Contents

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English: Master´s thesis

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02-06-20

# What's in a symbol? Darkness in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

## Introduction

The bulk of my previous engagements have revolved around literary criticism of what we can call literary classics. In this I have noticed regarding the reception literature of various literary classics that certain schools of thought give a drastic different reading than others. This by itself is not unusual and should come as no surprise that different schools of thought give different readings. What does seem surprising is just how different readings can get and it sometimes may seem that the various criticisms have not read the same literary text that embodies their criticism.

In this way it seems that a conclusion to one's presumption is given beforehand and that the literary text merely acts as a medium to confirm one's preordained beliefs. This in turn becomes problematic as it makes the literary text to be something that it may not be.

In line with this I wish to analyze Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* with a focus on the symbol of darkness and as employing an approach brought forth by Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism*. Such an approach may enable a view of the literary text as a whole, covering as many as its ambiguous meanings as the theory allows. Further, I wish to compare my own reading to those offered by selected and what I call politicized criticisms. All the above-mentioned leads me to the following thesis statement and questions:

Contemporary literary criticism has become ingrained in the political. An alternative understanding is to be found in Northrop Frye. Frye offers a relevant, universal

and unique approach to literature that politicized criticisms pay less or no attention to. In order to answer this paper's thesis, I will work with the following thesis questions: What makes contemporary literary criticisms political? Why is Frye relevant and how does he offer a universal and unique approach to literature? To which degree is it possible to compare the readings of selected politicized literary criticisms to one offered by Northrop Frye?

In the following section I will present a methodology that works towards explaining how I plan to work towards answering my thesis statement and questions.

## Methodology

In order to answer this paper's thesis, I start the following section with a contextual framework on the contemporary climate of literary theory as outlined in Terry Eagleton's book *Literary Theory – An Introduction* (2008) and Stephen Hick's *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault* (2011).

Following this, I will briefly elaborate upon the topic of Frye's political philosophy which will draw upon Brian Graham's book *The Necessary Unity of Opposites: The Dialectical Thinking of Northrop Frye* (2011).

The theoretical chapter will encompass the theoretical concepts used for this paper's analysis. The analysis seeks to answer the third thesis question of this paper; the degree in which it is possible to compare previous politicized readings to one offered by Northrop Frye. The second essay of Northrop Frye's book *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) titled *Ethical Criticism: Theory of Symbols* will be applied as the main theoretical source. As this book can be described as ambitious in its understanding, Robert D. Denham's *Frye's Theory of Symbols* (1975) will be used as a reference.

I will further introduce the parameters within which I will go about to apply the theory. Following this clarification chapter, the analysis will be presented.

I have chosen to analyze Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* with an emphasis on the symbol of darkness. This is chosen partly because the text has been scrutinized from every corner of literary criticism. It is thus my hope that in so working with this text from an approach brought forth by Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* will enable me to answer this paper's thesis statement and questions. *Heart of Darkness* has especially been read from many different political standpoints, be it Marxism, racism, feminism, post-colonialism, and so on. These receptions will form the focus points of my own analysis.

A comparison of political readings to one offered by Frye may prove to be rich of comparative examples. The primary text is partly chosen on behalf of what is suggested in the *Anatomy of Criticism*: a literary work that is regarded as a 'greatest classic' and thereby embodying a general tendency of what Frye terms 'primitive formulas' that is understood as the kind of literary text that have survived the test of time and may thus be rich in symbolic significance.

Symbols are highly ambiguous in meaning and by isolating and focusing on the symbol of darkness it is my hope to employ a universal approach to literature that politicized criticisms pay less or no attention to. I will outline an introduction to politicized readings of *Heart of Darkness* that will include a presentation of the general areas of interest found by politicized readings of the text.

The analysis will be conducted by a close reading and the organizing principle of the analysis is context. This context is provided by various 'phases' as organizing categories. These are: literal, descriptive, formal, mythical and anagogic.

Analyzing the symbolic phases of darkness may cover as many of the ambiguous meanings of the symbol as possible. The phases represent the many methods of analyzing symbolic meaning and it is clear that different kinds of criticisms relate or are inspired to different phases of symbolism.

In Frye's terms the descriptive phase critic will be interested in signs and how a text refers to things outside of the text such as biographical and historical criticism. The literal phase critic emphasizes motifs and takes a stance away from the literary author, society and history so to only study the literary work. The formal phase critic focuses on image so to interpret the feeling and tone of a text. The mythical phase encompasses the archetype. With the mythical phase we may start to see the universal aspect of Frye's approach. This phase deals with genres, conventions and traditions in literature, expanding universally. The last phase, the anagogic phase, deals with symbol as a monad.

My hypothesis is that the mythical and anagogic phase stands out and contrasts most clearly from a politicized reading. Anagogic refers to a religious, mystical or spiritual interpretation of which monad refers to the totality of all things and beings, as everything in one thing. This phase as well as the mythical phase may be an example of universal meaning. This type of criticism touches upon the progress of man, aspirations of society and human desires and universal stories of opposites such as good versus evil, man versus nature, and so on.

I will isolate the symbol of darkness in *Heart of Darkness* and analyze the meaning of the symbol in terms of Frye's five phases and compare these findings to one offered by selected political readings such as feminist and post-colonial criticism.

## Contextual Framework

This contextual framework seeks to address and answer the first question of this paper's thesis: What makes contemporary literary criticisms political?

The point of the following chapter is to evaluate this question. This question is inspired by the conclusion to Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (2008, Anniversary ed), titled *Conclusion: Political Criticism*. Eagleton, often described as a Marxist

critic, offers in his book from 1983 a clear presentation and argued introduction to twentieth-century literary theory and criticism.

## Contemporary Literary Theory: Political Criticism?

The title of Eagleton's conclusion should give us a simple answer: that criticism is political. Politics, he writes, has been a part of literary theory from the beginning. The political is defined around the way in which social life is organized and the power-relations involved in this. Eagleton's book seeks to show that the history of modern literary theory is part of the political and ideological history of our epoch (Eagleton 169).

Politics and literary theory share the same concerns of language, meaning, values, feelings and experiences as well as engaging in elaborated ideas about the nature of human individuals and societies. The historical emerges in the interpretations of history and in the differing views and versions of this past as well as present and in the assessment of the future. All literary theories are in this sense ideological. The problem arises in conjunction with the idea of literary theory being political in that it does so covertly or unconsciously. And some theories more than others. Modern, or contemporary literary theory, Eagleton writes, is just yet another culprit of this. His accusation is that modern literary theory takes a flight from realities to turn to alternatives. This flight lies in its distancing and refusal of social and historical realities.

Literary criticism deals in selecting, processing, correcting and rewriting texts in accordance with norms or 'rules' which at any given time is arguable and always historically variable. The authorities within a given field has the power of 'policing' language. They choose and determine that certain statements be excluded if they do not conform to a given norm. The power-relation lies in those who define and preserve the discourse. The political of literary theory happens between the literary-academic institutions and the ruling power-

interests of society at large. Eagleton's critique of politicized theories lies in its inability to self-reflect.

Ideology indicates discourses and power. Everyone has an opinion about something and the method in which we study literature reflects a strategic planning. There is obvious weaknesses and strengths of all theories and knowledge, and some are highlighted in his conclusive chapter. Formalist and structuralist criticism is unable to answer, writes Eagleton, the question of 'interest' while what he calls the 'liberal humanist' is. This is also the weakness of the latter's case. The weakness lies in this 'interest' of transformative power and in the overestimation of what it means to be a 'better person' (181). The power lies in determining and judging what this is. Current social priorities in this sense become especially political.

Moving to the foreword of the anniversary edition of Eagleton's book, we find a reevaluation of ´´what has happened over the last couple of decades´´ and an answer in that semiotics, hermeneutics, phenomenology and psychoanalytical theory is less prevalent today and instead we now have post-modernism, post-structuralism, post-colonialism and feminism as the commanding theories. Post-structuralism and post-modernism are classified as a cultural reality whereas semiotics and post-colonialism are classified as a political one. Eagleton's classification is interesting as it touches upon everyday cultural and political life.

The new big players in the literary theory field such as post-modernism and post-colonialism criticisms are what he describes as the opposite of 'pure' theory such as semiotics, hermeneutics, poststructuralism and phenomenology and notes that these 'pure' theories, ´´very distance from the everyday allows it to act from time to time as a powerful critique of it´´ and that ´´this is not the case with much post-modernist theory´´ (ix).

## Postmodern Politics

What is then post-modernist theory and why is it not able to self-reflect and self-criticize? Postmodernism, notes Eagleton, in its most complacent forms of pluralism, multiculturalism and respecting human differences, are as good as things can get.

Perhaps in striving for these ideals, a sort of powerhouse in terms of what can be regarded as the apex of a certain moral good, it becomes difficult to criticize itself. Unpacking 'postmodernism', the ´´most widely touted term in cultural theory today´´ (200), is a different matter. The historical or philosophical term 'postmodernity' can be distinguished from the narrower cultural and/or aesthetic term 'postmodernism': ´´Postmodernity means the end of modernity, in the sense of those grand narratives of truth, reason, science, progress and universal emancipation which are taken to characterize modern thought from the Enlightenment onwards´´ (200).

Truth or falsehood to these statements aside and in a short version: postmodernism is the distaste for fixed boundaries and categories on the traditional distinction; ´´a subversive strike at all elites, hierarchies, master narratives and immutable truths´´ (202). If we turn to its politically minded proponents we find ideas of ´´truth, identity, totality, universality, foundations, metanarrative´´ must be rid of so ´´genuinely effective radical projects can get off the ground´´ and includes names such as Foucault, Stanley Fish, Derrida and Richard Rorty (203).

New literary approaches have sprung up in this intellectual age of postmodernism, the most popular of which as noted by Eagleton are from the mid-1990s such as feminist and post-colonial criticism. The postmodern West finds an urgency of deconstructing categories and identities in the study of culture. The West is now being challenged by 'multiculturalism', writes Eagleton, to rethink its identity. Culture moves into areas of language, lifestyle, social value, group identity, and ´´intersects with questions of

political power´´. Marginal groups and peoples, racism, ethnic conflict and 'the other' are postmodern themes in ´´peripheral cultures´´ (204).

A critique of post-colonial theory is noted in it being too quickly conflated with much different societies under the same category of 'Third World' as well as in its language of obscurantism marked in its champions and remoteness from the conflicted and as such has ´´done little more than reflect the guilty self-loathing of a Western liberalism which would rather, in these hard political times, be absolutely anything but itself´´ (206).

Surprisingly, in this divided and fragmented world, it is precisely the traditional humanist doctrines which Eagleton points to as finding a hard time to die out. Especially the assumption of universal value as he notes that ´´the universal value may still be incarnate´´ and ´´a rare glimpse of transcendence can still be attained´´ (208).

It is within this idea that lay the premise of this paper's latter question: Why is Northrop Frye relevant and how does he offer a universal and unique approach to literature?

Before I attempt to answer this question, I would like to expand more on postmodernist theory as it in a sense speak of the opposite of the idea of universality, which in turn may emphasize the relevance of Frye.

## Cultural Politics

Stephen Hicks' book, *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault* (2011) dissects the political aspect and history of Postmodernism. Feminist theory and Post-colonial theory we have learned, are one of the most successful products of this intellectual age of postmodernism, and a product nonetheless found necessary.

This paper's thesis question: What makes contemporary literary criticisms political - is only partly answered in the former section of this paper. The answer so far is more of a statement: that contemporary literary criticism is political, because of postmodernism, but it doesn't address the why.

It is briefly noted by Eagleton that the political of literary theory happens between the literary-academic institutions and the ruling power-interests of society at large. From the literary-academic institutions: Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Francois Lyotard and Richard Rorty are marked by Hicks as the ´´postmodern vanguard´´, similar clientele as noted by Eagleton, and notes that these ´´members of this elite group set the direction and tone for the postmodern intellectual world´´ (Hicks 1).

Hicks, a philosopher at Rockford University, argues and presents from a perspective of a libertarian and is seen as an opposite view to Eagleton, what we can call an opposition to contemporary left-wing political strategies in his book. Hicks point of entry is within the origins of contemporary anti-capitalist movements, demonstrated in which postmodern ideas are rooted in Western intellectual tradition and how these deviates from what we can call orthodox Marxist.

It is in the failure of achieving the goals of the means of production that the Left, in Hicks' view, has responded with a denial of reality which he traces to the thinking of Kant, to Foucault and to Derrida. In short: an opposition to enlightenment ideals that is achieved by focusing on the links between the body, discourse, and power.

The idea is to minimize the pursuit of Enlightenment goods of material prosperity, technological prowess and reasoned self-understanding. This is achieved by changing our discourse to these ideas. Greater equality between those that have, and the have-nots can be achieved by changing our discursive stance on the importance of wealth and to lower feelings of self-worth that is attached to the acquisition of wealth.

We have learned that the society we live in now is Postmodern. Postmodernism as understood by Eagleton is to go against the idea of fixed boundaries and categories found in the traditional distinction. Postmodernism is an attack on elites, hierarchies, master

narratives and immutable truths. Ideas of truth, identity, totality, universality, foundations and metanarratives must be rid of.

From this it is not hard to see how postmodernism become political. These are all ideas that have shaped and developed Western civilization, and in so, the critique would go that what follows from advancement in society is dominance, oppression, and destruction towards the lesser receiving end of the stick. White rich males and capitalist nations are to be seen on top of the ladder and on the bottom: women, racial minorities, the poor, and developing or struggling nations.

Postmodern themes in ethics and politics are characterized by an identification as well as sympathy for marginal oppressed groups. If modernism have shaped the world for several centuries, the term postmodern is then situated in movement historically against modernism.

Modernism emphasizes individualism, perception and reason toward nature in contrast to the medieval or pre-modern characteristics of reliance of tradition, faith, original sin and feudal subordination. Liberal democracy followed from individualism. Reason, individualism, liberalism, science, and other ideas of the enlightenment project is what postmodernism, according to Hicks, rejects. Natural reality becomes anti-realism, experience and reason becomes linguistic social subjectivism. Individual identity and autonomy become various race, sex and class group-isms. Individualism in values, markets and politics becomes communalism, solidarity and egalitarian restraints. Science and technology are met with suspicion (14).

More interestingly for this project are postmodern or poststructuralist literary criticism, which we have learned is the tree, of which feminist criticism and post-colonial criticism are its branches.

In postmodern literary criticism, objectivity is replaced by the view that an author's race, sex or group membership shapes the text through deconstruction. Hicks, not being a

literary critic, gives an example reading of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*: instead of exploring universal themes of personal and social ambition, man and nature, what Captain Ahab ´´really represents is the exploitative authoritarianism of imperialistic patriarchalism and the insane drive of technology to conquer nature´´ (16). Elizabeth Schultz' reading of *Moby Dick* from 1988 of which Hicks is quoting from, exemplifies how a postmodern reading of *Moby Dick* becomes political.

Why postmodernism then? Truth, reality, reason, experience, liberty and equality, justice and peace, beauty and progress are all concepts that sound worth striving for. The vanguard, says Hicks, set these concepts into quotation marks, say that ´truth´ is a myth and that ´reason´ is a white male Eurocentric construct. Equality is a mask for oppressions and peace and progress are ´´met with cynical and weary reminders of power´´ (20).

Postmodernism thus become a cultural, philosophical and political movement that targets modernist and Enlightenment ideas. The grounds of epistemology do little to explain why postmodernism is political. Hicks finds that postmodernists are not distributed randomly across the political spectrum but are highly concentrated in the left-wing. What is interesting is why the appeal to subjectivity and irrationality can be of service politically. Socialism, historically, has always defended the modernist grounds of reason and science. This centralizing argument is important for Hicks. Socialism, accordingly, committed itself to propositions which empirically, scientifically and rationally could be scrutinized. The classical Marxist Socialist claims emphasized by Hicks are as follows:

1. ´´Capitalism is exploitative: The rich enslave the poor; it is brutally competitive domestically and imperialistic internationally
2. Socialism, by contrast, is humane and peaceful: People share, are equal, and cooperative.

3. Capitalism is ultimately less productive than socialism: The rich get richer, the poor gets poorer; and the ensuing class conflict will cause capitalism's collapse in the end.
4. Socialist economies, by contrast, will be more productive and usher in a new era of prosperity´´ (86-87).

Disaster would be that all four claims ´´were refuted both in theory and in practice´´ (87). According to Hicks, the free market has won. On the case of the moral and political, liberalism in its broadest sense, writes Hicks, is essential to protecting civil rights and civil society in general. Left-wingers are re-packaging themselves as more moderate communitarians, showcasing that the debate has shifted toward liberalism. His view is that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting richer. Historically, socialist nations have collapsed into dictatorships.

This speaks of the crises felt by left-wing socialists in the 20th century and is just one explanatory example. In this argument lies Hick's hypothesis about post-modernism: ´´Postmodernism is the academic far Left's epistemological strategy for responding to the crisis caused by the failures of socialism in theory and in practice´´ (89).

## Modernism & Postmodernism: Language & Meaning

The left-thinkers of mid-20th century thus found themselves in a dilemma. The new tactic would spring from subjectivist and relativistic epistemologies. But how does postmodern epistemology become integrated with postmodern politics?

One of the key strategies says Hicks, is language. This is illustrated by concepts such as ´´unmasking´´ and ´´rhetoric´´ and by a parallel between the modernist and postmodernist view of these concepts. For modernism, the ´´mask´´ metaphor is the recognition of the fact that words are not always to be taken literally or as a direct fact. Language can be used elliptically, metaphorically and to say falsehoods. Language can be textured with layers of meaning.

It is within ´´unmasking´´ we find an interpretive and investigative process whereby a literal meaning of the matter can be gained. It is a cognitive process, guided by objective standards and its purpose is to come to terms with an awareness of reality (175). Contrary to this we find the postmodern view. Here interpretation and investigation never clash with reality. We cannot get outside of language. In Hicks' view of postmodernism there is no non-linguistic standard which to relate language and no standard by which we can distinguish between the literal and the metaphorical, the false and the true. Deconstruction therefore never ends.

Rhetorically and in the modernist view, the function of language is complementary to it being cognitive. Reality is shaped by perception and forms conceptual beliefs on the premise of these perceptions: to act is based on cognitive and perceptual states. Rhetoric thus refers to the methods of using language that aid in the cognition of linguistic communication.

Contrary speaking in the postmodernist view we find that language cannot be cognitive because it does not connect to reality. The purpose of language is not to argue in order to prove or disprove. Instead of cognition, truth and argument, attractiveness is preferred. In this we find empathy, sensitivity and toleration. And in turn, effectiveness. Postmodernism then ´´seeks not to find the foundation and the conditions of truth but to exercise power for the purpose of social change´´ (183).

## Politicized Schools of Thought: Feminist and Post-Colonial Criticism

From Eagleton we learn that Feminist and Post-Colonial criticism are the two most successful products of our contemporary age of postmodernism. In the assessment of the political aspect of these schools of thought we find through Hicks that they are influenced by post-structural theoretical concepts that deals in the areas of language, culture and identity so to establish social change through power.

This brings us to the next point which may be relevant for this project's later analysis of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as this text is widely read by feminist and postcolonial criticisms.

