

ACTION NOTES

PLANNING NOTES

Sam

Inner Station

HK

over (Marlow's) learning about Kurtz
the woman

He's getting back into civilization - almost as disconnected
from reality as the jungle -

Sees the ~~same~~ superficial greed in the city -

JS

Could K have survived in "civilization"?

HK

POV - why Marlow as a narrator? why not 3rd
person?

JS

Kurtz feeling not bound by laws

[Does Kurtz have a conscience?] Is he
extraordinary?

"Horror, the horror" = ? the potential for evil

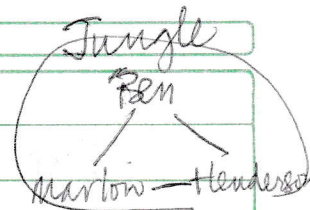
How do we respond to K? why?

Sam

uncivilized version of a great man?

JS

don't dislike him that much because we don't really
spend time w/ him.



voice
Journey
for
Marlow

(C+P)

TIME SCHEDULE

SUNDAY		MONDAY		TUESDAY		WEDNESDAY		THURSDAY		FRIDAY		SATURDAY	
MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE	MONTH	DATE

Setting

NG / Thorne-Lyman

PREPARED BY

DATE

3-27

3-28

ACTION NOTES

PLANNING NOTES

Ravatt

McNairy

Stannis

Ravatt

Sam
Raywalker

JS

Stannis

JS

Kurt

HK

- 1 Could it be moved?
 - 2 ^{from} ~~from~~ mention > could be anywhere ("Apocalypse Now")
 - 3 Leaves jungle to imagination - no specific description
 - 4 Tone = threatening
 - 5 Parallel w/ travel into his own soul
 - 6 Time
 - 7 white man's burden (still alive) ^{Carlson}
 - 8 Tone reflective, dark, eerie, mysterious, + Marlow
 - 9 sarcastic - parodying what happens to the people
 - 10 "head sizes" "pilgrims" "steam whistle"
 - 11 Frame
 - 12 ~~get~~ get Marlow's feelings into it more - seems a long story to tell others
 - 13
 - 14 first person more powerful, direct
 - 15 ~~why~~ (why does he have an audience other than the reader?)
 - 16
 - 17 Allows Marlow to digress, back up
 - 18 adds an "informality" to the situation.
 - 19
 - 20
 - 21
 - 22
 - 23 STRUCTURE & PACE
 - 24 Sudhakav - Kean
 - 25
 - 26
 - 27
 - 28
 - 29
 - 30
 - 31
 - 32
 - 33
- White man's burden -
- Carlson white going in & becoming savages - The reversal
- Henderson - different approach to the continent,
- Henderson going in looking for something -
- 2 beliefs:
- Marlow vs Kurtz
- M. puts down K. for trying to become a god -

21 April 94

Heart of Darkness

Symbol

par. 1

Colors

white - black good + evil

white for souls of blacks

black for souls of white men

Black - foreshadowing

oil painting

wool of women knitting

Maps

blank spaces -

Ivory

Jungle - man's true savagery

truth + reality - strips away

Jungle vs. England

no freedom in Eng - civilization's laws

In the jungle you make your own rules.

Survival of the fittest

London - gloom - vs forest that is open ?

Time + the river - river = eternity

Kurtz - symbol / mirror / shadow of Marlowe

Graves

Charlotte Painting of blindfolded woman - ironic

Chris Kurtz - mentions of justice

Per. 2

Rivers

Grind/maze - mystery + adventure

Beginnings of Britain

Correlation at end of novel - ancient Brits = natives

Storm, gloom, river used to conquer
Bruxelles - white sepulchre (New Test.)
Company in Brux. rotten inside

Steamboat

Swiftest boat but can't cope w/ jungle = men
savagery of world -

Inner Station as an unattainable goal,
whole novel as journey to inner station

Ships lost in Africa (blind, treacherous)

Ivory - greed + what men will do to get it.

deserted villages white man's wake - ?

white / darkness (post-war)

light of civilization vs heart of darkness
Story begins at sunset

Characters as symbols

Into the Light from the Heart of Darkness

One Man's Mission to Expose Brutal Slavery in Africa Inspired the Modern Idea of Human Rights

By ADAM HOCHSCHILD

SAN FRANCISCO--Fifty years ago this week, the U.N. General Assembly ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As with most statements of principle, its lofty ideals far surpassed the morals of its signers, who included assorted Latin American dictatorships and European colonial powers. Yet, the declaration was a milestone, and it has become a benchmark that many countries, including newly democratic South Africa, have looked to in writing their constitutions.

