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Colonialism, Racism and Imperialism in the Writings of Joseph Conrad

Diplomová práce

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Cíl, metody, literatura, předpoklady:

Práce se věnuje problematice kolonialismu, rasismu a imperialismu odrážejícím se v díle Josepha Conrada v souvislostech jeho doby a později. V teoretické části na základě relevantní sekundární literatury podá stručnou charakteristiku a vývoj kolonialismu a imperialismu a načrtne autorovu biografii. V praktické části analyzuje a zhodnotí z daného hlediska vybraná Conradova díla s přihlédnutím k pozdější tvorbě dalších autorů.

CONRAD, J. (1889): Heart of Darkness and Tales of Unrest. London: Arcturus 2018

CONRAD, J. (1900): Lord Jim. New York: Airmont, 1965.

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SHERRY, N.: Joseph Conrad: the Critical Heritage. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973.

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Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci *Kolonialismus, rasismus a imperialismus v díle Josepha Conrada* vypracoval sám pod vedením vedoucího závěrečné práce a uvedl jsem všechny použité prameny a literaturu.

Marek Jech

V Hradci Králové,

Anotace

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Diplomová práce se zabývá otázkou kolonialismu, rasismu a imperialismu v dílech Josepha Conrada, a to jak v kontextu jeho doby, tak i později. Teoretická část práce, která je založená na relevantních sekundárních zdrojích, stručně charakterizuje a popisuje vývoj kolonialismu a imperialismu a nastiňuje autorovu biografii. Praktická část práce přistupuje k tématu cílenějším způsobem a podrobně zkoumá výběr Conradových děl v souvislosti s teoretickým rámcem stanoveným v předchozí části. Tato analýza zvažuje, jak byla Conradova zobrazení kolonialismu, rasismu a imperialismu přijímána a interpretována čtenáři a kritiky v průběhu času a zkoumá, jak se jeho pohledy srovnávají a kontrastují s těmi jiných spisovatelů.

Klíčová slova: imperialismus, rasismus, Joseph Conrad, Srdce Temnoty

Abstrakt

Joseph Conrad se narodil 3. prosince 1857. Jeho otec byl horlivým stoupencem polského hnutí za nezávislost a za svou účast v revolučním hnutí na počátku 60. let 19. století byl uvězněn a shledán vinným z pobuřující činnosti. V roce 1862 mu byl udělen trest vyhnanství. Oba Conradovi rodiče onemocněli tuberkulózou a matka v dubnu 1865 zemřela. Po otcově smrti se o Konráda starali příbuzní a přátelé, zejména strýc z matčiny strany Tadeusz Bobrowski, který mu byl jako otec.

Joseph Conrad měl vášeň pro literaturu, podobný postoj vůči Rusku jako jeho otec a dobrodružnou povahu. Sám Conrad shledal, že nejlepší cesta bude narukovat k britskému obchodnímu námořnictvu, i když neznal anglický jazyk.

Na britskou půdu vstoupil ve věku 21 let. Část svého prvního platu utratil za kompletní dílo Shakespeara. Jeho znalosti angličtiny rychle rostly.

V období, kdy Conrad strávil delší dobu svých plaveb v Asii, začal psát svůj první anglicky psaný román *Almayerovo šílenství*. Také se mu podařilo přistát v indické Bombaji, kde obdržel nabídku práce jako druhý důstojník na lodi *Narcissus*. Zážitky na lodi mu posloužily jako inspirace pro jeho knihu *Černoch z lodě Narcissus*. Poté, co se mu nepodařilo najít místo v Africe pod anglickou námořní vlajkou, odjel do Bruselu. Pro Conrada se objevila možnost velet parníku na řece Kongo. Zážitky z Konga zanechaly trvalé stopy na jeho fyzickém zdraví i psychice Josepha Conrada a inspirovaly ho napsat *Srdce temnoty*.

Zásadní roli v belgických koloniálních záležitostech sehrál Brit Henry Morton Stanley, který prozkoumal střední Afriku kolem řeky Kongo. Objevení řeky Kongo v roce 1874 odstartovalo proces, díky němuž se oblast Konga dostala na evropské mapy. Král Leopold II. byl obchodně založený člověk, který miloval geografii a zaměřoval se na zámořskou kolonizaci. Stanley byl belgickým panovníkem pověřen, aby prozkoumal a přesvědčil náčelníky jednotlivých konžských kmenů, aby mu poskytli svá území.

V roce 1884 získal Leopold II. území osmkrát větší než Belgie jako korunní kolonii, která byla nazvána Nezávislý stát Kongo (État Indépendant du Congo). Kolonie postrádala uznání ze strany evropských velmocí. Belgickému králi pomohl německý kancléř Otto von Bismarck. Během Berlínské konference bylo území Leopoldova Konga oficiálně uznáno. Kongo bylo následně v obrovském měřítku vydrancováno a domorodí dělníci byli různými neetickými způsoby trestáni. Po roce 1908 bylo Kongo postoupeno z vlastnictví belgické královské rodiny belgickému státu, ale škody již byly napáchány. Stát Kongo měl jeden z nejtvrděších vykořisťovatelských systémů zavedených pro účely těžby slonoviny a kaučuku v Africe. Do roku 1908 se počet obyvatel Konga snížil na polovinu.

Literární dílo Josepha Conrada, zejména *Srdce temnoty*, bylo kritizováno pro svůj rasistický charakter. Jeho literární díla však poukazují na nelidské podmínky a spáry imperialismu v evropských zámořských koloniích. Conrad vybudoval svou spisovatelskou kariéru spíše jako literární bavič než jako autor polemických spisů. Conradova skepse vůči tvrzení, že civilizační úsilí zlepšilo morální úroveň domorodých obyvatel rostla s tím, jak blíže pozoroval evropská impéria a brutality, které s expanzí přicházely. V *Srdci temnoty* se objevuje protikladná základna barev. Conrad používá bílou a černou k vykreslení určité symboliky a pomocí barev odhaluje pravdu v nitru Leopoldova Konga.

Příběh *Lord Jim* se odehrává v době, kdy evropští námořníci cestovali po světě a obchodovali se zbožím tam a zpět. Jim je bílý imperialista a všímá si vykořisťovatelského chování svých evropských krajanů. Loď Patna byla velice multikulturní. Během závažné nehody se ukázala zbabělá povaha některých evropských námořníků. Nikdo z nich nepřevzal zodpovědnost a neřešil nouzi ostatních. Běloši zostudili sebe a svou službu pro vlast, což vedlo k jejich oprávněnému potrestání u soudu. Conrad zpochybňuje konvence britské gentlemanské společnosti a znázorňuje domorodé Malajce jako čestné muže a správné gentlemany.

Černoch z lodě Narcissus bylo jedním z nejčtenějších Conradových děl své doby. Název se díla se však v pozdějších letech stal přítěží. Conrad také v té době nebyl finančně stabilní a chtěl uspokojit názory známého redaktora pro větší vystavení. Joseph Conrad vykresluje postavu Jamese jako pověru o Jonášovi, který tak posádce přináší smůlu. Jamesova barva pleti byla použita jako zdůraznění jedné z námořnických pověr.

Dílo Josepha Conrada má i své odpůrce. Chinua Achebe je jedním z nejuznávanějších afrických spisovatelů 20. století. *Svět se rozpadá* je příběh o dopadu kolonialismu na život v tradiční africké vesnici vyprávěný z africké perspektivy.

Achebe mimo jiné psal i kritické eseje odhalující imperialistické předsudky v anglické literatuře. Achebe je přesvědčen o Conradovi, že to byl krvavý rasista a pohlíží na jeho dílo až příliš negativně. Achebe přinesl zcela nový pohled na vnímání Conradova díla se svou esejí *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness*. Někteří kritici však brání Conrada tím, že text kritizuje rasismus a imperialismus způsobem, který je rasistický i imperialistický. Události, kterým byl Conrad svědkem a jichž se účastnil, se odehrály v 90. letech 19. století. V té době byly postoje vůči lidem černé pleti rasistické. Hlavní hrdina a všichni ostatní klíčoví aktéři jsou Evropané. Conrad staví do centra pozornosti průměrného bílého evropského kolonistu. Jeho cílová skupina byli evropští čtenáři. Conradovy knihy, zejména *Srdce temnoty*, líčí, jak se člověk dostává do kontaktu se zcela odlišnou kulturou a jak se jeho pohled na kolonizaci tříští po svědectví brutalit koloniální nadvlády. Tvorba obou autorů nám dnes připomíná, na čem byla evropská společnost v té době vybudována.

Annotation

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The diploma thesis deals with the question of colonialism, racism, and imperialism in the writings of Joseph Conrad in the context of his time and later. Based on relevant secondary sources, the theoretical part briefly characterises and describes the development of colonialism and imperialism and outlines the author's biography. The practical part of the thesis takes a more focused approach, closely examining a selection of Conrad's works in light of the theoretical framework established in the earlier sections. This analysis considers how Conrad's portrayal of colonialism, racism, and imperialism have been received and interpreted by readers and critics over time and explores how his perspectives compare and contrast with those of other writers.

Keywords: imperialism, racism, Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness

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Introduction

This diploma thesis takes a look at the depiction of colonialism, racism, and imperialism in the work of Joseph Conrad and the literary impact his work had. During the 1880s and 1890s, the colonial greed of Western powers was at its peak. The scramble for Africa was in full swing, and major colonial powers raced to seize unclaimed African land. African resources and people were exploited and used to funnel the European economy. Forced labor was an effective instrument to lower operating expenses. In this diploma thesis, I will focus on the atrocities in the Congo Free State ruled by Belgian King Leopold II (1885–1908) and the impact the actions of colonists had on the native population. Furthermore, I will explore how the actions in the Congo influenced the literary work of Joseph Conrad.

Joseph Conrad is a Polish-born British novelist. His literary work was influenced by his travels across the world as a sailor. Besides exploring the darkness within human nature in his novels, he also came into contact with imperialistic attempts at extension, which deeply impacted his life, both positively and negatively. Conrad ran from imperialistic Russia to work in the British Empire as a sailor, which gave him purpose and content to write about. Colonialism, imperialism, and racism are themes that still have an impact on places across the world. I will look at criticism and the stance of authors on Conrad's work and how they perceive it, especially in light of Chinua Achebe. Achebe is known by some for his open critique of Conrad, calling him a "bloody racist." In my diploma thesis, I will analyse three of Conrad's novels and describe how racism, colonialism, and imperialism are portrayed, as well as whether Achebe's claims are justified or not. Then I will analyse Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart*, to better understand Africa from the point of view of an African author and how colonialism affected the native population from their point of view.

Joseph Conrad

Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski was born on December 3, 1857, to Apollo Korzeniowski and his wife Ewelina Bobrowska in Berdyczow, an at that time, predominantly Polish region of Ukraine that was part of the Russian Empire. Conrad's parents belonged to the Polish gentry, the szlachta. At the time of Conrad's birth, Poland had been partitioned among Prussia, Russia, and Austria-Hungary for over sixty years. Apollo Korzeniowski, writer and Joseph Conrad's father, was a fervent supporter of the Polish independence movement. He was imprisoned and found guilty of seditious activity for his leading participation in the early 1860s revolutionary movements. ¹

Apollo Korzeniowski was given an exile term in 1862 and transferred to Vologda, Russia, and afterwards to Chernikhov. The family moved with him. Conrad's parents both developed tuberculosis as a result of the unsanitary conditions, and his mother passed away in April 1865. Due to young Joseph's poor health, he was sent to relatives in Kyiv a year later. It was not until 1868 that Joseph's father, Apollo Korzeniowski, was allowed to return from exile and aid his son in recovering from a sickness. The boy spent most of his time in sole company of his father. ²

Life in exile left a mark on the young Joseph Conrad. He brought back those memories in *A Personal Record*, 40 years later, where he describes the day he was put on a carriage and left home with his parents.