Emphasizing and supplementing upon Hicks & Eagleton's views we find in Abrams and Harpham's pages on postcolonial studies in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* that ´´an important text in establishing the theory and practice in this field of study… applied a revised form of Michel Foucault´s historicist critique of discourse to analyze what he called ´´cultural imperialism´´… this mode of imperialism imposed its power not by force, but by the effective means of disseminating in subjugated colonies a Eurocentric discourse that assumed the normality and pre-eminence of everything ´´occidental´´, correlatively with its representations of the ´´oriental´´ as an exotic and inferior other´´. And that ´´such analysis has been supplemented by other theoretical principles and procedures, including Althusser´s redefinition of the Marxist theory of ideology and the deconstructive theory of Derrida´´ (Abrams & Harpham 277). Further, we learn that post-colonial studies identify several central issues: ´´The rejection of the ´´master narrative´´ of Western imperialism… its replacement by a counter-narrative… a major element in the postcolonial agenda is to disestablish Eurocentric norms of literary and artistic values, to expand the literary canon to include colonial and postcolonial writers´´ (277-278).

More so we find in Edgar & Sedgwick's *Cultural Theory* that post-colonial criticism is interested in a wide range of ´´metaphysical, ethical, methodological and political concerns´´ as well as the nature of ´´cultural identity and gender, concepts of nationality, race and ethnicity, the constitution of subjectivity… questions of language and power´´ (Edgar & Sedgwick 251).

This builds upon the notion that Postmodernism exercises power for the purpose of social change.

So far, we are bombarded with terms such as Postmodernism and poststructuralism. To clear things up I would like to define the two terms as they are sometimes mixed up and used differently by different authors.

Postmodernism is the distaste for fixed boundaries and categories on the traditional distinction. Postmodernism is the art, person and culture. Poststructuralism is the parallel movement in linguistic and literary theory. It is the critical perspective and procedure way of dealing with language and other systems. If structuralism is logocentric with a systemic structure, then poststructuralists regard this as being incoherent and absent. It strives to undermine or subvert traditional claims of so-called self-evident foundations that in structuralism guarantee the validity of knowledge and truth.

Poststructuralism deals with skepticism of universal meaning, knowledge, truth and value. This skepticism is evident in some modes of literary studies such as feminist studies (Abrams 279). In politically oriented poststructuralist critics, the established way of thinking becomes questioned and a stance is taken toward the established institutions, class structures, practices of economic and political and social organization: ´´an opposition to inherited ways of thinking in all provinces of knowledge´´ (280). The extreme form of poststructuralist theory encompasses both cognitive and evaluative relativism. All asserted truths and values are relative at a given time and place or to an economic, social, ethnic or interpretive class. The political aspect arises in advocating for or appeal to social justice, emancipation and equality for racial, sexual, ethnic and or other oppressed and excluded minorities (283).

Feminist Criticism, as noted by Eagleton, is the most successful of the political criticisms, with postcolonial criticism coming just behind. Feminist theory, then as of now, is at the top of the intellectual agenda: ´´it was the one which connected most deeply and urgently with the political needs and experience of well over half of those actually studying

literature´´ (Eagleton 193). Feminist Criticism provides a political link between the academic institutions and society.

## The Politics of Feminist Criticism

Having established a link between postmodernism and poststructuralism to feminist and postcolonial studies and why and how these can be perceived as being politicized, I would like to briefly emphasize the former as it gives a means to a broader perspective which may aid in answering this paper's thesis questions.

Much of feminist criticism concerns itself with the political fight for social, legal and cultural freedom and equality. Feminist criticism manifests itself by various vantage points and procedures, be it psychoanalytic, Marxist, poststructuralist and so on. The various feminisms share concepts and assumptions about ´´the factor of sexual difference and privilege in the production, the form and content, the reception, and the critical analysis and evaluation of works of literature´´ (Abrams 111). In this view, Western civilization is patriarchal, as understood in historic terms as being ruled by the father. Society is male-centered, controlled and organized and conducted so to subordinate women to men in all areas. As society is male dominated and patriarchal, the feminine is thus identified as ´´passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional, and conventional´´ (111).

This ideology pervades literature and writings that previously have been regarded as great literature and which is understood in this line of thinking as being written by men, for men. The highly regarded works of literature in this view focus on male protagonists that embody masculine traits. Females, if, and when they have a role are reduced to the marginal and subordinate, as complementary or as opposition to masculine desires and enterprises. The woman reader is thus an alien outsider. Furthermore, in this line of thought, the traditional categories and criteria for analyzing and interpreting literary works, which is represented in standard critical theory as ´´objective, disinterested, and universal´´ are infused

with masculine ´´assumptions, interests, and ways of reasoning´´ and thus gender-biased (Abrams 112).

One way to reconstitute our readings of literature in feminist criticism is to do justice to the female point of view, concerns and values. An author's intentions as well as design can be countered and a ''revisionary rereading'' (112) can take place to highlight presupposed sexual biases in a literary work. More so, in terms of language, an undertaking in feminist criticism is to make apparent that there is a ´´distinctive feminine mode of experience, or ´´subjectivity,´´ in ´´thinking, feeling, valuing, and perceiving oneself and the outer world´´ (113). A ´´women´s´´ language, or a feminine style of speech and writing in ´´sentence structure, types of relations between the elements of a discourse, and characteristic figures of speech and images´´ (113).

A goal of feminist critics is to enlarge and reorder, or to displace, the literary canon, the cumulative consensus of great works of literary texts. In terms of feminist criticism and theory, this come to be conceptualized with post-structural frames of references so to show for example that a male bias is encoded in our linguistic conventions in the use of ´´man´´, ´´mankind, ´´chairman´´, ´´spokesman´´ (114) and so on. A further claim is that all Western languages, in their totality, are male-engendered, male-constituted, and male dominated. Discourse in this view is what is termed phallogocentric.

Western language and discourse are manifested in logic, fixed classifications and oppositions, valid evidence and objective knowledge (114). The problem for feminist criticism is to establish the very possibility for a woman's language that does not conform and be appropriated into this supposed phallogocentric language, ´´since such appropriation is said to force her into complicity with linguistic features that impose on females a condition of marginality and subservience, or even of linguistic nonentity´´ (114).

There is a strong dilemma attached to this kind of non-logic. Abrams highlights one way to evade this dilemma. If a child, in a Western, patriarchal and phallogocentric society acquires language by proxy of existing in said society, then feminine writing and language for Hélène Cixous, must have its source in the mother before the child acquires said male-centered language. This is achieved ´´prelinguistic´´ and ´´unconsciously´´ in for example ´´those written texts which, abolishing all repressions, undermine and subvert the fixed signification, the logic, and the ´´closure´´ of our phallocentric language, and open out into a joyous freeplay of meanings´´ (114). The male centered, existing, monopolized language system, can also be evaded as posited by Luce Irigaray by ´´the diversity, fluidity and multiple possibilities inherent in the structure and erotic functioning of the female sexual organs and erogenous zones, and in the distinctive nature of female sexual experiences´´ (114).

Post-structural line of thoughts and positions are seen in a ´´prelinguistic, pre-Oedipal, and unsystematized signifying process, centered on the mother´´ and the technique is to challenge all categorizations of ´´woman´´ and/or other established concepts relating hereto.

This is seen as a contrast or a parallel to the father-controlled, syntactically ordered, and logical language, called ´´symbolic´´ (114). The process, called the semiotic process, seeks to disrupt and disperse ´´the authoritarian ´´subject´´ and strikes free of the oppressive order and rationality of our standard discourse which, as the product of the ´´law of the Father,´´ consigns women to a negative and marginal status´´ (115). Feminist theoretical and critical writings and line of thoughts are then to ´´expand yearly in volume and range´´ (115) and programs in women´s studies are appearing increasingly.

Having made the link between postmodernism and poststructuralism to politicized school of thoughts as seen in feminist criticism and post-colonial criticism I will

now move to Brian Graham´s *The Necessary Unity of Opposites: The Dialectical Thinking of Northrop Frye* (2011). This book may provide a means to assess how we can understand Northrop Frye´s contemporary relevance and as an alternative reading that deviates from what we can understand as a political reading as seen in feminist and post-colonial criticism.

## Northrop Frye: Beyond Politics?

We learn from Eagleton's *Literary Theory* that all literary criticisms are political.
Brian Graham in *The Necessary Unity of Opposites* advocates and argues that an interpretation of Northrop Frye lies in his post-partisan and dialectical position and secular thinking. Herein for this paper lies the value and interest in Frye's thinking. Graham's book is written ´´against the backdrop of highly politicized university studies´´ (Graham x) and brings to attention the political nature of Northrop Frye's work.

This section of the paper's contextual framework will revolve around the paper's thesis question: Why is Frye relevant and how does he offer a universal and unique approach to literature?

Graham's main argument is that Frye´s thinking is secular and dialectical, that Frye´s thinking is post-partisan and beyond ´Left´ and ´Right´. Frye's thinking and views are influenced by a view of literature and nature and as analogies to oppositions. In literature, writes Graham, the order of nature is characterized by oppositions such as night and noon, and of ''two opposing worlds: the world of romance and the analogy of innocence and the world of realism and the world of experience''. The two worlds stand in dialectical opposition to one another, but ´´in the apocalyptic world above they move dialectically beyond opposition and enter into unity´´ (5). The apocalyptic world is what Graham terms the unity of opposites.

More so, Frye identifies with the possibility of a third option, a dialectical and ´suprahistorical´ alternative. In this way, values such as beauty, truth, education, work,

liberty, equality, belief or vision are understood and shown to ´´not be mutually exclusive´´ in a historical viewpoint but ´´rather objectives which are in agreement with one another and therefore simultaneously attainable´´ (6). In other words, how we understood the value and meaning of beauty today is how it is to be understood tomorrow, as it was understood centuries ago. Beauty understood in this suprahistorical sense is thus never changing. Helen of Troy in mythology is said to be the most beautiful woman in the world but her appearance in the Homeric poems is given no description whatsoever. In this way the audience is allowed their own personal conception of beauty.

This is seen as an alternative position and antithetical to a historical mode of thought and therefore as a 'suprahistorical' alternative. This suprahistorical option is seen as transcending the level of historical dialectically opposed ideas and their political associations.

## Frye's Political Context and Blake Influence

Frye's political background is the wake of the Second World War and a wish to break free of the capitalist-communist opposition that affected much of the world in the wake of World War Two. The 1960s was a time of new trends in thinking that has come to be spoken of as the New Left. American liberalism at the time focused on the ´´legalization of abortion, issue of school prayer, Equal Rights Amendment, the sexual revolution, birth-control initiatives´´. The conservative response represented a rejection of much of these ideas and in the 1980s the ´´Left went on to develop its own new version of cultural radicalism, championing 'diversity', multiculturalism, and constructivism in the universities´´ (13).

This battleground of ideas has now been labeled culture wars. On one side we find an impulse toward orthodoxy and on the other side an impulse toward progressivism: ´´a new vanguard who prize a break with the past for an improved future´´ (13). This invites an understanding of Frye that lies in the opposition of conservative and radical, and a conclusion

that he is to be regarded as a cultural conservative, however, argues Graham, this is not the case.

Graham emphasizes that an influence of Blake lies behind Frye's avoidance of ideological dead ends of the twentieth century. Frye stand out from his contemporaries because of his Blake influenced dialectical thinking as brought forth by Blake´s conceptions of Orc, Urizen and Los. These conceptions, writes Graham, are dialectical and thereby post-partisan. This is evident from one level of meaning. Orc and Urizen represents radical and conservative attitudes respectively. Orc is tied in with passion, dream and the pleasure principle while Urizen with law, conscience and the principle of reality. In Blakean symbolic meaning: ´´… the cyclical nature of human history. A lurch to the Left, or rise of Orc, always presages an immanent return to the Urizenic thinking of the political Right´´ (20).

The symbolic worlds of Orc and Urizen are seen in dialectical opposition to one another. Los or Eden represents an alternative and ´´can be thought of as dialectical, suprahistorical… post-partisan´´. This third factor, Los, is bound up with apocalypse, and symbolizes societal work or constructive activity.

Frye's influence and understanding of Blake is, argues Graham, emblematic of the structure of his own secular dialectical thinking. The context of the third level, of which antithetical modes of thought are complementary, the values they promote such as beauty, truth, leisure, work, liberty, equality, are seen as necessary unities instead of dichotomies and hence post-partisan, beyond a left-wing and right-wing world. The secular dialectical is thus symbolized by Los and the apocalyptic world and its association of a world above nature and human history as symbolized by Orc and Urizen (21).

This Blakean symbolic world is partly representative of Frye's dialectical and post-partisan thinking, as seen through his literary theory. If we move beyond the symbolic

arena to explain Frye's post-partisanship, we find highlighted areas such as education and work as well as Frye's political philosophy, characterized by its dialectical nature.

On education and work, and in a short version, Graham concludes that Frye's attitude towards work and education is like his attitude to literature and is representative of his dialectical and suprahistorical thinking. Work and education are for Frye the one and the same thing. Leisure in this sense becomes ´´the cultivation of a vision of the real society which is the goal of work´´ and ´´work is a meaningful activity and not a burden best left to ´´lower orders´´ (75). Frye's view of leisure represents left and right political attitudes respectively.

## Frye's Political Middle-Ground

Frye's political thinking is influenced in the context of the Cold War and a desire to move beyond the stage of competing ideologies, understood as being mutually exclusive, and towards one which is ´´dialectical, suprahistorical, and post-partisan, where those goals are revealed to be compatible and simultaneously achievable´´ (76). Frye advocates for a political program that emphasizes equal weight to equality and freedom, to Left and Right priorities respectively.

Elaborating on these statements is proceeded by what Graham terms ´a new refutation of Left and Right´ and quotes Frye from Jan Gorak's *Northrop Frye on Modern Culture* (2003): ´´A totalitarian society may perhaps be reminded that it can pursue equality to the point of forgetting about liberty. A society like ours can be reminded that we can pursue liberty to the point of forgetting about equality'' (88). From this we can see a clear critique of capitalism and Communism and a representation of his dialectical thinking, as of a necessary unity. Granted, this reading of Frye from a contemporary point of view, may seem social democratic and in a sense, left-wing. However, as noted by Graham, the kind of social democracy, the ''third way'' (98), or middle ground, that Frye's necessary unity points to, is seen as a middle ground between a free-market capitalism and communism, a post-partisan

option. Frye, in this sense is not beyond politics. No one is. What he advocates for is a middle ground between the extreme ends of the two wings.

## Clarification of Theoretical Concepts

As the analysis of this paper seeks to answer the degree in which it is possible to compare previous politicized readings to an approach as offered by Northrop Frye, I will in this section present a definition of the various theoretical terms used in this paper's analysis. The theoretical source of this paper is Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, namely the second essay of the book titled *Ethical Criticism: Theory of Symbols*. As the *Anatomy* can be described as ambitious in its understanding, I will include points from Robert D. Denham's *Frye's Theory of Symbols*.

Northrop Frye is an acclaimed and influential literary critic, his discoveries as well as his development of literary interpretation are to be found in the *Anatomy of Criticism*. This book includes four 'essays' of literary theory and symbolism. The title name of the second essay, *Ethical*, is understood as a referral to a ''consciousness of the presence of society… (It) deals with art as a communication from the past to the present, and is based on the conception of the total and simultaneous possession of past culture'' (Frye 24). The connection between the past and the present is understood as the archetypal view of literature and of the connection between art and life, ´´which makes literature a liberal yet disinterested ethical instrument´´ (Denham 64). Literary education or study in this sense becomes for Frye an ethical aim.

The theory of symbols is directed towards an analysis of criticism. The contexts are 'phases' of how literature has been and can be interpreted. The aim with *Ethical Criticism* is to outline or discover the various levels of symbolic meaning.

Frye defines symbol as ''any unit of any literary structure that can be isolated for critical attention'' (71). This broad definition ranges from a word, phrase or an image to

the poem itself as a symbol reflecting the entire poetic universe and correlates with Dante's term of polysemous meaning: any work of literature may have multiple symbolic meanings. Such a broad definition allows Frye to associate appropriate kind of symbolism with each phase so to define the phase at the most level of generality. From this we get four sections of phases that present symbolism on five levels, the first containing two: literal; as motif, descriptive; as sign, formal; as image, mythical; as archetype and anagogic; as monad.

### Literal and Descriptive Phases: Symbol as Motif and as Sign

The first two of five phases are linked together as they are defined in relation to each other. We can understand sign and motif by terms such as centrifugal, as in outwards, and centripetal, as in inwards. When reading, one's attention moves both inward and outward. When the reader's attention focuses outwards, the attention and thinking are on the things that the words mean in relation to the reader's memory of their associations. Inwards, the focus is on a sense of the larger verbal patterns that words make. The verbal elementals that connect centrifugally are referred to as signs whereas the centripetal verbal elementals or structures are referred to as motifs.

In the descriptive phase the symbol is a sign as seen in the movement of reference being centrifugal. When the symbol is a motif the movement is centripetal. Verbal patterns in this theory are classified accordingly to the final direction of meaning, centrifugally, or centripetally.

A symbol as a sign can be exemplified by the symbol of ´cat´: ´´a group of black marks on a page representing a sequence of noises representing an image or memory representing a sense experience representing an animal that says meow'' (Frye 73). Sign becomes a unit that stand for and point to things outside of the place they occur. Inwards the symbol of cat is not primarily a symbol ''of'' anything, as it does not represent anything, but connects in a literal sense, as a motif.

The descriptive phase shows the centrifugal property of a symbol. Verbal structures may assist in this, exemplified by ‘’cat’’ and ‘’meow’’, as a sign. A ‘sign’ does not belong in the text but is the conventions that exist for talking about and naming something of our world.

The literal phase shows the centripetal property of a symbol. Here we can gather meaning by the context of the symbol. The symbol is understood by its contextual meaning in a specific situation and the motif is understood as the literal symbol. Context is understood as how words take on meaning in relation to one another. Centripetal meaning is understood as the symbolic meaning that derives from itself and not from things outside of the text. This criticism has come to be called New Criticism: the literary work as an autonomous work of art set apart from its creator and societal context (Frye 82). The literal phase of symbolism is akin in understanding to documentary naturalism as marked by direct or verifiable statements.

### Formal Phase: Symbol as Image

In the formal phase we see the union of the literal and the descriptive phase that, for Frye, provides the first stage of understanding.

The image in this phase is the symbol of the formal phase. Images may invoke feelings and tone of a text. Narrative and meaning in the descriptive and literal phase diverge in two opposite poles. In the formal phase the interest is in making them converge until they are somehow unified so to convey ‘’form’’ (Denham 67). The form of a poem can be understood by which every detail relates. Formal criticism begins by examining the imagery of a text in order to bring out its distinctive pattern: ´´the recurring or most frequently repeated images form the tonality´´ (Frye 85). Images of blood and sleeplessness in *Macbeth* is an example and points to thematic importance, as a typicality of the genre of tragedy of murder and remorse and emphasized in the line ´´making the green one red´´ (85) whereby the colors are of different intensities and thus used as a contrast, red being the key of the play as a

whole. Formal criticism does not read ideas into a text but reads out what is there, and the evidence offered of what that is so to ´´isolate the ideas embodied in the structure of poetic imagery´´ (Denham 68).