Before the declaration, governments made all sorts of similarly noble proclamations, though usually the human rights involved turned out not to apply to women, slaves and the colonized. But gradually these exceptions were challenged by great popular movements: against slavery, for women's suffrage, for Indian independence. The implication of all of them was that human rights were universal; there can be no exceptions.

It is surprising to realize how recent this notion of universality is. Even many of the British and American abolitionists who fought slavery in the 19th century were outraged at the idea that women wanted to attend the meetings of abolitionist organizations. John Stuart Mill, the great theorist of human liberty, felt that autocracy was a perfectly fine mode of government when dealing with "barbarians." Almost everyone in Europe felt that any European country had the right to seize colonial territory around the world, regardless of the wishes of the people who lived there.

Curiously, we have almost completely forgotten one of the most important campaigns that broadened our notion of human rights: the Congo reform movement. At the beginning of this century, it was the most vocal, best-organized human-rights movement in the world, active for nearly a decade in both the United States and Europe. In the long stretch of time between the abolitionists of the early- and mid-19th century and the worldwide pressure on South Africa to end apartheid of the 1970s and '80s, the Congo campaign was the only human-rights movement to operate on a truly international stage.

Furthermore, this movement was crucial in establishing the template for the way organizations

such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch operate today. This method includes the careful gathering and sifting of evidence; reliance on sworn testimony by eyewitnesses; the use of photographs and physical evidence to prove atrocities; and the faith that such methods of truth-telling can move large numbers of people to demand action.

The European scramble for Africa was a brutal business, and the bloodiest part was the seizure of the Congo. Between 1880 and 1920, its population was slashed in half, roughly from 20 million to 10 million people, according to estimates. For most of this period, the territory was the personal possession of King Leopold II of Belgium, making it the world's only privately owned colony.

The invention of inflatable tires for bicycles and cars ignited a world rubber boom in the 1890s, and the Congo's rain forest was extremely rich in wild rubber. To gather it, the king's large private army rampaged from village to village, holding women hostage to force the men to go deep into the forest, for days or weeks at a time, to gather high monthly quotas of rubber. Villagers who didn't meet quotas were slaughtered en masse. With most adults turned into forced laborers or hostages, there were few people to hunt, fish or raise crops, and famines raged. To avoid forced labor, hundreds of thousands fled to remote areas. Tens of thousands more were killed when the army suppressed rebellions. Among the traumatized, half-starving population, disease killed millions more.

For a time, the outside world knew little about what was happening in the Congo. One remarkable man changed this. Edmund Dene Morel was in his mid-20s, a junior official of a British shipping line that had the monopoly on cargo traffic to and from the Congo. Every few weeks, his company sent him to the Belgian port of Antwerp to supervise the loading and unloading of ships on the Congo run. Morel noticed that vessels arrived laden with enormously valuable cargoes of ivory and rubber but returned to Africa carrying no trading goods. Instead, they ferried mainly soldiers, firearms and ammunition. With horror, he realized there could be

only one possible source of all this rubber and ivory: forced labor, on a massive scale. He was right.

Morel quit his job and, within a few years, became the greatest British investigative journalist of his time. A man of torrential energy, he devoted a decade of 16-hour days to putting the story of Congo rubber slavery on the world's front pages. A file of more than 4,000 clippings about Congo atrocities from U.S., British and European newspapers, beginning in 1902, testifies to Morel's passion.

Morel was also a masterful organizer. In the United States, he convinced Mark Twain and Booker T. Washington to join the lecture circuit to denounce King Leopold's regime. In England, he made a speaking tour with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Urged on by Morel, both Twain and Doyle wrote books on the subject. On the continent, men and women wept on seeing Morel's slide show of Congo horrors. Missionaries joined forces with Morel's Congo Reform Assn. and showed audiences whips and chains they had brought back from the colony.

Everyone from the archbishop of Canterbury to U.S. university presidents joined the crusade. Between 1904 and 1913, the brutalities in the Congo were denounced at more than 1,000 mass meetings in the United States and Europe. Forced labor in the Congo was the subject of everything from hymns to children's books. Protests were held as far away as Australia. In Italy, two men fought a duel over the issue.

Like most great human-rights agitators, the Congo reformers, as they were called, did not quickly accomplish their aims. They saved some lives, but the forced-labor system remained as long as the price of rubber was high and changed only slowly after that. Nonetheless, it was the first time that millions of people in the United States and Europe concerned themselves with the fate of people in Africa. In an age that romanticized colonial warfare, it was the first time many Americans and Europeans realized that colonialism was founded on the systematic theft of African land, labor and lives.