Conrad's father's influence on him throughout their time together had a significant impact on him later in life. His relationship with his father likely had some influence on his passion for literature, interest in revolutionary politics, sentiments toward Russia, skepticism toward the rest of the world, and

¹ Peters, John G. *An Introduction to Joseph Conrad*. Cambridge University Press, 2006. p. 1, PDF File, <<https://www.pdfdrive.com/the-cambridge-introduction-to-joseph-conrad-cambridge-introductions-to-literature-e184876868.html>>. Accessed 11 Sep. 2022.

² Ibid.

adventurous personality. Conrad was taken care of by relatives and friends after his father passed away, especially by his maternal uncle Tadeusz Bobrowski, who served as a second father to Conrad. Tadeusz Bobrowski was cautious, meticulous, and pragmatic in contrast to the fiery and idealistic Korzeniowski, and he eventually disapproved of Korzeniowski's outlook on life. Conrad's opinions were heavily influenced by his Uncle throughout the years. Both his father and his uncle appear to have had a significant impact on Conrad's personality. ³

The death of Joseph Conrad's father did not go unnoticed. He died as a hero. His funeral served as a silent occasion to protest against Russian rule, to which various sorts of Polish society joined. ² To this day, Apollos Gravestone carries the inscription:

TO APOLLO NALE CZ KORZENIOWSKI

VICTIM OF MUSCOVITE TYRANNY

Born Feb.21,1820

Died May23, 1869

TO THE MAN WHO LOVED HIS COUNTRY

WORKED FOR IT

AND DIED FOR IT

HIS COMPATRIOTS ⁴

After his father's death, Joseph Conrad stayed in Cracow and attended the St. Anne Gymnasium. Conrad did not have many fond memories of St. Anne's School. During his four years of study there, he excelled in mathematics and history but not in grammar. Even though school routines and discipline were not

³ Ibid.

⁴ ean-Aubry, Gérard. *The Sea Dreamer: A Definitive Biography of Joseph Conrad*. Translated by Helen Sebba, Doubleday and Company, Inc, 1957. p. 45. PDF File, <<https://digitallibrary.punjab.gov.pk/jspui/bitstream/1/1296/1/The%20sea%20dreamer%20a%20definitive%20biography%20of%20Joseph%20Conrad.pdf>>. Accessed 11 Sep. 2022.

harsh, they were unavoidably unpleasant to the youngster with a vivid imagination. His desire for exploration and daydreams, did him little good, and the monotone subjects that made up the majority of the curriculum were, for the most part, not his favourites. On the other hand, he showed a particular interest in geography.⁵

In honour of Apollo Korzeniowski's memory and the contributions he made to the cause of Poland, the town council, on December 28, 1872, granted young Conrad the privilege to be exempted from paying taxes. This award also entitled him to Austrian citizenship, which would save him from eventually being drafted into the Russian military. However, Austrian citizenship applications did not amount to anything and were denied. His relatives most likely planned a future in Cracow or further west rather than returning to the Russian countryside. They had no clue what was silently bubbling in this young person's mind.⁶

Conrad had a secret passion for the sea. He loved reading J.F. Cooper and F. Marryat, which most certainly influenced his career decision. He decided to become a sailor. This decision was deemed childish or unpatriotic by some of his relatives, however, Conrad could not be swayed.

Conrad suffered from frequent headaches.⁷ In May 1873, on the recommendation of doctors, it was decided to send Conrad and his tutor on a six-week tour of southern Germany and Switzerland. However, not long after they left, cholera broke out in Cracow, so the uncle gave the two young travellers the permission to extend their trip, which ended up lasting three months. His tutor, Mr. Pulmann, who became a close friend of Conrad, was tasked with dissuading him from his career choice of becoming a seafarer. Whether on train, foot, or steamboat Pullman tried to persuade Conrad against his career choice.

⁵ Ibid., p. 47.

⁶ Ibid., p. 48.

⁷ Ibid., p. 46.

It was on the peak of the Furca Pass in Switzerland at the age of 15 when Conrad's choice to become a sailor was definitely sealed, as Pullman called him a hopeless incorrigible Don Quixote and gave up.⁸

Conrad thus effectively left Poland at the age of 17. Serving in the Russian or German Navy or merchant fleet was out of the question, considering the Polish attitude towards these countries.⁹ His uncle had an acquaintance in Marseilles. Therefore, Conrad studied his trade there, and his uncle provided him with a generous allowance. However, as Bobrowski's letters indicate, Conrad was irresponsible with money. Although Bobrowski always saved Conrad from his youthful irresponsibility, he continually scolded him for his unwise spending habits.¹⁰ The language barrier was not an issue for young Conrad since he has spoken French since childhood.¹¹

Marseilles was not the first contact with seawater. During Conrad's trip to Switzerland, he and Pullman took a ferry from Venice to Trieste.¹² Conrad's ambition was not to reach high places in the maritime sphere. He simply wanted to find a place of liberty and hope at sea, a sensational escape.¹³

⁸ Ibid., p. 51, 52.

⁹ Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁰ Peters, John G. *An Introduction to Joseph Conrad*. Cambridge University Press, 2006. p. 2, PDF File, <<https://www.pdfdrive.com/the-cambridge-introduction-to-joseph-conrad-cambridge-introductions-to-literature-e184876868.html>>. Accessed 11 Sep. 2022.

¹¹ Jean-Aubry, Gérard. *The Sea Dreamer: A Definitive Biography of Joseph Conrad*. Translated by Helen Sebba, Doubleday and Company, Inc, 1957. p.56. PDF File, <<https://digitallibrary.punjab.gov.pk/jspui/bitstream/1/1296/1/The%20sea%20dreamer%20a%20definitive%20biography%20of%20Joseph%20Conrad.pdf>>. Accessed 11 Sep. 2022.

¹² Jean-Aubry, Gérard. *The Sea Dreamer: A Definitive Biography of Joseph Conrad*. Translated by Helen Sebba, Doubleday and Company, Inc, 1957. p. 51,52. PDF File, <<https://digitallibrary.punjab.gov.pk/jspui/bitstream/1/1296/1/The%20sea%20dreamer%20a%20definitive%20biography%20of%20Joseph%20Conrad.pdf>>. Accessed 11 Sep. 2022.

¹³ Ibid., p. 55.

In 1875, Conrad experienced his first long-distance journey to the West Indies on board a cargo ship called *Mont Blanc*. The voyage lasted six months. The crew reached the Old World at Le Havre a day before Christmas. ¹⁴

Conrad's next encounter with the New World took place on board the *Saint Antoine* in July 1876, while it was sailing to the Caribbean and the Americas. It would serve as the inspiration for *Nostromo*. Conrad reportedly, in the early months of 1878, may have had a romantic relationship (perhaps with the inspiration for Doña Rita from *The Arrow of Gold*) and may have engaged in some smuggling activities. It's unclear what happened following these events during the journey, it seems like Conrad may have made an attempt at suicide or may have been hurt in a duel. ¹⁵

In the late 1870s, the question of Conrad's citizenship became more significant. Bobrowski had allowed Conrad to go to Marseilles not only because of Conrad's desire to pursue a life at sea. Bobrowski approved Conrad to travel to Marseilles, because Conrad was required to serve a lengthy military conscription due to his father's revolutionary efforts. He believed that Conrad might more easily obtain admittance of citizenship in France. However, it became evident that Conrad would not be free from military duties to Russia if he remained in France, since France required a valid passport to work in the French Merchant Marine Service. The Russian Empire refused to provide such a passport to Conrad. Thus, Conrad was forced to enlist in the British Merchant Marine despite having no knowledge of the English language. ¹⁶

Conrad set foot on British soil at the age of 21, while having no knowledge of the language. His number one priority was to find a job where he could learn it. Conrad did only coastal shipping until he picked up English from a few English

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁵ Peters, John G. *An Introduction to Joseph Conrad*. Cambridge University Press, 2006. p. 2, PDF File, <<https://www.pdfdrive.com/the-cambridge-introduction-to-joseph-conrad-cambridge-introductions-to-literature-e184876868.html>>. Accessed 11 Sep. 2022.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 2.

sailors among the international crews and from a British newspaper, *The Standard*. The learning progress was relatively rapid. Often, he had to guess the pronunciation of certain words he learned while reading. Outside the seamen's vocabulary, Conrad only came into contact with the written form. To boost his learning efforts, he spent some of the money from his very first pay on a complete collection of Shakespeare and *Political Economy* by John Stuart Mills, which he later regarded as soporific. Conrad adored Shakespeare.¹⁷

His mastery of English grew with speed. Just 18 months since arriving in England, Conrad was thinking about taking a third mate's examination to move up in the career ladder.¹⁸ According to Pousada, in less than two years after first coming into contact with the English-speaking world, he passed his second mate exam. This was particularly important since foreigners demonstrated to the examiners that they could speak and write the English language sufficiently to fulfil the responsibilities required of them on board a British vessel.¹⁹

Conrad kept working at his craft, and in 1884 he was able to land in Bombay, India, where he agreed to work as the second mate on the *Narcissus*. His encounter served as the inspiration for his first outstanding book, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus."* Upon arriving in England again, Conrad had completed the required time to be eligible for the first officer examination.²⁰ Pousada states that

¹⁷ Jean-Aubry, Gérard. *The Sea Dreamer: A Definitive Biography of Joseph Conrad*. Translated by Helen Sebba, Doubleday and Company, Inc, 1957. p. 77,78. PDF File, <<https://digitallibrary.punjab.gov.pk/jspui/bitstream/1/1296/1/The%20sea%20dreamer%20a%20definitive%20biography%20of%20Joseph%20Conrad.pdf>>. Accessed 11 Sep. 2022.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 83.

¹⁹ Pousada, Alicia. *Multilingualism of Joseph Conrad*. University of Puerto Rico, 1994, p. 4. *Weebly*, <http://aliciapousada.weebly.com/uploads/1/0/0/2/10020146/the_multilingualism_of_joseph_conrad.pdf>. Accessed 16 Nov. 2022.

²⁰ Peters, John G. *An Introduction to Joseph Conrad*. Cambridge University Press, 2006. p. 3, PDF File, <<https://www.pdfdrive.com/the-cambridge-introduction-to-joseph-conrad-cambridge-introductions-to-literature-e184876868.html>>. Accessed 11 Sep. 2022.

he passed the exam after several attempts due to linguistic limitations and a weakness in navigational skills.²¹

Positions as the first mate were hard to come by. Conrad eventually accepted one as second officer aboard the *Tilkhurst* in April 1885, despite his new certificate. Conrad attempted the test for a master's certificate in 1886, which would have allowed him to hold the position of captain, but he failed one section. He achieved the captain's rank in later years. Conrad filed for British citizenship in July, and on August 18, he received official notification of his acceptance. Later that year, Conrad retook the master's test, passing it this time. Conrad left Singapore in 1887 as first mate of the *Vidar*, a ship that made port stops across the Malay Archipelago. Conrad's time spent aboard the *Vidar* was his first opportunity to spend a significant amount of time in the East, and the trip would serve as inspiration for a significant portion of his writings about the region. Conrad left the *Vidar* in January 1888, and shortly after, he was given his first and last command when he was made captain of the *Otago*. This encounter served as the inspiration for a large portion of Conrad's work, including *The Shadow-Line*, *Falk*, *A Smile of Fortune*, and *The Secret Sharer*. Conrad visited Port Louis, Mauritius, as well as a number of ports along the Australian coast while in charge of the *Otago*, which had its base in Australia. Conrad made the decision to resign as captain and give up control of the *Otago* in March 1889. The motivations for this choice are still a mystery. He might not have liked the idea of staying in the East for an extended period of time, or he might have thought about docking and working on English soil in the future. Conrad's life underwent a significant transformation when he started writing *Almayer's Folly*, his first English-language novel. He had the option of writing in French or Polish, but he selected English.²²

²¹ Pousada, Alicia. *Multilingualism of Joseph Conrad*. University of Puerto Rico, 1994, p. 4. *Weebly*, <http://aliciapousada.weebly.com/uploads/1/0/0/2/10020146/the_multilingualism_of_joseph_conrad.pdf>. Accessed 16 Nov. 2022.

