

EURAMERICA Vol. 41, No. 1 (March 2011), 1-46
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<http://euramerica.org>

Joseph Conrad **—Postcolonialism and Imperialism**

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Abstract

This essay begins with a reconsideration of Chinua Achebe's famous criticism of Conrad as a "thoroughgoing racist." It starts by examining the context of Achebe's lecture and analysing what "Conrad" meant at that time as a critical construction through a reading of the two critics Achebe cites—Albert J. Guerard and F. R. Leavis. It explores, in particular, how "Heart of Darkness" was read in the United States before Achebe's intervention by a close examination of Guerard's Introduction to the popular edition of "Heart of Darkness" published by The New American Library, and it compares this with the reading provided by Edward Garnett in his early review. The comparison shows how Guerard's psychological approach to the novella de-Africanises the novel and wipes out the topical specificity and the politics which were part of the novel's original reception. It then examines in detail Achebe's charges against "Heart of Darkness" and offers an alternative reading of the novella, paying particular attention to Conrad's narrative strategies, his engagement with

Invited article, Received August 26, 2010
Proofreaders: Hsueh-mei Chen, Kuei-feng Hu, Ying-bei Wang

imperialist discourse, and the hierarchy of languages in the work. It then considers Conrad's other African story "An Outpost of Progress" to support the reading of Marlow as distanced from Conrad: since "An Outpost of Progress" presents a non-Marlovian "image of Africa," it allows us to see Marlow's perspective on Africa more clearly. The essay then contextualises the reading of Conrad's African fiction by reference to his earlier Malay fiction, and finally considers *Nostromo* in relation to globalisation.

Key Words: Joseph Conrad, Chinua Achebe, "Heart of Darkness," "An Outpost of Progress"

On 18 February 1975, Chinua Achebe gave a lecture on Joseph Conrad as the second Chancellor's Lecture at the University of Massachusetts. This lecture, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" was to have a major impact on Conrad studies and, one way or another, was to change the way that "Heart of Darkness" was read.¹ It also had a major impact on post-colonial readings of Conrad.² On the one hand, it led in some quarters to a complete rejection of all of Conrad's work on the basis of Achebe's accusation that Conrad was a racist. On the other hand, elsewhere, Achebe's focus on Africa and Africans in "Heart of Darkness" had the effect of foregrounding other colonised peoples in Conrad's work and encouraged more attention to Conrad's Malay fiction.³

More recently, in an interview with Mark Lawson on BBC Radio 4's *Front Row* (27 June 2007) on the occasion of the award of the Man Booker prize to Achebe for his fiction, Achebe spoke again about "Heart of Darkness." He revealed that his reading of Conrad as a "bloody racist" was not his immediate response to the work. His first reading was one of admiration: it was a second reading that left him with a sense of having been deceived or betrayed. In this account of his revised view of Conrad, Achebe sounded like a deceived lover. This sense of deception could be seen as providing some of the charge for the lecture he gave at Massachusetts. But what has puzzled me for a while now is that Achebe's reading of "Heart of Darkness" seems to have remained unchanged for 30 years. Given the complexity and ambiguity of the text, and the amount of discussion that Achebe's lecture

¹ A revised version of this lecture was published in the *Massachusetts Review*, 18, 4 (1977): 782-794. It became part of the Conrad canon of criticism when it was reprinted in the Norton Edition of "Heart of Darkness." All references to the essay are to the version published in Robert Kimbrough (ed.), *Heart of Darkness*, 251-262 (Achebe, 1988).

² This essay on Achebe is part of a two-part project: the second part will assess Said's work on Conrad.

³ See, for example, GoGwilt (1995); Hampson (2000); White (1993).

sparked off, I am surprised that there doesn't seem to have been a third reading during this period. I wondered, on the basis of this interview, whether Achebe needed this investment in the idea of Conrad as a racist as an enablement of his own fiction.

In the essay that follows I want to do six things. I want to begin by considering how "Heart of Darkness" was read before February 1975. Secondly, I want to consider in detail some of Achebe's specific charges against Conrad. Thirdly, I want to challenge, or at least question, Achebe's case against Conrad by suggesting another way to read "Heart of Darkness." Fourthly, I want to consider Conrad's other African fiction, "An Outpost of Progress" in this context. Then I want to go back and contextualise Conrad's African fiction by reference to his earlier Malay fiction. Finally, I want to move forward from Conrad's earlier works and briefly consider *Nostramo* in relation to globalisation.

I. An Image of Africa

Achebe begins his lecture by describing his walk from the English Department at the University of Massachusetts to the university car park in the autumn of 1974. During this walk he has an encounter with an older man who expresses his surprise at the idea that Africa should have either a history or a literature. This prompts Achebe to think of a letter he has received from high school children in Yonkers, who had just read *Things Fall Apart* (1958), and were, as he notes, "particularly happy to learn about the customs and superstitions of an African tribe" (Achebe, 1988: 251).

As a result of forty years of post-colonial criticism, we are now very familiar with the idea that colonisers de-historicise the places they plan to colonise. We are also very familiar with their practice of seeing the territory to be colonised as empty space. We can think of numerous examples from the Europeans in North America and Africa through to the Israelis in Palestine after the

Second World War.⁴ Achebe also picks up on the ethnocentric assumption implicit in the schoolchildren's response: he observes their lack of awareness that "the life of [their] own tribesmen in Yonkers, New York, is full of odd customs and superstitions" (251). The European processes of colonisation and imperialism have been accompanied, since at least the sixteenth century, with attempts to record and examine the "customs and superstitions" of the peoples encountered. Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627), for example, early on provided a model for the scientific description of the encounter with other cultures, which was adopted by eighteenth-century writers such as William Marsden. After mapping the voyage to New Atlantis, Bacon offers a description of the land, of the inhabitants, of their dress, housing, customs, and institutions. Bacon here was following his source, Joseph Acosta's *The Naturall and Morall Historie of the East and West Indies* (1604), but he provided a useful and influential taxonomic model for later writers.⁵ There is a direct continuity between Renaissance accounts of exploration and the development of anthropology as a discipline in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century. As a result, anthropology has a long history of entanglement in colonial and imperialist agendas (Hulme & McDougall, 2007). More important for our present purposes, we can see from this how the European study of other peoples is, as Edward W. Said pointed out, generally based on "a relationship of power, of domination," and, as a result, subordinates what is studied to "a sovereign Western consciousness," which is unchallenged and unexplored (Said, 1979: 6, 8). Achebe's reference to the "customs and superstitions" of the tribesmen of New York is a very deliberate turning back of this ethnographic, anthropological gaze and language against its producers.

At this point in his lecture, Achebe introduces "Heart of Darkness." From the two casual, anecdotal examples he has given,

⁴ Gerda Meyer famously described Palestine as depopulated.

⁵ For a fuller discussion of this, see Hampson (2000), Chapter 2.

he deduces a Western desire “to set up Africa as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations” (251). He then presents “Heart of Darkness” as “better than any other work” (252) displaying that desire. “Heart of Darkness,” he asserts, “projects the image of Africa as ‘the other world,’ the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization” (252). I will return to this statement later. I want to consider here the other reasons that he puts forward for selecting “Heart of Darkness.” First, he praises Conrad as “one of the great stylists of modern fiction and a good story-teller into the bargain” (252). Then he mentions how “Heart of Darkness” is “read and taught and constantly evaluated by serious academics” (252). In other words, what lies behind the targeting of “Heart of Darkness” is the novella’s status as a canonical text—“permanent literature,” to use Achebe’s term—and its academic reception. More specifically, “Heart of Darkness” was, and probably still is, one of the texts to be found on almost every first-year American university course on modernist fiction or the twentieth-century novel. The question I want to raise here is how was “Heart of Darkness” being read in these courses—how was “Heart of Darkness” being read in the North American academy in 1974? Achebe helps provide the answer.

Achebe cites “a leading Conrad scholar” who has described “Heart of Darkness” as “among the half-dozen greatest short novels in the English language” (252). As the footnote tells us, he is citing Albert J. Guerard from his Introduction to the 1950 New American Library edition of “Heart of Darkness.” As a cheap edition, the New American Library edition is likely to have been widely used by American students taking the courses described, and Guerard’s reading of “Heart of Darkness” is likely to have been very influential. This edition also continued in use at least into the 1970s: my own copy is not dated but is described as the “seventeenth printing” (Conrad, 1950). Achebe records later that “Students of *Heart of Darkness* will often tell you that Conrad is concerned not so much with Africa as with the deterioration of one European mind caused by solitude and sickness” (257). Achebe is

then rightfully scornful of this reading of the novella: he asks “Can nobody see the preposterous and perverse arrogance in thus reducing Africa to the role of props for the break-up of one petty European mind?” As he points out, such a reading dehumanises “Africa and Africans” (257). Furthermore, it re-produces the de-humanising of Africans which was at the heart of Leopold’s exploitation of the Congo—and which has permeated colonial and imperialist agendas in Africa more generally. It is also worth noting, at this juncture, Conrad’s letter to William Blackwood (31 May 1902), where he describes how the final pages of “Heart of Darkness” “make of that story something quite on another plane than an anecdote of a man who went mad in the centre of Africa” (Karl & Davies, 1986: 145-148). Conrad and Achebe clearly see eye to eye on this issue.