The Congo reform movement also transformed the people who took part in it. Morel had begun his working life as a thoroughly conventional businessman. Brought face to face with evidence of slave labor, he grew and changed. In 1909, he correctly predicted the horrendous consequences that would flow from Britain's establishing the newly independent Union of South Africa, with an all-white legislature. Morel saw enough imperial machinations in Africa to become a skeptic when World War I began. He was one of the few people on either side who said openly that the war was not

worth millions of lives. The British government censored his writing, tapped his phone and sent him to prison for six months of hard labor. Unbowed, he remained a leader of the British antiwar movement and was elected to Parliament after the war.

The movement also transformed the life of Roger Casement, an Irishman who had become British consul in the Congo in 1900. A few years later, the British government asked Casement to investigate the atrocity charges. Casement traveled deep into the rain forest and produced a detailed, well-documented report that added much fuel to the fire. On his journey, he began thinking: Ireland is also a colony. Ten years later, he resigned from the British consular service and threw himself into the cause of Irish independence.

In 1916, his former employers, the British government, ordered him hanged. Casement viewed the struggle for freedom in his native Ireland as having something in common with the struggle for freedom in Africa. He expressed this view in a ringing speech during the trial at which he was sentenced to death. The speech had a profound effect on the young Jawaharlal Nehru, who went on to lead the drive for Indian independence. It was one of many ways that the effects of the Congo reform movement rippled through the century.

If today you go looking for the photographic slides that Morel and his fellow Congo reformers used to such effect, you can find them. They are in two dusty wooden boxes on the shelves of a London organization called Anti-Slavery International, founded in 1839 as the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. It is the oldest human-rights organization on Earth. In the same room where the slides are stored, young men and women pack boxes with posters, pamphlets and videocassettes about child labor in South Asia, women in household slavery in the Middle East, child prostitution in Thailand, genital mutilation of women in Africa and the exploitation of immigrant domestic servants in England.

At the time of the Congo reform movement 100 years ago, the idea of full human rights--social, political and economic--was profoundly threatening to most countries. It still is.

Adam Hochschild Is the Author of "King Leopold's Ghost: a Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa."

were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, an impenetrable forest. The air was warm, thick, heavy, sluggish. There was no joy in the brilliance of sunshine. The long stretches of the waterway ran on, deserted, into the gloom of overshadowed distances. On silvery sandbanks hippos and alligators sunned themselves side by side.

The insistence on darkness, finally, and quite apart from ethical or mythical overtone, seems a right one for this extremely personal statement. There is a darkness of passivity, paralysis, immobilization; it is from the state of entranced languor rather than from the monstrous desires that the double Kurtz, this shadow, must be saved. In Freudian theory, we are told, such preoccupation may indicate fear of the feminine and passive. But may it not also be connected, through one of the spirit's multiple disguises, with a radical fear of death, that other darkness? "I had turned to the wilderness really, not to Mr. Kurtz who, I was ready to admit, was as good as buried. And for a moment it seemed to me as if I also were buried in a vast grave full of unspeakable secrets. 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."

It would be folly to try to limit the menace of vegetation in the restless life of Conradian image and symbol. But the passage reminds us again of the story's reflexive references, and its images of deathly immobilization in grass. Most striking are the black shadows dying in the greenish gloom of the grove at the first station. But grass sprouts between the stones of the European city, a "whited sepulchre," and on the same page Marlow anticipates coming upon the remains of his predecessor: "the grass growing through his ribs was tall enough to hide his bones." The critical meeting with Kurtz occurs on a trail through the grass. Is there not perhaps an intense horror behind the casualness with which Marlow reports his discoveries, say of the Negro with the bullet in his forehead? Or: "Now and then a carrier dead in harness, at rest in the long grass near the path, with an empty water-gourd and his long staff lying by his side."

All this, one must acknowledge, does not make up an ordinary light travelogue. There is no little irony in the letter of November 9, 1891, Conrad received from his guardian after returning from the Congo, and while physically disabled and seriously depressed: "I am sure that with your melancholy temperament you ought to avoid all meditations which lead to pessimistic conclusions. I advise you to lead a more active life than ever and to cultivate cheerful habits."⁴ Uneven in language on certain pages, and lacking "The Secret Sharer" 's economy, "Heart of Darkness" nevertheless remains one of the great dark meditations in literature, and one of the purest expressions of a melancholy temperament.

4. *Life and Letters* 1.148.