²² Peters, John G. *An Introduction to Joseph Conrad*. Cambridge University Press, 2006. p. 3, PDF File, <<https://www.pdfdrive.com/the-cambridge-introduction-to-joseph-conrad-cambridge-introductions-to-literature-e184876868.html>>. Accessed 11 Sep. 2022.

After failing to find a berth headed for the East, Conrad started seeking a command in Africa. He went to Brussels and met Albert Thys, the director of the Société Belge pour le Commerce du Haut-Congo, about the possibility of commanding a steamboat on the Congo River. Conrad visited his native Poland for the first time in sixteen years before departing for the Congo. Conrad felt uncomfortable and must have realised by this point how little he had in common with his fellow countrymen given the experiences he had, which were so different from those he encountered. ²³

In May 1890, he embarked on one of the most significant journeys of his life. His experiences would be partially documented in his *Congo Diary*, but they would also serve as the inspiration for his short story, *An Outpost of Progress*, as well as the novel *Heart of Darkness*. He entered the Congo River in June and started moving upstream. The experiences in Congo left a permanent mark on both Joseph Conrad's physical health and psyche.

²³ Ibid.

Historical background

The discovery of the Congo River, which no one had previously been able to sail up, was initially what started the process of putting the Congo region on the map. Back then, the primary focus of the explorers was the source of the Nile.²⁴

The colonisation of the Congo was not influenced by the military, as in other parts of Africa, or by merchants like Cecil Rhodes and Carl Peters, who were always willing to approach the army for assistance. It was initially carried out by citizens who were inspired by the spirit of exploration and the urge for civilisation. The idea of turning the region into a place of colonial exploitation was formed after the seizure by King Leopold II.²⁵

Leopold II was a business-minded individual who had a love of geography. Bismarck sarcastically remarked, “*This King has a lot of spare time.*”²⁶ His matters focused mostly on overseas colonisation rather than the actual state of Belgium. Internal affairs is what he had his ministers for.²⁷

As well as his predecessor, the second Belgian monarch was obsessed with colonies. His interest was no longer around the globe but solely focused on Africa. Only here did Leopold II see a real chance to fulfil his colonial desires. In 1874, he received remarkable news from a certain Briton - a traveler and adventurer who explored central Africa around the Congo River. His name is Henry Morton Stanley. He played a crucial role in Belgian colonial affairs. His three-year journey gave the royal authority the information that the area of the Congo is packed with immeasurable mineral wealth such as diamonds, zinc, and copper, as

²⁴ Ferro, Mark. *Colonization: A Global History*. Routledge, 1997, p. 83. *PDF Coffee*, <<https://pdfcoffee.com/mark-ferro-colonization-a-global-history-pdf-pdf-free.html>>. Accessed 17 Nov. 2022.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Hruška Emil. *Stíny Nad belgií*. Epoque, 2017. p. 13-21.

well as rubber, ivory, and coffee. This was exactly what Leopold II was waiting and hoping for.²⁸

While some explorers were looking for the source of the Nile and the secrets of African nature, Leopold focused on the business side of things and the future wealth the colony might bring.

Stanley was preparing a second long-term expedition to central Africa, commissioned by the Belgian monarch. The task was to persuade the chiefs of individual Congolese tribes to provide their territories. He concluded 400 so-called protectorate contracts which were signed by illiterate chiefs, thus giving their territories to Leopold II for unlimited use. This territory was not free. It was a deal, where tribal chieftains handed over their land for various pieces of cloth and fabric.²⁹

In 1884, Leopold II acquired a territory eight times larger than Belgium as a crown colony. The colony was named the Independent State of the Congo (État Indépendant du Congo). The colony lacked recognition by the European great powers. The Belgian King was helped by the German statesman Otto von Bismarck during the Berlin Conference. The Independent State of the Congo was officially recognised, and the rules for the Scramble of Africa were laid out.³⁰

The Scramble for Africa was a process in which each European power raced to hoist its flag on as many territories as they could. The Berlin conference (1884–1885) did not actually result in the division of black Africa, not even the recognition of the zones of influence behind the coast. It involved 14 nations, which essentially established a “gentlemen's agreement”, where each European power committed to no longer acquiring savage territory without first informing the others so they could present their claims. The African tribes and native population were not recognised as a power that would have had a say in these

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

matters. The continent of Africa was viewed as nobody's thing by the European nations. The matter of annexation was not discussed with the African folk. Leopold II, whose status as the Congo's sovereign owner was universally acknowledged, was the net beneficiary. He believed that having this approval further gave him the go-ahead to include the Katanga, a copper-mining region, to the Belgian Congo, further increasing its size.^{31 32}

The native workers were punished in various ways. Whipping was the usual motivator. Belgian overseers in the Congo and their native helpers managed the slaves of King Leopold II and forced them to work. In the 1890s, there was a large demand for rubber in the world, which made the Congo a profitable area. The Congo was packed with rubber trees. The harvest of rubber brought enormous wealth to the king and to the whole of Belgium. The vast majority of the wealth was accumulated through slavery and forced labour. The Congo was looted on an enormous scale. The workforce was plentiful and free. The Belgians exploited the Congo until 1908. After 1908, Congo was ceded from the possession of the Belgian royal family to the State of Belgium. While the conditions gradually improved in later years, the damage had already been inflicted.^{33 34}

Punishment was issued in various unethical ways. Each village in the rubber area was commanded harvest quotas. Each transgression was met with severe punishment. Cutting off hands was common, in case the quotas were not fulfilled or were delayed. To ensure leverage, women were often held captive. When a

³¹ Ferro, Mark. *Colonization: A Global History*. Routledge, 1997, p. 71,72. *PDF Coffee*, <<https://pdfcoffee.com/mark-ferro-colonization-a-global-history-pdf-pdf-free.html>>. Accessed 17 Nov. 2022.

³² Klíma Jan. *Dějiny Afriky: Vývoj Kontinentu, regionů a států*. Nakladatelství Lidové Noviny, 2012. p. 192,193.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Klíma Jan. *Dějiny Afriky: Vývoj Kontinentu, regionů a států*. Nakladatelství Lidové Noviny, 2012. p. 192,193.

village refused to meet the quota, it was burned and exterminated, including children.^{35 36}

The State of Congo had one of the harshest exploitation systems established for the purposes of ivory and rubber in Africa. Not only the Belgians, but also some African chiefs and their business associates profited from forced labour. It happened that villages were gradually depopulated. The practice of drafting manpower culminated in the depopulation of whole regions. Many died as a result of being transported far from their homes for work under cruel conditions. It is impossible to calculate how many villages have been destroyed or turned into deserts.³⁷

Unrest grew due to the harsh labor standards. Between 1895 and 1897, there were a series of rebellions against the colonisers in the Congo. All uprisings were suppressed while the Belgian king and Belgium grew richer. Buildings, such as the Palais de Justice in Brussels, were built using money made from colonial exploitation. Upgrades to the royal palace were realised. Royal Museum for Central Africa was built in the village of Tervuren, south of Brussels in the Flemish region. In 1900, the Antwerp central station was opened, with construction paid for by funds made from trade with colonial goods.³⁸

Severe colonial exploitation was unknown to the European public and was kept secret. However, torture, murder, and disease could not go unnoticed forever. It was not long until merchants, seamen, people at the docks, and journalists started noticing. The late 19th century is known as “the blackest chapter in Belgian history.” A man named Edmund Morel, an employee of a Liverpool shipping company staying on business in the port of Antwerp, played a major role

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Hruška Emil. *Stíny Nad belgií*. Epoque, 2017. p. 13-21.

³⁷ Ferro, Mark. *Colonization: A Global History*. Routledge, 1997, p. 127. *PDF Coffee*, <<https://pdfcoffee.com/mark-ferro-colonization-a-global-history-pdf-pdf-free.html>>. Accessed 17 Nov. 2022.

³⁸ Hruška Emil. *Stíny Nad belgií*. Epoque, 2017. p. 13-21.

in making Belgian colonial affairs public. Ships arrived in Antwerp loaded with rubber and ivory from the Congo. The same ships returned resupplied with soldiers, weapons, and ammunition. Morel watched port traffic and made detailed records until he came to the conclusion that he had discovered a crime of enormous dimensions. To start drawing attention to the situation in the Belgian Congo, the Congo Reform Association was founded. In 1904, a detailed report concerning the conditions in the colony was submitted to the British Foreign Office and published.³⁹

There was an immediate uproar in Great Britain as a result of the report's stunning revelations. The practice of Belgian colonialism was swiftly made known to other nations as well. In an effort to cover it up, Leopold II formed an investigation committee to verify whether such horrifying and vast atrocities had actually occurred and were still occurring in the Congo. About 10 million people fell victim to Belgian colonial exploitation. By 1908, the population of the Congo had been cut in half.^{40 41}

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Klíma Jan. Dějiny Afriky: Vývoj Kontinentu, regionů a států. Nakladatelství Lidové Noviny, 2012. p. 192,193.

Meaning of imperialism, colonialism and racism

Before looking at Joseph Conrad's depiction of the Congolese situation and his anti-imperial views, it is important to clarify the terms "imperialism", "colonialism" and "racism."

The word "*empire*" originates from the Latin form "*imperium*" - "*imperare*" meaning "*to command*." ⁴² Cambridge Dictionary defines imperialism as "*a system in which one government or person rules a group of other countries*" or "*a situation in which one country has a lot of power or influence over others.*" ⁴³ Governing a state takes more than one person. It is a breathing organism, a system. Running such a system requires more than one ruler or governing party. Imperialism should be viewed as a set of policies, opinion or impression and not as an action. It is the governing policies that put actions in motion. Said defines imperialism at its very fundamental level as the act of planning, settling, and exercising control over territory that you do not own, that is distant, that is inhabited by other people, and that belongs to them. It attracts people for a variety of reasons, while frequently causing unimaginable suffering for others. ⁴⁴

Doyle defines imperialism more as a system of policies. According to Doyle, an empire is a formal or unofficial relationship in which one state has effective control over the political sovereignty of another political society. Force, political cooperation, economic, social, or cultural dependence are all methods that can be used to accomplish this. Simply put, imperialism is the process or policy of creating or sustaining an empire. ⁴⁵

⁴² *Empire*. empire noun - Definition, pictures, pronunciation and usage notes | Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary at OxfordLearnersDictionaries.com. (2022). Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/empire?q=empire>>.

⁴³ Cambridge University Press . (2022). *Imperialism*. Cambridge Dictionary. Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/learner-english/imperialism>>.

⁴⁴ Said, E. W. (1994). *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage. p. 7.

⁴⁵ Doyle, M. W. (1986). *Empires*. Cornell University Press. p. 45.

Colonialism is about settling, ruling, and living. The terms colonialism and imperialism go hand in hand and are intertwined. Without a settlement, there would not be a governing body implementing policies. Said defines colonialism as a consequence of imperialism. Colonialism is the implanting of settlements on distant territory. ⁴⁶

Loomba states that colonialism is an act of forming a community in a new land that necessarily involved tearing apart or rebuilding the pre-existing communities through a variety of activities such as trade, pillage, negotiation, war, genocide, enslavement, and uprisings. ⁴⁷

The Australian Human Rights Commission describes racism as the practice of giving individuals with different racial backgrounds unequal access to opportunities and outcomes. Prejudice in speech or deed is only one aspect of racism. It happens when this bias, whether it be personal or institutional, is coupled with the ability to oppress, constrain, or discriminate against others. Racism is the collective term for any laws, regulations, ideas, and other constraints that exclude people from experiencing justice, dignity, and equity due to their race. It can take the form of intimidation, violence, or verbal or physical abuse. But racism is also present in organisations and systems that function unfairly and unequally. ⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Said, E. W. (1994). *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage. p. 9.

