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(1) Read the ending of Heart of Darkness, from the line “The dusk was falling” (Norton Anthology 128) to the last line, “the heart of an immense darkness” (Norton Anthology 131). Comment on the significance of the figure of the Intended, and her interaction with Marlow, for the novel. Why do you think Conrad chose to end the novel with this scene? Your close reading should pay particular attention to the use of setting, imagery, and dialogue in this passage.

Joseph Conrad's decision to end "Heart of Darkness" with an interaction between the protagonist Marlow and the character of Kurtz's Intended, discussing death and legacy of Kurtz, allows him to convey a morally ambiguous commentary on colonialism which invites discussion and analysis of the text. It's use of setting, imagery, and the dialogue it crafts allows a moment of reflection, highlighting core themes of the text and their relation to the ending, opening and title of the text itself. The imagery used to describe the scenery and characters, in addition to the resulting dialogue exchanged implies consequences which weigh on the entire narrative. Conrad utilises this interaction as a device to deliver the message of the text, explore criticisms of colonialism and highlight the contexts which surround both of these characters in relation to colonialist themes.

Analysing the final passage, the first lines quickly establish a tone and theme which will be consistently developed throughout the scene using light and dark imagery as a thematic device. The scene is introduced in the final stages of twilight, as "dusk was falling" (Conrad 128). This is reinforced as the "tall marble fireplace," with it's "cold and monumental lightness" is described (128). Through this imagery, the setting is already depicted as a place of light amidst darkness, which in itself is in contrast to how the African Congo has been described throughout the rest of the text. Reinforcing this, Kurtz's Intended is introduced and described as having "fair hair" and a "pale head", depicting her as naive and innocent (128). Her description bears great contrast to how the previous characters in Africa were described, most notably to that of Kurtz mistress earlier in the text.

The imagery used to describe the setting here depicts a stark juxtaposition to the setting displayed throughout the rest of the narrative. The use of light in this imagery in particular reflects how Conrad uses darkness as a device throughout the narrative to capture colonialist themes. This is reinforced as the purity described within the home of the Intended contrasts to the savagery depicted in the Congo. However, despite this initial description, as Marlow admits to himself in this final scene concurring, "with every spoken word, the room was growing darker", the darkness is described to manifest within this purity as he interacts with the Intended (129). Throughout the text, Conrad has hinged much of the thematic storytelling around motifs of light and dark, the title, "Heart of Darkness", being the most poignant of these. The final scene reinforces this, invoking imagery of both light and dark to depict the reality which faces each of these characters. The juxtapositions made between Europe and Africa here is reinforced through the description of setting, whereas the exploration of themes remain enigmatic due to the dialogue exchanged between Marlow and the Intended.

The significance of the Intended's inclusion in the final scene becomes clear through analysing the exchange between herself and Marlow, and what it represents in the text. The Intended's initial description is similar to that of the setting. Similarly to how darkness is described to manifest within the purity of the setting, she is described to be dressed "all in black" with a voice "full of mystery, desolation and sorrow" as described by Marlow, as they discuss the late Kurtz (128-129). This is representative of the dark reality which looms behind both the characters. Only Marlow knows the truth of Kurtz's demise, his madness and his African mistress. His responsibility to deliver this information to the Intended becomes clouded when her overwhelming distress and affirmation of Kurtz proves troubling for Marlow. As the scene continues and their exchange progresses, the truth of Kurtz and Marlow's decision becomes the focal point of the interaction. The repeated reminders of growing darkness reinforces this as Conrad continues to paint the scene with imagery through Marlow. As the Intended insistently persists at Marlow to confirm her beliefs about Kurtz, she repeats "you admired him...it was impossible to know him and not to admire him" (129). Her forced affirmations of Kurtz here act to deny the truth of his character, this dilemma acts to represent views on colonialism through Kurtz as both a symbol and narrative device.

Throughout the exchange between the Intended and Marlow, the defence of Kurtz and his legacy arises as an issue for both characters but through different contexts. The Intended's is from a place of naivety whereas Marlow, who knows the reality of the situation surrounding Kurtz, finds himself battling with which truth to accept. Kurtz character within the text acts to represent colonialism as a whole and the hypocrisy which surrounds it. Colonialism isn’t directly addressed throughout the narrative, but rather alluded to via devices such as Kurtz. As such, the colonialist perspective is captured throughout the text through the distinctions drawn between the likes of Marlow and his companions versus how African people are depicted. These predetermined bias's crumble when Kurtz’s madness is revealed, and his death alongside his African mistress. Kurtz integrity therefore represents the integrity of the entire operation and colonialism within the text. With Kurtz disgraced, the disturbed reality of colonialism is revealed, and shown only through the perspective of Marlow. This makes the exchange between Marlow and the Intended even more significant when considering he is the lone witness to this reality.

Understanding Kurtz’s role as a symbol and narrative device is integral to how Conrad comments on colonialism. The resulting interaction between Marlow and the Intended therefore becomes integral to the conclusion of Conrad's commentary on colonialism. The Intended's naivety towards the truth behind Kurtz represents naivety or forced naivety towards the condition of colonialism. This is further explored in the dialogued exchanged towards the end of this final passage. The implications of the pairs interaction is highlighted by the Intended when she speaks on Kurtz and "all his greatness, of his generous mind, of his noble heart, nothing remains- nothing but a memory" (130). The implications of which suggest thematically that Marlow and the Intended's recounts of Kurtz legacy represent societal outlooks on colonialism. The Intended's naive and incorrect account of Kurtz faced with Marlow's hesitation to share the reality of it, offers an interesting moral dilemma surrounding one of the core themes of the text.

Within the narrative, the readers understanding of the text, its setting and its contexts are delivered through the account of Marlow. His decision to withhold the truth from the Intended is a crucial element to the text and Conrad's choice to end the novel with this scene suggests a purpose in exploring the moral ambiguity surrounding his character. This is reinforced further when compared to the introduction of the novel, where Marlow depicts Gravesend, describing the "air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back seemed condensed into a mournful gloom" (74). Marlow's description here is representative of the corruption of colonialism and its association with his home, however the description of Kurtz and his Intendeds place does not reflect this, suggesting the different perspectives and bias's which construct Marlow's character. He is shown to be capable of acknowledging commentary on colonialism, yet is also shown to display a certain level of hypocrisy.

The enigmatic nature of Conrad's character style proves problematic when analysing its colonist themes and commentary. Discerning the intentions of Joseph Conrad's choice of ending scene is to consider the message behind the narrative. In order to analyse the thematic relevance of the ending scene to the narrative, it is necessary to address Conrad's depiction of African people within the text. Throughout the narrative, in contrast to Marlow and other characters, the people of Africa are degradingly described as savages, echoing colonialist stereotyping. The question of intention with Conrad's presentation of Marlow is left unanswered due to the enigmatic nature of his character and the moral ambiguity around his descriptions and comments on people and places throughout the text. Despite this, Conrad's choice in end scene and setting in relation to the symbolism of Kurtz's character is still significant to his commentary on colonialism and its hypocrisy. The dialogue constructed between Marlow and the Intended ends the novel on an uncomfortable, morally ambiguous note which invites both discussion and analysis of both the characters. As a result, the final scene proves its significant to the moral complications and understanding of colonialist themes presented throughout the text.

Works Cited

Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. 1899. The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries, 10th ed., vol. 2, *W. W. Norton & Company*, 2018.