At this point, I want to consider Albert J. Guerard. Guerard was, indeed, as Achebe says, one of North America’s leading Conrad scholars. His book, *Conrad the Novelist* (1958), was one of the most important books on Conrad of that decade. Perhaps more important, he was also an influential teacher. His Harvard/Radcliffe graduate seminar was attended by Thomas Moser in 1950 and 1953 and by Eloise Knapp Hay (among others). Moser’s own influential monograph, *Joseph Conrad: Achievement and Decline* (1957) acknowledges a debt to Guerard for “nearly a decade” of discussions on Conrad; Eloise Knapp Hay’s ground-breaking monograph, *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad* (1963) similarly acknowledges the encouragement of Guerard “over ten years.” What I am drawing attention to here is a sociology of knowledge: in this case the networks in which books are involved and out of which they emerge.

In *Conrad the Novelist*, Guerard reads “Heart of Darkness” as “a spiritual voyage of self-discovery” “toward and through certain facets or potentialities of self” (Guerard, 1958: 38). Indeed, Guerard goes as far as to assert that “If the story is not about this deeper region, and not about Marlow himself, its length is quite indefensible” (42). For Guerard, the story is, on the material level,

“a journey through the temptation of atavism,” a temptation which is concretised in the encounter with Kurtz “a white man and sometime idealist who had fully responded to the wilderness: a potential and fallen self” (38). On this level, the narrative embodies contemporary Victorian concerns about “reversion”: it represents what Guerard calls a “currently accepted but false psychology”—namely, the racist notion of atavism, of “white man’s reversion” (39). On a deeper level, Guerard argues, the novella enacts a “night journey into the unconscious and confrontation of an entity within the self” (39).⁶ Guerard reads the story as a “powerful dream,” which can be approached through Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung (i.e., “true” psychology) and the anthropological notion of the “night journey.” The focus is on Marlow and Marlow’s experience, and that experience is an internal, psychological journey in which others are reduced to aspects and potentialities of the self. It involves an approach to “the primitive,” but this is a completely psychologised concept of “the primitive”; the already problematic anthropological term has been turned into something completely abstract and de-cultured.⁷ Interestingly, as Achebe suggests, Africa and Africans almost disappear from Guerard’s account of the novella.⁸

Guerard’s earlier Introduction to the New American Library edition of “Heart of Darkness” unsurprisingly covers similar ground. He begins by describing Conrad as “perhaps the finest prose stylist of them all” (Conrad, 1950: 7) (which Achebe echoes). He refers to Conrad’s “experiments in structure and style” (7)

⁶ According to Guerard, the “true night journey can occur (except during analysis) only in sleep or in the waking dream of a profoundly intuitive mind” (39).

⁷ Achebe picks up on this in the title of the book planned by the District Commissioner (*The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*).

⁸ Guerard asserts at one point: “This is Africa and its flabby inhabitants; Conrad did indeed have a ‘feel for the country’” (46). However, the “inhabitants” that Guerard discusses are the boiler-maker, the “papier-mache Mephistopheles,” the harlequin and Kurtz, with only a brief glance at “the Negroes” in the grove of death.

(which he compares with William Faulkner's) but without going into any detail. The main emphasis falls on "Marlow's slow journey up the Congo into the heart of darkest Africa" as "a journey into the heart of man's darkness" (8). Guerard reads this journey in terms of Marlow's "half-conscious *identification*" with Kurtz. The focus of his account is firmly fixed on these two men; on Kurtz's "reversion to savagery as a result of physical isolation" (13); and on Marlow's "provisional descent into the primitive and unconscious sources of being" (9). This reading of the novella is perhaps influenced by the fact that the volume brings together "Heart of Darkness" and "The Secret Sharer," although it is perhaps the case that the volume brings together these two works, because Guerard reads Conrad in this way. Certainly, the Introduction and the juxtaposing of these two stories foreground the idea of Conrad as a psychological novelist, primarily concerned with "our capacity for idealism and our capacity for deterioration . . . our desire for brotherhood and our propensity to solitary crime" (7-8). Thus Guerard links the two novelle by reference to their protagonists' quest for self-knowledge: they must "travel through Kurtz and Leggatt, before they will be capable of manhood" (9). There is, as this suggests and as one would expect in a 1950's essay, an assumption of whiteness and maleness as the unmarked norm. None of the Africans are mentioned: they might be elided into the idea of the "primitive and prehistoric mind" (14), but the encounter with Africa and Africans is not an important element of Marlow's experience in Guerard's reading: "Observing Kurtz, and physically wrestling for his body and soul, Marlow can look on our original and savage nature in its nakedness" (14). While this might sound like Birkin and Gerald Crich in *Women in Love*, wrestling naked in front of the fire, in fact even Kurtz is ultimately not important except as an aid to self-examination, enabling Marlow's "'talking' to himself through the guise of another" (14).

Guerard's reading of the novella, in terms of Marlow's self-encounter, can be seen to pick up on some elements of the

interpretation offered in Edward Garnett's 1902 review.⁹ Garnett had there praised the novella as a "psychological masterpiece" (Garnett, 1973: 132). However, this had been contextualised by Garnett as a reference to the work's relation of "the sub-conscious life within us, our obscure motives and instincts" to our "conscious actions, feelings and outlook" (132). He was not suggesting that the novella was primarily a work of psychological self-exploration. Garnett had also praised the novella's acute "analysis of the deterioration of the white man's *morale*, when he is let loose from European restraint" (132): what Guerard described as the material level of the narrative. However, Garnett had begun his review of "Heart of Darkness" by the "blunt" presentation of its theme as "an impression, taken from life, of the conquest by the European whites of a certain portion of Africa, an impression in particular of the civilising methods of a certain great European Trading Company" (132). And the sentence I have just quoted about "the white man's *morale*" ends: "when he is let loose from European restraint and planted down in the tropics as an 'emissary of light' armed to the teeth, to make trade profits out of the 'subject races'" (132).

In other words, Garnett's 1902 review never lost sight of the context of conquest and colonisation. He is also alert to the language used to promote and obscure both processes in the propaganda and popular media of the time: his references to the colonist as an "emissary of light" and the self-fulfilling description of colonised people as "subject races" (as if this is an ordained role for them) pick up on the same linguistic self-consciousness in Conrad's text. As Garnett suggests, the "emissary of light" comes "armed to the teeth"; the "subject races" are there to be made

⁹ Thus Ross C. Murfin suggests "By seeing the novel as a dream of self-discovery, Guerard not only expands upon what Edward Garnett said when he called *Heart of Darkness* a psychological masterpiece but also explains why the world has been so taken with this story that *is*, at least in some ways, fuzzy, smoky, misty, unclear. *Heart of Darkness* is ambiguous as a *dream* is ambiguous . . ." (Conrad, 1989: 101).

profit out of. In his account of his conversation with his aunt, Marlow complains that she sees him as “something like an emissary of light,” and then observes “There had been a lot of such rot let loose in print and talk just about that time” before offering his own debunking of it: “I ventured to hint that the Company was run for profit” (Conrad, 1923b: 59).¹⁰ In the same vein, Garnett comments ironically on “the civilising methods of a certain great European Trading Company.” We might notice that Garnett is being carefully non-specific here—just as Conrad is in “Heart of Darkness.” We might know or guess the identity of the “European Trading Company,” but Garnett is careful not to name names. Both the ironic reference to “civilising methods” and the non-naming of the Company allow for legal deniability. Leopold had his lawyers and his tame journalists ready to deal with any criticism made of his activities in the Congo, and the public expose didn’t begin in Britain until the following year, 1903, with E. D. Morel and the Congo Reform Association.