Denham highlights some criterion for Frye's taxonomy which can be thought of as the degree to which a writer insists his imagery to precepts and examples and that the poet´s intention is directed centripetally. We should not read too much into a literary text's potential meaning but make use of what is in the text. The formal phase deals with commentary on a literary text as a potential allegory of events and ideas. The symbolism is used in the sense of thematically significant imagery and begins with images of actual things to then work outward to ideas and propositions, to find a concrete image to represent it (Frye 89).

### Mythical Phase: Symbol as Archetype

The mythical phase deals with the external relations of a literary text to others. The symbol of the mythical phase is the archetype. Melville's whale in *Moby Dick* is just one example out of ´´leviathans and dragons of the deep from the Old Testament´´ (Denham 70). We see in this phase how symbolism operates in multiple works of art. Symbols as archetypes is to consider how the symbols function across multiple texts and to draw connections among them. This phase is associated with archetypal criticism and deals with conventions, genres and traditions in literature.

The archetypal analysis of the plot of a literary text work with terms of the generic, recurring or conventional actions that shows analogies to what we can call rituals such as weddings, funerals, executions, chasing away of a villain, and so on. Frye notes that art imitates nature. Nature and art is exemplified with ´´the sun, the moon, the seasons, and human life and experience and is then seen in dawn, sunset and in the phases of the moon, seed-time and harvest, the equinoxes and the solstices, birth, initiation, marriage, and death´´

(Frye 105). Ritual in this sense imitates the cyclical processes in nature, ´´the rhythmic movements of the universe and the seasons, as well as the recurring cycles of human life; and literature in its archetypal phase imitates nature in the same way´´ (Denham 71). Archetypal criticism is based upon these organizing patterns. Symbols in this phase are natural objects with a human meaning and archetypal criticism therefore ´´rests on two organizing rhythms or patterns, one cyclical, the other dialectic´´ (Frye 106).

We can gather that an archetypal symbol, usually, is a natural object that has a human meaning and that it forms a view of art as a product of civilization. Convention thereby becomes archetypal. Frye's dialectical thinking becomes apparent in the mythical phase. Archetypal criticism in this sense rests on two patterns: cyclical and dialectic. In the union of ritual (mythos) and dream (dianoia) we see myth give a meaning to ritual and narrative to dream. In this dialectical thought of opposites, we have recurrence and desire. If ritual and dream are narrative (mythos) and significant content (dianoia), in the archetypal aspect recurrence become the ´´ritual as a recurrent act of symbolic communication´´ (Denham 71). Ritual in the two patterns of cyclical and dialectical imitates the processes of nature such as the movement of the seasons and cycles of human life. The dialectical pattern concerns itself with the world of dream where we find that desire is in a constant conflict with reality and ´´liberation and capture, integration and expulsion, love and hate´´ would be terms applied to the dialectic in ritual and dream (72). For the literary critic the content of dramatic action is the ritual of it.

### Anagogic Phase: Symbol as Monad

The anagogic phase deals with the symbol as a monad. Anagogic refers to a religious, mystical or spiritual interpretation of which monad refers to the totality of all things and beings, as everything in one thing.

This phase as well as the mythical phase is an example of 'universal meaning'. The anagogic phase is seen as a culmination of Frye's theory. The different phases of literary symbolism are viewed as a sequence parallel to that which Frye terms medieval criticism. In this sense the descriptive level will correspond to the historical or literal one of the medieval scheme, ´´or at any rate of Dante´s version of it´´ (Frye 116). The formal phase is the level of commentary and interpretation, equivalent of the second or allegorical level of the Middle Ages. The mythical phase, the study of myths and of poetry, is seen a technique of social communication and corresponds to the third medieval level of moral and tropological meaning that concerns with the figurative and social aspect of meaning, the medieval distinction between the allegorical of what one believes (*quid credas*) and the moral as what one does (*quid agas*). This, explains Frye, is also reflected in his conception of the formal phase as an aesthetic or speculative. With the anagogic phase, ´´We have now to see if we can establish a modern parallel to the medieval conception of anagogy or universal meaning´´ (116).

The anagogic phase, like the mythical, is concerned with the mythopoeic aspect of literature but in a narrower sense of themes ´´relating to divine or quasi-divine beings and powers´´ (116). Archetypes we have learned, are communicable symbols. In Frye's view, there is a center of which a group of universal symbols belong. The universal here is understood as ´´images of things common to all men, and therefore have a communicable power which is potentially unlimited´´ (118). Universal symbols in the mythical phase may include ´´food and drink, of the quest or journey, of light and darkness´´. The mythical phase unites the ritual and the dream. In the anagogic phase ´´literature imitates the total dream of man´´ (119). Going from the descriptive to the formal phase of symbolism the imitation of nature shifts from a reflection of external nature to a formal organization of which nature was the content. In the formal phase, the poem is still contained by nature or reality. In the

archetypal phase, the whole of poetry is also still contained within the limits of the natural or plausible. In the anagogic phase nature becomes no longer contained, ´´but the thing contained´´. Archetypal symbols such as the city, the garden, the quest, the marriage, and so on, ´´are no longer the desirable forms that man constructs inside nature, but are themselves the forms of nature´´ (119).

The different phases of symbolism are not to be seen mutually exclusive.

A symbol may have different aspects, from the literal to the descriptive, to the formal and lastly to the mythical and anagogic. If we take the symbol of a ´tree´ as an example, then it is both a word with a sound, or a sign of trees in the world, to a symbol of new life or birth, to human goodness and truth. The phases of symbolism thus take the critic through different levels of symbolism so to zoom in and out of symbolic meaning.

## Introduction to Post-Colonial & Feminist Readings of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

Feminist and Post-Colonial criticisms, as mentioned by Eagleton, are the most successful enterprises of contemporary postmodern society. These schools of thought have been found to be politicized.

## Post-Colonial Readings of *Heart of Darkness*

### Chinua Achebe: Joseph Conrad - Racist?

Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe's essay *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness* from 1975 argues that *Heart of Darkness* as well as Joseph Conrad purveys colonial stereotypes about Africans. Achebe points to Conrad the author as a ´´bloody racist´´ and asserts that the literary text renders ´´Africa as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril´´ (Achebe 21).

Achebe is quick to jump to conclusions, stating that ´´quite simply it is the desire – one might indeed say the need – in Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to

Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest´´ (15).

Achebe's criticism is not only on Conrad or *Heart of Darkness* but on European and Western civilization as seen through what he terms permanent literature.

Africa in this sense will function as ´´the other world´´ as an antithesis to Europe and therefore of civilization. Achebe points to attributes of civilization that he sees as intelligence and refinement are in Africa ´´mocked by triumphant bestiality´´ (15).

*Heart of Darkness* employ numerous settings. The text opens on the River Thames and in Achebe's view is juxtaposed to the River Congo: ´´the very antithesis of the Thames´´. The River Congo is understood by Achebe as a primordial place and as one stuck in time. He notes that river Thames has ´´conquered its darkness… and is now in daylight and at peace´´. What this 'darkness' is, is suggested as a lack of ´´kinship, of common ancestry´´ that will be absent in Congo (15). Achebe's reading is suggestive that the Africa portrayed by Conrad is frenzied, chaotic, disorganized and primal and hence an embodiment of ´darkness´.

Achebe reaches the conclusion that Conrad is racist on the premise that ´´white racism against Africa is such a normal way of thinking that its manifestations go completely unremarked´´. This conclusion is made on the backbone of presumed previous readings of *Heart of Darkness* in 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´´ and ´´Africa is merely a setting for the disintegration of the mind of Mr. Kurtz´´ (21). Achebe's goal is to disestablish what he sees as a Eurocentric norm in the portrayal of Africa as a mere analogy of deterioration of one's mind - as a figurative hell and the elimination of Africa as a human factor. Africa as a metaphysical setting is thus questioned. *Heart of Darkness* as a literary canon is also questioned in this regard. In

Achebe's view the literary text celebrates the dehumanization of African peoples and should therefore not be called a great work of art (21).

His essay is concerned with the European image of Africa and not only of the one depicted by Conrad. Europe stands as advancing in civilization while Africa is ´´trapped in primordial barbarity´´. The meaning of *Heart of Darkness* in this post-colonial reading is an understanding of Africa as something to be avoided (25).

Achebe's reading in retrospective can be seen as furthering a view of endemic racism in European literature and in so establishes itself as an early example of Post-Colonial criticism that concerns itself with political and social questions regarding the role of imperialism and racism in Western literature, compelling critics with such interests to a return to *Heart of Darkness* with a new point of view.

### Hunt Hawkins: Joseph Conrad - Racist or Critic of Imperialism?

For Hunt Hawkins in his 1982 article *The Issue of Racism in Heart of Darkness* does just that. Achebe's essay has brought ´´a fresh perspective to Conrad studies´´ but only ´´carry a measure of truth´´ (Hawkins 163). Hawkins attempts to answer some of Achebe's claims while not denying Conrad's racist characterizations of the natives but contends that we look at the historical and biographical context to argue that Conrad is more overtly critical of Europeans than of Africans.

Hawkins' starting point is on the level of characterization, noting that *Heart of Darkness* ´´barely shows the Congolese. None of the African characters has a name… No African appears for more than a full paragraph. We do not go into the minds of any of the Africans to see the situation from their point of view. In fact, they barely speak, being limited to a total of four pidgin sentences´´ (163). Instead we get in Hawkins view Marlow's ´´derogatory language in describing Africans´´. Examples of this derogatory language are descriptive words such as ´´savages, niggers, the prehistoric man, rudimentary souls´´ and

adjectives to their behaviour or appearance such as ´´grotesque, horrid, ugly, fiendish, satanic´´ as well as implicit animal comparisons with ´´ants, hyenas, horses, bees´´ (163). Conrad's imagery of African peoples and life is thus marked by Hawkins as a projection that can hardly be called flattering. These examples and viewpoints may support Achebe's argument of racism.

On the other hand, these examples can also be called into question as being a simple way of reducing Conrad to that of a racist. Hawkins departure in this route is the argument that Conrad is to be seen as a progressive of his time: ´´his attitude is complex, itself critical of racism… ultimately sympathetic to non-European peoples´´ (163) and wishes to shed a different understanding of Conrad's complexity and in so studies a series of defences on Conrad's behalf.

The first line of defence deals with one of Achebe's critiques of Conrad and in his reduction of Africa as a setting to describe a figurative hell. Hawkins argues that the European's hearts are not corrupted by Africa or Africans but also carry the corruption of Europe, whatever that may be, within them. He reaches this conclusion from Kenyan novelist Leonard Kibera: ´´I study *Heart of Darkness* as an examination of the West itself and not as a comment on Africa´´ and emphasizes that Conrad the author had little personal experience of Africa, did not speak any African language and while he has been in Africa, he ´´spent… mostly in the company of white men´´ (164). Conrad in this sense gives a brief and almost non-existing portrait of African life while instead focusing on the European characters: ´´Marlow, Kurtz, the Intended, the pilgrims – and the European forces which drive them such as the need for money´´ (164).

Hawkins' final point lies in Conrad's depiction of the Europeans, which in his view seem more negative than of his imagery of Africans: ´´a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed

devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly´´ and of the Manager with a ´´short flipper of an arm´´ and the members of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition as ´´less valuable animals´´ (167).

On the topic of the corruption of the character of Kurtz, Hawkins makes the argument that he is driven by motives of economic prosperity through ivory trading so to accumulate wealth to become successful back in Europe, wishing that ´´kings meet him at railway stations on his return´´ (167). As well as showcasing less material lusts in favour of power over Africans. In this view Kurtz is not corrupted by Africa or Africans but is himself the corruptor. The adjectives applied to Africans in the literary text such as ´´satanic´´ is in this way not what they do on their own, but ´´for their participation in Kurtz's ceremonies´´ (167).

In this regard Achebe fails to acknowledge or appreciate Conrad´s condemnation of Kurtz and European imperialism generally. The most revealing character in this sense is according to Hawkins to be seen in Marlow. Marlow in the beginning of the text describes the Africans as ´´grotesque, horrid, ugly, and fiendish´´ but develops sympathy for them and makes an effort to understand that in Africa drums may have ´´as profound a meaning as the sound of bells in a Christian country´´ (168). Marlow does not exploit Africans the same way as Kurtz either, instead he chooses to acknowledge their shared mortality in ´´their humanity – like yours´´ (168).

These viewpoints shed light that *Heart of Darkness*, at least for Hawkins, represents an attack on imperialism and emphasizes a progressive Joseph Conrad in his critique of colonialism and imperialism, which in no doubt can be seen as a rare sight with the time of publication in mind.

## Edward Said: Two Post-Colonial views of *Heart of Darkness*: Employing Postmodernism

These two conflicting sides of the post-colonial debate leads us to Edward Said whom in his essay *Two Visions in Heart of Darkness* argues for a contradiction between two ´´visions´´ of imperialism.

His first vision renders the world ´´as official European or Western imperialism saw it´´. What Said means by this is that the old and narrow view of us vs. them is kept intact, the West has left its colonies but withholds moral, cultural and intelligent superiority over what has been conquered and is exemplified with ´´Show me the Zulu Tolstoy´´ (Said 25).

Achebe portrays this line of thinking in defending ´´Conrad's savages´´, whom he reads as being portrayed as cultural inferior to Europeans. Achebe, in a response to British art historian Frank Willet's description of Gauguin's trip to Tahiti: ´´the most extravagant individual act of turning to a non-European culture in the decades immediately before and after 1900, when European artists were avid for new artistic experiences… that African art began to make its distinctive impact´´, of which Achebe is quick to highlight and assert that ´´they have a name too: the Fang people, and are without a doubt among the world's greatest masters of the sculptured form´´ (Achebe 24). This approach assumes that the colonial world ´´ontologically speaking´´ are ´´lost to begin with, irredeemable, irrecusably inferior´´ (Said 25) and must therefore be defended. This vision deals with the supposed inability of *Heart of Darkness* to imagine anything other than the Western master over the colonial ´´other´´.

Said's second Post-Colonial vision of *Heart of Darkness* is ´´considerably less objectionable´´. His argument for this second vision deals with an understanding that Conrad saw his own narratives as local to a time and place, ´´neither unconditionally true nor unqualifiedly certain´´ (26). Conrad in this way is aware of being stuck in time, does not reflect about the past or future, and does not, in Said's view, give us the sense that he could ´´imagine a fully realized alternative to imperialism´´. The natives of *Heart of Darkness* are

thus given no hope of independence and European tutelage is taken as a given. What Conrad does in Said´s view is to date imperialism, to show its contingency, record its illusions, violence and waste which enables later readers to imagine something more of an Africa carved up by different European colonies and is seen by him as a ´´less imperialistically assertive possibility´´ (Said 28).

In this view, Marlow, while on the boat anchored in the Thames, tells his story as the sun sets, and by the end of the narrative ´´the heart of darkness has reappeared in England; outside the group of Marlow's listeners lies an undefined and unclear world´´ (28). The reader is thus left to decide what this supposed imperial metropolitan represents. What Conrad achieves according to Said is self-conscious circular narrative forms which draw attention to themselves as artificial constructions to encourage the reader ´´to sense the potential of a reality that seemed inaccessible to imperialism, just beyond its control, and that only well after Conrad's death in 1924 acquired a substantial presence´´ (29).

Elaborating upon this is achieved by depicting Conrad's narrators as ´´not average unreflecting witnesses of European imperialism´´ meaning the narrators showcase cognition. Said's essay is short of textual examples in this regard and instead turns to ´´an important ideological shift during the 1970s and 1980s´´ (26). For Said, this ideological shift is the contraction of horizons of ´´the first of the two lines leading out of *Heart of Darkness*´´.

Said points to Jean-Francois Lyotard and Michel Foucault as ´´apostles of radicalism and intellectual insurgency´´ whom describes a ´´great legitimizing narratives of emancipation and enlightenment´´ (26). Said turns to postmodernism, which he sees through Lyotard's eyes as ´´concerned only with local issues, not with history but with problems to be solved, not with a grand reality but with games´´ and of Foucault's idea of ´´the self to be studied, cultivated, and, if necessary, refashioned and constituted´´ (26).

By incorporating these lines of thought Said make the argument that Conrad´s narrative form; ´´in its explicit references to the outside, it points to a perspective outside the basically imperialist representations provided by Marlow and his listeners´´ (27-28). Moving outside of the narrative enables Said to point to things outside of the literary text and to move beyond a ´´beginning point and a vindicating goal´´ and thus to make his own trajectory out of Conrad's narrative form. This perspective ´´suggests the presence of a field without special historical privileges for one party´´ of which Said can be said to belong to the ´´non-white, non-Western, and non-Judeo-Christian´´ and thus in his view a ´´less imperialistically assertive possibility´´ (28).

Said's Post-Colonial reading of *Heart of Darkness* is marked by what I will term positive imaginary. By deconstructing Conrad's supposed ´´way of demonstrating this discrepancy between the orthodox and his own views of empire´´, Said demonstrates vaguely what will apparently leave Conrad's ´´immediate audience as well as the reader with the acute sense that what he is presenting is not quite as it should be or appears to be´´ (29).

Said's reading of *Heart of Darkness* employs an approach that allows him to conclude that ´´the whole point of what Kurtz and Marlow talk about is in fact imperial mastery, white European *over* black Africans, and their ivory, civilization *over* the primitive dark continent´´ (29). Critique of empire and colonialism is in this view the meaning of *Heart of Darkness*.

Said's postmodern reading sees the world of *Heart of Darkness* ´´being made and unmade more or less all the time´´. Conrad, Marlow and Kurtz will in this view be seen as ahead of their time in understanding that ´´the darkness´´ has an ´´autonomy of its own, and can reinvade and reclaim what imperialism had taken for *its* own´´ (30). But as Said explains, are not able to move beyond their time so to take the next step: ´´to recognize what they saw, disablingly and disparagingly, as a non-European ´´darkness´´ was in fact a non-European

world *resisting* imperialism so as one day to regain sovereignty and independence, and not, as Conrad reductively says, to reestablish the darkness´´ [*sic*] (30).

Said's reading limits Conrad to an implicit critic of imperialism. The darkness is in this understanding to be colonized or illuminated: ´´to bring light to the dark places and peoples of this world by acts of will and deployments of power´´ (30).

For Said, imperialism has monopolized the entire system of representation and it is through a deconstructive approach that he reaches a conclusion that allows him to speak for ´´the other´´, to conclude that Conrad ´´preserved an ironic distance in each of his works´´ (25) – an ironic distance that deals with criticizing imperialism, of a narration in Said's view is sealed within its own circularity so to establish the effect that everything is not quite as it should be or appears to be and in so distorts reality.

## Feminist Readings of *Heart of Darkness*

### Jeremy Hawthorn: Women & Imperialism

Hawthorn's essay *The Women of Heart of Darkness* argues that Conrad purposely crafts the female characters in *Heart of Darkness* to give ´´insight into the way in which gender visions enter into the duplicities of imperialism´´ (Hawthorn 360) and that issues of gender are ´´inextricably intertwined with matters of race and culture´´ (353). From a feminist criticism perspective, the friendship with post-colonial criticism is a construct that is now becoming familiar as imperialism seems to occupy many of Conrad's critics. In feminist and post-colonial line of thinking, imperialism is a product of patriarchy after all.

The women located by Hawthorn in *Heart of Darkness* as playing an ´´indispensable role´´ are Marlow's aunt, Kurtz´ presumed mistress and The Intended (353). Other than these three women there is the portrait of the blindfolded female as well as the two women knitting black wool in the Company's office in Europe.

