

Digested Discourse in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

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1. Introduction

Recently we are witnessing a new page of the long history of invasion and migration into Europe. In and around Calais there is a cluster of refugee camps nicknamed the “jungle.” There originally stood a Red Cross reception centre called Sangatte near the Port of Calais in 1999.¹ It opened to accommodate illegal immigrants mainly from Sudan, Eritrea, and other African countries who were seeking a way to reach Britain across the Strait of Dover. After its closedown, migrant camps mushroomed in this area, which resulted in occasional conflicts between the dwellers of the camps and the local police as well as among the dwellers. The migrant encampment had already got its nickname by 2009,² but without the riots in July 2015 and the massive flow of immigrants and refugees arriving in Europe from Syria and other countries in 2015, it would not have received wider media coverage. Now the British across the Channel are observing the “jungle” as part of the new wave of threat that they think might disturb the legacy of empire.

Few literary works represent the anxiety, fear, or sometimes even hopes people in Europe have had towards those influxes of people and their influence better than Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the camps in the vicinity of Calais are called the jungle and feared about by local people who live on both sides of the Strait, just as Marlow felt fear (and became mesmerised, too) towards the cry from the jungle along the Congo river. Between the jungle of fin-de-siècle 1899, when the work was first published, and the new jungle emerging one hundred years later, we can see the common residue of the imperial mind that is still threatened by sheer, uncontrollable energy from outside Europe. The incidents surrounding the new jungle also remind us of the fact that “the discourse of resurgent empire proves that the nineteenth-century imperial encounter continues today to draw lines and defend barriers” (Said, 26). Such energy is symbolically represented as darkness in *Heart of Darkness*. Darkness is obsessively ubiquitous throughout this approximately-seventy-page novella. The darkness

¹ “Calais Mayor Threatens to Block Port If UK Fails to Help Deal with Migrants,” interview with Natacha Bouchart, *Guardian*, 3 September 2014, retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/sep/03/> <Accessed on September 15, 2015>

² “Calais Migrant Camps: Seventeen Years of Shanty Towns,” Channel 4, 30 July 2015, retrieved from <http://www.channel4.com/news/> <Accessed on September 3, 2015>

Conrad depicts it so rich and complex in meaning that it is nigh impossible for us to summarise it in a word. Therefore, suffice for now to say that it is primarily a symbol of savagery and every evil aspect of human greed that becomes most apparent in the “Dark Continent” of Africa. However, when the Thames is surrounded by the darkness of the night in the ending, we can see the darkness arrive from the dark continent across the sea and swallow the “enlightened” empire. By writing this way, Conrad ingeniously shows the indistinguishability between the abominable horror in the jungle of Africa and the human desire that exists in every corner of the European cities.

In this article I argue that *Heart of Darkness* can be understood as a grand metaphor of eating and that the novella describes a conflict between inside and outside or between Europe and Africa, and a consequent shift into boundary breaking. Using the very nature of eating, especially that of cannibalism, as a boundary-breaker, Conrad foregrounds both the ambivalence and contradiction of imperialism as well as its fascination and vulnerability. Not only is the work scattered with statements about eating and food, but also the whole novella is, in fact, a parable in which the Victorian ethics that Marlow holds as a citadel of civilisation in order to resist darkness is consequently swallowed up by it. To show this, I would particularly like to focus on the idea of cannibalism in the novella. Cannibalism is at first glance discussed by Marlow, who narrates his journey to Africa to his crew on the *Nellie* on the Thames, as a cultural marker that is remotest from civilisation and peculiar to indigenous people in Africa, and therefore as evidence of barbarianism. However, a close analysis reveals that his discussion of it gradually destabilises the distinction between the civilised and the uncivilised that it ought to represent.