What Guerard leaves out, in other words, is precisely the topical specificity and the politics of “Heart of Darkness”: a politics which engages both with imperialism in Africa and with the discourses circulated in Europe to justify and mask the imperialist agenda. Garnett’s review shows how these were part of the original reading of, and response to, “Heart of Darkness.” Interestingly, this is one difference between the Introduction and the later chapter. In the Introduction, Guerard refers briefly (and somewhat inappropriately) to “capitalists” tearing treasure “from the bowels of the earth” “under the pretence of bringing progress to backward peoples.” Then he adds somewhat gnominically: “Then it was ivory which poured from the heart of darkness; today it is uranium. And the political meaning of this novel remains as true for us as for the 1890s” (Conrad, 1950: 13). What the “political meaning” of the novel might be not engaged with or spelt out. That reference to “uranium,” however, probably had more resonance in the 1950s

¹⁰ All references are to this edition.

than it has today: the uranium for the atomic bombs dropped by the US on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was mined in the Congo; and the post-war period saw heightened anxieties about the possible use of these weapons of mass destruction against Europe or the US. What we need to consider then is the context in which Guerard was writing—namely, the 1950s America of McCarthyism and the House Un-American Activities Committee. What I am suggesting, in short, is that Achebe's 1975 lecture is a response to a 1950's de-politicised reading of "Heart of Darkness," which had become the dominant, institutionalised reading in the American academy during a period of political repression in the United States. What Achebe does is restore that political dimension—but not simply as anti-imperialism, rather as post-colonialism.

II. Ontological Imperialism

The other critic that Achebe mentions is F. R. Leavis, the only precursor mentioned by Guerard. Achebe picks up on Leavis's famous 1941 criticism of Conrad's "adjectival insistence upon inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery" (Leavis, 1948: 177). Where Guerard sought to explain and justify this quality of the writing by reference to the idea of the dream, Achebe presents it as a sign of Conrad's "artistic bad faith." He draws on this to attack Conrad for "inducing hypnotic stupor in his readers," and then asserts that, "while pretending to record scenes, incidents, and their impact," Conrad was, in reality, choosing the role of "purveyor of comforting myths" (Achebe, 1988: 253). I will return to this charge later. At this stage what interests me is Achebe's selective use of Leavis. One of the significant differences between Leavis and Guerard relates to Conrad's use of Marlow: Leavis presents Marlow merely as a fictional device, as a narrator who provides a "specific and concretely realised point of view" (Leavis, 1948: 38); Guerard explicitly rejects this position in order to focus on Marlow's experience. He foregrounds Marlow's "spiritual

voyage of self-discovery” and, in effect, by doing so collapses any gap between Marlow and Conrad (What he does, literally and metaphorically, is bracket out the relationship, referring to Marlow as a “projection to whatever great or small degree of a more irrecoverable Conrad” [38].). Achebe, of course, follows Guerard. From one angle, this relates to the question who is the central character: is it Marlow or is it Kurtz? For Leavis it is Kurtz, for Guerard it is Marlow. For Achebe, it becomes that “bloody racist” Conrad. I want to focus, however, on the issue of “adjectival insistence” and approach it through the idea of the “specific and concretely realised point of view,” and I would want to suggest that Leavis himself doesn’t attend sufficiently to his own formulation. Indeed, I would want to argue that Leavis’s criticism of Conrad’s “adjectival insistence” is precisely evidence of an insufficiently rigorous application of this asserted understanding of Marlow’s role as a “specific and concretely realised point of view”: it needs to be said that we never encounter Conrad in this text, but only the unnamed primary narrator and Marlow.

Andrew Gibson has written illuminatingly, from a Levinasian perspective, about Leavis’s account of the two kinds of writing in “Heart of Darkness” (Gibson, 1998: 113-137). The first kind of writing is what Leavis calls Conrad’s “art of vivid essential record,” an art of “things seen and incidents experienced” (Gibson, 1998: 115), in which significance resides in particulars—and significance, particularity and the essence are one and the same thing. The second is characterised by “adjectival insistence”—“unspeakable rites,” “unspeakable secrets,” “monstrous passions,” “inconceivable mystery” and so on (115). In the first case, Gibson argues, the moral categories exist (for writer and reader) prior to their specific embodiment—and the power of literature is inseparable from ontology, from a knowledge of essences. In the second case, Gibson argues, ethical force is located “precisely in what it does not or cannot say” (Gibson, 1998: 117). The insistence on “the limits to representation and the power of the unrepresentable” (Gibson, 1998: 115) in “Heart of Darkness,” which, for Leavis,

was “little short of disastrous” (115), for Gibson not only deepens the novel but is its real ethical basis. Following Levinas, Gibson observes: “To proceed towards the other on the basis of what is deemed to be prior knowledge is at once to have neutralised the alterity, the complexity, the freedom of the other; to have reduced the other to the order of the same” (Gibson, 1998: 117). This “ontological imperialism,” to use Levinas’s own term, with its totalising impulse and will to domination, is repeatedly enacted in the novel—not least in Kurtz’s document for the suppression of savage customs or Marlow’s statements about women (It is also, I would suggest, the manner that Achebe uses for writing *Things Fall Apart*). By contrast, Marlow’s narration is also permeated by a repeated sense of the limits to knowledge and representation, “the irreducibly complex mystery of the world as it is encountered by the cognitive intellect” (Gibson, 1998: 129). As Gibson points out, the most obvious example of the “incomprehensible” for Marlow in “Heart of Darkness” is Africa: “the silence of the land, . . . its mystery, its greatness, the amazing reality of its concealed life” (Conrad, 1923b: 80). However, “incomprehensibility” is not restricted to Africa and Africans. The Russian harlequin is described as “improbable, inexplicable, and altogether bewildering” (1923b: 126). Indeed, incomprehensibility is at the centre of the colonising experience: the Romans in Britain are described as living “in the midst of the incomprehensible” (1923b: 50). But incomprehensibility and unrepresentability are also at the very centre of all our experience: Marlow, for example, finds that it is impossible “to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one’s existence” to another person (1923b: 82). For Gibson, this is where an ethical reading begins: this questioning of totalising discourse is a challenge to Western ontology, to a habit of thought (white, European, masculine) that seeks to master the other and reduce the other to the terms of the same.

However, I want to approach the idea of Marlow as a “specific and concretely realised point of view” from a different angle—that of contemporary anthropology. In the case of “Heart

of *Darkness*,” Conrad knew in advance that his readers would be those of *Blackwood’s Magazine*, and he also knew what that implied. Talal Asad notes:

When anthropologists return to their countries, they must write up “their people,” and they must do so in the conventions of representation already circumscribed . . . by their discipline, institutional life, and wider society. (1986: 159)

When Conrad came to tell his African experiences to his English audience, he faced precisely these problems. In Conrad’s case, this is further complicated since his “return” is not to his own country but to a foreign country. First, then, he creates as his narrator an English officer from the merchant navy—in order to mediate between his own Polishness and his English readers. Secondly, he shows his understanding of the parameters within which he was working (and also explores those parameters) by mirroring them in Marlow’s relations with his audience.

Marlow’s audience, like the readership of *Blackwood’s Magazine*, is made up of males of the colonial service class. Marlow is forced to confront the problem of making his experience intelligible to an audience which readily manifests the limit of its understanding and tolerance (“Try to be civil, Marlow”). There is an instance of this audience’s response in the long passage that Achebe discusses:

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. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise (Conrad, 1923b: 96)

The word “ugly” is clearly a comment supplied by Marlow’s audience, which Marlow picks up and considers. It is not clear

whether Marlow's auditor offers this as a comment on the scene depicted (people howling, leaping, spinning and making horrid faces) or on Marlow's assertion of "kinship." What is clear is that Marlow considers this comment and then returns to his own train of thought about his kinship with the Africans he encounters. Achebe returns to this quotation later and asserts that "the black man lays a claim on the white man which is well-nigh intolerable" (Achebe, 1988: 257). I would suggest there is no evidence for this being an "intolerable claim" in the passage I have just cited, but this is the prelude to Achebe's explicit claim that Conrad is "a thoroughgoing racist" (257). Thirdly, in Marlow, Conrad chooses an atypical member of his class ("He was a seafarer, but he was a wanderer too"), and his tales are, famously, not the typical seafarers' tale, tales of "direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut," but rather "inconclusive tales," whose meaning was "not inside like a kernel, but outside, enveloping the tale" (Conrad, 1923b: 48). Marlow adopts various rhetorical strategies in relation to this particular audience, and Conrad similarly shapes his narrative strategies in "Heart of Darkness" to a known, implied reader. However, far from purveying "comforting myths" (as Achebe alleges) the narrative strategies of both Marlow and Conrad work to subvert many of the "comforting myths" of their respective audiences.