CHINUA ACHEBE

An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*†

In the fall of 1974 I was walking one day from the English Department at the University of Massachusetts to a parking lot. It was a fine autumn morning such as encouraged friendliness to passing strangers. Brisk youngsters were hurrying in all directions, many of them obviously freshmen in their first flush of enthusiasm. An older man going the same way as I turned and remarked to me how very young they came these days. I agreed. Then he asked me if I was a student too. I said no, I was a teacher. What did I teach? African literature. Now that was funny, he said, because he knew a fellow who taught the same thing, or perhaps it was African *history*, in a certain Community College not far from here. It always surprised him, he went on to say, because he never had thought of Africa as having that kind of stuff, you know. By this time I was walking much faster. "Oh well," I heard him say finally, behind me: "I guess I have to take your course to find out."

A few weeks later I received two very touching letters from high school children in Yonkers, New York, who—bless their teacher—had just read *Things Fall Apart*. One of them was particularly happy to learn about the customs and superstitions of an African tribe.

I propose to draw from these rather trivial encounters rather heavy conclusions which at first sight might seem somewhat out of proportion to them. But only, I hope, at first sight.

The young fellow from Yonkers, perhaps partly on account of his age but I believe also for much deeper and more serious reasons, is obviously unaware that the life of his own tribesmen in Yonkers, New York, is full of odd customs and superstitions and, like everybody else in his culture, imagines that he needs a trip to Africa to encounter those things.

The other person being fully my own age could not be excused on the grounds of his years. Ignorance might be a more likely reason; but here again I believe that something more willful than a mere lack of information was at work. For did not that erudite British historian and Regius Professor at Oxford, Hugh Trevor Roper, also pronounce that African history did not exist?

If there is something in these utterances more than youthful inexperience, more than a lack of factual knowledge, what is it? Quite simply it is the desire—one might indeed say the need—in Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote

†An amended version (1987) of the second Chancellor's Lecture at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, February 18, 1975; later published in *The Massachusetts Review*, 18 (1977): 782-94.

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and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest.

This need is not new; which should relieve us all of considerable responsibility and perhaps make us even willing to look at this phenomenon dispassionately. I have neither the wish nor the competence to embark on the exercise with the tools of the social and biological sciences but more simply in the manner of a novelist responding to one famous book of European fiction: Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which better than any other work that I know displays that Western desire and need which I have just referred to. Of course there are whole libraries of books devoted to the same purpose but most of them are so obvious and so crude that few people worry about them today. Conrad, on the other hand, is undoubtedly one of the great stylists of modern fiction and a good story-teller into the bargain. His contribution therefore falls automatically into a different class—permanent literature—read and taught and constantly evaluated by serious academics. *Heart of Darkness* is indeed so secure today that a leading Conrad scholar has numbered it "among the half-dozen greatest short novels in the English language."¹ I will return to this critical opinion in due course because it may seriously modify my earlier suppositions about who may or may not be guilty in some of the matters I will now raise.

Heart of Darkness projects the image of Africa as "the other world," the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality. The book opens on the River Thames, tranquil, resting, peacefully "at the decline of day after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its banks." But the actual story will take place on the River Congo, the very antithesis of the Thames. The River Congo is quite decidedly not a River Emeritus. It has rendered no service and enjoys no old-age pension. We are told that "Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world."

Is Conrad saying then that these two rivers are very different, one good, the other bad? Yes, but that is not the real point. It is not the differentness that worries Conrad but the lurking hint of kinship, of common ancestry. For the Thames too "has been one of the dark places of the earth." It conquered its darkness, of course, and is now in daylight and at peace. But if it were to visit its primordial relative, the Congo, it would run the terrible risk of hearing grotesque echoes of its own forgotten darkness, and falling victim to an avenging recrudescence of the mindless frenzy of the first beginnings.

These suggestive echoes comprise Conrad's famed evocation of the African atmosphere in *Heart of Darkness*. In the final consideration his method amounts to no more than a steady, ponderous, fake-ritualistic repetition of two antithetical sentences, one about silence and the other about frenzy. We can inspect samples of this on pages 36 and 37 of the

present edition: a) *It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention* and b) *The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy*. Of course there is a judicious change of adjective from time to time, so that instead of *inscrutable*, for example, you might have *unspeakable*, even plain *mysterious*, etc., etc.