⁴⁷ Loomba, A. (1998). *Colonialism/postcolonialism*. Routledge. p. 8.

⁴⁸ *What is racism?* The Australian Human Rights Commission. (n.d.). Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/race-discrimination/what-racism>>.

Depiction of imperialism in Heart of Darkness

Conrad's literary work, especially *Heart of Darkness*, was criticised for its racist nature. However, displaying Africans and the dark history of imperialism does not necessarily mean, that the work of Joseph Conrad is racist. It may be quite the opposite, since his pieces of literature point out the inhumane conditions in European overseas colonies. As Watts claims, people read fiction for a variety of reasons, and Conrad made his career as an entertainer rather than as a writer of polemical writings. The joys produced by *Heart of Darkness* come from a variety of places. They are partly found in its vivid evocation, suspenseful techniques, originality, and ability to provoke thought. ⁴⁹

White writes about Conrad that the gap between the supposed benefits of imperial trade for all parties involved and its actual circumstances deeply interested him. Conrad's scepticism about the claims that the "civilising" effort improved moral standards also grew as he observed empires more closely and the brutalities that came with expansion. Similar to how his own early memories of political struggle spoke to him and sparked his imagination as well as his regret, the power struggles he saw between rival colonial powers and opposing cultures also spoke to him and connected them for him with the captivating accounts of heroic adventure he had read about in his youth. He had gone in the footsteps of the truth-seekers he had so greatly admired, only to discover shameful proof of their treacherous exploitation. After this encounter, he would start writing. ⁵⁰

Poland itself was a victim of imperialistic gains made by Russia, Prussia, and Austria. By Conrad being intentionally racist and pro-imperialist, he would be turning his back on his family and the cause his father strived for. Why would

⁴⁹ Stape, J. H., & Watts, C. (1996). *Heart of Darkness*. In *The Cambridge Companion to Conrad* (p. 45–62). Cambridge University Press.

⁵⁰ Stape, J. H., & White, A. (1996). Conrad and Imperialism. In *The Cambridge companion to Conrad* (p. 184). Cambridge University Press.

Joseph Conrad support a system that irreversibly damaged his family? Conrad found his passion in sailing. The paradox of it is that he found himself employed by a system that the Polish intelligentsia strived against.

Said has the view that Conrad stands apart from the other colonial authors of his day because he was so self-conscious about his actions, maybe partly because of the colonialism that made him, a Polish immigrant, a servant of the imperial system. Therefore, *Heart of Darkness*, like the majority of his other stories, cannot simply be a recitation of Marlow's adventures. It is also a dramatisation of Marlow, the former nomad in colonial lands, presenting his narrative to a group of British listeners. Marlow tells his tale about the Congo jungle, namely to an accountant, a lawyer, and the captain of the ship. Conrad wanted to emphasise the fact that during the 1890s, the business of empire, once an adventurous and frequently individualistic enterprise, had become the empire of business by having the majority of the people in this group come from the business sector. Halford Mackinder, an explorer, geographer, and liberal imperialist, delivered a series of lectures on imperialism at the London Institute of Bankers during the same period. Perhaps Conrad was aware of this. Conrad shows us that there is no way out of the sovereign historical force of imperialism and that it has the power of a system that represents as well as speaks for everything within its supremacy, despite the almost overpowering force of Marlow's narrative, leaving us with an accurate sense that there is no way out.⁵¹

Imperialist view on Africa in the 19th century

An important concern to keep in mind is the way society looked upon Africa on the brink of the 20th century. The view of the world was different from what it is today. Africans were seen as lesser beings. They lived in huts, wore different

⁵¹ Said, E. W. (1994). *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage. p. 23, 24.

clothes, and used bows and arrows instead of rifles. The technological superiority of the Europeans cannot be denied. In May 1903, British statesman and colonial administrator Lord Milner gave a speech to the town congress of Johannesburg. The speech shows the perception of Africans by the European globalists and the view on Africa during that time period. Milner said the region was created for white people. Although Africa being inhabited only by white people is ludicrous because there are five to one more African people than there are whites, expelling the natives would destroy all of the nation's industries. The white man should rule. It is justified on the basis of having a more advanced civilisation than others. The vast majority of the black population may never be able to climb the many steps that separate the white man from the black man. As a result, the white man must dominate. The white man's rule is necessary because of his superior civilisation.⁵² Clearly, Lord Milner's speech shows racist tendencies. Africans were not seen as equal to Europeans.

Kurtz and imperial madness

As described in *Heart of Darkness*, the steamboat was like a "demon" to the natives, a simple blow of a steam whistle was enough to scare African warriors away.⁵³ The only one who was not scared of the steamboat and the whistle was the mysterious woman. The woman is the symbol of an obstacle that imperialistic Europe cannot deal with. I am convinced that this obstacle is a lack of belief and spirituality. Humanism started to question some Catholic truths, yet they still

⁵² Bennet, G. (2005). *The concept of Empire Burke to Attlee 1774 1947*. p. 343, 344. Internet Archive. Retrieved December 20, 2022, from <<https://archive.org/details/conceptofempireb033085mbp/page/n365/mode/2up>>.

⁵³ Conrad, J. (n.d.). *Heart of Darkness*. (J. Menéndez, Ed.) *ibiblio*. p. 73. Retrieved December 19, 2022, from <https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Conrad/Heart_Darkness.pdf>.

firmly believed in God, as some European literary works show.⁵⁴ One of the things the age of enlightenment brought to Europe was the idea of religious tolerance.⁵⁵ However, after arriving in the “dark continent” and starting to conquer, the idea of serving god, doing good, or being tolerant vanished. As depicted in *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz was a man whom the Europeans admired and Africans worshipped.

Kurtz represents imperialism in the book. He commands, gives orders, makes policies and enforces them. At the same time, it seems as though Kurtz placed himself on the same level as God by surpassing the native way of life and beliefs. Among the African folk deep in the jungle, he was worshipped above all. God should be feared, and the natives feared him. One of the meanings of the darkness that is constantly described is a godless void that Kurtz got acquainted with. Imperialism and Kurtz placed themselves above God. Human nature showed its true colours in the “dark continent”, a lawless place. The thick foliage cut off the rest of the world, allowing the torture of other human beings. The colonists, especially Kurtz, placed themselves in the position of god, while the goals of Kurtz’s deeds and leadership were simply profits.

Marlow on imperialism

Conrad describes how colonialism has not changed in centuries. The only thing that differs is better technology. *Heart of Darkness* begins with Marlow wondering about what England must have looked like before the Romans came and brought civilisation. Since then, London is a place from where light comes out, contrary to the heart of Africa. Conrad strikes a conflict within the reader

⁵⁴ Tepl, J. von, Genzmer, F., & Mieder, W. (1998). *Der Ackermann und der Tod text und übertragung*. Reclam.

⁵⁵ Lessing, G. E. (n.d.). *Nathan der Weise*. Projekt Gutenberg-DE. Retrieved December 20, 2022, from <<https://www.projekt-gutenberg.org/lessing/nathan/titlepage.html>>.

about whether Europeans actually bring light or darkness. An antithetical nature is present throughout the book. Colonists bring light, yet the light is followed by death and suffering. Sticking heads on pikes is not enlightening.⁵⁶ It is a foul move to discourage servants from disobeying the people in positions of power.

Marlow sees similarities between the continents of Africa and Europe. The rivers Thames and Congo are no different from each other. It is flowing water, just like the stream of time. White men used to be like black men. The whites are just ahead of time.

Marlow reminisced about the Romans and how they explored darkness and conquered it for whatever reason there may have been. He also mentions that it was brute force that did it, and progress was made through brute force. Strength is described in the book as “*an accident arising from the weakness of others.*”⁵⁷ Colonisation is depicted as “*conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves*”⁵⁸ Colonists are described as “*emissaries of light, lower apostles*” that bring civilisation.⁵⁹ However, civilising is just a front. It is mentioned on the same page that the Company in *Heart of Darkness* is run mainly for profit. Marlow learns quickly that the actual heart of darkness is in Europe, since that is the place where greed for ivory and the evil deeds connected to it originate.

Marlow found spirituality through the African experience, and while he told the tale of his African endeavour, he sat like a Buddha.⁶⁰ He reached enlightenment. He witnessed the practices of “civilising” the Africans. Unlike Kurtz, Marlow was not obsessed with ivory. He was obsessed with finding Kurtz.

⁵⁶ Conrad, J. (n.d.). *Heart of Darkness*. (J. Menéndez, Ed.)*ibiblio*. Retrieved December 19, 2022, from <https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Conrad/Heart_Darkness.pdf> p. 96.

⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 8, 9.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 18.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 8, 128.

During the journey, his helmsman was hit with a spear. There was no proper burial, he threw him overboard in the river. This action shows the unethical nature of exploration. To fill the blank spaces on the map, Marlow sacrificed one of his crew members. Would there be a proper burial if the helmsman was white? I do not think so. By the time the deadly encounter with the natives happened, Marlow was already obsessed with finding Kurtz. Marlow saw the exploitation with his very own eyes, realising that colonisation and bringing civilisation were horrible actions, that brought suffering and pain to the indigenous population. In the book, Marlow showed compassion to his helmsman. By throwing him overboard, he prevented the possibility of the helmsman's body being eaten by the cannibals on board. In addition, throughout the course of the book, Marlow treated the cannibals with respect, even though he was not used to their ways. Marlow showed sympathy toward the natives.

*“The man seemed young—almost a boy—but you know with them it’s hard to tell. I found nothing else to do but to offer him one of my good Swede’s ship’s biscuits I had in my pocket.”*⁶¹

Marlow certainly did not view the African natives as equal, yet he still treated them with respect unlike other characters in the book. As he describes:

*“It was unearthly, and the men were— No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it—this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly.”*⁶²

⁶¹ Ibid. p. 26.

⁶² Ibid. p. 58.

He sees the similarities, they are in fact humans, but wild humans. This goes back to the Roman colonisation of England. Conrad shows through Marlow's perspective that our European predecessors were once like the African: loud, wild, and primitive. Marlow viewed the Africans as less civilised humans. Marlow has a prejudice toward black people. However, according to Lord Milner's speech, people back in the day were racist and had even worse opinions of Africans than the character of Marlow had. The Congo experience changed Marlow and his view of the modern world. No human being deserves to be treated like this.

The question that Conrad poses in the book is, whether civilisation is actually better than the untouched jungle. Colonists in the book describe it as a deadly dark place with primitives and dangers at any corner, yet it is home to the native population. While the reader does not get the natives' point of view on the affair in the book, I am most certainly convinced that the native population did not view the depths of the Congolese jungle as primitive and in need of civilisation. Natives did not bend nature to their will. They worked with it, while the colonists sometimes even needlessly carved nature according to their wishes:

*“A horn tooted to the right, and I saw the black people run. A heavy and dull detonation shook the ground, a puff of smoke came out of the cliff, and that was all. No change appeared on the face of the rock. They were building a railway. The cliff was not in the way or anything; but this objectless blasting was all the work going on.”*⁶³

Colonists bring suffering while the jungle brings suffering to them. The reason why colonists brought suffering was exploitation and the goal of maximising profits, not the act of civilising.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 23.