Thus, at the start of "Heart of Darkness," Conrad deploys a series of strategies in relation to his implied reader. To begin with, there is the evocation of "the great spirit of the past" (47) by the unnamed primary narrator. This celebration of British trade and exploration "from Sir Francis Drake to Sir John Franklin" (47) offers the kind of nationalist history and imperialist rhetoric with which his first readers would have been very familiar to lull them into a false sense of security. However, for more careful readers, hints of a different vision are suggested at the end:

Hunters of gold or pursuers of fame, they had all gone out
on that stream, bearing the sword and *often* the torch,

messengers of the *might* within the land. (47, my italics)

The references to Sir Francis Drake and Sir John Franklin are also not as straightforwardly celebratory as they might at first seem. Some of Conrad's first readers might have been reminded of a less than flattering article on Drake that had appeared in *Blackwood's* six months earlier, while Sir John Franklin's expedition not only ended in the loss of all involved but also prompted rumours of cannibalism among the sailors (Hampson, 1989: 9-22). (No wonder Marlow felt that "The glamour's off" [Conrad, 1923b: 52]). Marlow's imaginative account of the Romans in Britain has a similarly unsettling effect. First, there is the defamiliarising awareness that the "sandbanks, marshes, forests, savages" (49) are in the Thames Valley. The imperialist rhetoric of civilisation and savagery is reversed and brought home. At the same time, the coloniser's fearful impression that "the savagery, the utter savagery, had closed round him" (50) from this reversed perspective is very clearly seen as revealing of his alienation rather than as a veridic discourse about the Thames Valley. Secondly, the account of the Roman citizen, his experiences and his expectations, is by turns made worryingly familiar and then distanced from his British readers. Thus, having drawn the account too close to both its audiences, Marlow affirms "Mind, none of us would feel exactly like this. What saves us is efficiency" (50). While the British reader contemplates this saving difference, Marlow then introduces a context in which "efficiency" is not a redeeming quality: "It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale" (50). Marlow then offers his British reader another lifeline ("What redeems it is the idea only . . . something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to . . ." [51]), but this turns out to be a reader trap. While we assume that he has broken off in order to tell a story that will illustrate this "idea," he has broken off to tell a story prompted by the image of setting something up to bow down before and offer sacrifices to. In other words, while the reader is carried through the narrative in quest of a redeeming

“idea,” Marlow (and Conrad) knows that this is an unredeeming story about Kurtz setting himself up as a god.

In short, Conrad sets up a primary narrator and a scene of narration with a defined and limited audience in order to stage Marlow’s narrative. Marlow’s act of narration is an attempt to understand his own experience but also an attempt to represent that experience to his “home” audience for whom the experiences he describes are remote and alien. Marlow uses various strategies to convey his experience to his audience but also, as we have seen, to unsettle and challenge his audience. In the course of his narration, Marlow’s attempts to understand and represent his experience are exposed to our critical attention, while his assertions of the incomprehensible and the unrepresentable are a challenge to habits of mind that we (and Achebe) share.

III. Imperialist Discourses and the Hierarchy of Languages

Achebe, I have suggested, follows Guerard rather than Leavis in effectively collapsing the gap between Conrad and Marlow. He notes the critical argument that “the attitude to the African in *Heart of Darkness* is not Conrad’s but that of his fictional narrator” and that, far from endorsing it, Conrad is “holding it up to irony and criticism” (Achebe, 1988: 256). But he rejects this argument on the grounds that Conrad “neglects to hint however subtly or tentatively at an alternative frame of reference by which we may judge the actions and opinions of his characters” (256). I have always found this both a puzzling requirement to make of a work of fiction and a difficult argument to refute. It occurs to me that it is perhaps difficult to refute precisely because it is a puzzling requirement to make. It comes to the novella with a preconceived notion of how the novella should work. It is, in short, precisely the kind of imperialist habit of thought that seeks to master the other and reduce the other to the terms of the same that Gibson praises “Heart of Darkness” for resisting and deconstructing. We might

also ask, I think, whether Achebe himself provides “an alternative frame of reference” for the attitudes towards gender (for example) in *Things Fall Apart*.

I want, in this section, to begin by engaging with some of Achebe’s specific criticisms and readings of “Heart of Darkness.” For example, Achebe insists that Africa is presented as “the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization.” I would argue, to begin with, that the imperialist language of civilisation and savagery is precisely what the account of the Romans in Britain is designed to subvert. Achebe makes this argument by contrasting the Thames and the Congo: “these two rivers are very different, one good, the other bad,” he claims. The Thames, he goes on, has “conquered its darkness, of course, and is now in daylight and at peace” (252). This is just a very careless, and ideologically driven, reading of the text. The novella begins with a description of the estuary, which concludes:

The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth. (Conrad, 1923b: 45)

And the final words of the novel are no more cheerful:

The offing was barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed sombre under an overcast sky—seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness. (162)

In short, as Cedric Watts has argued, what one might expect to be antitheses, in fact, reveal parallels and similarities (Watts, 1977: 10, 98). Indeed, Conrad destabilises the antitheses of imperialist discourse by suggesting connections where there should only be oppositions: Thames and Congo, darkness and light, civilisation and savagery.

Achebe similarly presents the African woman and the Intended as antitheses. He mentions Marlow’s extended

description of her (“savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent” [Conrad, 1923b: 135-136]) at Kurtz’s departure, which he contrasts with Marlow’s comments on his first moments with the Intended: “I noticed she was not very young—I mean not girlish. She had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering” (157). What is interesting is how Achebe again falsifies the evidence here. He omits the first sentence I quoted, which makes it clear that the “mature capacity for fidelity” is Marlow’s reading of her character once he has discovered that she is “not very young.” Whether this idea of her “mature capacity for suffering” is a true reading by Marlow is another matter. What he is not doing, as Achebe’s juxtaposition and omission imply, is comparing her “mature capacity for fidelity” with the African woman’s capacities. Marlow does, indeed, juxtapose or superimpose the two figures later: “a tragic and familiar Shade, 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” (160-161). Again, as with the two rivers, rather than a simple antithesis, Marlow here presents equivalence, and we are involved in a complex judgement of similarities and differences (not always necessarily at the expense of the African woman).

What might seem a stronger part of Achebe’s argument is what he sees as “the most significant difference” between the two women, “implied in the author’s bestowal of human expression to the one and the withholding it from the other” (Achebe, 1988: 255). He concludes: “It is clearly not part of Conrad’s purpose to confer language on the ‘rudimentary souls’ of Africa” (255). To respond to this I want to turn again to contemporary anthropology and its engagement with “writing the other.”

Let me begin with James Clifford and his consideration of how “out of the heteroglot encounters of fieldwork, ethnographers construct texts whose prevailing language comes to override, represent, or translate other languages” (Clifford, 1988: 112). In “Heart of Darkness,” as in reports of ethnographic fieldwork,

heteroglot experience is rendered into a largely monoglot text, and Clifford mentions, in passing, “the many complexities in the staging and valuing of different languages in *Heart of Darkness*” (Clifford, 1988: 100). Let us consider first the two or three places where this largely monoglot text is broken into by other languages. First, Marlow concludes his account of his meeting with the two women outside the door of the Company offices with the following apostrophe: “*Ave!* Old knitter of black wool. *Morituri te salutant*” (Conrad, 1923b: 57). The Latin tag points to the common culture of Marlow and his audience: a culture grounded in the shared educational background of English public schools. The two other instances occur in the same part of the text, but serve a different function. These are the two occasions when the text breaks out into French. The “*Bon voyage*” from the “great man” who runs the Company (56), and the farewell advice from the doctor (“*Du calme, du calme. Adieu.*”) (58). These passages indicate that, although Marlow’s narrative is in English, many of the encounters that he subsequently recounts are to be imagined as taking place in French. Yet, apart from these two speeches, no attempt is made to indicate that French is generally the medium of communication, except in so far as explicit references to English dialogue (as for example with the Swedish captain) serve this end. We might ask in what language are we to imagine Marlow and the harlequin conversing. The Russian could certainly read English (as his copy of Towson’s *An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship* shows), but would English or French have been the medium for their conversation. The indeterminacy is itself significant, since it suggests that English and French are granted similar status within the narrative.

By comparison, Russian and African languages are present in the text in ways that suggest they have been assigned a lower status in an implicit hierarchy of languages. When Marlow encounters the Russian notes written in Towson’s *Inquiry*, he doesn’t recognise the language but thinks they are “in cipher” (99). In other words, he can’t read them but he decides they are potentially

meaningful. Marlow's failure to even recognise Cyrillic script opens up a gap between Marlow and Conrad—Conrad for his early adult life was a Russian subject travelling with a Russian passport. This also suggests that the text's hierarchy of languages is Marlow's rather than Conrad's. This is particularly important in relation to the representation of African languages in the text. As Achebe notes, African speech is reduced to "a violent babble of uncouth sounds" or "short grunting phrases" (Achebe, 1988: 255). Where Russian exists in the text as script, as written code that is potentially meaningful, African languages are present only as sound; as pre-verbal and pre-syntactic sound; as sound that is the direct expression of emotion or pure sound (like music) or utterance without meaning. However, there is an important exception, which Achebe misses, the Russian's brief inset account of an incident involving the African woman, himself, and Kurtz:

She got in one day and kicked up a row about those miserable rags I picked up in the storeroom to mend my clothes with. . . . At least it must have been that, for she talked like a fury to Kurtz for an hour, pointing at me now and then. (136-137)

In this brief narrative, instead of an iconic "noble savage," the Russian presents domestic drama. Instead of pre-verbal Africans, the Russian presents discursive speech. Marlow reduces Russian script to cipher and African language to noise, but, for the Russian, both have the status of language. In other words, the text's hierarchy of languages is Marlow's, and it is presented as the product of Marlow's specifically English incomprehension.