On the matter of race and culture, one concern for Hawthorn lies in Marlow's comments about women: ´´Girl! What? Did I mention a girl? Oh, she is out of it – completely. They – the women I mean – are out of it – should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse´´ (353). For Hawthorn this line is not directed at all women, but more specifically European women and in so he finds that Marlow's statement is culture and class limited. He sees that women for Marlow are 'out of' the man's world the same way as ´´Kurtz's ideas and values are out of the horrific world he constructs in Africa´´ (353).

Hawthorn finds a similarity in meaning between Kurtz and women in *Heart of Darkness*. Women have ´´much in common with the world of Kurtz's ideals´´. *Heart of Darkness* in this view ´´explores the fate of an idealism betrayed into a corrupting alliance with imperialism, European women perform an important symbolic function´´ (354). What is exactly to be understood by this ´´idealism´´ is not explicitly stated. What we can gather is that Kurtz lives in a world of his own, the same way as women ´´live in a world of their own´´. For Hawthorn the European women serve a representative function of ´´portraying that idealism which the domestic imperialist powers use as apology for their exploitation´´ (354).

His argument is that Kurtz idealism is a ´´weak, emaciated, and unhealthy creature´´ the same way as imperialism is understood. Marlow's aunt and Kurtz's Intended, both European women and whose symbolic function as noted through their lack of ´´energy and practicality´´ will represent negative connotations of imperialism. The role of European women in imperialist nations are reduced to passive spectators whose function is to ´´soothe´´ (354).

Hawthorn's reading is emphasized by ´´Marlow's patronizing tone when talking of his aunt is, however, mild in contrast to the powerful connotations of death and disease to be found in the description of The Intended´´ as ´´all in black, with a pale head, floating

towards me in the dusk… This fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow, seemed surrounded by an ashy halo from which the dark eyes looked out at me´´ (Hawthorn 354-355).

Hawthorn's understanding of imperialism idealism in *Heart of Darkness* is marked by connotations such as ´´pure´´ and ´´halo´´ which are described as seeming unhealthy and corruptive. European women are thus portrayed so to strengthen the meaning of imperialism idealism as ´´weak, unhealthy and corrupted´´. The imagery opposition of white and dark is emphasized so to represent an underlying symbolic association of ´´good´´ and ´´bad´´.

On this notion the centre of Africa is white on the map, ´´but turns out to be a place of darkness; the Intended is pale and fair, but her dark eyes and the darkness falling in room´´ suggests to Hawthorn that ´´her very purity is productive, however unknowingly, of evil´´ (355).

The duplicity of meaning in *Heart of Darkness* in this feminist reading are that the conventional associations of white with purity and virtue is challenged and idealism can be corrupted. Existence for European women is marked by being in a world of their own. This become for Hawthorne ´´a sort of living death´´ (355). By living a world of their own, European women help keep the world of men better.

Contrasting the Intended to Kurtz' African mistress reinforces Hawthorn's view. Exemplifying from Conrad's text we get a picture of Kurtz mistress: ´´She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the earth proudly… She carried her head high. She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent ´´ (356). The imagery of the African woman for Hawthorn contrasts the European women and shows the African as an embodiment of life, passion and freedom while the European woman as seen in Marlow's aunt is dainty and in the Intended as sickly and sterile. The African is a sharp opposite. Opposites are static and passive to active and forceful, death and life and black and white to

colour. Africa is contrasted to Europe in the same way the women are. European life is thereby criticized.

Hawthorn's reading of *Heart of Darkness* as two aspects of a feminist view of women are made on how, in his eyes, Conrad presents Africans against Europeans. It is also a critique on European culture itself or at least how it is seen from a feminist perspective: men and women are treated differently.

### Richard Ruppel: Women and Homosexuality in Men?

Contrasting Hawthorn's reading of *Heart of Darkness* and by drawing on different ways to think about gender as well as sexuality, we find in Richard Ruppel that the representation of women in Conrad's text is attributed to the pressures of what he terms the adventure genre and a representation of women as ´´members of a separate species´´ (Ruppel 398).

Ruppel argues in *Homosexual Bonding and Homosexual Desire in Heart of Darkness* that the male-male relations cause anxieties and tensions that masks the representation of women by ´´homosocial bonding´´ that enables ´´homosexual panic´´ (398).

Ruppel's essay is interesting as it touches upon the many possibilities and ambiguities of feminist criticism. In what he terms the adventure genre, male feelings and passions are ´´most often reserved for other men´´ (398). Ruppel's reading focuses on areas of the text such as Marlow and his audience aboard the *Nellie*, in his admiration for African men and in his obsessive desire to reach Kurtz.

For Ruppel the women of the text are subtle antagonists or alien intruders. They are ´´sexually undesirable to men, but they are the real powers behind the scenes, and they provoke all the men's behavior´´ (398). For Ruppel the role of women in *Heart of Darkness* are as puppeteers and not as objects of desire.

Ruppel's understanding of homosocial bonding takes place onboard the *Nellie*. Here Marlow and the primary narrator, lawyer, accountant, and director of companies ´´gather

to relax, to get away from civilization´´. The bonding takes place by escaping to ´´an all-male holiday from the rigors and restrictions of civilization´´ and is highlighted by their ´´affectionate terms´´ such as ´´the bond of the sea´´ which in Ruppel's view holds ´´their hearts together through long periods of separation´´ (399).

Concerning the women in Conrad's text, the ´power´ of Marlow's aunt lies for Ruppel in her influence to have him appointed captain of the steamer on the River Congo and thereby indirectly endangered his life. On the receptionists outside of the Company Director's office, Ruppel identifies them as ´´ominous beings´´ whom presides over ´´the corruption´´ and ´´sometimes death of a foolish young men´´ (400).

Marlow's third female encounter is one identified as ´´purely symbolic´´ and occurs when the Brickmaker shows him Kurtz's painting of the blindfolded woman carrying a torch. In this instance Ruppel leans towards Sandra Gilbert's reading of the painting as a representation of ´´women's controlling power in the novella, despite their marginality within the narrative´´ (401).

In this sense the painting is seen as ´´vaguely evoking an image of Justice, the picture disturbingly suggests the contradictions between power (the torch) and powerlessness (the blindfold) and thus it introduces the idea of the other who has been excluded and dispossessed but who, despite such subordination, exercises a kind of indomitable torchlike power´´ (401).

Accordingly the women portrayed in *Heart of Darkness* will for Ruppel embody a persistent dichotomy: that they are ´´out of it´´ and blind to ´´the truth´´ of which he emphasizes that ´´they need protection´´ from and that they are ´´powerful and controlling in sinister ways´´ (401). This vague description is difficult to grasp but I will lean towards an understanding of Ruppel that women in *Heart of Darkness* present a symbolic function as showcasing blind and benevolent power against the patriarchy. The female character's in

Conrad's text are secondary to the narrative but whose function establishes utmost consequence.

Kurtz's mistress is for Ruppel ´´the one truly powerful African in *Heart of Darkness*´´ a conclusion he makes on behalf that it is the only African the Harlequin fears and that she is ´´almost supernaturally powerful´´ (402).

Marlow's last encounter with a woman occurs at the end of the text when he visits the Intended. The Intended is seen by Ruppel as the African Mistress's white counterpart and as equally formidable. Kurtz is driven ´´out there´´ because her family, in Ruppel's view, believed ´´he wasn't rich enough´´ to marry her. This establishes in Ruppel's view Kurtz' impetus for ivory trading in Africa.

If women are the real power behind the scenes and as serving a role of puppeteers in the behaviour of the Company, its agents and of the entirety sum of the male characters it might be conclusive to say that they are to be held responsible. This, however, is not the case for Ruppel. He notes that the representation of women in *Heart of Darkness* are ´´perfectly paradoxical´´ (402). On the literal level, Ruppel writes, they have no power. Ruppel takes on to blame Marlow, ´´who proves himself such a misogynist´´ and suggests that Marlow makes out that men sacrifice themselves to maintain the patriarchy and thus to sustain the women who drive them on. The women have ´´no understanding of this because they force men to lie to them about the world´´ (403).

Male characters in *Heart of Darkness* for Ruppel are attempting to escape their world, or they are driven out by women ´´to pursue homosocial bonds in the wilderness´´. Women are made out in Ruppel's eyes to be formidable and frightening instead of being attractive, but he does note that the Intended and the African Mistress are ´´both identified exclusively through their potentially sexual relationship to Kurtz´´ and that ´´Kurtz's African

consort certainly comes across as a femme fatale, in the dominatrix mode, but she remains a *symbol* of threatening female sexuality´´ (403).

On one hand it becomes difficult to understand Ruppel's interpretation of Conrad's text as a depiction of homosocial bonding or homosexual desire. This is evident by his thesis of ´´the homoerotic subtext of the novella provides one other plausible explanation for Marlow's obsessive search for Kurtz´´ (404) which is obscured by incorporating examples of men being attracted to females, even if only as he notes, on the symbolic level.

Ruppel's example of a ´´homoerotic subtext´´ takes place before the abortive attack on the steamer. Marlow and the Pilgrims are stuck in a fog below Kurtz's station and Marlow remarks, as noted by Ruppel: ´´The approach to this Kurtz grubbing for ivory in the wretched bush was beset by as many dangers as though he had been an enchanted princess sleeping in a fabulous castle´´ (404). For Ruppel the ´´grubbing for ivory in the… bush´´ is the ´´very antithesis of an enchanted princess´´. Kurtz is thereby understood as a representation and object of sexual desire, ´´here equated with the archetypal object of male desire, an enchanted princess´´ and will culminate in the passage describing Kurtz's corruption and degeneration in the jungle: ´´The wilderness had patted him on the head, and-lo-he had withered; 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´´ (404).

This sort of reading will imply sexual implications. The wilderness is the active agent and seducer and Kurtz is the passive recipient of desire, emphasized for Ruppel by Marlow's claim of Kurtz as the ´´spoiled and pampered favourite´´ of the jungle.
The wilderness takes on a male role and Kurtz is represented as the object of the wilderness's desire: ´´an object which is ultimately penetrated and destroyed´´ (404).

Ruppel's idea of ´´homosexual panic´´ is reached in conclusion that Marlow's audience, the men onboard the *Nellie*, objects to the aforementioned passages in that ´´they balk at the association Marlow makes between himself and the Africans´´, suggesting to Ruppel that it is not only Kurtz whom Marlow has an interest in and Marlow has thus ´´overstepped normal homosocial bonds´´ (406). The event is balanced and responded to by Marlow's immediate introduction of ´´the girl´´, the Intended. Conrad's passage of ´´Girl! What? Did I mention a girl´´ is thereby seen by Ruppel as his ´´amusing and incongruous ejaculation´´ (406) – as an entertaining way of introducing conventional heterosexuality.

Ruppel's goal with his reading is thus to show how ´´culturally and historically determined our own notions of male desire always are´´ (406) and in this way concern itself with a political oriented goal of social change in a male-centered society: to highlight how women are subordinated and how homosexuality can or should be normalized.

### Politicized Readings: Part-Conclusion

These politicized readings of *Heart of Darkness* all share the same in that the point to things outside of the text. They criticize contemporary and past white European male society. Conrad the author is both criticized and honoured. I have found that Achebe is Conrad's harshest critic. He falls upon the mentality of ´´us´´ vs. ´´them´´ whereby he chooses to focus on the author and not the text itself. The language of *Heart of Darkness* is noted as being coloured in terms of derogatory wording of the natives.

It is concluded that the same, if not worse treatment through derogatory wording is projected onto the Europeans of the text. In this way Conrad is seen by multiple critics as a progressive of his time, and not as Achebe remarks: a bloody racist.

An interesting part in Said's reading is that he makes a point of emphasizing his own race and background, to highlight that he is to be seen as ´´ non-white, non-Western, and non-Judeo-Christian´´ and therefore as a ´´ less imperialistically assertive possibility´´. This

implies that the critics in the opposite camp, e.g. white, western, Judeo-Christian are seen, at least by Said, as a lesser assertive possibility and this thinking thus dwells into the realm of politics and racism. His opinion in this sense is more valid than one of white westerners because he doesn't belong to the group that he criticizes.

On the level of characterization, similar areas of interests fall upon Marlow and Kurtz as well as the five representations of women in the text. Hawkins and Ruppel concludes that Kurtz is driven to Africa by motives of economic prosperity. Hawkins explores the idea that Kurtz deifies himself over the lake tribe, an idea which I would like to explore further.

Marlow is presented by Hawkins as portraying redeeming characteristics in humanizing and relating to the Africans. For Said, Marlow is simply a follower of imperialism. More so Said employs a deconstructive approach that enables him to view Conrad as being concerned with imperialism. This point is reached by moving beyond the narrative and to point to things outside of the literary text which he allows himself based upon the presumed notion that imperialism has monopolized the entire system of representation and so he makes his own conclusion that is based outside of textual evidence.

Hawthorn and Ruppel has shed light on the female characters of *Heart of Darkness*. The European women, Marlow's aunt and Kurtz's Intended are viewed by Hawthorn as serving a symbolic function by connotating the negative side of imperialism. The function of the European women in the selected feminist readings present women as being reduced to a passivity and marginality. European women are furthermore juxtaposed to African women in this sense.

For Ruppel, the female characters possess all the indirect power vital for the plot.

In Ruppel we also see a contemporary political reading that concerns itself with political and social questions of homosexuality and the role of women in a patriarchal society as being secondary to men.

On the point of the symbol of darkness it is found that each critic chooses the dichotomy of Europe or Africa as a place of darkness. The critics who points to Africa as a place of darkness are those that least buy into the idea of Conrad criticizing Europe and imperialism, such as Achebe. The Europe and Africa dichotomy are furthermore explored through the River Thames/River Congo opposition. Darkness is understood by Ruppel as a representation of latent homosexuality in the white characters that takes place both in Africa and in Europe. Said points to two meanings or connotations of darkness. The first deals with darkness as an expression of the negative connotations of imperialism: the act of colonizing as a dark or bad act. Second is the undiscovered or uncolonized nation, country, continent or people group as understood in terms of an undiscovered part on a map. Said´s first example is also how darkness is used and understood by Hawthorn, as seen through the imagery opposition of white and dark in the example of the Intended.

## Analysis

Having presented a contextual framework that addresses the aspect of contemporary literary criticisms being ingrained in the political and how Northrop Frye's approach can be seen as being universal, I will now proceed to the analytical part of this paper which will deal with the third thesis question of this paper: To which degree is it possible to compare the readings of selected politicized literary criticisms to one offered by Northrop Frye?

### *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad

My analysis of *Heart of Darkness* will take a point of entry that follows from the politicized readings of the text. I will thus work in similar areas of interest as the post-colonial and

feminist readings. Before we move onto the literal phase analysis, I would like to emphasize one passage from Marlow's narration that speaks to the relevance of a Frye approach:

> ´´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 (if his propensity to spin yarns to be expected), 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´´ (Conrad 5).

This passage tells us that *Heart of Darkness* has centripetal and centrifugal points of reference. Centripetally, or inwards, the signifier in this example is the yarn and the yarn have a single and stable signified, e.g. the kernel. Centrifugally, or outwards, the yarn signifier has no kernel. Having no signified kernel means that the meaning is centrifugally as in outwards produced by the narration. Marlow's passage suggests that a Frye approach seems valuable to a text like *Heart of Darkness* in that it deals with as many ambiguous meanings of the text as possible, going both inside and outside of the nut, and perhaps also beyond.

### Literal Phase in *Heart of Darkness*

In the theoretical section of this paper I note how the literal phase of symbolism is akin in understanding to direct or verifiable statements. To Frye, literal is understood differently and opposite as what we can think of as its common usage. To him, literal is the meaning of the symbol in its specific literary situation.

Meaning in the literal phase is representational and does not depend upon external references. The symbolic meaning of the text comes from itself, as a motif. Motif is understood as the literal symbol through its centripetal properties. The symbol is understood

by its contextual meaning in a specific situation, as being dependent on what comes before and after the symbol.

The literal phase will form a contextual technical vocabulary for the rest of the phases and consequently the literal phase will be the phase most elaborated upon.

The politicized readings of *Heart of Darkness* provide numerous situations in Conrad's text. The majority of these are found dependent upon external references that the literal phase is not interested in. What is of interest to us in the literal phase is the location of the symbolic unit of ´´darkness´´ as a motif and in so being devoid of as little as what we can understand as meaning.

### The *Nellie*: River Thames – River Congo dichotomy

*Heart of Darkness* begins onboard the *Nellie* anchored on the River Thames. Achebe sees the setting of the River Thames as juxtaposed to the River Congo, as an antithesis to the Thames. To Achebe, the river Thames has ´´conquered its darkness… and is now in daylight and at peace´´ (Achebe 15). If we examine the proposition from a literal phase standpoint, then ´´River Thames and its conquest of darkness marked by being in daylight and at peace´´ should be prevalent from the specific situation: the *Nellie* anchored in the River Thames, in daylight, and peacefully. Indeed, the first narrator narrates that ´´the wind was nearly calm´´ and the ´´tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still´´ (Conrad 3). We get the notion that the River Thames has ´´less darkness´´ as it can be seen in the text as juxtaposed to a nearby town: ´´The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and greatest, town on earth´´ (3).

The point Achebe makes of the River Thames ´´conquering´´ it's ´´darkness´´ is not to be found in the literal phase. In fact, quite the contrary can be noted: ´´A change came over the waters, and the serenity became less brilliant but more profound´´ and ´´the sun set;

the dusk fell on the stream´´ (4-5). This tells us not of a conquest of darkness, but that the sun is setting.

On the point of Achebe's remark of the River Thames ´´conquering´´ its ´´darkness´´, we are told in *Heart of Darkness* that ´´when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago… Light came out of this river since´´ (5). We can gather that with ´´Romans´´ came ´´light´´ - an opposition to darkness and thus an elaboration on ´´conquest´´ of ´´darkness´´. Darkness in this sense was conquered on the River Thames nineteen hundred years ago but at the same time we are told by the narrator that ´´darkness´´ covers the River Thames, however for Marlow, ´´light´´ came with the Romans long ago.

Further, Marlow points out that ´´darkness was here yesterday´´ (5), which only adds more confusion. At the end of *Heart of Darkness* the narrator notes that ´´the offing was barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed somber under an overcast sky – seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness´´ (77). Said's understanding is that darkness reappears after Marlow's narrative, but the text indicates that darkness is already there before his narrative, as seen in the end of the first narration by the first narrator: ´´The sun set; the dusk fell´´ (5). In a literal phase sense, the River Thames has not ´´conquered´´ its ´´darkness´´. *Heart of Darkness* begins with darkness and ends with darkness, however ´´light´´ had been on the River Thames ever since the Romans came nineteen hundred years ago.

### Brussels: Receptionists & Marlow's Aunt

Jeremy Hawthorn argues that women play an ´´indispensable role´´ in *Heart of Darkness* and serve a ´´representative function´´ which in his view is ´´portraying that idealism which the domestic imperialist powers use as apology for their exploitation´´ (Hawthorn 354).