Conrad may have been critical toward society at that time. The industrial revolution improved the standard of living in Europe over time. People moved into cities to work in factories. Through technological advancement industrial output was rising, demanding more input. Required goods came from colonies to boost the growth further. The working class was established, while the middle class increased available funds for spending, thus demanding luxury goods and commodities such as ivory and precious metals. European life was improving at the cost of colonial exploitation. Colonists in the Congo did not care about bringing European values and civilising. They only cared about what they were leaving with.

Ivory as a symbol of African colonialism

The white men in the Company had their rivalries and differences. The only reason they were there was for Ivory and to make profit:

*“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.”*⁶⁴

Ivory promised wealth, power, and a career in high places. It shows European greed in action. People at the station were obsessed with gaining wealth and plotted against and envied each other.

Kurtz was a goal driven man. He commanded his army of natives, made alliances with other chiefs, burned villages, and put heads on sticks for one primary purpose, ivory. Civilising the “primitives” was not the purpose as Marlow describes.

⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 36.

*“The wilderness had patted him on the head, and, behold, it was like a ball—an ivory ball; it had caressed him, 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. He was its spoiled and pampered favourite. Ivory? I should think so.”*⁶⁵

Imperialists acted as if they owned everything. They claimed the region and exploited the natural resources for profit. It was greed that drove them towards madness. Profits were above morals. The colonists went against each other in contrast to the tribal unity of the natives.

*“The only real feeling was a desire to get appointed to a trading-post where ivory was to be had, so that they could earn percentages. They intrigued and slandered and hated each other only on that account—but as to effectually lifting a little finger—oh, no. By heavens! there is something after all in the world allowing one man to steal a horse while another must not look at a halter.”*⁶⁶

Meaning of colour in Heart of Darkness

Colours bring various feelings to the eyes and the mind. In *Heart of Darkness*, an antithetical nature of things appears. It is especially noticeable when Conrad uses colours to portray certain symbolism. Conrad exposes the truth through the use of colour.

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 79.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 38.

Black can be associated with death, evil, power, elegance, formality, and mystery. The black colour usually carries a negative connotation, but it can also indicate strength and authority. ⁶⁷ That is how the colonists and the Old World were pictured in *Heart of Darkness*. Black can mean both the beginning and the end. The colour is viewed similarly in multiple cultures.

Pompas and Luzzatto write about cultures and how they view archetypal darkness. The Phoenicians assumed that in the beginning there was sombre darkness. In ancient Egyptian culture, there were the infinite and the void, which were connected to darkness. The god Marduk was born in the centre of the abyss, “in his dark chamber, in the area of destiny, in the dominion of determinations,” according to the ancient Mesopotamians, Sumerians, and later Babylonians. In ancient Greek culture, black stood out and could be found expressed in the darkness of primeval chaos and the primordial void where gods originated. ⁶⁸

Black became the symbol of darkness in various civilisations, including Europe during the late Victorian era. On the beginning pages of *Heart of Darkness*, the narrator is indicating, that there is some sort of unknown or evil lingering.

“The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth.” ⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Cerrato, H. (2012). *How Colors Impact Our Daily Life In Business, Art, Work And Love*. Retrieved February 11, 2023, from <<https://bloccs.xtec.cat/gemmasalvia1617/files/2017/02/the-meaning-of-colors-book.pdf>>.

⁶⁸ Pompas, R., & Luzzatto, L. (2019). *Black, white and red: Archetypes and symbols - color and colors*. Retrieved February 11, 2023, from <<https://www.color-and-colors.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Black-white-and-red-archetypes-and-symbols.pdf>>.

⁶⁹ Conrad, J. (n.d.). *Heart of Darkness*. (J. Menéndez, Ed.) *ibiblio*. p. 3. Retrieved December 19, 2022, from <https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Conrad/Heart_Darkness.pdf>

*“Only the gloom to the west, brooding over the upper reaches, became more sombre every minute, as if angered by the approach of the sun. And at last, in its curved and imperceptible fall, the sun sank low, and from glowing white changed to a dull red without rays and without heat, as if about to go out suddenly, stricken to death by the touch of that gloom brooding over a crowd of men.”*⁷⁰

For some reason, the darkness is not disappearing. Perhaps Conrad is hinting at some sort of corruption within the European society. Later, the reader learns about the Company. Marlow walks through a deserted street, giving the reader an impression of void or emptiness. As Marlow approaches the door, there are two women knitting wool, posing as guards at the gate of hell.

*“Two women, one fat and the other slim, sat on straw-bottomed chairs, knitting black wool. The slim one got up and walked straight at me—still knitting with downcast eyes—and only just as I began to think of getting out of her way, as you would for a somnambulist, stood still, and looked up.”*⁷¹

Watt analyses this scene in a similar manner and sees the entire voyage of Marlow interpreted as a symbolic representation of the classic descent into hell, such as that described in the sixth book of Virgil’s Aeneid or Dante’s Inferno. Marlow depicts his experience in light of the widespread paganism and Christian notions of a journey to the underworld.⁷² Darkness and blackness symbolise the brutalities done in the Congo. The “mournful gloom” spreads in the Congo upon

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 4.

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 14.

⁷² Watt, I. (1979). Impressionism and Symbolism in Heart of Darkness. In N. Sherry (Ed.), *Joseph Conrad, a Commemoration* (pp. 44–46). essay, The Macmillan Press Ltd. Retrieved February 11, 2023, from <https://scholar.alaqsa.edu.ps/9132/2/Joseph%20Conrad_%20A%20Commemoration%20%28%20PDFDrive%20%29.pdf>.

the arrival of the colonists in Africa. The colonists call themselves “emissaries of light,” despite the fact that they spread darkness.

According to Cerrato, white symbolises light, goodness, innocence, purity, and cleanliness. It is considered the colour of perfection. In addition, as opposed to black, white usually has a positive connotation.⁷³ Light and the colour of white are associated with a force within shadows that, when released, ignites chaos while transforming it into the cosmos or harmony.⁷⁴ The portrayal of light varies by ancient peoples depending on the culture, but its essential colour, white, remains the same.⁷⁵ White simply contrasts with the negative pole of black.⁷⁶

Marlow shares his experiences with the Company and how his fantasy met reality:

“True, by this time it was not a blank space any more. 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 for a boy to dream gloriously over. It had become a place of darkness.”⁷⁷

Marlow saw innocence and a glimmer of hope in the eyes of the natives. Belgian Congo, within the grasp of the Company, was corrupted by greed. White

⁷³ Cerrato, H. (2012). *How Colors Impact Our Daily Life In Business, Art, Work And Love*. Retrieved February 11, 2023, from <<https://blocs.xtec.cat/gemmasalvia1617/files/2017/02/the-meaning-of-colors-book.pdf>>.

⁷⁴ Pompas, R., & Luzzatto, L. (2019). *Black, white and red: Archetypes and symbols - color and colors*. Black, white and red: archetypes and symbols. Retrieved February 11, 2023, from <<https://www.color-and-colors.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Black-white-and-red-archetypes-and-symbols.pdf>>.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Conrad, J. (n.d.). *Heart of Darkness*. (J. Menéndez, Ed.) *ibiblio*. p. 20. Retrieved December 19, 2022, from <https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Conrad/Heart_Darkness.pdf>.

is a symbol of goodness, however, it is the white people that cause suffering as if they lost their goodness and humanity.

*“Now and then a boat from the shore gave one a momentary contact with reality. It was paddled by black fellows. You could see from afar the white of their eyeballs glistening. They shouted, sang; their bodies streamed with perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks—these chaps; but they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement, that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast.”*⁷⁸

Kurtz’ job was to gather ivory and send it to the coast for further processing. In the beginning, he was just like Marlow, an adventurer looking to provide for himself or possibly his family. The dark ways of the Company and the unknown dark environment changed him into a monster.

*“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,’ and so on, and so on.”*⁷⁹

It was “*white fog more blinding than the night*” that hindered Marlow’s journey further up the river.⁸⁰ Not only the indigenous population suffered, but also nature saw the colonists as an incoming danger and acted as a closed door.

“We called at some more places with farcical names, where the merry dance of death and trade goes on in a still and earthy atmosphere as of an

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 81.

⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 63

*overheated catacomb; all along the formless coast bordered by dangerous surf, as if Nature herself had tried to ward off intruders; in and out of rivers, streams of death in life, whose banks were rotting into mud, whose waters, thickened into slime, invaded the contorted mangroves, that seemed to writhe at us in the extremity of an impotent despair.”*⁸¹

Pompas and Luzzatto write that the colour red has long been associated with riches, power, and royalty. It symbolises blood and served two functions in historical military uniforms and heroic deeds: on the one hand, it increased power and aroused rage, on the other hand, it served as a cover for spilt blood because it is red. Red speeds up our physical responses because it signals the beginning of danger.⁸²

*“There was a vast amount of red—good to see at any time, because one knows that some real work is done in there...”*⁸³

Red symbolises the hard work of native people who worked and bled for European progress. For the native population, the red colour meant spilled blood, while for the colonists, red signified heroic deeds.

The colour red does not appear as much as black or white in *Heart of Darkness*, however, the colour had an impact on Joseph Conrad’s life since it was the colour of the British Empire. As Johnson writes, sometimes the dominions of the British Empire were painted pink. The imperial fantasy of seeing Britannia legitimately ruling her subjects from the centre of the world is depicted on maps.

⁸¹ Ibid. p. 21.

⁸² Pompas, R., & Luzzatto, L. (2019). *Black, white and red: Archetypes and symbols - color and colors*. Black, white and red: archetypes and symbols. Retrieved February 11, 2023, from <<https://www.color-and-colors.it/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Black-white-and-red-archetypes-and-symbols.pdf>>.

⁸³ Conrad, J. (n.d.). *Heart of Darkness*. (J. Menéndez, Ed.)*ibiblio*. p. 14. Retrieved December 19, 2022, from <https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Conrad/Heart_Darkness.pdf>.

As a result, jingoism emerged, covered up by the pretext of missionising and civilising. The British attempted to purge the barbaric colonial settlements, resulting in “racial progress,” but by engaging in extensive exploitation, they instead created a gap and division with otherness.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Johnson, C. (2013, May 14). *Painting the World Pink*. Manchester Historian. Retrieved February 11, 2023, from <<https://manchesterhistorian.com/2013/painting-the-world-pink>>.

Lord Jim

Lord Jim is set in a time when European sailors travelled the world, trading goods back and forth. The story begins with a young sailor finding work on the Patna, an old steamboat, with 800 pilgrims aboard travelling to Mecca. One day, the ship collides with some sort of debris in the water and is bound to sink. Jim and some other crew members leave the ship escaping on lifeboats. People aboard the Patna were saved by the French and Jim goes to trial for his cowardly behaviour of abandoning the ship, since he is first mate. Jim loses his certification and is free to go.

Jim is a white imperialist, like most of his European compatriots. Over time, young Jim notices the exploitative behaviour of his fellow Europeans. In chapter 2, during his hospital stay, the readers learn that there are two more people in the “white man’s ward,” giving us a clue of possible racial segregation. After being released from the hospital, he notices two types of men being appointed in Asia.

“The majority were men who, like himself, thrown there by some accident, had remained as officers of country ships. They had now a horror of the home service, with its harder conditions, severer view of duty, and the hazard of stormy oceans. They were attuned to the eternal peace of Eastern sky and sea. They loved short passages, good deck-chairs, large native crews, and the distinction of being white. They shuddered at the thought of hard work, and led precariously easy lives, always on the verge of dismissal, always on the verge of engagement, serving Chinamen, Arabs, half-castes—would have served the devil himself had he made it easy enough.”⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Conrad, J. (2006, January 9). *The Project Gutenberg eBook of Lord Jim*. Chapter 2. Retrieved January 28, 2023, from <<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/5658/pg5658-images.html#link2HCH0036>>.

Conrad hints that one of the aspects of the exploitative nature is letting the native workers do all the hard labour while colonists enjoy themselves, making it a stereotype.