The eagle-eyed English critic F. R. Leavis drew attention long ago to Conrad's "adjectival insistence upon inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery." That insistence must not be dismissed lightly, as many Conrad critics have tended to do, as a mere stylistic flaw; for it raises serious questions of artistic good faith. When a writer while pretending to record scenes, incidents and their impact is in reality engaged in inducing hypnotic stupor in his readers through a bombardment of emotive words and other forms of trickery much more has to be at stake than stylistic felicity. Generally normal readers are well armed to detect and resist such underhand activity. But Conrad chose his subject well—one which was guaranteed not to put him in conflict with the psychological pre-disposition of his readers or raise the need for him to contend with their resistance. He chose the role of purveyor of comforting myths.

The most interesting and revealing passages in *Heart of Darkness* are, however, about people. I must crave the indulgence of my reader to quote almost a whole page from about the middle of the story when representatives of Europe in a steamer going down the Congo encounter the denizens of Africa.

We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil. But suddenly as we struggled round a bend there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us—who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember, because we were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign—and no memories.

The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there—there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. 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

1. Albert J. Guerard, *Introduction to Heart of Darkness* (N.Y.: New American Library, 1950) 9.

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. Yes, it was ugly enough, but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you—you so remote from the night of first ages—could comprehend.

Herein lies the meaning of *Heart of Darkness* and the fascination it holds over the Western mind: "What thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours. . . . Ugly."

Having shown us Africa in the mass, Conrad then zeros in, half a page later, on a specific example, giving us one of his rare descriptions of an African who is not just limbs or rolling eyes:

And between whiles I had to look after the savage who was fireman. He was an improved specimen; he could fire up a vertical boiler. He was there below me and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat walking on his hind legs. A few months of training had done for that really fine chap. He squinted at the steam-gauge and at the water-gauge with an evident effort of intrepidity—and he had filed his teeth too, the poor devil, and the wool of his pate shaved into queer patterns, and three ornamental scars on each of his cheeks. He ought to have been clapping his hands and stamping his feet on the bank, instead of which he was hard at work, a thrall to strange witchcraft, full of improving knowledge.

As everybody knows, Conrad is a romantic on the side. He might not exactly admire savages clapping their hands and stamping their feet but they have at least the merit of being in their place, unlike this dog in a parody of breeches. For Conrad things being in their place is of the utmost importance.

"Fine fellows—cannibals—in their place," he tells us pointedly. Tragedy begins when things leave their accustomed place, like Europe leaving its safe stronghold between the policeman and the baker to take a peep into the heart of darkness.

Before the story takes us into the Congo basin proper we are given this nice little vignette as an example of things in their place:

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. They wanted no excuse for being there. They were a great comfort to look at.

Towards the end of the story Conrad lavishes a whole page quite unexpectedly on an African woman who has obviously been some kind of mistress to Mr. Kurtz and now presides (if I may be permitted a little liberty) like a formidable mystery over the inexorable imminence of his departure:

She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent. . . . She stood looking at us without a stir and like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose.

This Amazon is drawn in considerable detail, albeit of a predictable nature, for two reasons. First, she is in her place and so can win Conrad's special brand of approval and second, she fulfills a structural requirement of the story: a savage counterpart to the refined, European woman who will step forth to end the story:

She came forward all in black with a pale head, floating toward me in the dusk. She was in mourning. . . . She took both my hands in hers and murmured, "I had heard you were coming." . . . She had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering.

The difference in the attitude of the novelist to these two women is conveyed in too many direct and subtle ways to need elaboration. But perhaps the most significant difference is the one implied in the author's bestowal of human expression to the one and the withholding of it from the other. It is clearly not part of Conrad's purpose to confer language on the "rudimentary souls" of Africa. In place of speech they made "a violent babble of uncouth sounds." They "exchanged short grunting phrases" even among themselves. But most of the time they were too busy with their frenzy. There are two occasions in the book, however, when Conrad departs somewhat from his practice and confers speech, even English speech, on the savages. The first occurs when cannibalism gets the better of them:

"Catch 'im," he snapped with a bloodshot widening of his eyes and a flash of sharp teeth—"catch 'im. Give 'im to us." "To you, eh?" I asked; "what would you do with them?" "Eat 'im!" he said curtly. . . .

The other occasion was the famous announcement:

"Mistah Kurtz—he dead."

At first sight these instances might be mistaken for unexpected acts of generosity from Conrad. In reality they constitute some of his best assaults. In the case of the cannibals the incomprehensible grunts that had thus far served them for speech suddenly proved inadequate for Conrad's purpose of letting the European glimpse the unspeakable craving in their

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hearts. Weighing the necessity for consistency in the portrayal of the dumb brutes against the sensational advantages of securing their conviction by clear, unambiguous evidence issuing out of their own mouth Conrad chose the latter. As for the announcement of Mr. Kurtz's death by the "insolent black head in the doorway" what better or more appropriate *finis* could be written to the horror story of that wayward child of civilization who willfully had given his soul to the powers of darkness and "taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land" than the proclamation of his physical death by the forces he had joined?