This brings me to Achebe's most serious charge, and this is the representation of Africans in the text. Achebe instances the presentation of the "improved specimen," the African fireman, whom Marlow compares to "seeing a dog in a parody of breeches . . . walking on his hind-legs" (97). Here we quite clearly have a racist representation, but I would want to argue again that it is still Marlow's representation rather than Conrad's. Marlow,

after all, is a character, and his character is that of an Englishman who signed up to take part in the Belgian exploitation of the Congo. It is interesting to compare his attitude here with similar attitudes in George Orwell's *Burmese Days* (1934), based on Orwell's time serving as a policeman in Burma.

As a context, I want to return to Edward Garnett's review of "Heart of Darkness." I quoted earlier his summary of the novella's theme as "the civilising methods of a certain great European Trading Company" but I left out the final words of the sentence "face to face with the 'nigger'" (Garnett, 1973: 132). Now there are two words that are tricky in this formulation. The first is the word "civilising," which I have already discussed. In relation to what we see in "Heart of Darkness," this has to have a deeply sardonic resonance. However, as I said earlier, for casual readers of the review, who had not read the novella, this might be taken at face value. (And, given Leopold's way of dealing with critics, this might have been a valuable ambiguity.) The second word, obviously, is "nigger." The word appears with quotation marks around it, and these quotation marks clearly hold it up for criticism. Nevertheless, it is the word Garnett uses: he doesn't search for another one. Is it the word he assumes the implied reader would use? Further on, he refers to "the white man's uneasy, disconcerted, and fantastic relations with the exploited barbarism of Africa" (132). As a committed anti-imperialist, Garnett is careful to place the adjective "exploited" before "barbarism," but there is no conception of African culture except as "barbarism" present in the review. Garnett was never in Africa and probably had little or no contact with Africans. As a result, perhaps, he falls back on the lazy stereotype of "barbarism." In another later summary of the novella, he refers to "the helpless bewilderment of the unhappy savages in the grasp of their flabby and rapacious conquerors" (133). Again, there is a clear anti-imperialist stance, but this is combined with what seems to be a lazy recourse to the stereotype ("unhappy savages"). There is also an uneasy sense that his prose has been taken over by Marlow's.

What I am suggesting here is that, in writing “Heart of Darkness,” Conrad encountered the problem that is also encountered by anthropologists: namely to find a language in which Marlow can report his experiences to a home audience. As James Clifford puts it, the ethnographic experience involves “a state of being in culture while looking at culture” (Clifford, 1988: 93). The narrative method of “Heart of Darkness” can be seen as an exemplary response to this part of the problem: Marlow’s account of his experiences in Africa is scrupulously contextualised by the frame narrative. Indeed, for Clifford as a practising anthropologist, Conrad provides a model, not just in this one work, but in the entire body of his work, or rather in the act of writing that body of work:

His life of writing, of constantly becoming an English writer, offers a paradigm for ethnographic subjectivity; it enacts a structure of feeling continuously involved in translation among languages, a consciousness deeply aware of the arbitrariness of conventions, a new secular relativism. (Clifford, 1988: 96)

Conversely, Achebe’s criticism of “Heart of Darkness” as an inadequate “image of Africa” should be set against Gabriel García Márquez’s comment on representations of colonised people’s generally:

The interpretation of our reality through patterns not our own, serves only to make us ever more unknown, ever less free, ever more solitary. (Márquez, 1993: 19)

If Conrad had presented an adequate “image of Africa,” would he also, thereby, have reduced that reality to “patterns not our own” for African readers?

IV. Mid-Point Summary

Achebe is right: African culture and history have been denied adequate representation in European writing, and “Heart of

Darkness” does nothing to remedy this. However, Conrad does not present himself as an expert on Africa and Africans: he creates a narrator and a narrative situation; he does not present the pseudo-authoritative first-person report of so many magazine articles of the period. “Heart of Darkness” fixes on the power-relations between Europe and Africa and holds up for analysis the European discourses produced in that context, exposing the “desires, repressions, investments, and projections” (as Said puts it) (Said, 1979: 8) involved in those discourses. Africa is not the arbitrarily-selected backdrop for a story about “the break-up of one petty European mind”: Kurtz’s “break-up” is the result of his place in the power-laden engagement of Europe and Africa; Kurtz is a victim of one of the discourses of imperialism; and Kurtz’s history shows how damaging that discourse is to both Africans and Europeans although, of course, it is Africans who have borne the brunt of this damage. The current dire situation in the Congo can be traced back directly to Belgian intervention at the end of the nineteenth century.

As I suggested at the start, Achebe’s own account is insufficiently historical. He seems primarily concerned with “Heart of Darkness” as a text existing within modern institutional parameters—specifically, as “the most commonly prescribed novel in twentieth-century literature courses in English Departments of American universities” (Achebe, 1988: 259)—and, even more specifically, as interpreted within that context in the 1950s and 1960s. He treats “Heart of Darkness” without reference to the context in which it was written and without consideration of the kinds of awareness to be expected of a novelist of the 1890s.

In nineteenth-century terms, Conrad was explicitly not a racist. As I will demonstrate in a moment, he is very explicit about his belief in a common humanity. The notion of “kinship,” however remote, in “Heart of Darkness” signals this belief. It contrasts forcibly with nineteenth-century racist attitudes which promoted the idea that different races belonged to different species and, indeed, that, as a result of this, (contrary to evidence) they

could not interbreed without producing sterile offspring. However, by late twentieth-century terms, “Heart of Darkness” has undeniable racist elements—in particular, the representation of the fireman, and the representation of African languages. As I have suggested, however, these might be assigned to Marlow as functions of his narrative. What is harder to justify in these terms is the introduction of the cannibal crewmen and the narrative of Kurtz’s decline presented as a process of Africanisation.

V. The Case of Henry Price

I want to move this argument forward now by considering Conrad’s short story, “An Outpost of Progress,” written in 1896 (that is, before he wrote “Heart of Darkness”) (Conrad, 1923e). Conrad described it as “the lightest part of the loot” that he “carried off from Central Africa.” It presents us with a non-Marlovian “image of Africa,” which allows us to see Marlow’s perspective more clearly.

Early criticism of “An Outpost of Progress” tended to focus on the two Europeans in the story, Carlier and Kayerts. Jocelyn Baines, for example, describes its subject as “the rapid disintegration of two white traders, average products of the machine of civilisation, when confronted with the corroding power of solitude and the unusual” (Baines, 1971: 218). Similarly, much later, Ian Watt, in *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, states that “The plot concerns two average lower middle-class Belgians who go out to the Congo to get rich” (Watt, 1980: 75). “An Outpost of Progress” can, indeed, be read as a sardonic story, in the manner of Guy de Maupassant, which anatomises the inadequacies of Carlier and Kayerts and, through them, mocks the idea of the “civilising mission.” Carlier and Kayerts are introduced as “two perfectly insignificant and incapable individuals, whose existence is only rendered possible through the high organisation of civilised crowds” (Conrad, 1923e: 89). Kayerts has come to

Africa to “earn a dowry” (91) for his daughter; Carlier has been sent to Africa because he “had made himself so obnoxious to his family by his laziness and impudence” (91). Their vision of their task in Africa is to “sit still and gather in the ivory those savages will bring” (90). Both men are so institutionalised, so dependent on the support of a surrounding crowd of like-thinking men, as to be incapable of independent thought or action. Thus Kayerts is filled with nostalgia for his life as a Government clerk in Europe:

He regretted the streets, the pavements, the cafés, his friends of many years; all the things he used to see, day after day; all the thoughts suggested by familiar things (91)

While Carlier is similarly nostalgic for his life as a soldier.

For both men, Africa is a void, a blank: “The river, the forest, all the great land throbbing with life, were like a great emptiness” (92). If this is a version of the imperial gaze, dehistoricising and erasing the human presence from the colonised landscape, then that gaze here is also defined as the product of “stupidity and laziness” (92) rather than an expression of power (although it could, of course, be both). The “great emptiness of Africa,” in this instance, very clearly reflects a lack in the viewer. For one brief moment in the story, Carlier and Kayerts gain a sense of purpose, when they come across an article in an old newspaper about “Our Colonial Expansion.” Its rhetoric allows them briefly “to think better of themselves”:

It spoke much of the rights and duties of civilization, of the sacredness of the civilizing work, and extolled the merits of those who went about bringing light, and faith and commerce to the dark places of the earth. (94)

However, when they try to imagine the civilisation they will bring to this particular “dark place,” the inadequacy of their imaginings subverts their self-regard and the rhetoric of “civilising work”:

“In a hundred years, there will be perhaps a town here. Quays, and warehouses, and barracks, and—and—billiard rooms. Civilization, my boy, and virtue . . .” (95)

Carlier’s vision of civilisation exhausts itself after this brief enumeration of the barracks and billiard rooms of his former life, for which he feels nostalgic.

