "التِّقْنِيَّة الانْطِباعيَّة: التفكيك المُتأخِّر" ، "الحُبْكة المُضْمَرة" ، "الازْدِواجيَّة النَّصيَّة وتَنَاقُضِية فضيلة الشّر"، "السرْد *الفُوسْتِي*" ، "المُطَارَدة المزْدَوجة"، "التَنقُّل النَّصِّي والتَعَايُش القَصَصِي"، "الرَّمْزِيَّة"، "السُخْرِيَّة"، "الكَلَام الحُر المَنْقُول"، "البَدَل" و "التَشْبِيه". أمَّا بِالنِّسبةِ للفصل الثَّالِث مِنَ البحث فهو يُنَاقِش القِراءةَ النَّقديَّة التَفكِيكِيَّة لِلرِّواية التي تَنفِي إمكانية فهمِ وتَفسير النَّص بِشكلٍ مَوضُوعي، بَل تَقُول بِترْك النَّص مَفْتوحا لِلتَّأويل الذاتي الابْداعي. وعليه فإنَّ الرِّوايةَ مَحَل الدِّراسة تَتَمَيَّز بِالغُموض وعدم اليقين. ما يُمكن اسْتِخلاصُهُ هو أنَّ "قَلْبَ الظُّلُمَاتِ" ليست مُجَرَّد قِصَّة أو مُغَامرة عَبْرَ النّهر, بل هي أبعدُ مِن ذلك بِكثير. الرِّواية عِبارة عن اسْتِكشافٍ لِعَالمِ الخير والشَّر، النُّور والظَّلام، الأسود والأبيض، العقل والجنون. بِاخْتصار الرِّواية تُمثِّل رائعةَ الفراغِ الجَوهري الذي يسكُن قلب الانسانية واللُّغة معًا.