It might be contended, of course, that the attitude to the African in *Heart of Darkness* is not Conrad's but that of his fictional narrator, Marlow, and that far from endorsing it Conrad might indeed be holding it up to irony and criticism. Certainly Conrad appears to go to considerable pains to set up layers of insulation between himself and the moral universe of his history. He has, for example, a narrator behind a narrator. The primary narrator is Marlow but his account is given to us through the filter of a second, shadowy person. But if Conrad's intention is to draw a *cordon sanitaire* between himself and the moral and psychological malaise of his narrator his care seems to me totally wasted because he neglects to hint however subtly or tentatively at an alternative frame of reference by which we may judge the actions and opinions of his characters. It would not have been beyond Conrad's power to make that provision if he had thought it necessary. Marlow seems to me to enjoy Conrad's complete confidence—a feeling reinforced by the close similarities between their two careers.

Marlow comes through to us not only as a witness of truth, but one holding those advanced and humane views appropriate to the English liberal tradition which required all Englishmen of decency to be deeply shocked by atrocities in Bulgaria or the Congo of King Leopold of the Belgians or wherever.

Thus Marlow is able to toss out such bleeding-heart sentiments as these:

They were dying slowly—it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest.

The kind of liberalism espoused here by Marlow/Conrad touched all the best minds of the age in England, Europe and America. It took different forms in the minds of different people but almost always managed to sidestep the ultimate question of equality between white people and black people. That extraordinary missionary, Albert Schweitzer, who sacrificed brilliant careers in music and theology in Europe for a life of service to Africans in much the same area as Conrad writes about, epit-

omizes the ambivalence. In a comment which has often been quoted Schweitzer says: "The African is indeed my brother but my junior brother." And so he proceeded to build a hospital appropriate to the needs of junior brothers with standards of hygiene reminiscent of medical practice in the days before the germ theory of disease came into being. Naturally he became a sensation in Europe and America. Pilgrims flocked, and I believe still flock even after he has passed on, to witness the prodigious miracle in Lamberene, on the edge of the primeval forest.

Conrad's liberalism would not take him quite as far as Schweitzer's, though. He would not use the word *brother* however qualified; the farthest he would go was kinship. When Marlow's African helmsman falls down with a spear in his heart he gives his white master one final disquieting look.

And the intimate profundity of that look he gave me when he received his hurt remains to this day in my memory—like a claim of distant kinship affirmed in a supreme moment.

It is important to note that Conrad, careful as ever with his words, is concerned not so much about *distant kinship* as about someone *laying a claim* on it. The black man lays a claim on the white man which is well-nigh intolerable. It is the laying of this claim which frightens and at the same time fascinates Conrad, "... the thought of their humanity—like yours. . . . Ugly."

The point of my observations should be quite clear by now, namely that Joseph Conrad was a thoroughgoing racist. That this simple truth is glossed over in criticisms of his work is due to the fact that white racism against Africa is such a normal way of thinking that its manifestations go completely unremarked. Students of *Heart of Darkness* will often tell you that Conrad is concerned not so much with Africa as with the deterioration of one European mind caused by solitude and sickness. They will point out to you that Conrad is, if anything, less charitable to the Europeans in the story than he is to the natives, that the point of the story is to ridicule Europe's civilizing mission in Africa. A Conrad student informed me in Scotland that Africa is merely a setting for the disintegration of the mind of Mr. Kurtz.

Which is partly the point. Africa as setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human factor. Africa as a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril. Can nobody see the preposterous and perverse arrogance in thus reducing Africa to the role of props for the break-up of one petty European mind? But that is not even the point. The real question is the dehumanization of Africa and Africans which this age-long attitude has fostered and continues to foster in the world. And the question is whether a novel which celebrates this dehumanization, which depersonalizes a portion of the human race, can be called a great work of art. My answer is: No, it cannot. I do not doubt Conrad's great talents. Even *Heart of Darkness* has its memorably good passages and moments:

The reaches opened before us and closed behind, as if the forest had stepped leisurely across the water to bar the way for our return.

Its exploration of the minds of the European characters is often penetrating and full of insight. But all that has been more than fully discussed in the last fifty years. His obvious racism has, however, not been addressed. And it is high time it was!