With the arrival of the “knot of armed men,” the slave traders from the coast, the imperialist rhetoric of civilised and savage receives a further knock:

Their leader . . . stood in front of the verandah and made a long speech. He gesticulated much, and ceased very suddenly. (97)

For readers of “Heart of Darkness,” the scene is curiously reminiscent of Marlow’s speech “with gestures” to his bearers—with the significant difference that this speech is addressed by an African to Europeans. For Carlier and Kayerts, the scene is inexplicably unsettling:

There was something in his intonation, in the sounds of the long sentences he used, that startled the two whites. It was like a reminiscence of something not exactly familiar, and yet resembling the speech of civilized men. (97)

Although Carlier and Kayerts are completely dependent on the safety of the familiar and have each indulged in memories of their former lives, here the discovery of the familiar in the unexpected is unwelcome and the involuntary memory is disconcerting. What they are experiencing is an undermining of the categories, the binary oppositions of imperialist rhetoric, which they have imposed on their experiences of Africa. Where they have been able to dismiss the other Africans they have dealt with as “savages” and “animals,” the arrival of this particular group forces on them a recognition of authority and culture which undermines

their simple civilised/savage binary. In the context of what I have been saying about the staging of languages in “Heart of Darkness,” it is interesting that Carlier recognised that the leader was speaking in sentences and it is significant that his amazed response to this linguistic performance is the observation: “I fancied the fellow was going to speak French” (97).

I could continue further with this analysis of the story in terms of the two Europeans. However, what I want to draw attention to, instead, is how the story is actually very carefully grounded in the cultural diversity of Africa. Furthermore, I would argue that Makola/Henry Price is really the pivotal figure in the narrative: his ability to negotiate between and manipulate the different cultures of Europe and Africa is the true centre of the story.

The cultural diversity of Africa begins in the Makola household. In this “station on the Kassai” in Central Africa, Makola is from Sierra Leone to the north, while his wife is from Loanda in Angola to the south; neither of them is native to the region. In addition to Makola’s household, the story involves three distinct groups of Africans: the local people, the armed strangers from the coast, and the ten station-men left by the Director. It is clear that each of these belongs to a different ethnic group with a distinctly different culture. The local people are represented as a fully-functioning community. It consists of the spear-carrying menfolk, who are engaged in hunting for ivory, and the women, who seem to be in charge of cultivation. Relations with Carlier and Kayerts are determined by their leader, Gobila, “the chief of the neighbouring villages” (95). Gobila is entertained by Carlier striking matches and by Kayerts letting him sniff the ammonia bottle—a version of the technological trope present also in “Heart of Darkness.” Some attempt is also made to represent Gobila’s mental processes, and again recourse is made to familiar “primitive” tropes. Thus Gobila believes that all white men are “brothers, and also immortal” (96). This belief in the immortality of white men is not affected by the death and burial of the first

European to man this station “because he was firmly convinced that the white stranger had pretended to die and got himself buried for some mysterious purpose of his own, into which it was useless to inquire” (96). Gobila here is like the Malay helmsman on board the *Patna*, who declared, in court, that “it never came into his mind then that the white men were about to leave the ship through fear of death”: “He did not believe it now. There might have been secret reasons” (Conrad, 1923c: 115). Like the Malay helmsman, Gobila is represented as assigning to the Europeans a position of unchallengeable authority and superiority: he sees them as god-like beings, or, at least, as beings whose thoughts, actions, and purposes are beyond his comprehension. At the same time, however, the story also makes clear that these “god-like beings” actually depend on Gobila and his people for their material survival:

In consequence of that friendship the women of Gobila’s village walked in single file through the reedy grass, bringing every morning to the station, fowls, and sweet potatoes, and palm wine, and sometimes a goat. The Company never provisions the stations fully, and the agents required those local supplies to live. (Conrad, 1923e: 96)

The strangers from the coast, on the other hand, carry firearms not spears; they are “tall, slight” and “draped classically from neck to heel in blue fringed cloths” (97), whereas the local people are “naked, glossy black, ornamented with snowy shells and glistening brass wire” (92). Apart from these signs of their cultural difference from the local people, the most striking characteristic of these strangers is that they are not in awe of the Europeans. I have already referred to the speech that their leader addresses to Kayerts and Carlier. When it becomes apparent to him that they do not understand him, he addresses himself to Makola, and turns his attention from the Europeans on the verandah of their house to Makola’s hut. For the remainder of the strangers’ stay, the Europeans are ignored, and, to the horror of Kayerts and Carlier,

these strangers “generally made themselves at home” (98) on the station. The third group, the ten station-men, have been brought from “a very distant part of the land of darkness and sorrow” (100). They were engaged by the Company for six months, but have served “for upwards of two years” (100). They can’t run away, because “as wandering strangers they would be killed by the inhabitants of the country” (100). They are represented as having a different culture from the local people, which causes them further problems:

the rice rations served out by the Company did not agree with them, being a food unknown to their land, and to which they could not get used. Consequently they were unhealthy and miserable. (100)

Thus, where the Company, in its limited provision of rations, homogenises African cultures, the narrative carefully distinguishes distinct cultural groups. The station-men, like the local people, are also represented as belonging to a fully functioning community:

They were not happy, regretting the festive incantations, the sorceries, the human sacrifices of their own land; where they also had parents, brothers, sisters, admired chiefs, respected magicians, loved friends, and other ties supposed generally to be human. (100)

The reference to “incantations,” “sorceries,” “human sacrifices” presents them as “other” and accords with stereotypical representations of “the African,” but the subsequent reference to “parents, brothers, sisters” immediately breaks down the distance between them and the reader. The reference to “admired chiefs” and “respected magicians” then turns back upon the reader’s own society and its social and religious leaders. The final words effectively thematise the issue of sameness and difference and prompt the reader towards a sense of common humanity within cultural diversity. This is reinforced subliminally by the parallel between the “regrets” of Carlier and Kayerts for their homes and

the similar nostalgia, homesickness, expressed here. These Africans in Africa feel as homesick for their own distant community as the two Europeans.

In short, where Carlier and Kayerts experience Africa as “a void,” “a great emptiness” (92), the narrative intimates that that space is filled with a range of functioning communities and cultures. And where the Company homogenises Africa, the narrative is careful to distinguish and differentiate a range of cultures.

This brings me back to the staging of languages in the narrative. When Makola is first introduced, it is observed that he “spoke English and French” (86). In addition, it is clear from the narrative that he must also speak—or, at least, understand—some African languages. When the armed strangers arrive, Makola claims not to understand their language, when questioned by Kayerts, but he clearly has some understanding of it, since he responds to their leader when addressed:

“Hey, Makola, what does he say? Where do they come from? Who are they?”

But Makola, who seemed to be standing on hot bricks, answered hurriedly. “I don’t know. They come from very far. Perhaps Mrs. Price will understand. . . .”

The leader, after waiting for a while, said something sharply to Makola, who shook his head. (97)

Mrs. Makola, for her part, both understands and speaks the language (“The next moment Mrs. Makola was heard speaking with great volubility” [97-98]), and Makola subsequently describes them to the Europeans as “traders from Loanda” (101)—which might or might not be true.¹¹ While Mrs. Makola engages in dialogue with the strangers, Makola seems to lose his linguistic skills:

When questioned by the white men he was very strange,

¹¹ The statement is ambiguous: it is unclear whether they have travelled from Loanda or were born in Loanda.

seemed not to understand, seemed to have forgotten French—seemed to have forgotten how to speak altogether. (99)

The implication, obviously, is that Makola, at this point, doesn't want to communicate with the Europeans. He wants to exclude them from knowledge of the dialogue taking place in the station with the "traders from Loanda." Through their linguistic skills, through the different languages they speak, Makola and his wife occupy the pivotal position in the narrative: they can communicate with both these dangerous strangers and the ignorant Europeans, and they can exclude the Europeans from the negotiations, if they wish.

Makola's ability to switch languages is, however, only one aspect of his hybridised identity. I have called him "Makola" throughout, but the story begins by noting that the name had been given to him by "the natives down the river" and had "stuck to him through all his wanderings" (86), whereas he "maintained that his name was Henry Price" (86). His introduction into the narrative also noted that, in addition to his ability to speak English and French, he "wrote a beautiful hand, understood bookkeeping, and cherished in his innermost heart the worship of evil spirits" (86). The implication is, perhaps, the acquisition of a veneer of European skills over a deep-rooted Africanness, but the way he operates in the story actually shows him negotiating between African and European cultures through a switching of languages but also through a performance of identity that draws on the resources of both cultures. That reference to his understanding of bookkeeping is particularly important in this context.