## Receptionists

The first time we come across women in *Heart of Darkness* is at the Company's offices: ´´two women, one fat and the other slim, sat on straw-bottomed chairs, knitting black wool´´ (Conrad 10). On the topic of women playing an ´´indispensable role´´ we are told that the slim secretary ´´full of desolation and sympathy, made me sign some document´´ and after Marlow signs the document he ´´began to feel slightly uneasy. You know I am not used to such ceremonies, and there was something ominous in the atmosphere. It was just as though I had been let into some conspiracy´´. Marlow notes that the fat woman ´´seemed uncanny and fateful´´ (10).

The centripetal meaning of the two secretaries are gathered through Marlow's representation of them. The two secretaries are ascribed as being ´´uncanny´´ and ´´fateful´´ and that Marlow ´´thought of these two guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall, one introducing, introducing continuously to the unknown, the other scrutinizing the cheery and foolish faces with unconcerned old eyes´´ and that ´´Not many of those she looked at ever saw her again´´ (11).

The two secretaries are emphasized by a contextual meaning as seen in the settings, plot and characters. Marlow is signing a document and it is not clear if he does so willingly or unwillingly but doing so makes him feel uneasy in that he has been led into a conspiracy. The secretaries play an ´´indispensable role´´ in him signing the document. They are fateful in a way of introducing ´´to the unknown´´ which relate to the ´´door of Darkness´´.

We can gather that ´´unknown´´ and ´´darkness´´ relate to one another, and that the door Marlow had been led into is the door to the ´´sanctuary´´ (Conrad 10). Inside the sanctuary ´´light was dim´´ and a ´´heavy writing desk´´ sits in the middle. Here Marlow

meets ´´The great man himself´´ (10). This is the first time in Brussels we are introduced to the motif of darkness.

For now, the motif of darkness is found at the beginning and end of *Heart of Darkness* as well as Marlow's statement that ´´darkness was here yesterday´´ and ´´door of Darkness´´.

Hawthorn's notion that the secretaries play an indispensable role is marked by Marlow's remark of ´´taking an immense part in all my sorrows´´ (11) which is exemplified later in the text when Kurtz ´´is crawling on all fours´´ towards the native tribe's camp and Marlow recalls that ´´I had some imbecile thoughts. The knitting old woman with the cat obtruded herself upon my memory´´. Marlow's ´´sorrows´´ will be the grave situation him and Kurtz are in, marked by Kurtz telling him ´´Go away – hide yourself´´ (64-65), which bears a centripetal relation to Marlow's Roman gladiatorial proclamation as he leaves the Company's offices: ´´*Ave!* Old knitter of black wool. *Morituri te salutant´´* (11).

The motif of darkness is related to the two secretaries in that they introduce Marlow to the ´´door of Darkness´´ and emphasized by the centripetal verbal units of ´´fateful´´ and ´´uncanny´´.

### Marlow's Aunt

Another woman emphasized by the politicized readings, as seen in Hawthorn and Ruppel is Marlow's aunt.

Hawthorn's reading of the aunt is emphasized by ´´Marlow's patronizing tone when talking of his aunt´´ (Hawthorn 354) and Ruppel notes that Marlow's aunt is indirectly responsible through her influence to have him appointed captain of the steamship.

Marlow speaks about his aunt, or women in general, with a condescending tone as he remarks that ´´it's queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own´´ (Conrad 13).

On the aunt bearing indirect responsibility to the appointment of Marlow, Marlow recalls that ´´it became quite plain to me I had been represented to the wife of the high dignitary, and goodness knows to how many more people besides, as an exceptional and gifted creature – a piece of good fortune for the Company´´ (12). Marlow's aunt has represented Marlow to the wife of the high dignitary and the Brickmaker later tells Marlow that ´´the same people who sent him specially also recommended you´´ to which Marlow replies that ´´my dear aunt's influential acquaintances were producing an unexpected effect upon the young man´´ (25-26) which tells us that Marlow's aunt is to bear indirect responsibility in the appointment of Marlow.

Hawthorn's reading of the secretaries and Marlow's aunt serving a ´´representative function´´ as ´´portraying that idealism which the domestic imperialist powers use as apology for their exploitation´´ (Hawthorn 354) is not clear in the literal phase analysis which is understandable as Hawthorn makes the conclusion based on symbolic meaning that stems from an external and not internal understanding. I will explore this position in the descriptive phase.

What I can note is that the motif of darkness bears a word to word relation with the two secretaries and Marlow's aunt. The two secretaries are ´´fateful´´ and ´´uncanny´´ and by introducing Marlow to the ´´ door of Darkness´´ they inflict upon him ´´sorrows´´. Marlow's aunt is influential in Marlow's appointment in the first place. The motif of darkness in this sense bears word to word relation to ´´high dignitary´´, ´´The great man himself´´, ´´sanctuary´´ and ´´light was dim´´ (10).

### Company & Central Station: Natives, Pilgrims, General Manager, Brickmaker, Eldorado Expedition

*Heart of Darkness* is marked by many of its critics as dealing with issues of racism. Hawkins doesn't deny what Achebe sees as Conrad's racist characterizations of the natives but argues

that the text is more overtly critical of Europeans than of Africans. His examples are to be found on the level of characterization and as well as Marlow's ´´derogatory language in describing Africans´´ (Hawkins 163).

Moments before arriving at the Company Station, Marlow's first encounter with the native Africans as well as the Europeans employed on the locations take place and centripetal properties of the natives and Europeans begin to form. Marlow sees ´´six black men advanced in a file… I could see every rib, the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope; with a chain whose bights swung between them´´ (Conrad 16). Seeing these men make Marlow ´´think suddenly of the ship of war I had seen firing into a continent´´ which tells us that these black men are prisoners of war but are noted as ´´criminals´´ in the text.

At the Company station another motif of darkness is formed that is not the same that bears word relation to the Europeans. Marlow notes that ´´everything else in the station was in a muddle´´ and that ´´Caravans, strings of dusty niggers with splay feet, arrived and departed; a stream of manufactured goods – rubbishy cottons, beads, and brass-wire – set into the depths of darkness, and in return came a precious trickle of ivory´´ (18).

From this we can gather that there are multiple motifs of darkness in *Heart of Darkness*. The depths of ´´darkness´´ will in this sense point to something away from the station.

Marlow has ´´seen the devil of violence, and the devil of greed, and the devil of hot desire´´ (16). Having just arrived in Africa and having prior experience of the ´´Indian Ocean, Pacific, China Seas´´ (Conrad 7) we don't know where the metaphorical ´´devils´´ that Marlow speaks about have been experienced. Marlow notes that the people in charge of the prisoners ´´were strong, lusty, red-eyed devils´´. We don't know the race of the captors only that one of them had ´´a large, white, rascally grin´´ (16).

Climbing on top of a hill, Marlow states that ´´I would become acquainted with a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly´´ (16) which is identifiable at a later point when the narration takes place at the Central Station: ´´the first glance at the place was enough to let you see the flabby devil was running that show´´ (21). The General Manager is described as ´´commonplace in complexion, in feature, in manner, and in voice. He was of middle size and of ordinary build. His eyes, of the usual blue, were perhaps remarkably cold´´ (21).

We can gather that the General Manager is a British sailor as we are told that ´´when he went home on leave, he rioted on a large scale – pompously. Jack ashore – with difference in externals only´´ (22). The term ´´jack ashore´´ carries connotations of British sailors on shore leave behaving in a rowdy or drunken manner. Just like the captor has a ´´large, white, rascally grin´´ so do the General Manager; ´´that smile of his´´ - as noted after he finishes his line that ´´men who come out here should have no entrails´´ a line which Marlow understands ´´as though it had been a door opening into a darkness he had in his keeping´´ (22).

From this context we can gather that the motif of darkness bears a relation to the ´´weak-eyed devil´´ that is the General Manager, centripetally related to the ´´door of Darkness´´ that leads Marlow into the ´´sanctuary´´ where he meets ´´the great man himself´´ (10). We don't know if these two men are the same person.

Contextualized centripetally it is noted that while being stationed in Africa the General Manager behaves in an ordinarily manner that ´´inspired uneasiness - nothing more´´ and when on shore leave, he behaves in an unrestrained way. The General Manager's ´´rapacious and pitiless folly´´ relate to the ´´white men´´ (Conrad 21) that ´´wandered here and there with their absurd long staves in their hands like a lot of faithless pilgrims´´ (23). The Pilgrims imbed a context of rapaciousness as seen in the following passage: ´´the word 'ivory'

rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it. A taint of imbecile rapacity blew through it all like a whiff from some corpse´´ (23).

On the point of Conrad being more critical of the Europeans than of the Africans we can see from the General Manager and of the Pilgrims in this specific situation that the centripetal meaning corresponds with this understanding of the General Manager and of the Pilgrims. The Pilgrims' task is to ´´camp, cook, sleep, strike camp, march´´ (20) and their speech is described adjectively as ´´a violent babble of uncouth sounds´´ (19) and are driven by ´´a desire to get appointed to a trading post where ivory was to be had… they intrigued and slandered and hated each other only on that account´´ (24-25).

The representation of the natives in the setting of the Company & Central Station are brief. Marlow describes some of them as ´´black and naked´´ that ´´moved about like ants´´ (15) and ´´strings of dusty niggers with splay feet´´, ´´phantom´´ and ´´creatures´´ (18).

On the individual characterization of the Europeans found in the Company & Central station, of which the General Manager and the Pilgrims have been elaborated upon, a last figure is the Brickmaker. Words ascribed to him are ´´young, gentlemanly, a bit reserved, with a forked little beard and a hooked nose´´ (24). Marlow notes that ´´the business entrusted to this fellow was the making of bricks… but there wasn't a fragment of a brick anywhere in the station, and he had been there more than a year – waiting´´ (24). This tells us that the Brickmaker is a useless worker in the Central Station and that other agents call him ´´the Manager's spy´´ who attempts to pry information out of Marlow: ´´he alluded constantly to Europe, to the people I was supposed to know there´´ (24-25). A further reference is gained from Marlow's description of him as ´´this papier-mâche Mephistopheles´´ (26). Marking the Brickmaker as a papier-mâche Mephistopheles will connote centrifugal properties and I will allow myself in this literal phase to make a sign relation of the Brickmaker in pointing out a

potential centrifugal meaning seen in his characteristics of laziness, ambition and greed: ´´a whole candle to himself´´ (Conrad 24).

The last group in the Company & Central Station setting are the Eldorado Exploring Expedition that is ascribed centripetal properties of ´´less valuable animals´´ (33) and ´´their talk, however, was the talk of sordid buccaneers. It was reckless without hardihood, greedy without audacity, and cruel without courage´´ and that ´´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´´ (31).

On the one hand while Marlow has a specific mission in Africa in finding Kurtz, the Eldorado Expedition's mission is to violently extract whatever treasure they can get their hands on, without a care of the consequences. The ´´leader of that lot´´ is the ´´uncle of our Manager´´ who is described as ´´in exterior he resembled a butcher in a poor neighbourhood, and his eyes had a look of sleepy cunning. He carried his fat paunch with ostentation on his short legs and all the time his gang infested the station spoke to no one but his nephew´´ (31). We don't know the identity of the group, what we do know is that the General Manager is the leader's uncle, whom we know is a British sailor.

From the Pilgrims to the Brickmaker and to the Eldorado Exploration Expedition we start to see that the symbols become fully intelligible once they are related to one another. A broader contextual meaning of the motif of darkness is made of the General Manager ´´a door opening into a darkness he had in his keeping´´ (22) that bears a relation to the settings of the Company's offices and ´´The great man himself´´. Other than this centripetal reference no other is made that bears a direct relation to the motif of darkness.

I have briefly touched upon areas that bears centrifugal properties that may relate to the symbol of darkness as seen in Marlow's earlier note about stepping ´´into a gloomy circle of some Inferno´´ (Conrad 17). For now, we can understand the motif of

darkness through the word to word relation showcased in the examples of the General Manager.

More so, three symbolic areas that exemplifies different centrifugal meanings in an understanding of metaphorical devils is made. We see greed relating to the Pilgrims, violence to the Eldorado Expedition and desire to the Brickmaker. On Hawkins' point that *Heart of Darkness* shows a more overtly critical attitude towards Europeans than of Africans, no connotations of devil are to be found of the natives. No motif of darkness is further found in reference to the natives either.

### Journey to the Inner Station: Shared Humanity?

Moving from the settings of the Company & Central Station we find ourselves in a part of *Heart of Darkness* that I will label as the Journey to Inner Station. It is in this setting Hawkins note as being exemplary in showcasing Marlow's shared humanity with the natives.

Having finally repaired the steamer, Marlow and his crew sails up the River Congo. Onboard the steamer is Marlow, the General Manager, three to four Pilgrims and ´´twenty cannibals´´ that ´´were men one could work with, and I am grateful to them´´. For the Pilgrims, the purpose of the journey or the mission is ´´to get something´´ and for Marlow it is ´´towards Kurtz´´ (35). The following excerpt from a long passage reveals how Marlow depicts the setting of going up the Congo River and further details about the inhabitants:

> ´´We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil. But suddenly as we struggle round a bend, there would be a glimpses of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. The

> steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us – who could tell? (Conrad 35-36).

To Marlow the settings of the River Congo is an alien setting. The ´´accursed inheritance´´ is understood centripetally as relating to past mentions of ´´ivory´´ and the Pilgrims search for ´´something´´.

Marlow's attitude towards the natives as showcasing a shared humanity: ´´humanity – like yours´´ is also explored in this passage. The natives at the Company and Central Station are in shackles: ´´a bit of white worsted round his neck´´ (17). It is here that Marlow are ´´accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster´´ (36) to which he has shown sympathy and humanity for by offering one of the captives ´´good Swede's ship's biscuits´´ and recognizes that ´´they were dying slowly – it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals´´ (17). In the setting of the Congo River, Marlow ´´could look at a thing monstrous and free´´ (36). Marlow is unique in his understanding of the natives, as the only one employed by the Company that centripetally shows an understanding of the natives as fellow humans: ´´the men were – No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it – this suspicion of their not being inhuman´´ (36).

### Inner Station: Kurtz

Having finally arrived at the Inner Station after surviving an attack from the natives, Marlow meets the Harlequin, a character that provides the first-hand information to him about Kurtz.

Hawkins makes the argument that Kurtz is driven by motives of economic prosperity through ivory trading so to become successful back in Europe as well as showcasing a less materialistic side in terms of asserting power over the natives, an argument he makes using examples from the Harlequin. The Harlequin, a character ´´full of mystery

and wisdom´´ is in Marlow's view devoted to Kurtz: ´´It came to him, and he accepted it with a sort of eager fatalism… I suppose Kurtz wanted an audience, because on a certain occasion, when encamped in the forest, they had talked all night, or more probably Kurtz had talked… He made me see things – things´´ (Conrad 55).

Through the Harlequin we begin to form a centripetal meaning of Kurtz. Having nursed Kurtz ´´through two illnesses´´ he acts as a caretaker of the Inner Station, waiting on Kurt to return from having ´´discovered lots of villages ´´ and that ´´mostly his expeditions had been for ivory´´ and Kurtz ´´got the tribe to follow him. They adored him. He came to them with thunder and lightning, you know – and they had never seen anything like it´´ (55).

For the Harlequin, Kurtz is not ´´an ordinary man´´ and he reveals that ´´the wilderness had found him out early and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude – and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core´´ (57-58). From this we can gather that the Harlequin is an admirer of Kurtz, and that Kurtz had made him see things. Kurtz has been going to nearby native villages armed with weapons: ´´two shot-guns, a heavy rifle, and a light revolver-carbine´´ (59) and thereby got the tribe to follow and adore him. Marlow retrospectively and centripetally allures that Kurtz has gone mad by being deep in the wilderness for so long.

The madness of Kurtz is further established centripetally by the ´´ornamentation´´ of the Inner Station: ´´head on the stakes… their faces… turned to the house… black, dried, sunken, with closed eyelids´´ and ´´the Manager said afterwards that Mr Kurtz's methods had ruined the district… They only showed that Mr Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts´´ (Conrad 57).

Kurtz can control the natives: ´´they would not stir till Mr Kurtz gave the word´´ and ´´his ascendancy was extraordinary. The camps of these people surrounded the place, and the chiefs came every day to see him. They would crawl…´´ (58).

The Harlequin as well as the native tribe peoples being followers of Kurtz is reinforced when ´´a group of men appeared… bearing an improvised stretcher´´ of which Kurtz seemingly lays: ´´Now, if he does not say the right thing to them we are all done for´´ (59).

Hawkins' proposition of Kurtz as a corruptor may be examined through the centripetal meaning from the word to word relation in the text.

Kurtz being a force of suppression is noted at an earlier point in Marlow's narration: ´´I learned that, most appropriately, the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs had entrusted him with the making of a report for its future guidance´´ and that Kurtz ´´had written it too. I've seen it. I've read it´´ (49). Kurtz has written a report which Marlow has read, and of the opening paragraph of the report Marlow reads that: ´´He began with the argument that we 'whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, must necessarily appear to them (savages) in the nature of supernatural beings – we approach them with the might as of a deity´´ (50) and that Kurtz, ´´whatever he was, he was not common. He had the power to charm or frighten rudimentary souls into an aggravated witch-dance in his honour; he could also fill the small souls of the pilgrims with bitter misgivings´´ (50).

We can gather that before Kurtz ´´had taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land – I mean literally´´ (49) and before his ´´nerves went wrong´´ (50) had been tasked with writing a report on suppressing the natives and in order to do that: ´´we whites´´ must act as ´´supernatural beings – we approach them with the might as of a deity´´ of where ´´thunder and lightning´´ will relate to the ´´might of a deity´´ as seen through the point of view of the

natives but which we can understand as ´´his arms – two shot-guns, a heavy rifle, and a light revolver-carbine´´.

It is understandable that in order to suppress the natives deep in the Congo, force must be used. Kurtz as a corruptor cannot be made on these grounds alone.

The General Manager notes that Kurtz's ´´methods ruined the district´´ (Conrad 57) and ´´Mr Kurtz has done more harm than good to the Company´´ (61). We know that Kurtz has discovered many neighboring tribal villages and that ´´mostly his expeditions had been for ivory´´.

Natives has prior been ascribed words such as ´´enemies, criminals, workers´´ but the ornamental heads at the Inner Station ´´were the heads of rebels´´ (58). We know Kurtz can communicate with the African Woman ´´she talked like a fury to Kurtz for an hour´´ (61). For the General Manager, the methods of Kurtz have ruined the district and ´´the district is closed to us for a time´´ (61). The methods of Kurtz is revealed to Marlow: ´´I found myself lumped along with Kurtz as a partisan of methods´´ (62) to which the Harlequin ´´informed me… that it was Kurtz who had ordered the attack to be made on the steamer´´ because ´´he thought it would scare you away – that you would give it up, thinking him dead´´ (62-63). Towards the end of *Heart of Darkness* and before Marlow meets the Intended, he recollects what Kurtz ´´said one day´´ that ´´This lot of ivory now is really mine. The Company did not pay for it. I collected it myself at a very great personal risk. I am afraid they will try to claim it as theirs though… what do you think I ought to do – resist? Eh? I want no more than justice´´ (73).