The Patna is a multicultural melting pot:

*“She was owned by a Chinaman, chartered by an Arab, and commanded by a sort of renegade New South Wales German, very anxious to curse publicly his native country, but who, apparently on the strength of Bismarck’s victorious policy, brutalised all those he was not afraid of, and wore a ‘blood-and-iron’ air, combined with a purple nose and a red moustache.”*⁸⁶

The pilgrims aboard the Patna were described as “*human cargo*” or “*cattle*” by the German captain. He did not think much of them. He actively dehumanised them, calling them cattle. The German had this false vision of him: a white imperialist commanding the ship with the “herd” aboard. The white crew were segregated from the coloured people.

*“The five whites on board lived amidships, isolated from the human cargo.”*⁸⁷

Suddenly, when the accident happened, none of the people in the leading position took responsibility. The men in control, serving the empire, refused leadership when leadership was in dire need, thus going back to the stereotype of leaving the hardships to the natives, in this case, the Malay men in charge of the wheel. Serving the empire required responsibility and honour. It was status that differentiated the crew from the pilgrims. By acting ungentlemanly, the white men

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

dishonoured the empire, leading to their rightful punishment in court. Within the system, the pawns must play their role.

Questioning gentility

In *Lord Jim*, Conrad dedicates his time to describing the reach of imperialism in a slightly different manner. Ultimately, *Lord Jim* is a story about guilt and repayment. Simultaneously, Conrad raises the question of what the late Victorian gentleman should represent and be like. Oliva's work hints that the character of Jim was viewed as the stereotypical gentleman. The public schools are largely responsible for codifying the stereotype of the English gentleman as the archetype of the "Anglo-Saxon race", and Jim's appearance, personality, and attitudes significantly fit this definition from the middle to late 19th century. Marlow is more often heard than seen, though his account of Jim also reveals a lot about him. Whatever may be able to be deduced with regard to his gentility, it is clear that Jim is the main target of this stereotype in the book.⁸⁸ Let us examine Jim's characteristics besides his skin colour. He is young, inexperienced, reckless, and boyish. He fantasises about heroism and adventure at sea, although the reality turns out to be the opposite.

*"He was gentlemanly, steady, tractable, with a thorough knowledge of his duties; and in time, when yet very young, he became chief mate of a fine ship, without ever having been tested by those events of the sea that show in the light of day the inner worth of a man, ..."*⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Oliva, M. P. (2010). Narrative Voice and Racial Stereotypes in the Modern Novel: Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim* and William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (dissertation). p. 138. UPF. Retrieved January 26, 2023, from <<https://www.tdx.cat/bitstream/handle/10803/7454/tmp.pdf;sequence=1>>.

⁸⁹ Conrad, J. (2006, January 9). *The Project Gutenberg eBook of Lord Jim*. Chapter 2. Retrieved January 28, 2023, from <<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/5658/pg5658-images.html#link2HCH0036>>.

By abandoning the Patna during the incident, Jim abandons his gentlemanly properties. He fails to take accountability for his actions. Throughout the development of the story, the readers learn that Jim is more concerned about his reputation, which is haunting him. Patusan is where he can start anew and learn from the mistakes of the past. While the events on Patusan end with death, it does not necessarily mean Jim has not learned from his previous mistakes. He made some mistakes in his leadership due to his reckless and naive character, however, in the end he faced the consequences and took responsibility as a true leader, thus ending his life in a gentlemanly manner.

In the book, Marlow considers the boy to be “*one of us.*”⁹⁰ clearly hinting at his skin colour and talks about entrusting the ship to the Jim.

*“I would have trusted the deck to that youngster on the strength of a single glance, and gone to sleep with both eyes—and, by Jove! it wouldn’t have been safe. There are depths of horror in that thought. He looked as genuine as a new sovereign, but there was some infernal alloy in his metal.”*⁹¹

Marlow has some sort of trust in Jim, yet he sees something odd about him, indicating the presence of possible cowardice and unmanliness. Marlow might be telling us that there is no place for boys running the empire. Maturity is connected to gentility. English gentlemen were in charge of the empire. Marlow considers Jim “one of us,” which can imply skin colour, however, it does not degrade the Malaysians, it is meant as not being foreign to Marlow in the Far East and having the same European roots or seeing Jim as a seaman just like Marlow.

In contrast to Jim, there is Gentleman Brown, the opposite of what a gentleman should stand for while still sharing similarities with Jim. They are both adventurers running from something. Brown evades prison, and Jim his past. Both

⁹⁰ Ibid., chapter 7, 8.

⁹¹ Ibid., chapter 5.

are renegades of the system they used to live in. Brown is the son of a baronet, an honourable title, hinting that his father was indeed a gentleman of the middle-class. However, Brown disregards traditional morals by running off with the wife of a missionary, smuggling guns, and robbing. Brown's escapades demonstrate that there is a reason for his notoriety. In addition to being immoral, he is also incredibly intelligent and a skilled leader who seizes every chance that presents itself while Jim and the Bugis' hesitate to take action.

Oliva describes the changes of gentility that white skin became one essential mark of a gentleman at this point, and blacks of all ranks and degrees were firmly placed in the lowest orders of nature and society. This Victorian shift in attitudes redefined the idea of a gentleman. In the following decades of the nineteenth century, the emphasis on the gentleman's race as the fundamental stereotype of the English upper classes increased. This trend was heavily influenced by both popular culture and the ideological work of "scientists" involved in the definition of the "human race." Colonisers were not doubting the physical capabilities of coloured workers, however, taking the ability to increase one's status is essentially degrading and discriminating. Olive adds that *Lord Jim's* questioning of the gentleman should not necessarily be interpreted as a message against imperialism. The Boer Wars and the scandals surrounding the particularly intensive exploitation of many empire-controlled territories, such as King Leopold's Congo, sparked a discussion about the nature of the coloniser and his obligations.⁹²

Nuances of imperialism are present in *Lord Jim*. Aboard the Patna Jim is a middle-class gentleman among people of the lower class. On Patusan, there is Jim, a white gentleman among the natives, however, Jim is not the one with the entire power. Although he is a gentleman, he is not above all the natives. Jim and

⁹² Oliva, M. P. (2010). Narrative Voice and Racial Stereotypes in the Modern Novel: Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim* and William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (dissertation). UPF. Retrieved January 26, 2023, from <<https://www.tdx.cat/bitstream/handle/10803/7454/tmp.pdf;sequence=1>>. p. 132-134.

Brown's ungentlemanly conduct questions the idea of gentility and shows the negative side of what an English middle-class gentleman is capable of.

The natives of Patusan are introduced in a fairly positive manner. As Marlow describes:

*“Doramin was one of the most remarkable men of his race I had ever seen.”*⁹³

Doramin shows the native way of life to Jim and takes him under his wing. Both Marlow and Jim think highly of him. Doramin represents how a real leader should behave. His son Dan Waris was also highly thought of.

*“Dain Waris, the distinguished youth, was the first to believe in him; theirs was one of those strange, profound, rare friendships between brown and white, in which the very difference of race seems to draw two human beings closer by some mystic element of sympathy. Of Dain Waris, his own people said with pride that he knew how to fight like a white man. This was true; he had that sort of courage—the courage in the open, I may say—but he had also a European mind. You meet them sometimes like that, and are surprised to discover unexpectedly a familiar turn of thought, an unobscured vision, a tenacity of purpose, a touch of altruism.”*⁹⁴

Dain Waris is presented with good intention. However, the way Conrad presents Dain Waris by praising his European-like personality. I do not see this as a sign of Conrad's racist views, but rather a prejudice that people of colour are mostly from less developed cultures. Meeting a like-minded individual on a

⁹³ Conrad, J. (2006, January 9). *The Project Gutenberg eBook of Lord Jim*. Chapter 26. Retrieved January 28, 2023, from <<https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/5658/pg5658-images.html#link2HCH0036>>.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

remote island somewhere in the jungle might have surprised most seamen Conrad included. Conrad might also mean that there are likeminded or same people just as the Europeans in remote areas of the world.

The stay at Patusan had a positive impact on Jim, however, the deaths of natives and Dain Waris showcase what sort of impact colonists had on the indigenous population, whether they arrived or left.

Lord Jim is the story of a young seaman in a colonial land. It is inevitable for writers like Conrad to stumble upon the differences between racial types. However, more than ethnic origin, Conrad tackled the idea of the gentleman and his possible impact on imperial matters. People like Brown did not have a positive impact both on the empire and the natives, Jim learned his gentle duties in the end, paying the ultimate price for it. The two gentlemen from the beginning until the end were Doramin and Dan Waris, thus the natives. I believe, if the Patna incident was set in a native Malaysian environment, there would be no need for a trial in the first place. The Bugis were taught honour and duty from birth in an isolated environment. If put in the situation Jim was in, all of them would have made the right decision of not leaving the ship. Therefore, the control of the ship during the incident was left to two Malayan men.

Conrad displays people of a different colour other than white in situations that needed courage, honour and a sense of duty. Conrad attacks the idea of gentlemen being white, since Malaysians display gentility throughout the book, while the main character Jim is on the path to becoming a gentleman.

The Nigger of the Narcissus

In 1884, while working as a sailor, Conrad was able to land in Bombay, India, where he agreed to work as the second mate on the *Narcissus*.⁹⁵ His encounter served as the inspiration for his first, outstanding book, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus."*⁹⁶ During its release, the book was well-received among critics. While stating it was not perfect, Conrad and his literary work were on the right path. Nobody was utterly concerned with the title, although it is important to note that in the United States, the book was released under a different title (*Children of the Sea* in the first American edition).⁹⁷ The piece of literature is also findable under *The N-word of the "Narcissus."* The name of the novel raises the question, why Conrad decided to name it like that. Joseph Conrad struggled financially during the time of the release, and the book itself did not have major success as a commercial product.⁹⁸ McDonald writes that Conrad needed the public endorsement of an older, more well-known, and established peer to cement his standing in the literary world in 1896 and to strengthen his self-image as a writer. Henley was the more prosperous contemporary editor so he decided to go with him. William Ernest Henley is described as "ferociously Tory and Imperialist." Conrad used the N-word in the title. He wanted it to be serialised in the *New Review* magazine due to financial reasons. Conrad rigged his text before publication, motivated by a desire to applaud Henley's belligerent Toryism.⁹⁹ The choice of the title might have been purely for monetary reasons. Whether they are

⁹⁵ Peters, John G. *An Introduction to Joseph Conrad*. Cambridge University Press, 2006. p. 3., PDF File, <<https://www.pdfdrive.com/the-cambridge-introduction-to-joseph-conrad-cambridge-introductions-to-literature-e184876868.html>> Accessed 11 Sep. 2022.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid. p. 45.

⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 7.

⁹⁹ McDonald, Peter D. 1997. *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice, 1880–1914*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 29-33.

writers or seamen, most people still have families to feed. Food on the table and a roof over the head are fundamental things for survival, even in the civilised world. Conrad might have just gone along with the imperialist agenda to get by. However, the name of the novel might have been its downfall in later years, especially today, as Peters writes. The greatest piece of early Conrad is *The Nigger of the "Narcissus."* In fact, if it were not for the book's title, it is safe to say that it would be read more frequently than it is right now. It was formerly among Conrad's most regularly read works. The novel used to garner a lot of attention, in part due to its clarity, in part due to its qualities as an adventure story, and in part due to its literary qualities.¹⁰⁰

Origin of the N-word

The N-word was already coined as a pejorative term in the 1890s. Pryor writes that the N-word was not originally a word used by African Americans. The term "negar" first became popular among colonial settlers in 1619, when British settlers referred to the first twenty forced black labourers in Jamestown as "negars." It merged all workers of African descent in British North America under a single racialised identity. They were considered the property of the whites. The word slave described a category of workers. The term "nigger" was used to address African slaves. It was neither a compliment nor an insult when white people originally used it. It covered a recognisable group of low-status workers.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Peters, John G. *An Introduction to Joseph Conrad*. Cambridge University Press, 2006. p. 45., PDF File, Accessed 11 Sep. 2022, from: <<https://www.pdfdrive.com/the-cambridge-introduction-to-joseph-conrad-cambridge-introductions-to-literature-e184876868.html>>.