In the latter half of the story, Kayerts and Carlier discover that Makola's dialogues with the "traders from Loanda" were arranging an exchange of the ten station-men, who were no longer able to work, for a load of ivory in order to satisfy the traders' need for men to sell as slaves and, simultaneously, to appease the Director of the Company on his return visit. Or rather, as Makola

explains to Kayerts, there was no exchange in the sense of trade:

“No regular trade,” said Makola. “They brought the ivory and gave it to me. I told them to take what they most wanted in the station. . . . Those traders wanted carriers badly, and our men were no good here. No trade, no entry in books; all correct.” (103)

As Kayerts realises, Makola has sold the station-men into slavery for six tusks of ivory. Makola has got rid of the dangerous “traders from Loanda” through negotiating a deal with them; now he is using his mastery of the discourse of accountancy (and understanding of imperialist hypocrisy) to sell the deal to Kayerts. He presents the exchange as an exchange of gifts; at the same time, as a trained accountant, he re-assures Kayerts that it hasn’t gone through the books. In the same way, later, when Kayerts kills Carlier, Makola again demonstrates his mastery of European discourses:

After meditating for a while, Makola said softly, pointing at the dead man who lay there with his right eye blown out—
 “He died of fever.” Kayerts looked at him with a stony stare. “Yes,” repeated Makola thoughtfully, stepping over the corpse, “I think he died of fever. . . .” (114)

Makola again shows his ability to find the appropriate terms to balance the Company’s books—in this case, finding the right words to account for an awkward corpse.

Makola’s mastery of these different situations through his flexible negotiation of different cultures stands out clearly in contrast with the incompetence and inflexibility of Carlier and Kayerts. And, as the narrative makes clear, an important part of his mastery of situations derives from his mastery of discourses.

VI. Colonial Fiction

Conrad's early reputation was that of a writer of colonial fiction. His first two novels, *Almayer's Folly* (first published in 1895) and *An Outcast of the Islands* (first published in 1896) were both set in South-east Asia, and early reviewers saw him as annexing a new territory for British fiction. They compared his work, for example, with Louis Becke's stories of the South Pacific.¹² He was also, perhaps inevitably, termed "the Kipling of the Malay Archipelago" ("Unsigned Review," 1895: 530). And yet *Almayer's Folly* is a very disconcerting empire story. It is a very different kind of work from the imperialist and masculinist adventure fiction produced by the writers of W. E. Henley's circle (such as Robert Louis Stevenson and Rudyard Kipling). Andrea White has written illuminatingly about Conrad and adventure fiction, showing how Conrad wrote from within the genre of adventure fiction, but, at the same time, "wrote a fiction at odds with the traditional assumptions of the genre" (White, 1993: 5). As White notes, adventure fiction "traditionally celebrated an unqualified kind of heroism" (1993: 5) and provided "the energizing myth of English imperialism" (1993: 6). We might think of Stevenson's Jim Hawkins, for example, and how *Treasure Island* (1883) records his growth to maturity through his successful completion of a series of tests of courage. Or we might think of H. Rider Haggard's hero, Sir Henry Curtis, in *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) with his immense physical strength and courage in battle—and how he and Allan Quartermain and Captain John Good successfully make their way over freezing mountains and waterless desert to their goal (and the replacement of a bad African king by a good one).

I said a moment ago that *Almayer's Folly* was a disconcerting

¹² Louis Becke, *By Reef and Palm* (1894), *The Ebbing of the Tide* (1896), *The Mutineer* (1898).

imperial adventure story, and I want to consider that a bit further now. First, it has to be said that Almayer is a very unheroic hero. In the opening chapter, he thinks back to the start of his career in Macassar and remembers his first impressions of the adventurous Captain Lingard: “And so Lingard came and went on his secret or open expeditions, becoming a hero in Almayer’s eyes by the boldness and enormous profits of his ventures” (Conrad, 1923a: 8). In other words, his admiration is not for the adventures Lingard has had (“his loves, and . . . his desperate fights with the Sulu pirates”) but for “his smart business transactions” (7) and “enormous profits” (8). He agrees to marry Lingard’s adopted daughter, the survivor from a boatful of Sulu pirates, in the hope of inheriting Lingard’s wealth—and getting rid of her. Hardly heroic actions! Secondly, like *Treasure Island* and *King Solomon’s Mines*, *Almayer’s Folly* has a plot involving a search for treasure. Almayer dreams of becoming wealthy and leaving the up-river trading station where he has spent twenty-five years of his life since his marriage. To this end, he allies himself with a Balinese prince, Dain Maroola, to search for gold up-country. However, at the start of the novel, this plan has already met with disastrous failure: the search for gold has to be abandoned, and Almayer is left trying to salvage something from the wreckage. Contrast this with the end of *Treasure Island*, where the pirates’ treasure is divided up between Jim, and the doctor and the squire, and we are assured that “All of us had an ample share of the treasure.” Or the end of *King Solomon’s Mines*, where Quatermain, Good and Curtis’s younger brother Neville have to be careful not to flood the market with the diamonds they have brought back from Africa.

The first disconcerting feature of *Almayer’s Folly*, then, is that Almayer is a failure. Not only does he not find the gold, but it is apparent from the start that his whole life is a failure: his business in Sambir has failed; he has lost his patron; and he is trapped up a Borneo river with a wife he despises and had planned to get rid of. Furthermore, Almayer is powerless in Sambir: when Dain arrives, Almayer’s first response is to send him on to the

Rajah: “You have come to the wrong house . . . if you want to trade as you say. I was a trader once, not now” (52). It also becomes clear, as the narrative proceeds, that Almayer doesn’t even control what goes on in his own household: his wife has private dealings with the Rajah and her own separate transaction with Dain, of which Almayer is entirely ignorant. This is a very different image of the European in the tropics from the masterful white men of colonial adventure fiction.

I said that Almayer allies himself with Dain to search for gold. We are told early in the novel that Lingard had spent “all the profits” from his legitimate trade on expeditions up-country in an unsuccessful search of gold. It is this search for gold that Dain agrees to undertake for Almayer. In return, Almayer will arrange for Dain to acquire the gunpowder he needs to defend himself against the Dutch, who are the colonial power in the area. As the opening of Chapter 4 states clearly, after the outbreak of the Achin War (that is, after the Achinese took up arms against the Dutch attempted takeover of Sumatra), the Dutch tried to enforce “the total stoppage of gunpowder trade” in the archipelago (48). In other words, Almayer, who is of Dutch descent, is supplying gunpowder to a local leader to engage in fighting with the Dutch. Not only is Almayer not an heroic imperialist male, he is actively supporting the anti-imperialist struggle. Furthermore, Conrad’s narrative gives full weight to local politics. Not only is Dain Maroola working in order to protect Balinese independence from Dutch colonial interests, but Sambir has a complex local politics quite independent of its nominal Dutch masters. Almayer has been displaced by the Arab trader, Syed Abdulla, with his Arab trading networks, and the old Rajah has been replaced, with “the help of a little scientific manipulation” (i.e., poison), by Lakamba (who represents the Bugis interest in the area).

Another unconventional feature of Conrad’s novel is the prominence of women in it. In the first place, there is, of course, Mrs. Almayer. Although Haggard explicitly excludes “petticoats,” he does give prominent roles to two women, Gagool and Foulata,

neither of whom, of course, wears a petticoat. The ancient, evil Gagool is derived from stories of witch doctors and medicine women; Foulata, by contrast, is young, beautiful and caring. Foulata is an example of a common female figure in colonial travel-writing and fiction: the beneficent local woman who tends to the suffering European male “out of pity, spontaneous kindness, or erotic passion” (Pratt, 1992: 95-96). This figure is a way of recuperating the European practice of concubinage and simultaneously asserting both European superiority and the welcome extended to colonising Europeans by local people. By contrast, Mrs. Almayer as a young woman had been part of a Sulu crew attacking Europeans (and others). When Lingard had killed all her companions, she had expected to be enslaved by him and become his mistress—she was not best pleased to find herself sent to a convent to be educated. Her subsequent marriage to Almayer is a great disappointment to her. She has an affair with Lakamba; she schemes against her husband; and at the end of the novel leaves him to cross the river to the Rajah’s compound.