Hawkins make the point of Kurtz being a corruptor on the premise that he is driven by motives of economic prosperity through ivory trading but develops less material lusts in favoring power over the natives. This has been found evident from the centripetal properties of the text. Kurtz has power over the natives, which he has assumed through

technological prowess in firearms and that this has made the natives worship him. In this sense Kurtz assumes a role of a corruptor of the natives in so that Kurtz become a figure of worship and a figure above the native chieftains.

Kurtz does not wish to leave the interior of the Congo, as exemplified by ordering the earlier attack on the steamer and when Kurtz attempt to escape from the ´´little cabin´´ of the Inner Station to go ´´crawling on all fours´´ towards the tribal camp (Conrad 64). The last example emphasizes a corruptor as understood in terms of altering his original form of being an employer of the company, with their interests at heart, to subvert to an allegiance that lies elsewhere, here to the natives or to the wilderness:

> ´´I tried to break the spell – the heavy, mute spell of the wilderness that seemed to draw him to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions. This alone, I was convinced, had driven him out to the edge of the forest, to the bush, towards the gleam of fires, the throb of drums, the drone of weird incantations; this alone had beguiled his unlawful soul beyond the bounds of permitted aspirations´´ (65).

This line also suggests that not only is Kurtz a corruptor, but that he has been corrupted by the wilderness as the Harlequin's earlier notion relates centripetally to: ´´the wilderness had found him out early and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude – and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating´´ (57-58).

I will explore the centrifugal properties of the ´´wilderness´´ in the descriptive phase.

## Back in Europe: The Intended

Marlow's next narration takes place in the context of being ´´back in the sepulchral city´´ (Conrad 70) which we know is where the Company's offices are located.

The areas of interest for the selected politicized readings of *Heart of Darkness* as seen in Hawthorn and Ruppel to take place in what Marlow sees as the ´´city that always makes me think of a whited sepulchre´´ (9) is the Receptionists, Marlow's aunt and The Intended. These three European women are located by Hawthorn as playing an ´´indispensable role´´ and serving a ´´representative function´´ which in his view is ´´portraying that idealism which the domestic imperialist powers use as apology for their exploitation´´ (Hawthorn 354). Marlow's aunt and the Receptionists have been covered in this regard.

Hawthorn's reading of The Intended is mostly in terms of symbolic representations as a representation of the negative connotations of imperialism as seen in his connotations of death and disease found in Marlow's description of the Intended's home. Kurtz is also seen by Hawthorn as a symbolic representation of the negative connotations of imperialism as a ´´weak, emaciated, and unhealthy creature´´. In this literal phase analysis such a view of Kurtz is not found. What can be noted is that he is described as ´´unhealthy´´. The Intended is noted by Hawthorn in the same way as Kurtz, as lacking ´´energy and practicality´´.

Hawthorn contrasts the African Woman to the Intended and shows that the African is a symbolic representation of life, passion and freedom while the Intended is sickly and sterile.

Ruppel views the Intended as the African Woman's white counterpart but as equally formidable. Kurtz is driven ´´out there´´ by the Intended because he wasn't rich enough to marry her and is seen by him as the impetus for his ivory trading in Africa.

Hawthorn notes that existence for European women is marked by being in a world of their own and is ´´a sort of living death´´, doing so in order to keep the world of men better.

These politicized readings deal with stark statements that should be evident from the centripetal properties of the text.

### The Intended

Mention of The Intended first appears centripetally by Kurtz just before his death: ´´My Intended, my ivory, my station, my career, my ideas´´ (Conrad 68) and a year after his death, Marlow visits her.

The Intended lives in an area of ´´tall houses… of a street as still and decorous as a well-kept alley in a cemetery´´ (72). Marlow visits her at a time when ´´the dusk was falling´´.

He waits in a room with a ´´tall marble fireplace´´ that ´´had a cold and monumental whiteness. A grand piano stood massively in a corner, with dark gleams on the flat surfaces like a sombre and polished sarcophagus´´ (73). Ruppel's conclusion that Kurtz is driven ´´out there´´ by the Intended because he wasn't rich enough to marry her is brought forth here. Marlow narrates that ´´I had heard that her engagement with Kurtz had been disapproved by her people. He wasn't rich enough or something´´ (75).

The Intended is described as ´´all in black with a pale head, floating towards me in the dusk´´ and ´´fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow´´ and that it has been ´´more than a year since the news came´´ of Kurtz death, and is still ´´in mourning´´ (73). To Marlow ´´she carried her sorrowful head as though she were proud of that sorrow´´ (74).

The motif of darkness in this setting is brought forth and is noted in the exterior of her person: ´´all in black´´.

Both Ruppel and Hawthorn contrasts the Intended to the African Woman.

## African Woman

While Kurtz says ´´My Intended, my ivory, my station, my career, my ideas´´ (68) he makes no mention of the African Woman. The African Woman is termed by the politicized readings as African mistress. This is not centripetally evident so I will term her the African Woman.

The first time we encounter the African Woman is just after a native tribe delivers Kurtz on a stretcher. The description of the African Woman all falls in one long passage. To Marlow, the first expression of her is ´´a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman´´ (60) and that

> ´´She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the earth proudly with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high; her hair was done in the shape of a helmet; she had brass leggings to the knee, brass wire gauntlets to the elbow, a crimson spot on her tawny cheek, innumerable necklaces of glass beads on her neck; bizarre things, charms, gifts of witch-men, that hung about her, glittered and trembled at every step. she must have had the value of several elephant tusks upon her. She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress. And in the hush that had fallen suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land, the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had ben looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul´´ (60).

We can understand the African Woman through this specific contextual situation. The centripetal properties of her is made on the word relating to her movement, appearance and character. Her face ´´had a tragic and fierce aspect of wild sorrow´´ (60) and her character is savage, magnificent and superb.

She is not afraid of the men aboard the steamer ´´she stood looking at us without a stir´´ but the Harlequin is afraid of her: ´´If she had offered to come aboard I really think I would have tried to shoot her,' said the man of patches nervously´´ (Conrad 61). Her movement, appearance and character are ´´like the wilderness itself´´ (61). She is able to control the natives: ´´Suddenly she opened her bared arms and threw them up rigid above her head as though in an uncontrollable desire to touch the sky, and at the same time the swift shadows darted out on the earth, swept around on the river, gathering the steamer into a shadowy embrace´´ (61).

We can only relate the African Woman to the Intended on the context of them being the only two women that we know has a direct relation to Kurtz. The African Woman ´´got in one day´´ aboard the boat and ´´talked like a fury to Kurtz for an hour´´ (61).

The centripetal properties of the African Woman and as a juxtaposition to Marlow's aunt and the Intended is evident from the word to word relation as understood by their specific contextual situations. The room of Marlow's aunt is ´´soothingly´´ and here they have a ´´long quiet chat by the fireside´´ (12) and The Intended is described as having ´´mourned for so long in silence´´ (76). The contextual meaning of the African Woman provides in this sense an opposite to the two European women. The words relating in this regard to the African Woman is ´´fury´´ whereto the Aunt is ´´quiet´´ and ´´soothingly´´ and the Intended as ´´crying´´.

The motif of darkness is ascribed word to word relation with the Intended as ´´all in black´´. The motif of darkness is not found centripetally to the African Woman.

I can note that the word relation ´´shadowy embrace´´ bears a centrifugal aspect that I will explore further in the descriptive phase.

## Literal Phase: Part-Conclusion

Having compared the politicized readings of *Heart of Darkness* to the first of five phases of Frye's symbolic context I can note that many of the findings of the politicized readings are prevalent in this literal phase.

Areas that have been found similar in understanding is Hawthorn's argument that women play an indispensable role in *Heart of Darkness*. This is evident from the two secretaries and Marlow's aunt. The secretaries play an indispensable role in Marlow signing the document thus taking a part of his later sorrows. Marlow's aunt has also been found serving an indispensable role in her influence to have Marlow appointed captain of the steamer. Further, Marlow has been found to speak about European women in a condescending tone.

On the point of racism and Conrad's critical attitude towards Africans, the centripetal meaning of the text has shown a more overtly critical attitude towards Europeans than of Africans. Hawkins make a point that *Heart of Darkness* represents an attack on imperialism and emphasizes a progressive Joseph Conrad in his critique of colonialism and imperialism. This is evident by Marlow as being a unique character in showcasing a shared humanity with the natives.

Hawkins make the argument that Kurtz is driven by motives of economic prosperity so to become successful back in Europe and as showcasing a less materialistic side in terms of asserting power over the natives. The centripetal meaning gathered of the former is made on the word to word relation as expressed by Kurtz and Marlow. Kurtz has very few lines in *Heart of Darkness* so the few he has will be deemed important. His line that ´´My Intended, my ivory, my station, my career, my ideas´´ emphasizes Hawkins former idea and the latter is gathered from the opening paragraph of Kurtz's report to the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs which Marlow reads as ´´we 'whites, from the point

of development we had arrived at, must necessarily appear to them (savages) in the nature of supernatural beings – we approach them with the might as of a deity´´ (Conrad 50). This line relating with the former showcase centripetal properties of Kurtz as conqueror of the natives on behalf of economic gain, but also one that marks a development of a corruptive force.

Ruppel and Hawthorn contrasts the African Woman to the Intended. This is only found evident on the basis that the two are related to Kurtz on the premise that they are the only two women that he has relation to. The centripetal meaning is contextualized to opposites between the European and the African Woman. The word relation hereto is verbal patterns such as ´´fury´´ to the African Woman and ´´crying´´ to the Intended.

Finally, the motif of darkness has been found in the area around river Thames, the Company's offices, the General Manager and the Intended. More so, *Heart of Darkness* begins and ends with darkness.

Areas that have not been found similar in understanding in the literal phase is Achebe's remark that the River Thames is seen as an antithesis to the River Congo and that the River Thames has ´´conquered´´ its ´´darkness´´. I note that in the literal phase, the River Thames has not ´´conquered´´ its ´´darkness´´. *Heart of Darkness* begins with darkness and ends with darkness, however ´´light´´ had been on the River Thames ever since the Romans came nineteen hundred years ago. Said notes that ´´darkness´´ reappears after Marlow's narrative which forms conflicting arguments that I will explore further in the descriptive phase.

Hawthorn and Ruppel's readings of the secretaries and Marlow's aunt serving a ´´representative function´´ as ´´portraying that idealism which the domestic imperialist powers use as apology for their exploitation´´ is not clear in the literal phase analysis. I will explore this position in the descriptive phase. Hawthorn and Ruppel also shed light that Marlow's

aunt and Kurtz's Intended serves a symbolic function by connotating the negative side of imperialism. I will explore this further in the descriptive phase.

Lastly, I have found outside of the political readings further areas of interest in *Heart of Darkness* that reinforces the idea that the text shows a more overtly critical attitude towards Europeans as seen in the European characters in the Company & Central Station as devils. Dante's *Inferno* come to mind with Marlow's early notion about stepping ´´into a gloomy circle of some Inferno´´ (Conrad 17) and corresponds to an idea of the three European characters as embodying characteristics of the devil respectively as greed, violence and desire. Kurtz as a deity is also interesting with Marlow's first depiction of him in mind: ´´it was as though an animated image of death carved out of old ivory´´ (59) as well as the fact that Kurtz is a recipient of native worship.

These two propositions as well as the idea of Kurtz as a deity may be more suited for a mythical and anagogic phase analysis.

### Descriptive Phase in *Heart of Darkness*

While the literal phase deals with the symbol of darkness as outside an attached sign-value, the descriptive phase will deal with areas of interest of the politicized readings which cannot be analyzed from a literal phase point of view as the claims lean centrifugally, not centripetally.

The descriptive phase will allow the showcasing of the centrifugal properties of symbols, as signs. Sign is understood as being centrifugal in referring to things outside of the text. Historical and biographical criticism as well as simple usage of the dictionary in terms of denotations and connotations of a symbolic unit or word can be thought of associating to this phase. The politicized readings may in this way be scrutinized as they point to something in *Heart of Darkness* to something external of the text. I will in this section explore and analyze what the politicized readings treat as a sign.

## The *Nellie*: River Thames – River Congo dichotomy

The first of the politicized propositions that is problematized in the literal phase is Achebe's remark of the River Thames ´´conquering´´ its ´´darkness´´. To Marlow, ´´when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago… Light came out of this river since´´ (Conrad 5). Centripetally the ´´Romans´´ brought ´´light´´. The first narrator narrates in the beginning that ´´The sun set; the dusk fell´´ (5) and Marlow follows with ´´darkness was here yesterday´´ (5). At the end of *Heart of Darkness*, the first narrator tells that ´´The offing was barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed somber under an overcast sky – seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness´´ (77). We can understand the sign of darkness by the opposition of light.

To Achebe, the understanding of the sign of darkness lies in a vague explanation of ´´lack of kinship, of common ancestry´´ that will be absent in Congo (Achebe 15) and which is present on the Thames as he sees the Thames as an antithesis to the Congo. Achebe's connotation can be elaborated in its meaning by his suggestion that Conrad's portrayal of Africa is marked by it being a frenzied, chaotic, disorganized and primal place and in this a sign of darkness. Thames will be juxtaposed to Congo in this sort of understanding.

We can gather that for the first narrator, the River Thames assumes darkness both before and after Marlow's narrative. *Heart of Darkness* begins and ends with darkness. To Marlow however, darkness is not to be found on the river Thames at the present, but that darkness was there yesterday. For him, darkness is to be found on the river Congo: ´´as a little chap I had a passion for maps… At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth… But there was one yet – the biggest – the most blank, so to speak – that I had a hankering after… By this time it was not a blank space anymore. It had got filled since my boyhood with rivers and lakes and names. It had ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery – a white patch… It had become a place of darkness´´ (Conrad 8). The sign of darkness

understood by Marlow in this passage denotates a previous unexplored area no longer being unexplored and is as such a ´´place of darkness´´.

In Achebe's view, Western civilization portrays Africa as ´´the other world´´, as an antithesis to Europe and of civilization. His narrow view of civilization is marked by attributes of intelligence and refinement which in Africa is juxtaposed to ´´triumphant bestiality´´ (Achebe 15). Congo is portrayed as a frenzied, chaotic, disorganized and primal place and in this lies Achebe's connotation of the sign of darkness.

It is clear from any reading of *Heart of Darkness* that the settings in Africa are chaotic and disorganized and is especially evident from the European presence on the continent as seen in the first depiction of the French warship firing mindlessly ´´into the continent´´ understood by Marlow as ´´a touch of insanity in the proceeding´´ (Conrad 14).

The Company Station is also ´´in a muddle´´ (18) and the Central Station is marked as being disorganized: ´´surrounded by scrub… a neglected gap was all the gate it had´´ (21). The Inner Station is a house with a ´´ruined roof… with three little square windows, no two of the same size´´ (57). The European Stations in Congo are disorganized. The Europeans inhibiting these stations are also disorganized. The Pilgrims ´´wandered here and there´´ and are seemingly oblivious as to their surroundings which is exemplified by a man attempting to fill a bucket with water but unaware that there was a hole in the bottom of his pail (23). Marlow also complains about not being able to get rivets to repair the steamer, having to wait several extra months as the caravans with new shipments only seem to bring useless things such as ´´calico, cotton prints, beads´´ (23).

The Congo as a primordial place and as stuck in time is evident from the centripetal description of the land: ´´The great wall of vegetation, an exuberant and entangled mass of trunks, branches, leaves, boughs… A deadened burst of mighty splashes and snorts reached us from afar, as though an ichthyosaurus had been taking a bath of glitter in the

greater river´´ (Conrad 30). The natives of the land cannot be said to be disorganized in the same way as the Europeans. While the European encampments are basically in ruins and their behavior is irrational, we see the natives manage to organize an attack on the steamer, killing the Helmsman (40).

The river Congo is a primordial place as understood in terms of inhibiting a less developed civilization than found on river Thames. The natives of Congo are made up to be more intelligent than the Europeans which only has their advanced technology in terms of firepower and steamboats going for them. Achebe's remark about Conrad's portrayal of Africa as ´´the other world´´ as understood in a negative way is hard to grasp. On one hand Conrad's portrayal of Africa is made by it being a primal place both in terms of the natives and in the land and as stuck in time. Europe on the other hand, makes Marlow ´´think of a whited sepulchre´´ (9) - as a dead place. To Marlow, civilization came ´´when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago… Light came out of this river since´´ (5). Centrifugally the native or barbarous Britons with the coming of Romans are no more and darkness or barbarity is replaced with light or civilization.

Civilization in Europe is organized: ´´I had no trouble finding the Company's offices´´ (9), and the inhabitants are ´´the Director´´ and ´´The Lawyer´´ and ´´The Accountant´´ (3). When Marlow arrives in Brussels, he thinks of a ´´whited sepulchre´´ that bears a centrifugal movement to Matthew 23:27: ´´Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whited sepulchers, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth´´ (*New Oxford Bible*, Matthew. 23-27) which speaks and relates to the European characters, the Director, the Lawyer and the Accountant as hypocrites.

From this we can elaborate upon the notion that there are multiple symbols of darkness in *Heart of Darkness*. To Marlow, the European forces in Congo is described as

disorganized and irrational. Europeans give in this centrifugal view a negative connotation of the sign of darkness. The European forces of civilization, e.g. ´´light´´ are out of their natural elements and therefore succumb to the forces of the wilderness – another sign of ´´darkness´´ that wait for ´´the passing away of a fantastic invasion´´ (Conrad 23). This sign of darkness is reinforced in Marlow's passage that the land ´´was like a rioting invasion of soundless life´´ (30). The other symbol of darkness is thus the Congo Wilderness as a force that denotates an absence of light, as understood in terms of European civilizations, and thereby embodies darkness.

When Achebe sees the river Thames as an antithesis to the river Congo he fails to acknowledge that being a primordial place ´´ trapped in primordial barbarity´´ and as a place stuck in time, does not necessitate that the place upholds less value than another place, as being superior or inferior.

In other words, the multiple signs of darkness are both ascribed to the imperial powers in Africa as well as Europe and the sign of darkness is also Africa as a primordial place, an embodiment of an underdeveloped place that has an absence of light or civilization. The Director, the Lawyer and the Accountant are representatives of the European sign of darkness and correspondingly they are the people on board the *Nellie* listening to Marlow's narrative.

Many of the politicized readings emphasize that women play an indispensable role in *Heart of Darkness* and Kurtz's painting of the Blindfolded Woman is identified as ´´purely symbolic´´ by Ruppel.

The picture of the Blindfolded Woman is described as ´´representing a woman draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The background was somber – almost black. The movement of the woman was stately, and the effect of the torchlight on the face was sinister´´ (25). The torch corresponds to the idea of bringing the light of civilization into the

dark and barbarous Congo and centripetally relates to Marlow's conversation with his aunt and his statement that ´´I was also one of the Workers, with a capital – you know. Something like an emissary of light´´ and the aunt's talk of ´´weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways´´ (Conrad 12).

This speak of the sign of darkness that is the European imperial mission in Africa and is representative of Hawthorn's idea of ´´portraying that idealism which the domestic imperialist powers use as apology for their exploitation´´ (Hawthorn 354). We see the idealism of the imperial power of bringing civilization to the natives as an excuse for exploitation, exemplified by Kurtz's painting. The effect of the torch on her face connotates this idealism.

### Darkness: Connotations and Denotations

Having established the notion that Kurtz's painting of the Blindfolded Woman serve a representative function of portraying what Hawthorn sees as ´´idealism which the domestic imperialist powers use as apology for their exploitation´´ the difference between my reading and Hawthorn's is that I make this conclusion on behalf of Kurtz's painting and not the two secretaries.