¹⁰¹ Pryor, Elizabeth Stordeur, "The Etymology of Nigger: Resistance, Language, and the Politics of Freedom in the Antebellum North" (2016). *History: Faculty Publications*, Smith College, Northampton, MA. p. 212. Retrieved January 28, 2023, from <https://scholarworks.smith.edu/hst_facpubs/4>.

Rahman describes the etymology of the word similarly. The term has been in use as a racist insult since the mid-1800s. The racist version, the term “nigger”, is one of two modern versions that originated from the word N-word, which was once used by white people as a reasonably neutral descriptor. The N-word is thought to have been borrowed from the Spanish and Portuguese slave trade term “negro”, which meant “black” and referred to the dark skin of Africans. The English form was used as early as 1574. The dictionary characterises this early usage as largely neutral. The first examples given point to a benignly superior attitude that white people had toward Africans, one that assumed inferiority and a lack of social, intellectual, and cultural advancement. Early on, Europeans used the term to communicate social implications that were moderately derogatory, but it eventually turned into an outright insult.¹⁰² The term was first listed in a Merriam-Webster dictionary in 1864, when it was noted that it was frequently used in scorn or depreciation and that it was a synonym for “negro.”¹⁰³

Sailors of the Narcissus

The crew of the *Narcissus* was made up of 26 men of various backgrounds. James Wait was the only one of African descent. He is described as “...*tall, calm, cool, and superb with a deep voice.*”¹⁰⁴ The voice is strong and noticeable throughout the deck. Apart from calling him the N-word, James is initially described in a fairly positive manner. The crew was surprised by his skin colour.

¹⁰² Rahman, J. (2012). The N Word: Its History and Use in the African American Community. *Journal of English Linguistics*, 40(2), p. 138-142. Retrieved January 28, 2023, from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254089775_The_N_Word_Its_History_and_Use_in_the_African_American_Community>.

¹⁰³ Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Nigger. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved January 31, 2023, from <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nigger>>.

¹⁰⁴ Conrad, J. (2006). *The nigger of the narcissus*. The Nigger of the "Narcissus" by Joseph Conrad. Retrieved February 2, 2023, from <<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/17731/17731-h/17731-h.htm>>.

*“A surprised hum—a faint hum that sounded like the suppressed mutter of the word ‘Nigger’—ran along the deck and escaped out into the night. The nigger seemed not to hear. He balanced himself where he stood in a swagger that marked time. After a moment he said calmly:—‘My name is Wait—James Wait.’”*¹⁰⁵

Throughout the development of the book, Conrad uses the N-word to address the character of Jimmy. However, while reading it, it does not set the tone of derogatory use. It does imply Jimmy’s skin colour, yet it is not used to scorn him for it. Among seamen such as Conrad, it seems like the word stayed in their vocabulary for longer than it should have.

The reasons for James’ unpopularity among the crew members rose already after his arrival, since he announced that he was ill and dying. It was displayed as if death had boarded the ship with James. The cook was a strongly religious person. Some other crew members gave a hint of being superstitious. A dying person aboard might bring bad luck throughout the journey. That is the main reason for James’ unpopularity among some.

Belfast is an interesting character. To decide whether he was racist towards Jimmy or not is conflicting. He “would knock his ugly black head off”, yet the same evening he would steal pie from the cook, risking his position on the ship.

*“...Belfast stole from the galley the officers’ Sunday fruit pie, to tempt the fastidious appetite of Jimmy. He endangered not only his long friendship with the cook but also—as it appeared—his eternal welfare.”*¹⁰⁶

Belfast treats Jimmy well and gives him warm clothes, despite the fact that he is freezing. He takes good care of him and treats him well. However,

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

sometimes he snaps and says something disrespectful toward him. Before and during the rescue of James, while he is stuck in his cabin, Belfast addresses him as a “cursed nigger.”¹⁰⁷ Then again, Belfast is one of the few willing to rescue James, and while figuring out whether he is alive, Belfast addresses James as “darling.” Belfast is a good person, though very emotional. He is an example of actions speaking louder than words.

The character of Donkin, on the other hand, is that of a terrible human being disliked by many on board. He treated James with no respect even calling him a “black-faced swine.”¹⁰⁸ The narrator describes Donkin as follows:

“He was impudently cringing to us and systematically insolent to the officers.”¹⁰⁹

“...Donkin—as usual—made insulting remarks.”¹¹⁰

Donkin did not take the James’ sickness seriously. He is rather concerned with himself, although being capable of working.

“Donkin skulked shamelessly, uneasy and miserable. He grumbled:—“I’m perishin’ with cold outside in bloomin’ wet rags, an’ that ‘ere black sojer sits dry on a blamed chest full of bloomin’ clothes; blank his black soul!”¹¹¹

The ship is an organism, by undermining James’ sickness he is spreading conflict and bad morale. Singelton and the Captain, seem to care nothing about

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

James and his illness. They are concerned with the ship. They would have treated any sick sailor like this, regardless of skin colour. The crew is essentially a replaceable asset to them. Their purpose is to fulfil the tasks and sail on. They have seen men like Donkin or James before.

Conrad is putting men of different origins and backgrounds in one isolated place, a ship. Whether the crewmen like it or not, they have to work together and face the dangers of the ocean. They are a team, a temporary tribe with its own hierarchy. The dislike for James may have happened due to him not fulfilling his role on board of the ship. All crew members besides him provided some sort of value, whereas the ill James was not doing anything productive. That is why he was excluded by some of the crewmen.

Whether the character of James was black or white would not have mattered, since it was his illness that played the major role in the symbolism and superstition. Not long after his death, the ship suddenly caught wind. It was not the colour of the skin that slowed the ship down, it was the conflict, that put the crew against each other. Conrad made the character black so that the symbol stands out. Also, by lessening the illness of a fellow crew member, Conrad shows the ignorance of some sailors he encountered while he was out on the sea.

Sailors' superstition

In the *Dictionary of Reference and Allusions*, it is written that Jonah is a Hebrew prophet in the Bible. He received a message from God telling him to travel to Nineveh. Jonah, however, disobeyed God's order and boarded a ship headed for Tarshish instead. God sent a storm as a punishment, but the other sailors saved the ship by tossing Jonah overboard as a sign of bad luck. As a

result, the storm subsided. Jonah was then engulfed by a whale, where he was imprisoned for three days and three nights before being rescued by God.¹¹²

Jonah is a byword for bad luck, especially among sailors.¹¹³ Conrad portrays James as the Jonah of the *Narcissus*. Not long after James passed away, thus leaving the ship, the sails caught a breeze of air again, and the *Narcissus* arrived in London. This raises the question of whether there is a connection between bad luck and James' skin colour. I am convinced that this is not a mere coincidence and that Conrad did this intentionally. James was the only black person, while at the same time being the biggest burden. This shows a racial bias if the character of James is looked at as a burden. I am convinced that Conrad wanted to emphasise one of the sailors' superstitions travelling with a Jonah while using the contrast of skin to make it stand out.

¹¹² Delahunty, A., & Dignen, S. (2012). *A Dictionary of Reference and Allusion*. Oxford University Press. p. 198.

¹¹³ Formula Boats. (2019, July 16). *Boating myths and superstitions*. Formula Boats. Retrieved February 2, 2023, from <<https://www.formulaboats.com/blog/boating-myths-and-superstitions/>>.

Chinua Achebe and the criticism of Joseph Conrad

As Clarke writes, one of the most read, studied, and revered African writers of the 20th century was Chinua Achebe, author of “*An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness*” (1977). He was born in colonial Nigeria in 1930, therefore, he had first-hand knowledge of colonialism, the social, political, and economic phenomenon by which numerous European countries seized power over nations in other areas of the world. From 1885 until 1960, the tribes and territories of Nigeria were governed by the British.

Despite this, Achebe had a reasonably wealthy childhood and education. He received his education at the prestigious Government College in Umuahia, which was modelled after a British elite school. It gave Achebe an upper-edge education while also exposing him to the colonisers’ attempts to suppress his native language and culture.

Afterward, Achebe won a scholarship and attended the University College in Ibadan, Nigeria, a former University of London affiliate. *Things Fall Apart* (1958), a story about the impact of colonialism on life in a traditional village told from an African perspective, was written when he was working for the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation. *Things Fall Apart* brought Achebe international acclaim and established it as one of the most significant works of African fiction in English. Achebe lectured at the University of Nigeria and several North American universities, including the University of Massachusetts. He wrote a number of acclaimed books about Nigeria as well as a significant number of critical essays that exposed colonialist biases in English literature. He promoted

African literature throughout his career and remained a vocal public voice on African politics. At the age of 82, Achebe passed away in 2013. ¹¹⁴

Achebe's *An Image of Africa* criticises Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* for its negative perception of Africans. Achebe further explains how Conrad is obsessed with the N-word. The essay critiques how Africa is portrayed negatively in Western culture and was initially presented as a lecture at the University of Massachusetts in February 1975 before being published. In *An Image of Africa*, Achebe writes that there is a psychological requirement for people in the West to perceive Africa as being in direct contrast to Europe. Africa is seen as a continent that is barbaric, uncivilised, and bestial. The predominance of these overused classifications in Western society reinforces the idea that Europe is the antithesis of Africa. The lands of the Thames are civilised, sophisticated, and kind, while the Congo River is like travelling back to the beginning of the world. The issue that is worrying Conrad is the kinship of the races, thus having bestial and primitive roots, such as the natives that are described as primitives and are viewed as "ugly" to the character of Marlow. ¹¹⁵

In addition, Achebe criticises Conrad for the necessity of putting Africans "in their place" and labels their language as "babble of uncouth sounds" for the most part. From Achebe's point of view, Joseph Conrad was a racist. The frequent occurrence of emotive words in *Heart of Darkness* Achebe condemns as trickery to influence the reader. ¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Clarke, C. (2017). *An Analysis of Chinua Achebe's An Image of Africa Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness*. Macat International Ltd. Retrieved February 25, 2023, from <https://edisciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/5751703/mod_folder/content/0/ConradHeart%20of%20Darkness/%28Macat%20Library%29%20Clare%20Clarke_%20Lindsay%20Scorgie-Porter%20-%20An%20Image%20of%20Africa_%20Racism%20in%20Conrad%E2%80%99s%20Heart%20of%20Darkness-Routledge%20%282017%29.pdf?forcedownload=1>.