The other prominent female is the Almayers’ daughter, Nina. Indeed, part way through the novel she takes over the central position in the narrative. The story of Almayer’s failure and decline is counterpointed by the story of Nina’s discovery of a new identity. She had been brought up by Almayer to think of herself as a “white woman,” but this identity doesn’t survive her move to Singapore to be educated. When she returns, she takes an interest in her mother, her mother’s traditions and her mother’s stories, “describing the glories of the Sultan of Sulu, his great splendour, his power, his great prowess” (41). Dain’s arrival provides the catalyst for her commitment to a new identity. Nina is half-Dutch and half-Malay, in a fictional world divided between Dutch and Malays. In the end she finds her new identity by aligning herself with her Malay heritage. Thus, not only is Almayer a failure, but his daughter finds a solution to the problems caused by her mixed descent by choosing her mother’s Malay traditions rather than her father’s European ones.

In his “Author’s Note” to *Almayer’s Folly*, which, unfortunately, wasn’t published with the novel, Conrad addresses himself to Alice Meynell’s criticism of what Conrad describes as “that literature which preys on strange people and prowls in far-off countries.”¹³ Where Meynell had criticised this literature as “decivilised,” Conrad’s “Author’s Note” insists on the legitimacy of dealing with non-Europeans in fiction by asserting the common humanity shared between people “no matter where they live; in houses or in huts, in the streets under a fog, or in the forests behind the dark line of dismal mangroves” (Knowles, 1995: 4). Indeed, as a direct challenge to Meynell’s idea of fiction of empire as “decivilised” fiction, Conrad wanted his first novel to be advertised as a “Civilised story in savage surroundings.”¹⁴

VII. Neo-Colonialism

I want to end by considering *Nostramo* (1904) in relation to both neo-colonialism and globalisation. Chapter 3 of *Almayer’s Folly* begins: “deliberations conducted in London have a far-reaching importance, and so the decision issued from the fog-veiled offices of the Borneo Company darkened for Almayer the brilliant sunshine of the Tropics” (Conrad, 1923a: 34). James Corner has noted that we now “live in a world where local economies and cultures are tightly bound into global ones”: “localities can be more closely connected to sites thousands of miles away than to their immediate surroundings” (Corner, 1999: 226). Conrad was aware of the close connections between the local and the global from the start of his writing career. In *Nostramo*, he confronts this issue directly: not only is the silver mine, the central

¹³ Owen Knowles includes this “Author’s Note” in his edition of *Almayer’s Folly* (1995: 3-4). All references to this “Author’s Note” are to this edition.

¹⁴ Alice Meynell’s article, “Decivilised,” was published in the *National Observer* (24 January 1891) and reprinted in *The Rhythm of Life* (1893). See Karl & Davies (1983: 199).

symbol for “material interests” (or, as we would now say, “market forces”), run by US finance, but the steamship company, the railway, and the telegraph company all represent the penetration of the economy of Conrad’s fictional South American country by European financial interests.

The immediate historical context for *Nostromo* was the emergence of the United States as an imperial power. Partly through his friendship with Cunninghame Graham, Conrad took a particular interest in the Spanish-American War. In May and July 1898, Conrad wrote to Cunninghame Graham echoing his friends’ public opposition to the United States’ role in the war and his criticism of US expansionist ambitions. Under the December 1898 treaty that concluded the war, the United States acquired, among other things, Cuba and the Philippines: this clearly marked the end-point in the imperial decline of Spain and the arrival of the United States as an international player. Another event during this period reinforced this message and is more directly relevant to *Nostromo*. Until November 1903, Panama was part of the Republic of Colombia. In June 1902, the United States Congress approved the Panama route for a new canal to link the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Unfortunately, the Colombian government rejected the terms of the Hay-Herrán Treaty to develop the new canal. Representatives of the New Panama Canal Company then promoted a secessionist movement in Panama. US warships prevented Colombian troops from landing to suppress the revolt, and, when Panama seceded from Colombia on 3 November 1903, the new country received prompt recognition from the United States. Within a month, Panama had negotiated in its own name the canal treaty that Colombia had rejected. On 26 December 1903, Conrad wrote to Cunninghame Graham, reflecting on what he termed “the Yankee Conquistadores in Panama” (Karl & Davies, 1988: 102). Cunninghame Graham’s strategy of drawing parallels between the conquistadores and the new imperialism also plays its part in *Nostromo*, the novel Conrad had begun in December 1902. The novel begins by evoking the “time of Spanish rule,” and the

“time of Spanish rule” remains as the text over which the present time of the novel is palimpsestically written. Thus, for example, when Charles Gould re-opens the San Tomé mine, its blood-stained history is recalled: “Worked in the early days mostly by means of lashes on the backs of slaves, its yield had been paid for in its own weight of human bones. Whole tribes of Indians had perished in the exploitation” (Conrad, 1923d: 52).

On the surface, *Nostromo* could be said to be the story of the drawing of a boundary and the creation of a new nation. After the failure of the Ribierist Government of Costaguana, which has been funded by European capitalists and represented their interests, the founding of the new republic of Sulaco preserves the Blancos, the creole aristocracy, as the ruling class and continues to protect the investments of the US and European capitalists at the expense of the indigenous peoples. The Ribiera Government had been backed by the mine-owner Gould, and Gould had been backed by the American financier Holroyd. As the novel discreetly puts it, “with a credit opened by the Third Southern Bank (located next door but one to the Holroyd Building), the Ribierist party in Costaguana took a practical shape under the eye of the administrator of the San Tomé mine” (143). Holroyd had early on expressed his vision of US influence:

We shall be giving the word for everything: industry, trade, law, journalism, art, politics, and religion, from Cape Horn clear over to Smith’s Sound, and beyond, too, if anything worth taking hold of turns up at the North Pole. . . . We shall run the world’s business whether the world likes it or not. (77)

The early part of the novel shows very clearly how this neo-colonialism works: it emphasises, in particular, how the “conditions of civilized business” (37) operate in relation to the development of the railway. The building of the railway needs land at cheap prices, which the landowners are unlikely to agree to. The first stage was that “A commission had been nominated to fix the

values, and the difficulty resolved itself into the judicious influencing of the Commissioners” (37). Ultimately, however, the “man of railways” knows that Ribiera “was their own creature” (38) and can rest assured that “The Government was bound to carry out its part of the contract with the board of the new railway company, even if it had to use force for the purpose” (37).

However, in Conrad’s representation of the new republic a new emphasis creeps in. This is not just the new form of imperialism that was to dominate the twentieth century, but rather a fearful anticipation of globalisation. Thus the novel notes early on (in a retrospective view from beyond the foundation of the new republic) that the “material apparatus of perfected civilization which obliterates the individuality of old towns under the stereotyped conveniences of modern life had not intruded as yet” upon Sulaco (96-97). However, by the end of the novel, we can see how this process is overtaking Sulaco through the glancing reference to the “American Bar” on the Plaza Major. At the same time, as Tony Schirato and Jen Webb have noted, contemporary globalisation has also been accompanied by a “turn to the local,” and Conrad shows how this aspect of globalisation, too, was already evident at the start of the last century (Schirato & Webb, 2003). Thus, at the end of *Nostramo*, alongside the triumph of “material interests,” we glimpse the existence of “the secret societies amongst immigrants and natives” (511) working to resist the new world order. This re-introduces the difference within the Americas that the discursive regime of globalisation occludes (and also foregrounds those for whom the new economic order is a threat to civilisation rather than synonymous with civilisation).

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康拉德：後殖民主義與帝國主義

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(王智明譯)

摘要

本文伊始重新考量阿切貝將康拉德視為「徹頭徹尾的種族主義者」的著名批評。文章之初檢視阿切貝此一演講的脈絡，並透過閱讀阿切貝引用的兩位批評家——古拉與李維斯——來分析「康拉德」在當時所指為何。本文特別藉由仔細檢視古拉為新美國文庫出版的《黑暗之心》流行版本所撰寫的緒言，探究在阿切貝的批評介入前，這部作品在美國如何為人所閱讀，並將之與加耐特早先發表的評論相較。這樣的比較顯示古拉的心理學讀法祛除了這部小說中的非洲特色，並抹去了讀者原先閱讀這部作品時所涵概的主題的獨特性及政治性。本文接著仔細檢視阿切貝對《黑暗之心》的指控，並提供另類的閱讀，特別注重康拉德的敘事策略，他與帝國主義論述的交鋒，以及作品中不同語言的階序。文章繼而考量康拉德另一篇非洲故事〈進步的哨所〉，以支持《黑暗之心》的主角馬洛有別於作家康拉德的讀法，原因在於〈進步的哨所〉呈現了一個非馬洛式的「非洲意象」，讓我們更清楚看出馬洛觀看非洲的視角。本文進一步參照康拉德早期的馬來小說，將對他的非洲故事之讀法置於這個脈絡裡，文末並思考《諾斯楚摩》這部長篇小說與全球化的關係。

關鍵詞：康拉德、阿切貝、《黑暗之心》、〈進步的哨所〉