Hawthorn and Ruppel point to Marlow's aunt and the Intended as serving a symbolic function in connotating the negative side of imperialism. European women in the selected politicized readings are also juxtaposed to the African Woman in this sense.

The role of Marlow's aunt is already clear from prior examples. She is indirectly responsible for having him appointed captain of the steamer. In this I don't agree with Hawthorn's proposition that the role of the aunt is reduced to that of a mere spectator whose role is to stay at home and sooth him.

A symbolic connotation of the negative side of imperialism is more starkly found with the Intended and as contrasted to the African woman.

Kurtz is all about few things: ´´My Intended, my ivory, my station, my career, my ideas´´ (Conrad 68). He is an agent of the Company sent to Congo in search for ivory in order to become wealthy. He does this, as suggested by Ruppel and as seen centripetally in the text, so he can get rich and marry the Intended.

The Intended lives in the ´´whited sepulchre´´, Brussels, centrifugally the administration headquarter of the Belgian King Leopold II, notorious and universally condemned for his doings in the Congo. The Intended is economically wealthy as seen centripetally in the literal phase. On her appearance Marlow remarks that ´´This fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow, seemed surrounded by an ashy halo from which the dark eyes looked out at me´´ and ´´she carried her sorrowful head as though she were proud of that sorrow´´ (73).

To Marlow, seeing the Intended makes him see Kurtz: ´´I saw her and him in the same instant of time – his death and her sorrow´´ and speaking to her makes ´´the room growing darker, and only her forehead, smooth and white, remained illumined by the unextinguishable light of belief and love´´ [*sic*] (74).

The illumination of light on the Intended's face, highlighted by the dark background, is reminiscent of the same reading we get from Kurtz's painting of the Blindfolded Woman, as a representative of imperialism idealism, centripetally shown by the word to word relation of ´´belief´´ and ´´light´´ and ´´ashy halo´´ as well as the connection of Marlow seeing Kurtz and the Intended as one.

It is in the settings of the Intended's home that we see Marlow reflecting his guilt as a participant in imperialism: ´´yes, I know,' I said with something like despair in my heart, but bowing my head before the faith that was in her, before that great and saving illusion that shone with an unearthly glow in the darkness, in the triumphant darkness from which I could not have defended her – from which I could not even defend myself´´ (75).

The sign of darkness in the case of the Europeans are clear. Darkness in this sense is connotated as a critique of the idealism of imperialism, the belief of the civilization mission to native people and lands as a guise for exploitation and thereby a connotation of moral wickedness.

This sign of darkness in most cases are highlighted by light: ´´illusion´´ and ´´unearthly glow in the darkness´´ and ´´his goodness shone in every act. His example!´´ (Conrad 75).

The symbolic function of the Intended and the Blindfolded Woman as connotating a critique of the idealism of imperialism, e.g. one of two signs of darkness, may be further reinforced by the contrast of the African Woman.

I note that the sign of darkness has multiple aspects in its meaning. The imperial mission is one sign of darkness out of two.

Africa as a primordial place and as an embodiment of an underdeveloped place that denotates a want for the absence of light, e.g. European civilization, as emphasized in it wanting to reject the imperial powers is also a sign of darkness. Again, ´´when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago… Light came out of this river since´´ (5). In Europe, the Romans brought light through civilization with their imperial conquests and with them the barbarians ceased to exist. Congo has not been conquered by an imperial power before, at least not centripetally. Darkness or primal barbarity thereby still exists in the Congo.

### Darkness in Congo

The wilderness in *Heart of Darkness* is its own character or entity. Multiple passages tell of the wilderness ´´waiting patiently for the passing away of this fantastic invasion´´ (30). The connotative significance of the wilderness or nature in general is first noted at the beginning of the text by the first narrator: ´´The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther

back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and greatest, town on earth´´ (Conrad 3). The difference between the wilderness surrounding the Thames to Congo is that the wilderness in England has been tamed long ago by the coming of the Romans.

The native peoples of the wilderness in Congo as exemplified by the cannibals are to Marlow ´´´Fine fellows… in their place´´ (35) and the European intruders wish for the wilderness to ´´be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil´´ (35). The natives are at peace with the wilderness and at times can be considered the voice of it: ´´it seemed as though the mist itself had screamed´´ (39) which reflects the primal and savage qualities of the wilderness as seen in Marlow's first look at them: ´´they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast. They wanted no excuse for being there´´ (14). The wilderness wants the European invaders gone and it becomes a ´´rioting invasion of soundless life´´ that wants ´´to sweep every little man of us out of his little existence´´ (30).

The African Woman is the embodiment of the wilderness: ´´like the wilderness´´ (61) and ´´the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul´´ (60). She acts as a passive agent in not causing direct harm to the invading force. Juxtaposing the African Woman to the European women as seen in the Intended forms a stark contrast of life and death.

I note in the literal phase that Kurtz has been corrupted by the wilderness. We know that the wilderness in the form of the African woman can communicate with Kurtz: ´´she talked like a fury to Kurtz for an hour´´ (61) and coincidently we also know ´´that it was Kurtz who had ordered the attack to be made on the steamer´´ because ´´he thought it would scare you away – that you would give it up, thinking him dead´´ (62-63).

The wilderness as a sign of darkness that wants to ward off the invading imperial powers in their name of the civilizing mission is contextualized in this way to the African woman as a passive agent who enforces this action through her manipulation of Kurtz whom orders the attack on Marlow's steamer. I agree with Hawthorn's notion that the African woman as contrasted to the Intended connotates a negative side of imperialism. The African woman is an embodiment of natural freedom, passion and life while the Intended sits in her tomb-like home.

This is also telling of how we are to make meaning or value out of the two symbols of darkness.

### Formal Phase in *Heart of Darkness*

The formal phase is to Frye the phase of how we are to make meaning or value out of symbols. It is in the union of the literal and the descriptive phase that provides the first stage of understanding the text as a whole. The symbol in this phase is the image. The image defined is understood by the interplay of the motifs and signs that gives a work specific interpretation of the symbol of darkness as image. Images may invoke cognition of the text. The union of the literal and the descriptive phase conveys form in the formal phase. Form of the text is understood by which every detail relates. Images of darkness are the key of the literary text, understood by conveying the message or meaning of the text.

### Darkness *in Heart of Darkness*

The culmination of the various motifs and signs found in Conrad's text leads us to form and tonality.

The *Nellie* is surrounded by darkness and Marlow narrates to the passengers a story filled with imagery of darkness as seen through the description of Brussels, in the treatment of the native peoples and in the wild nature of the Congo, as well as the moral compass of the European powers.

I note in the descriptive phase the two signs of darkness found in *Heart of Darkness*. One sign of darkness is the imperial civilizing mission and the other is Congo as an underdeveloped place that seeks to reject the imperial powers. The formal phase will work towards emphasizing these two symbols of darkness.

The first expression of Brussels, the ´´whited sepulchre´´, is ´´a narrow and deserted street in deep shadow, high houses, innumerable windows with venetian blinds, a dead silence, grass sprouting between the stones, imposing carriage archways right and left, immense double doors standing ponderously ajar´´ (Conrad 10). From our first meeting with darkness imagery that surrounds the river Thames we now in Brussels get a broader image towards the form of the text.

Deep shadows and dead silence establish an ominous feeling and the ironic and cynical description of the secretary: ´´compassionate´´ and ´´full of desolation and sympathy´´ as well as Marlow pointing out that he feels ´´uneasy´´ (10) sets the tonality of the text.

The first expression of Brussels directs us towards an emphasis on the form of the text and corresponds to the two symbols of darkness: imperialism idealism and the opposing force of this ideology. In this instance the form is exemplified by ´´deep shadow´´ and ´´dead silence´´ and ´´grass sprouting between the stones´´. Even in the heart of the one sign of darkness, Brussels, the other sign of darkness, the opposing force, shows an allegory of wishing to slip through the cracks and in so shows a will of resistance.

Irony and cynicism continues to mark the tonality of the text and is directed towards the natives in the majority of the imagery of them, here exemplified by one: ´´Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees, leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair. Another mine on the cliff went off, followed by a slight shudder of the soil under my feet. The work was going on. The work!´´ (Conrad 17). The exclamation mark after

´´work´´ shows Marlow's cynicism in that he can't believe the work of the station is going on while the natives are dying: ´´this was the place where some of the helpers had withdrawn to die´´ (17). We see irony in Marlow's replacement of the word native with helper.

The Europeans and the natives reinforce the symbol of darkness as an image of imperialism idealism and Marlow's ironic distancing from it: ´´I went to work the next day, turning, so to speak, my back on that station. In that way only it seemed to me I could keep my hold on the redeeming facts of life´´. For the Europeans at the stations ´´everybody had behaved splendidly! Splendidly!´´ (22-23) but everything is in ruins, the native slaves are dying all around the stations, and very little progress is actually made. The Europeans are blind to the truth in this sense and in so shows the idealism of imperialism and its imbedded hypocrisy. While Marlow acknowledges that the native cannibals are ´´Fine fellows… in their place´´ (35) we get no such acknowledgment of the Europeans and this shows how they are contrasted to the Africans, as being in the wrong place.

We can make out a value judgement of the sign of darkness by the imagery of the European powers in the Congo. The tonality in this sense is repeated by Marlow's irony and cynicism throughout *Heart of Darkness*.

Edward Said's reading of *Heart of Darkness* is emphasized by his own private person as a ´´non-white, non-Western, and non-Judeo-Christian´´ and is in his view a ´´less imperialistically assertive possibility´´ (Said 28) – as a more valid reading than found in any white Christian westerner. Feelings in this way play a major part in his criticism.

The literal and descriptive phase has shown that the symbol of darkness, the wilderness, wants to ward off the invading imperial powers. This corresponds to Said's idea that ´´the darkness´´ has an ´´autonomy of its own´´. In the descriptive phase it becomes clear that Conrad through Marlow is more critical towards the Europeans than of the natives and in this we see a contradiction of Said's argument that Conrad through Marlow are not able to

move beyond his time in criticizing imperialism, which I have shown that he implicit and explicit do.

Said reductively notes that imperialism has monopolized the entire system of representation understood in terms of not being able to speak for ´´the other´´. The two symbols of darkness clearly show that Conrad can speak for ´´the other´´ in his implicit and explicit critique of imperialism. I note that Conrad keep an ironic distance in this way. Said's understanding is that this ironic distance distorts reality, which I cannot agree on.

A clear example of this is Marlow's less-repeated imagery of the African Woman and in her conveying the form of Congo's nature and wilderness. The African Woman emphasizes and reinforces a negative image in our understanding of imperialism idealism.

While irony and cynicism dominate most of *Heart of Darkness,* the imagery of the African Woman is in respectful terms. She is the only one who bears imagery of color and is a stark contrast to the grey and dark colors found with the Intended. The river Thames and Brussels are in this same way contrasted to Congo. There is nothing that indicates a distortion of reality in this sense. An understanding of reality distorted can only be made if one omits a centripetal view and to a lesser extent a centrifugal view as well. In this way one may wonder if Edward Said have even read Conrad's text.

I invoke Said's criticism here the same way as the formal phase deals with commentary on a literary text as a potential allegory of events and ideas as the same can be noted of Said's essay. His reading is seen as exemplary in a formal phase analysis as it stresses the aspect of feeling and tonality that we get from reading anything. His criticism is not as much about Conrad's text as it is about his critical political standpoint: that his and other marginalized groups views are more valid than others because of a personal background used as an excuse for validity.

Said wants to stress the negative aspect of imperialism and that Conrad is not able to move beyond his time so to take the next step: ´´to recognize what they saw, disablingly and disparagingly, as a non-European ´´darkness´´ was in fact a non-European world *resisting* imperialism so as one day to regain sovereignty and independence, and not, as Conrad reductively says, to reestablish the darkness´´ [*sic*] (Said 30). I have already noted that ´´darkness´´ is not re-established at any point. *Heart of Darkness* begins and ends with darkness. However, I agree with Said in his understanding that the ´´non-European darkness´´ is a ´´non-European world´´ that resists imperialism. This is evident both in the settings of Europe and Africa and already from the first description of Brussels: ´´grass sprouting between the stones´´ (Conrad 10) that bears a connection to the resistance of the Congo wilderness. Imperialism idealism as reflected in Marlow showcases his guilt as a participant.

In the passage that exemplifies Marlow's guilt we get the feeling that corresponds with Said's argument that Conrad through Marlow is not ´´able to move beyond his time´´ - to explicit state a critique of imperialism idealism. What Marlow instead does is to admit to his guilt and in turn emphasize the strong pull that was or is imperialism idealism.

However, we do see numerous times examples of explicit critiques of imperialism idealism from Marlow, and already from early pages of the text: ´´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´´ (7). This is exactly what Marlow's narration does. His narration makes us look into an abhorred and idyllic world experienced by him and told to the men onboard the *Nellie*.

Darkness imagery instead of distorting reality they highlight serious and important historical events that some would argue follows to the present: imperialism. Contrasting light with darkness reinforces an understanding that deals with the two conflicting sides of imperialism, the oppressor and the oppressed. In *Heart of Darkness* the two colours,

darkness and light, has switched sides so to show an analogy of proportion between the poem and the real-life issue that it imitates. Marlow's narration is on the one hand, a narration: ´´It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream – making a vain attempt´´ (Conrad 27) and on the other hand his narration, or dream, is as easily another's reality.

## Mythical Phase in *Heart of Darkness*

The mythical phase like the formal phase deals with the aesthetic or speculative understood in terms of ascribing moral and tropological meaning concerning the figurative and social aspect of meaning. The symbol in the mythical phase is the archetype: a typical or recurring image. An archetype symbol connects one poem with another so to unify and integrate the literary experience. In the descriptive and formal phase I have located two symbols of darkness, one concerning the European imperial mission and the other the opposing force, Congo. The mythical phase will work towards an elaboration of past findings and how the symbols of darkness are expanded in the mythical phase, as archetypes.

I note in the literal phase further areas of interest that springs to mind with the mythical phase and that *Heart of Darkness* shows a more overtly critical attitude towards Europeans than of the native Africans.

Emphasizing this idea will be done by expanding prior findings. The European characters in the Company & Central Station along with Marlow's early remark about stepping ´´into a gloomy circle of some Inferno´´ alludes to an understanding of the symbol of darkness as an archetypal symbol of hell and devil(s) and bears a connection to Dante´s *Divine Comedy*, whereby the characteristics of the Pilgrims, the Eldorado Expedition and the Brickmaker corresponds to the different circles of Dante´s inferno, greed relating to the Pilgrims, violence to the Eldorado Expedition and desire to the Brickmaker. The archetypal hell in turn connects and emphasizes the connotation of moral wickedness that is the European side of the symbol of darkness.

The symbol of darkness as an archetype will in the mythical phase be seen as a convention of moral wickedness as exemplified in the two secretaries and bears a comparison to the witches of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* who foretells future events just like the secretaries have shown to be ´´fateful´´. The temporal pattern of *Heart of Darkness* like *Macbeth* is understood by the audience as a warning not to have blind trust or faith, as Marlow acknowledges that he has upon meeting the Intended: ´´bowing my head before the faith that was in her´´ (Conrad 75).

In line with this, I have shown that Conrad diligent usage of ´´whited sepulchre´´ relate to Matthew 23:27 and bears an archetype to the self-righteous and hypocritical people that encompass the ideology that is the idealism of imperialism and Marlow expresses that this line of thinking is rotten in the core. The Brickmaker as a ´´papier-mâché Mephistopheles´´ (26) bears an archetype to Goethe´s *Faust* and reinforces the idea that the imperial forces are metaphoric demons who are morally bankrupt.

The opening pages of *Heart of Darkness* is narrated by what I term the first narrator. Before Marlow's narrative begins, the first narrator lets us know about ´´the great spirit of the past´´, the men and ships who has also called Thames their home or had borne them to ´´the battles of the sea´´. The men ´´whom the nation is proud´´ (4) is listed as Sir Francis Drake and Sir John Franklin. These centrifugal figures do not point archetypally to another poem or literary text, but to history. Drake was the first Englishman to circumnavigate the globe in the 16$^{th}$ century and Franklin´s warship *Erebus and Terror* tells that the imperialism idealism of the Europeans in *Heart of Darkness* is not a new phenomenon and that conquest has long been celebrated by the English nation which corresponds to the findings from the formal phase: that Marlow's narrative is as easily another person's reality.

I invoke the historical even though to Frye the mythical phase should emphasize beyond the merely historical and into the question of what an aspect of literature as a whole is (Frye 95). If, however, the pull towards the historical is strong enough in the literary text then it should to Frye not be omitted. Frye uses an example of Napoleon as a sun myth that speak of the rise of career, the zenith of fame or the eclipse of fortunes: ´´Social and cultural history, which is anthropology in an extended sense, will always be a part of the context of criticism´´ (110). With this in mind, I will allow myself the following allusion to Roman history.

Again, to Marlow, civilization came to England with the Romans nineteen hundred years ago. Rome having expanded its empire to far reaches of Europe and Africa and is archetypally referred to as the Eternal City. Marlow imagines ironically ´´the feelings of a commander of a fine… trireme´´ and the ´´promotion to the fleet at Ravenna´´, the chief Roman naval base (Conrad 6). The symbols of Rome and Ravenna emphasizes the archetype aspect of imperialism in that all roads lead to Rome and that Rome is what we understand as the archetypal city of imperialism. In this way Thames bears a relation to Ravenna and London/Brussels to Rome.

Like the Romans conquering the barbarous Britons, they too must have felt what Marlow calls ´´the fascination of the abomination´´ and the ´´mysterious life of the wilderness´´ (6). Marlow's phrases add a nuanced archetypal aspect to the symbol of darkness that is imperialism idealism in that it speaks about a universal pull towards the dark unknown and not necessarily on behalf of economic or national gain. A contemporary and universal understanding of this pull can be understood by today's society and in its fascination with catastrophes, destruction, death and everything mysterious and unknown.

The fascination of the abomination or of all things horrific in *Heart of Darkness* is strongest seen in Kurtz. Kurtz has resided for a long time in ´´the heart of darkness´´, at the Inner Station or deep in the Congo River. His phrase ´´ My Intended, my ivory, my station,

my career, my ideas´´ (Conrad 68) may be linked to Caesar´s proclamation of *Veni, Vidi, Vici* which tells us that Kurtz has achieved victory over his goals, however contrary to Caesar, Kurtz's achievement has come at the highest cost: his life.

Kurtz, like Caesar, has an imperial cult and is worshipped by the natives: ´´Mr Kurtz was one of the immortals´´ (62). The two are both intelligent and come from civilization to end up travelling to foreign lands in the name of imperialism. Caesar travelled to Britain and Kurtz travelled to Congo.

The imagery of Roman imperialism and European imperialism are linked numerous times. We see this in Marlow's statement that Roman conquerors brought civilization to England nineteen hundred years ago, to dreaming about the fleet of Ravenna and to his gladiatorial proclamation as he leaves the Company's offices, and by comparing the weaponry of Kurtz to the ´´thunderbolts of that pitiful Jupiter´´ (59). Emphasizing these archetypes in turn highlights an understanding of *Heart of Darkness* that speaks to the moral and social aspect of meaning: how these archetypal symbols are ingrained in our culture, and what they mean.

