

**“AN AIR OF PLOTTING”:
CONSPIRACY AND IMPERIALISM IN JOSEPH
CONRAD’S “HEART OF DARKNESS”**

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Abstract

This paper will argue that the manager’s conspiracy against Kurtz manifests the same strategy as that employed by real-life colonial explorers in the 1890s. It also argues that Marlow tries to grasp the significance of “imperialism” as a historical process when he tells the story of Kurtz.

This paper will contextualize the conspiracy theme by discussing two historical contexts: the Emin Pasha Relief Expedition, and J. A. Hobson’s *Imperialism: A Study*. It will show that the manager’s journey marks similar efforts in territorial annexation to those that characterized the Expedition. Secondly, this paper will tackle “imperialism” as a contingent historical process. It will discuss Marlow’s evaluation of Kurtz in the context of the late 1890s when “imperialism” meant different things to different European countries.

Key Words: Joseph Conrad, conspiracy, imperialism