Conrad was born in 1857, the very year in which the first Anglican missionaries were arriving among my own people in Nigeria. It was certainly not his fault that he lived his life at a time when the reputation of the black man was at a particularly low level. But even after due allowances have been made for all the influences of contemporary prejudice on his sensibility there remains still in Conrad's attitude a residue of antipathy to black people which his peculiar psychology alone can explain. His own account of his first encounter with a black man is very revealing:

A certain enormous buck nigger encountered in Haiti fixed my conception of blind, furious, unreasoning rage, as manifested in the human animal to the end of my days. Of the nigger I used to dream for years afterwards.²

Certainly Conrad had a problem with niggers. His inordinate love of that word itself should be of interest to psychoanalysts. Sometimes his fixation on blackness is equally interesting as when he gives us this brief description:

A black figure stood up, strode on long black legs, waving long black arms. . . .

as though we might expect a black figure striding along on black legs to wave white arms! But so unrelenting is Conrad's obsession.

As a matter of interest Conrad gives us in *A Personal Record* what amounts to a companion piece to the buck nigger of Haiti. At the age of sixteen Conrad encountered his first Englishman in Europe. He calls him "my unforgettable Englishman" and describes him in the following manner:

"(his) calves exposed to the public gaze . . . dazzled the beholder by the splendor of their marble-like condition and their rich tone of young ivory. . . . The light of a headlong, exalted satisfaction with the world of men . . . illumined his face . . . and triumphant eyes. In passing he cast a glance of kindly curiosity and a friendly gleam of big, sound, shiny teeth . . . his white calves twinkled sturdily."³

2. Jonah Raskin, *The Mythology of Imperialism* (N.Y.: Random House, 1971) 143.

3. Bernard C. Meyer, M.D., *Joseph Conrad: A*

Psychoanalytic Biography (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1967) 30.

Irrational love and irrational hate jostling together in the heart of that talented, tormented man. But whereas irrational love may at worst engender foolish acts of indiscretion, irrational hate can endanger the life of the community. Naturally Conrad is a dream for psychoanalytic critics. Perhaps the most detailed study of him in this direction is by Bernard C. Meyer, M.D. In his lengthy book Dr. Meyer follows every conceivable lead (and sometimes inconceivable ones) to explain Conrad. As an example he gives us long disquisitions on the significance of hair and hair-cutting in Conrad. And yet not even one word is spared for his attitude to black people. Not even the discussion of Conrad's antisemitism was enough to spark off in Dr. Meyer's mind those other dark and explosive thoughts. Which only leads one to surmise that Western psychoanalysts must regard the kind of racism displayed by Conrad as absolutely normal despite the profoundly important work done by Frantz Fanon in the psychiatric hospitals of French Algeria.

Whatever Conrad's problems were, you might say he is now safely dead. Quite true. Unfortunately his heart of darkness plagues us still. Which is why an offensive and deplorable book can be described by a serious scholar as "among the half dozen greatest short novels in the English language." And why it is today perhaps the most commonly prescribed novel in twentieth-century literature courses in English Departments of American universities.

There are two probable grounds on which what I have said so far may be contested. The first is that it is no concern of fiction to please people about whom it is written. I will go along with that. But I am not talking about pleasing people. I am talking about a book which parades in the most vulgar fashion prejudices and insults from which a section of mankind has suffered untold agonies and atrocities in the past and continues to do so in many ways and many places today. I am talking about a story in which the very humanity of black people is called in question.

Secondly, I may be challenged on the grounds of actuality. Conrad, after all, did sail down the Congo in 1890 when my own father was still a babe in arms. How could I stand up more than fifty years after his death and purport to contradict him? My answer is that as a sensible man I will not accept just any traveller's tales solely on the grounds that I have not made the journey myself. I will not trust the evidence even of a man's very eyes when I suspect them to be as jaundiced as Conrad's. And we also happen to know that Conrad was, in the words of his biographer, Bernard C. Meyer, "notoriously inaccurate in the rendering of his own history."⁴

But more important by far is the abundant testimony about Conrad's savages which we could gather if we were so inclined from other sources and which might lead us to think that these people must have had other occupations besides merging into the evil forest or materializing out of

4. Meyer, p. 30.

it simply to plague Marlow and his dispirited band. For as it happened, soon after Conrad had written his book an event of far greater consequence was taking place in the art world of Europe. This is how Frank Willett, a British art historian, describes it:

