

THE HEART OF DARKNESS, III

9 October 2019

NEW KEYWORD

- **Going Native**
- The term indicates the colonizers' fear of contamination by absorption into native life and culture. The construction of native cultures as either primitive or degenerate in a binary discourse of colonizer/colonized led, especially at the turn of the century, to a widespread fear of 'going native' amongst the colonizers in many colonial societies. [...It] suggests that both the associations with other races and even the mere climate of colonies in hot areas can lead to moral and even physical degeneracy. [...] Going native could also encompass lapses from European behavior, the participation in 'native' ceremonies, or the adoption and even enjoyment of local customs. [...] Perhaps the best known canonical example of the perils of going native is Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*."

From Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. Routledge: New York, 2000.

REVIEW:

EDWARD SAID

“TWO VISIONS IN THE HEART
OF DARKNESS”

WHAT'S THE POINT?

- “Conrad wants us to see how Kurtz’s great looting adventure, Marlow’s journey up the river, and the narrative itself all share a common theme: Europeans performing acts of imperial mastery and will in (or about) Africa.” p. 23
- That is, *Europeans using colonialism and, crucially, narrative and language, to perform acts of control and violence on Africans.*

WHAT ARE THE 'TWO VISIONS'?

- The first is that the novella has a classic imperialist point of view and agenda.
- The second is that the novella is actually positioning itself in opposition to the classic imperialist point of view.

WHAT ARE THE 'TWO VISIONS'?

- I. Conrad has “rendered the world as official European or Western Imperialism saw it [...] not only as markets but as locales on the ideological map over which they continued to rule morally and intellectually.” p. 25
- That is, *Conrad's book is essentially imperialist and nothing more. He is bringing his European values of Western Progress and Civilization and judging Africa and Africans as 'bad' / 'retrograde' from within those foreign constructs.*

WHAT ARE THE 'TWO VISIONS'?

- 2. The novella is “local to a time and place, neither unconditionally true nor unqualifiedly certain.” He does not show an alternative to imperialism, *but* he “records its illusions and tremendous violence and waste [...and so] he permits his later readers to imagine something other than an Africa carved up into dozens of European colonies.” pp. 27-8
- His circular narrative “encourages us to sense the potential of a reality that seemed inaccessible to imperialism and beyond its control. [...And] He keeps drawing attention to how ideas and values are constructed (and deconstructed) through dislocations in the narrator’s language.” pp. 28-9
- That is, *he is still worth reading, because his novella journals, from the point of view of the real eye-witness, the violence and evil and absurdity and waste and insincerity of the imperialist agenda. His novella uses language to break down the supposed ‘rationality’ of European Civilization and Progress, to show that it was built on changing and subjective ideas and values.*

WHAT ARE THE LIMITS?

- The limits of Conrad's capacity to use narrative to expose imperialist violence and insincerity:
 - Conrad and Marlow are unable to get "outside the world-conquering attitudes" so the aesthetic of the book remains essentially imperialist. pg. 24
- That is, *Conrad does not turn the others' noise into voices. He still only allows Europeans to speak and so he doesn't allow himself or his narrator to conceive of the world outside the imperialist closed-circuit system.*

THE END OF HEART OF DARKNESS

HARLEQUIN

Who is he, literally?

What could he represent, symbolically or allegorically?



KURTZ

1. What is he like?
2. Is he like you expected? Why, why not?
3. Like everything in this book there is an enigma, an incongruence at the center of Kurtz, what is it?
4. What do you think Marlow is hoping to find? Does he find it? If not, what does he find?

KURTZ

1. Who is Kurtz, literally?
2. Who/what is Kurtz, allegorically?

AN ATMOSPHERIC CHANGE

- “I seemed at one bound to have been transported into some lightless region of subtle horrors, where pure, uncomplicated savagery was a positive relief, being something that had a right to exist—obviously—in the sunshine.” 48
- Marlow is talking to the manager and thinks to himself: “It seemed to me I had never breathed an atmosphere so vile, and I turned mentally to Kurtz for relief—positively for relief.” 52
- “I felt an intolerable weight oppressing my breast, the smell of the damp earth, the unseen presence of victorious corruption, the darkness of an impenetrable night.” 52
- “His was an impenetrable darkness. I looked at him as you peer down at a man who is lying at the bottom of a precipice where the sun never shines.” 58

PHANTOMS, SHADOWS, SHADES

- p. 41: “The shade of Mr Kurtz”
- p. 50: “This shadow [Kurtz] looked satiated and calm.”
- p. 54: I was anxious to deal with this shadow myself alone—and to this day I don't know why I was so jealous of sharing with any one the peculiar blackness of that experience.”
- pp. 55: “This clearly was not a case for fisticuffs, even apart from the very natural aversion I had to beat that Shadow—this wandering and tormented thing. 'You will be lost,' I said—'utterly lost.'”
- p. 57: “The shade of the original Kurtz”
- p. 61: “He lived then before me; he lived as much as he had ever lived—a shadow insatiable of splendid appearances, of frightful realities; a shadow darker than the shadow of the night, and draped nobly in the folds of a gorgeous eloquence.”

A TRANSITION:

FROM THE PHYSICAL CONGO TO A TRULY 'UNWORLDLY' PLACE

- p. 31: “Fancy a man lugging with him a book of that description into this nowhere and studying it.”
- p. 56: “Sometimes he [Kurtz] was contemptibly childish. He desired to have kings meet him at railway-stations on his return from some ghastly Nowhere, where he intended to accomplish great things.”
- p. 56: “they shouted periodically together strings of amazing words that resembled no sounds of human language, and the deep murmurs of the crowd, interrupted suddenly, were like the responses of some **satanic litany**.”

THE MOMENT OF TRANSITION

- p. 33: “The rest of the world was nowhere, as far as our eyes and ears were concerned. Just nowhere. Gone, disappeared; swept off without leaving a whisper or a shadow behind.”

RETURN TO EUROPE

- p. 64: “I shall see this eloquent phantom as long as I live, and I shall see her, too, a tragic and familiar Shade, resembling in this gesture another one, tragic also, and bedecked with powerless charms, stretching bare brown arms over the glitter of the infernal stream, the stream of darkness.”

KURTZ AS ALLEGORY

- p. 55: “And, don't you see, the terror of the position was not in being knocked on the head—though I had a very lively sense of that danger, too—but in this, that I had to deal with a being to whom I could not appeal in the name of anything high or low. I had, even like the [Africans], to invoke him—himself—his own exalted and incredible degradation. There was nothing either above or below him, and I knew it. He had kicked himself loose of the earth. Confound the man! he had kicked the very earth to pieces.”

NIETZSCHE, 1882

- “God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. [...] What sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us?”

CHINUA ACHEBE

1930-2013



A WELL-CONSTRUCTED ARGUMENT

- Introduction
- A thesis
- What in this thesis is new and/or important
 - That is, what was the old perspective and why is it wrong/incomplete?
- The proof of this thesis
- Possible criticisms of this thesis and the author's responses to those possible criticisms
- Why this new insight is important
 - Repercussions in the field
 - Or an extension of the application of this insight (how is it pertinent or useful in general?)
- Conclusion/s

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