¹¹⁵ Achebe, C. (2016). *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness*. *The Massachusetts Review* 57(1), 14-27. Retrieved February 25, 2023, from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301639783_An_Image_of_Africa_Racism_in_Conrad's_Heart_of_Darkness>.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

As Clarke writes, a demand appeared to remove *Heart of Darkness* from university curricula, which infuriated several academics. Several lecturers had strong, emotional reactions. Achebe received both criticism and supportive comments from the academic world. Chinua Achebe introduced a new way of looking at Conrad's literary work. ¹¹⁷

Clarke adds, that in Conrad's defence, Cedric Watts wrote his essay "*A Bloody Racist*": *On Achebe's Perspective of Conrad* (1983). Watts saw a suggestion in Achebe's writing that white readers are not capable of properly evaluating the book due to their race. Watts argued that Conrad is indeed an important critic of racism and imperialism. The phrase "bloody racist" is changed to "thoroughgoing racist" in Achebe's updated 1988 edition of the essay, only slightly altering the harshness of his lecture. Whether this is the result of editorial interference or criticism of his lecture is unknown. ¹¹⁸

Clarke states that Patrick Brantlinger, an expert on Victorian studies, has made an effort to find a middle ground by taking the historical context into account. He acknowledges that *Heart of Darkness* contains what might be considered racist viewpoints, but he also points out that the book showcases relatively progressive views on colonialism for its time, and they come to the conclusion that Conrad is not particularly at fault, noting that any condemnation is unfairly based on outdated social standards. ¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Clarke, C. (2017). *An Analysis of Chinua Achebe's An Image of Africa Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness*. Macat International Ltd. Retrieved February 25, 2023, from <https://edisciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/5751703/mod_folder/content/0/ConradHeart%20of%20Darkness/%28Macat%20Library%29%20Clare%20Clarke%20Lindsay%20Scorgie-Porter%20-%20An%20Image%20of%20Africa%20Racism%20in%20Conrad%E2%80%99s%20Heart%20of%20Darkness-Routledge%20%282017%29.pdf?forcedownload=1>.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Brantlinger claims that Conrad's impressionistic writing style serves to conceal the book's contradictions.¹²⁰ The text criticises racism and imperialism in ways that are both racist and imperialist.¹²¹ Conrad appears to have progressive political views, yet he is limited by the limitations of his own time and location.¹²²

I agree that black characters in *Heart of Darkness* are portrayed in disrespectful moments and situations. Conrad may have even come to the Congo as a racist, however the horrors he saw changed his own mindset indefinitely. It is also important to note, that the events Conrad witnessed and took part in happened in the 1890s. The attitudes in Europe were racist. The negative descriptions of Africans were common. If Conrad had been overtly criticising the European colonial progress, he would have been frowned upon by the European middle class.

What Achebe might be misinterpreting as racism on Conrad's part is the fear of the unknown. Travelling is a life-changing experience. The story of Marlow depicts how a man makes contact with a completely different culture. Societies across the world have various social conventions. Something that is accepted in one culture might be frowned upon in another one. The core of ugliness between the kinship was the complete unawareness of different habits in cultures. Some absolutely unthinkable behaviour to the Europeans may have been a socially acceptable convention in Africa. Marlow experiences a cultural shock. His view of the world is being shattered by both the native African people and the colonists that caused the atrocities. Chinua Achebe communicates a non-European point of view, while Conrad conveys a white European view. Achebe thinks positively of Conrad's writing style. He thinks that *Heart of Darkness* is a well-written book,

¹²⁰ Godard, L. (2012). *The landing: Conrad and the critics: Responses to heart of darkness*. Landing, Athabasca University. Retrieved February 25, 2023, from <<https://landing.athabascau.ca/blog/view/136720/conrad-and-the-critics-responses-to-heart-of-darkness>>.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

which is why racism is overlooked by other critics.¹²³ However, what is not overlooked in *Heart of Darkness* is the depiction of colonial exploitation by the Europeans, hinting that it is not right. The target audience Conrad is attempting to reach is Europeans. They should be aware of what happened in the Belgian Congo. I think this is the reason the protagonist and all the other key players are European. It puts the average white European middle-class colonist in the spotlight. It is simpler for the target audience to put themselves in the protagonist's position and follow him as he travels through the darkest regions of humanity. Not only are the Europeans unmistakably the "bad guys," but even the protagonist, who has good or neutral intentions, also suffers the destruction of his soul. The reason for the natives' bestiality is the loss of their dignity. Enslavement took away their humanity.

Things Fall Apart

Chinua Achebe's work *Things Fall Apart* provides a different view on colonialism, that is, from the other side, the side of the indigenous people. Achebe gives us a description of how things change over time due to the arrival of European colonists. As Okonkwo and his family come back, they discover that many things have changed in their town as a result of the arrival of the missionaries. A jail with a European-style justice system was established, and a church along with a hospital were built. Okonkwo is baffled as to why the populace did not rise in protest against these intruders. Some Igbo people convert and abandon the old religious ways. As a more radical missionary, Mr. Brown takes charge, violence eventually breaks out, and the colonists overthrow the local

¹²³ Achebe, C. (2016). An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. *The Massachusetts Review* 57(1), 14-27. Retrieved February 25, 2023, from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301639783_An_Image_of_Africa_Racism_in_Conrad's_Heart_of_Darkness>.

authorities. Okonkwo kills himself because he is disillusioned with the new way of life. ¹²⁴

Esther Lombardi, a journalist, presents an outcome after reading the book and what the general perception of the book should be.

“In addition to the themes of the effect of colonization on African society and how cultures clash, there are also personal themes in "Things Fall Apart." Readers can examine how people's character leads to their outcomes, such as how adaptable (or unadaptable) they are to change, and how that can be considered a kind of destiny. An examination of the book can also look at human emotions and find commonalities and universals.

The destiny theme can be examined on a societal level as well. Achebe illustrates the complexity of the Igbo society and how it functions—unlike the authoritarian encroachers—without a strong central government. Is it destiny for the people to have been conquered, then? You can also examine how the community and people interact to find balance and function as a society” ¹²⁵

“...Though controversial to write a novel in the colonizers' language, the book was able to reach more people that way. Achebe was also able to work untranslatable Igbo words into the telling so that people would be able to understand them through context as they read, rather than have a translator not achieve adequate subtleties of meaning.

The book awakened pride in history and community for people in Africa and led them to realize that they could tell their own stories.” ¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Achebe, C. (1994). *Things Fall Apart*. Anchor Books. Retrieved February 28, 2023, from <<http://marul.ffst.hr/~bwillems/fymob/things.pdf>>.

¹²⁵ Lombardi, E. (2019, October 30). *Things Fall Apart Study Guide and Discussion Questions*. ThoughtCo. Retrieved February 28, 2023, from <<https://www.thoughtco.com/things-fall-apart-study-questions-741643>>.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

Sickels writes that before the publication of *Things Fall Apart*, most books about Africa were written by Europeans and tended to portray Africans as barbaric people who needed to be educated by Europeans. For instance, Africa is shown as a savage, and uncivilised continent in Joseph Conrad's story *Heart of Darkness* (1899), one of the most renowned books of the early twentieth century. Yet in 1958, Chinua Achebe dismantled this prevalent image with his book *Things Fall Apart*, which accurately and sympathetically depicts Igbo life and looks at the impacts of European colonisation from an African perspective. *Things Fall Apart* is frequently assigned in African schools and universities and is regarded as the most significant novel to have been written in black Africa to date. The book has also been translated into more than fifty languages and is regularly found on the syllabuses of courses in literature, world history, and African studies around the world. *Things Fall Apart* is the archetypal modern African novel.¹²⁷

Although the message of *Things Fall Apart* is rather positive than negative, there are places in the world where the book is outright banned, such as Malaysia.¹²⁸ ¹²⁹ The book has also been banned in Achebe's home country, Nigeria, due to the fact that it brings back memories of the effects of Christian missionaries and British colonialism on the traditional Igbo community.¹³⁰ The book laid out a case against the colonists.¹³¹ *Things Fall Apart* also faced

¹²⁷ Booker, M. K., & Sickels, A. (2010). The Critical Reception of *Things Fall Apart*. In *Things fall apart, by Chinua Achebe (critical insights)* (pp. 33–34). essay, Salem Press. Retrieved February 28, 2023, from <https://salempress.com/Media/SalemPress/samples/ci_things_fall_apart_pgs.pdf>.

¹²⁸ Ifeduba, E. (2018). Book Censorship in Nigeria: A Study of Origin, Methods and Motivations, 1805-2018. p. 7,8. Retrieved February 28, 2023, from <<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/188140534.pdf>>.

¹²⁹ Plath, D. (2020, August 12). *Top 10 banned books that changed the face of black history*. National Coalition Against Censorship. Retrieved February 28, 2023, from <<https://ncac.org/news/blog/top-10-banned-books-that-changed-the-face-of-black-history>>.

¹³⁰ Ifeduba, E. (2018). Book Censorship in Nigeria: A Study of Origin, Methods and Motivations, 1805-2018. p. 7,8. Retrieved February 28, 2023, from <<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/188140534.pdf>>.

¹³¹ Ibid.

challenges in a Texas high school in 2012.¹³² According to Ifeduba, the piece of literature was included on the list of texts that Texan schools had difficulty teaching due to the book's support of sedition. The ban on the book was only contested. The credibility of the book was attacked due to the following aspects appearing in the text: "*violence or horror; politically, racially, or socially offensive; offensive to religious sensitivities.*"¹³³ However, the act of trying to ban the book caused uproar, promoting the discussion about the educational use of such books, arguably putting them in the spotlight.¹³⁴

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Plath, D. (2020, August 12). *Top 10 banned books that changed the face of black history*. National Coalition Against Censorship. Retrieved February 28, 2023, from <<https://ncac.org/news/blog/top-10-banned-books-that-changed-the-face-of-black-history>>.

Conclusion

European nations competed to colonise as much of Africa as they could during the 19th century in an effort to gain power and wealth. The colonising Europeans claimed to have civilised Africa, but their actions were contrary to reality because they only cared about financial gain and power.

Belgian colonial past is bloody. Horrible deeds caused by Belgian supremacy influenced Conrad for the rest of his life. In *Heart of Darkness*, he is critical of the behaviour of white people. He depicts how society is ignorant of the issue. Conrad criticises European imperialism by addressing the Congolese matter through the eyes of a white sailor employed by the Empire. Although the depiction of Africans and people of different colours might seem derogatory, just like the indigenous people, Conrad himself is trapped within the pincers of the Empire. As a young Pole, Conrad tried to escape the Russian oppression, which irreversibly damaged his health, his family's health, and family ties. Conrad knows what it is like to be both persecuted and employed by an empire. Conrad is harshly critical of the colonisers' cruelty and disrespect towards the people and the land. He condemns the acts of colonisers and exposes them. Although sometimes quite disguised, Conrad shows sympathy and pity. He struggles between what is considered good and what is considered evil. His vision of discovering paradise and the secrets of the world was shattered by the European civilising mission in Africa. The destructive effects of imperialism on both colonised peoples and the colonisers themselves are highlighted in his work.

In *Lord Jim*, Conrad questions the requirement of being white to become a conventional gentleman. Conrad is critical of the ship commanders and officers sent to the Far East. They are too comfortable, making their stay a vacation rather than a duty, which makes them incompetent. The character of Jim is a prime example of a middle-class gentleman lacking masculine traits. Native Malaysians

represent the polar opposite. Conrad praises the indigenous people for their bravery.

Joseph Conrad captured the issues of colonialism quite precisely. However, to make a living, he was forced to adapt some of his work. He deliberately named the book *The Nigger of the "Narcissus."* He lived in racist times and wanted to appeal to people with influence standing above him. By openly opposing the mainstream agenda, he would damage himself and his well-being just as it had damaged him and his parents in the past.

Achebe's view is that *Heart of Darkness* gave Africans a dehumanising and deeply offensive portrayal. The portrayal is led by Conrad's ignorance and prejudice. His claims about Conrad being a racist are too harsh. Chinua Achebe's critique is just as important as the work of Joseph Conrad. Both authors point out the negative side of colonialism and make the issue relevant to this day. Racism is a sensitive subject that sparks strong emotions.

Achebe challenged Western misconceptions about Africa and its people while introducing Western readers to the diversity and richness of African culture. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe describes what it is like to be the victim of the civilising process done by the European imperialists, while Conrad condemns the civilising act from the opposite party.

The main reason I am interested in this issue is the controversy surrounding Conrad and his beliefs. I initially saw him as an adventurer, and I still do. He is a seaman fulfilling his dreams of travel. His depiction of European brutalities and his experiences during travels across the world make his work crucial for understanding the clash of cultures. Conrad brings imperialism closer and reminds the reader of what society is built upon.

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