The European imperial forces in the Congo are no different than the Roman conquerors of the Europeans own lands, and in this sense, the symbol of darkness repeats itself as an archetype. *Heart of Darkness* is thus an imitation of other poems and history. It speaks about the nature of the symbol of darkness that is imperialism idealism and the extent of how ingrained in European culture this archetype is and how we can make meaning out of it. From the Romans to the Bible to Dante and lastly to Shakespeare and Goethe the darkness archetype shares conventions in relation to a similarity in how we are to understand the European symbol of darkness in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*: as connotating a moral wickedness that lies in all humankind.

## Anagogic Phase in *Heart of Darkness*

The findings of the mythical phase lead us to the anagogic phase that treats the symbol of darkness as a monad. This phase, as well as the mythical phase, is what we can understand as exemplary of universal meaning. What is of special interest in the anagogic phase is the ´´establishment of a modern parallel to the medieval conception of anagogy or universal meaning´´ (Frye 116).

Anagogic refers to a religious, mystical or spiritual interpretation and monad refers to the totality of all things and beings, as everything in one thing. The anagogic phase will work with similar themes as the mythical phase but in a narrower sense of ´´relating to divine or quasi-divine beings and powers´´ (116).

I note in the mythical phase that the symbol of darkness connected to the Europeans as an archetype in *Heart of Darkness* is understood by the universal aspect of moral wickedness inherent in all mankind.

The other symbol of darkness relating to the African Woman and the Congo wilderness is not yet explored in the sense of making universal meaning out of the symbol.

The connotations found in the descriptive phase are analogous to seeds that now in the anagogic phase become monads.

The description of the African Woman all fall in one long passage. She is ´´like the wilderness´´ and is able to control the natives with almost god-like powers: ´´Suddenly she opened her bared arms and threw them up rigid above her head as though in an uncontrollable desire to touch the sky, and at the same time the swift shadows darted out on the earth, swept around on the river, gathering the steamer into a shadowy embrace´´ (Conrad 61). She is central in our understanding of the non-European symbol of darkness. Her status as an authoritative figure is established centripetally by ´´measured steps´´ and ´´stately´´. The symbol of darkness as a monad in the context of the African Woman and the Congo

wilderness becomes a unit of life, truth and freedom. The spiritual, mystical or religious side will echo the native's connection to nature and the Europeans lost connection with nature that is replaced with moral wickedness.

In *Heart of Darkness* the plot pattern is much in line with the idea of man against nature. The European imperialism idealism seeks economic prosperity in guise of a civilizing mission. The natural inhabitants of the lands, the natives, in turn suffer for this. The natural land also suffers by the European machinery as the only access to ivory is by chopping down the wilderness. Brussels and London are artificial constructions of ´´tall houses… of a street as still and decorous as a well-kept alley in a cemetery´´ (Conrad 72). What was once natural is destroyed by buildings of civilization and even here we see ´´ grass sprouting between the stones´´ (10). The natural order or the balance of nature is shifted so what we normally associate with life is merely unnecessary constructions of concrete that in turn means a moral death. Abandoning nature has for the Europeans allowed a growth of moral wickedness, a loss of colour, passion and an abandonment of natural life. Light in turns highlight these features of the symbol of darkness.

The European symbol of darkness as a monad in turn is starkest seen in Kurtz as ´´translucently pure as a cliff of crystal´´ (70).

Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* speaks of a ´´feeling of converging significance… the feeling that we have moved into the still center of the order of words´´ which occurs to him in the greatest moments in Dante's *Purgatorio* and Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (Frye 117). In *Heart of Darkness* that moment occurs when Marlow narrates about his first view of Kurtz.

Darkness as a monad will fully encompass Kurtz. Marlow notes prior to seeing Kurtz that ´´the original Kurtz had been educated partly in England´´ pointing out that the Kurtz in the Congo wilderness is a different Kurtz. Kurtz absence ´´for several months´´ in the

wilderness is seen by the Harlequin as a way of ´´getting himself adored´´ and that his ´´appetite for more ivory had got the better of the – what shall I say – less material aspirations´´ and that ´´he was rotten at the core´´ (Conrad 57-58). Something has changed or transcended Kurtz during his time in the Congo wilderness.

When Marlow lays his eyes on Kurtz for the first time he sees ´´the eyes of that apparition shining darkly far in its bony head that nodded with grotesque jerks´´ and ´´the cage of his robs all astir, the bones of his arm waving´´. To Marlow, seeing Kurtz is like seeing death: ´´it was as though an animated image of death carved out of old ivory´´ and when Kurtz opens his mouth ´´it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he had been wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him´´ (59). The symbol of darkness as a monad and meaning lies in Kurtz as a monad of darkness incarnate. Ascribing him a connotation of encompassing imperialism idealism is made, like prior examples, by the juxtaposition of light: ´´apparition shining darkly´´. Kurtz is and shows the evil face of imperialism in all its wickedness.

Marlow's later narration of speaking to Kurtz reveals how Kurtz is transcended: ´´the heavy, mute spell of the wilderness that seemed to draw him to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions´´ (65). Kurtz before his search for ivory in the Congo wilderness embodied imperialism idealism in his core. Now he possesses ivory from the inside and out. The wilderness or Mother Nature had ´´found him out early and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion´´ and thus transcending ´´awakening´´ the nature of Kurtz's wickedness, the symbol of darkness, to his outside – becoming a fully integrated monad of darkness.

The two symbols of darkness in this way integrate into one so to show the truth of Kurtz nature as well as a showcasing a universal application ´´humanity like yours´´

(Conrad 36) and corresponds to what Marlow asks us to see early in his narration: ´´Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything?´´ (27).

In a spiritual, religious or mystical aspect what Marlow wants the audience, the men onboard the *Nellie*, to see and gather from his narration is a lesson learned from his experience with Kurtz that for Marlow arises in a sense of epiphany that springs out from the ´´truth – truth stripped of its cloak of time´´ (36). Kurtz has transcended an acknowledgement of the evil that he possesses passively on the inside back in the civilized Europe that now in the Congo wilderness adheres and manifests to his outside. Kurtz is allowed, so to speak, to do as he wishes in the Congo without the laws of civilization to hold him back, as Marlow says: ´´he must meet that truth with his own true stuff´´ (36), only the truth, the wilderness, can show and allow Kurtz a release of his evil natural form and in this sense imperialism idealism become with Kurtz ´´the forms of nature´´ (Frye 119).

What Marlow narrates and what anagogic meaning lies behind his narration is that European civilization are blind to the truth, they are not allowed their truth, and only in the return to nature is this truth revealed to them, like it is to Marlow both by his own example and also the example set by Kurtz: ´´Since I had peeped over the edge myself, I understand better the meaning of his stare that could not see the flame of the candle but was wide enough to embrace the whole universe, piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the darkness´´ (70).

For Marlow, Kurtz has embraced the darkness, the inherent evil of imperialism idealism within him: ´´He had summed up – he had judged. ´The horror!´… After all, this was the expression of some sort of belief. It had candour, it had conviction, it had a vibrating note of revolt in its whisper, it had the appalling face of a glimpse of truth – the strange commingling of desire and hate´´ (Conrad 70). To Marlow, the meaning gathered from Kurtz

is not made in any understanding that lies in an aspect of positivity or negativity but simply an acknowledgement of embracing one's true nature, one's truth.

If this nature is evil, then that evil should be set loose. The evil inherent in the followers of imperialism idealism should by this understanding not be hidden away like we see in the example of the General Manager ´´with difference in externals only´´ but the people whom are fully engulfed in this ideology should in Marlow's view be like Kurtz. They should, like the General Manager notes: ´´have no entrails´´ (Conrad 22) and embrace their inhumanity and not hide or disguise their nature as an excuse and by using the false excuse of a civilizing mission.

To Marlow the symbol of darkness should be cast out in the open and shone light on.

This in turn corresponds to a modern parallel as centrifugal of the text and how we can understand the symbol of darkness today. I have shown that Marlow's phrase: ´´the fascination of the abomination´´ relates to the European symbol of darkness that bears an archetype to historically followers of imperialism, namely the Romans. The phrase adds a nuanced meaning to the symbol of darkness on a universal level that not necessarily speak of economic or national gain, but the pull towards the unknown, mysterious, detestable and abhorrible. In line with this the symbol of darkness fully encompasses Kurtz as a monad. His evil is allowed to be set free in the Congo.

Just like the Romans and Kurtz the anagogic meaning behind the symbol of darkness will be one where everyone possesses a heart of darkness, an inner pull towards a fascination of the unknown, to moral wickedness, to evil, to feelings of horror, and to things outside of what we can regard as the norm. For Kurtz, this universal understanding, or truth, is finally realized moments before his death.

## Conclusion

Having arrived at the end of this Master's thesis, it is now possible to conclude upon this project's thesis questions. It has become evident by comparing the reception literature of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* to a reading offered by Northrop Frye that the literary criticisms we can locate as belonging in the schools of thought of Feminist and Post-Colonial criticism are to a certain degree more concerned in making out a political rather than literary meaning of *Heart of Darkness*.

I find in my analysis that I agree in several areas as the politicized readings. The literal phase analysis has allowed me to scrutinize every centripetal proposition made by the politicized readings. In this I find that I agree with Hawthorn's statement that women play an indispensable role in *Heart of Darkness*. This is seen centripetally by the two secretaries and Marlow's aunt. The secretaries play an indispensable role in having Marlow signing the document, sealing his journey to the Congo. Marlow's aunt has influential powers in Brussels, thus allowing Marlow to get appointed captain of the steamer. I also agree that Marlow speaks about European women with a condescending tone. On the critics who point to Conrad as showcasing a critical attitude towards the native Africans, the centripetal meaning has shown a more critical attitude towards the Europeans, and that Marlow showcases a shared humanity with the natives.

Hawkins statement that Kurtz is driven by motives of economic prosperity is also found in the literal phase. More so, I have found that the literal phase gives a reading of Kurtz as a development of a corruptive force.

Hawthorn and Ruppel sees a contrast of the African Woman to the Intended. This contrast is only evident on the context that these two women are the only women we know has a centripetal relation to Kurtz.

Concluding on the symbol of darkness in the literal phase I have found that the motif of darkness is evident on the River Thames, the Company's offices, the General Manager and The Intended and that *Heart of Darkness* begins and ends with darkness.

The descriptive phase analysis has enabled a centrifugal view of the text that in turn has permitted me to compare the politicized readings that lean towards an external view of the literary text.

In the descriptive phase I disagree with Achebe's findings that the Congo wilderness is merely a symbol of lack of kinship and of common ancestry. Instead I make a connotation of the symbol of darkness that leans towards a negative view of the European forces in the Congo, as exemplified in them being disorganized and irrational contrary to the natives who doesn't share these characteristics.

Further, I have located a second symbol of darkness in the descriptive phase. I point to the Congo wilderness as a sign of darkness that denotes an absence of light understood by an absence of civilization and in so embodies darkness. The two signs of darkness are thereby ascribed to the imperial powers and to Africa as an underdeveloped place.

More so I point to Kurtz's picture of the Blindfolded Woman as a symbolic unit representative of Hawthorn's idea of portraying imperialism idealism. Herein lies the idea that is repeated multiple times in *Heart of Darkness*: that light contrasts darkness.

I disagree with Hawthorn's proposition that Marlow's aunt portrays a symbolic function in connotating a negative side of imperialism. Instead I point to the Intended as a stronger representation of imperialism idealism that especially become evident with the contrast of light. From these examples it has become clear that the sign of darkness connotates a critique of the idealism of imperialism in showcasing a connotation of moral wickedness.

For the descriptive phase I conclude that the sign of darkness that is imperialism idealism is reinforced by contrast of the African Woman. The Congo wilderness as a sign of darkness is contextualized to the African Woman as a passive agent who enforces action through Kurtz. In this sense I agree with Hawthorn that the African Woman as contrasted to the Intended connotates a negative side of imperialism. The former imbeds natural freedom, passion and life while the latter lives in her tomb-like home.

For the formal phase analysis, I can conclude that irony and cynicism mark the tone of the text. Marlow through irony takes a distance from imperialism idealism and showcases his guilt as a participant.

Further I conclude that in the formal phase I agree with Said's notion that the symbol of darkness that is the Congo wilderness has an autonomy of its own.

I disagree with Said's proposition that imperialism has monopolized the entire system of representation. I show that Conrad can speak for ´´the other´´. This is evident from his implicit and explicit critique of imperialism. The African Woman is shown to be a stark example in this regard, as the only character that has been found with respectful imagery. It has become clear that his reading is especially rooted in a political rather than a literary interest.

More so I disagree with Said's notion that darkness imagery distorts reality. I have found the opposite to be true. Light in many examples contrasts darkness so to further an understanding of the two sides of imperialism idealism: the oppressor and the oppressed.

In the mythical phase analysis, I find my thesis statement regarding Frye as offering a universal and unique approach to literature that politicized readings pay less or no attention with to be true.

I conclude that the symbol of darkness is an archetype in its connection to other literary works namely the Bible, Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe, as well as Roman history.

The symbol of darkness that is imperialism idealism bears an archetypal understanding that alludes to Dante's *Divine Comedy* seen in the examples of the Pilgrims, the Eldorado Expedition and the Brickmaker as corresponding to the different circles of Dante's inferno. The symbol of darkness as an archetype in this sense emphasizes past findings in connotating moral wickedness and thereby furthers a view that Conrad shows a more overtly critical attitude towards the European characters in the literary text than of the natives. No relation to symbolic devils is attached to the natives.

A connotation of moral wickedness exemplified by the two secretaries is also furthered by the symbol of darkness as an archetype that bears a relation to the witches of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The universal or social dimension of this reading is one that is telling of not to have blind trust or faith, as Marlow like Macbeth shows to have.

More so, I conclude that Conrad diligent usage of ´´whited sepulchre´´ relate to Matthew 23:27 and emphasizes the symbol of darkness that is imperialism idealism as an archetype that highlights an idea of the people who encompasses this ideology as self-righteous and hypocritical. The Brickmaker as a papier-mâché Mephistopheles is similar in this line of understanding and points to the idea of being rotten or empty on the inside. The symbol of darkness as an archetype in the example of the Brickmaker bears a relation to Goethe's *Faust* and reinforces an idea of the Europeans as metaphoric demons who are morally bankrupt.

Other than bearing a relation to literary texts I conclude that the symbol of darkness that is imperialism idealism also bears an archetype to history. By incorporating centrifugal figures such as famous explorers and actors of imperialism, Conrad showcases that imperialism idealism is not a new phenomenon of his time, but that the ideology goes back to the 16$^{th}$ century and even further to Roman history. In this sense the symbol of

darkness bears an archetype to Rome as the Eternal City, Ravenna to the River Thames and London/Brussels to Rome.

In line with this I conclude that the symbol of darkness as an archetype is seen in Kurtz as an actor of imperialism idealism and relates archetypally to Caesar.

The symbol of darkness as an archetype has been found to expand in meaning in a universal aspect. Imperialism idealism in this sense is not only about economic or national gain at the cost of others, but it speaks of a universal pull towards the mysterious and the unknown and that the fascination of the unknown bears a universal meaning depending on its context.

This leads me to conclude upon the anagogic phase.

I conclude that the anagogic phase has enabled a spiritual, religious or mystical interpretation and that the symbol of darkness becomes a monad. In this sense the African Woman becomes the center in our understanding of the non-European symbol of darkness. I conclude that the symbol of darkness in the context of the African Woman and the Congo wilderness becomes a unit of life, truth and freedom. The spiritual, religious or mystical side lies in the native's connection to nature and is contrasted to the Europeans lost connection with nature that instead is replaced with moral wickedness. Further I have found in this that the natural order or the balance of nature is shifted so what we would normally associate with natural life instead becomes artificial constructions.

The symbol of darkness that is imperialism idealism in the anagogic phase has shown to be starkest exemplified in Kurtz. Hereto I conclude that Kurtz has been transcended in the Congo wilderness and that while in Europe he possessed imperialism idealism on the inside we see in the interior of the Congo this ideology from the inside and out and Kurtz becomes darkness incarnate.

I conclude that the two symbols of darkness in the anagogic phase become a monad, as one. The symbol of darkness that is the Congo wilderness has shown to transcend the nature of Kurtz, so to allow his inner self, or truth, to unfold.

The universal aspect in turn speak of embracing or acknowledging one's true nature, be this good or evil.

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## Abstract

In this Master´s thesis I examine what makes contemporary literary criticism political and why and how we must instead look to Northrop Frye as he offers a relevant, universal and unique approach to literature that politicized literary criticism pay less or no attention to.

In line with this I examine to which degree it is possible to compare the readings of selected politicized literary criticisms of Joseph Conrad´s *Heart of Darkness* to one offered by Northrop Frye.

The first section of the paper works towards an understanding of how and why contemporary literary criticism is seen as being political and how Northrop Frye is to be viewed as a middle-ground, as in-between the two opposite camps of the political spectrum as understood by left-wing and right-wing.

In order to analyse Conrad´s text, I use Northrop Frye´s second essay of his *Anatomy of Criticism* titled *Ethical Criticism: Theory of Symbols*. This essay enables an approach that sheds light on what Frye terms five phases of literary symbolism. The five phases of literary symbolism work toward a systematization of literary symbolism and explores the symbol of darkness in Conrad's literary text in terms of all its possible and ambiguous meanings.

When I analyse the symbol of darkness in the literal phase I look at the symbol in terms of its internal references, as what Frye terms motif. This phase allows me to scrutinize the selected politicized readings of Conrad's text and to see if their statements can be verified through the specific literary situations. In turn the descriptive phase allows me to analyse the statements of the politicized readings that lean towards external references as well as uncovering the outward properties of the symbol of darkness as what Frye terms sign and as found in the literary text.

The formal phase analysis deals with the symbol of darkness as what Frye terms image. This phase unifies the literal and the descriptive phase and allows me to make out a value judgement out of the symbols of darkness found in Conrad's text.

Lastly, I analyse the mythical and the anagogic phase that becomes a reading embodying what we can understand as universal meaning by way that the symbol of darkness in the former is read as an archetype and the latter as a monad. The last two phases enable me to make a modern or contemporary parallel in my understanding of the symbol of darkness in *Heart of Darkness*.

Based on my analysis whereby I compare selected politicized readings of *Heart of Darkness* to an approach offered by Northrop Frye and as operated by me, I find that the politicized readings are to an extent more interested in making a political rather than literary meaning out of *Heart of Darkness*. At the same time, many of the findings do compare which I do not find surprising with the primary text in mind. *Heart of Darkness* deals with many aspects which we can consider political, namely imperialism. I find that the politicized readings tend to point to the same areas of interest in Conrad's text but that their readings differ greatly.

For example, Chinua Achebe reads Conrad as being racist in his portrayal of the natives in his fictional text. I find that Conrad is more overtly critical towards the Europeans. More so, Edward Said invokes his own private person to assert that his view is more valid than others and that Conrad is not able to speak for what he terms as the other. I find that Conrad can speak for the other as seen in his implicit and explicit critique of imperialism. In terms of feminist readings of Conrad's text, I find that I agree with most of their statements broadly speaking but that I locate the source of their statements elsewhere.