Gauguin had gone to Tahiti, the most extravagant individual act of turning to a non-European culture in the decades immediately before and after 1900, when European artists were avid for new artistic experiences, but it was only about 1904-5 that African art began to make its distinctive impact. One piece is still identifiable; it is a mask that had been given to Maurice Vlaminck in 1905. He records that Derain was 'speechless' and 'stunned' when he saw it, bought it from Vlaminck and in turn showed it to Picasso and Matisse, who were also greatly affected by it. Ambroise Vollard then borrowed it and had it cast in bronze. . . . The revolution of twentieth century art was under way!⁵

The mask in question was made by other savages living just north of Conrad's River Congo. They have a name too: the Fang people, and are without a doubt among the world's greatest masters of the sculptured form. The event Frank Willett is referring to marked the beginning of cubism and the infusion of new life into European art, which had run completely out of strength.

The point of all this is to suggest that Conrad's picture of the peoples of the Congo seems grossly inadequate even at the height of their subjection to the ravages of King Leopold's International Association for the Civilization of Central Africa.

Travellers with closed minds can tell us little except about themselves. But even those not blinkered, like Conrad with xenophobia, can be astonishing blind. Let me digress a little here. One of the greatest and most intrepid travellers of all time, Marco Polo, journeyed to the Far East from the Mediterranean in the thirteenth century and spent twenty years in the court of Kublai Khan in China. On his return to Venice he set down in his book entitled *Description of the World* his impressions of the peoples and places and customs he had seen. But there were at least two extraordinary omissions in his account. He said nothing about the art of printing, unknown as yet in Europe but in full flower in China. He either did not notice it at all or if he did, failed to see what use Europe could possibly have for it. Whatever the reason, Europe had to wait another hundred years for Gutenberg. But even more spectacular was Marco Polo's omission of any reference to the Great Wall of China nearly 4,000 miles long and already more than 1,000 years old at the time of his visit. Again, he may not have seen it; but the Great Wall of China is the only structure built by man which is visible from the moon!⁶ Indeed travellers can be blind.

5. Frank Willett, *African Art* (N.Y.: Praeger, 1971) 35-36.

6. For the omission of the Great Wall of China, I

am indebted to *The Journey of Marco Polo* as recreated by artist Michael Foreman, published by Pegasus Magazine, 1974.

As I said earlier Conrad did not originate the image of Africa which we find in his book. It was and is the dominant image of Africa in the Western imagination and Conrad merely brought the peculiar gifts of his own mind to bear on it. For reasons which can certainly use close psychological inquiry the West seems to suffer deep anxieties about the precariousness of its civilization and to have a need for constant reassurance by comparison with Africa. If Europe, advancing in civilization, could cast a backward glance periodically at Africa trapped in primordial barbarity it could say with faith and feeling: There go I but for the grace of God. Africa is to Europe as the picture is to Dorian Gray—a carrier onto whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate. Consequently Africa is something to be avoided just as the picture has to be hidden away to safeguard the man's precarious integrity. Keep away from Africa, or else! Mr. Kurtz of *Heart of Darkness* should have heeded that warning and the prowling horror in his heart would have kept its place, chained to its lair. But he foolishly exposed himself to the wild irresistible allure of the jungle and lo! the darkness found him out.

In my original conception of this essay I had thought to conclude it nicely on an appropriately positive note in which I would suggest from my privileged position in African and Western cultures some advantages the West might derive from Africa once it rid its mind of old prejudices and began to look at Africa not through a haze of distortions and cheap mystifications but quite simply as a continent of people—not angels, but not rudimentary souls either—just people, often highly gifted people and often strikingly successful in their enterprise with life and society. But as I thought more about the stereotype image, about its grip and pervasiveness, about the willful tenacity with which the West holds it to its heart; when I thought of the West's television and cinema and newspapers, about books read in its schools and out of school, of churches preaching to empty pews about the need to send help to the heathen in Africa, I realized that no easy optimism was possible. And there was, in any case, something totally wrong in offering bribes to the West in return for its good opinion of Africa. Ultimately the abandonment of unwholesome thoughts must be its own and only reward. Although I have used the word *willful* a few times here to characterize the West's view of Africa, it may well be that what is happening at this stage is more akin to reflex action than calculated malice. Which does not make the situation more but less hopeful.

The Christian Science Monitor, a paper more enlightened than most, once carried an interesting article written by its Education Editor on the serious psychological and learning problems faced by little children who speak one language at home and then go to school where something else is spoken. It was a wide-ranging article taking in Spanish-speaking children in America, the children of migrant Italian workers in Germany, the quadrilingual phenomenon in Malaysia, and so on. And all this