2. Backgrounds

Cannibals or their practice of cannibalism have appeared in numerous writings, both fictional and non-fictional. Herodotus’ *Histories* in the fifth century BC is one of the earliest written accounts for cannibals, in which he referred to one of the tribes near Scythia called the Anthropophagi as “more savage than those of any other race”:

They neither observe justice, nor are governed, by any laws. They are nomads, and their dress is Scythian; but the language which they speak is peculiar to themselves. Unlike any other nation in these parts, they are cannibals. (Book 4, Chapter 106)

With some rare exceptions such as Michel de Montaigne’s essay “Of Cannibals” in the sixteenth century, in which he made a relatively “fair” comparison between an ethnic group in Brazil and

his contemporary Europeans, to call a group of people cannibals has always implied a demarcation between the civilised “us” and the savage “others.” As Peter Hulme puts it, cannibalism “is inseparable from considerations of difference and distinction” (2).

While this understanding of cannibalism as excluding is presented with a view to discussing the relationship between two groups, anthropologists, those of the latter half of the twentieth century in particular, also indicate an assimilative aspect of the act of cannibalism. They do so when they explain the cultural significance of cannibalism *within* an ethnic group that is said to practice such deeds. Scholars, for example Marshall Sahlins, insist that cannibalism is a deeply symbolic ritual by which the consumption of the consecrated victim, namely human flesh of their ancestors or enemies, “transmitted divine power to man” and that “one assimilates the animus of another group’s hostile power into one’s own” (Sandy, 6; 18). Cannibals, they argue, extend to act because it is believed that such acts function to take in someone else’s power, usually magical, and assimilate it as their own.

With the arrival of Walter Arens’ pioneering work on cannibalism, *The Man-Eating Myth*, in 1979, studies on cannibalism have mainly developed the idea of it as a border breaker between two groups. They suggest a postcolonial interpretation of cannibalism as annihilating the difference between the representing and the represented, subject and object: “The idea of incorporation,” as Maggie Kilgour states, dissolves the very division “it appears to produce” between inside and outside (*From Communion*, 4). One explanation extended from this argument is that “postcolonial counter-narratives will seek support from the language of [Freudian] psychoanalysis to argue that the figure of the cannibal is a projection of European fantasies” (Hulme, 9). The idea of cannibalism or the idea that colonial others should be cannibals purports to distinguish the west from the rest, but is in fact a reflection of the colonisers’ desire to deviate themselves from social norms in the west and indulge themselves in abnormality that they believe is only possible outside the west. In this sense, cannibalism is a typical example of Edward Said’s orientalism.

Despite the fact that *Heart of Darkness* is frequently referred to as a literary example of descriptions of cannibalism, the number of the critiques on this topic is by no means large. To my knowledge, there are only four precedent papers that feature on eating or cannibalism in Conrad’s fiction.³ The four papers do provide insightful ideas, but none of them takes the relationships among Africa, Europe, and darkness in this novella as a metaphor of eating or anthropophagy. Tony Tanner’s argument, for example, can be understood as the first attempt to deal with cannibalism in Conrad’s fiction intensively. His main focus is not on *Heart of*

³ Here I am not counting critical works such as those by Chinua Achebe and Brook Thomas, in whose works cannibalism in *Heart of Darkness* is mentioned only briefly.

Darkness but Conrad's short story "Falk", and his examination of *Heart of Darkness* is only a garnish to that of this short story. Tracy Collins contributes to the topic with lexicostatistics as he carefully counts the number of the food-related words including those relating to cannibalism in the work. Unfortunately he only concludes about this interesting "motif" that it shows "Marlow was sympathetic to the Africans" (153). Misako Miyagawa's discussion of cannibalism in *Heart of Darkness* is suggestive in the sense that it identifies cannibalism in Africa with cruel rules for survival that are also found ubiquitously in the European society. She discusses the connection between Marlow's trauma about cannibalism and an image of the devouring European society filled with human greed that he witnesses after his return from Africa. David Gill's examination of the historical and biographical contexts of cannibalism in Conrad's fiction is worthy of note. His objective is to pinpoint the reason for Conrad's obsession with cannibalistic themes in the novelist's biography and to apply Freudian psychoanalysis to his interpretation.

This article, on the other hand, attempts to show that discourse and ideology in *Heart of Darkness* can be construed with the metaphor of eating. The discourse and ideology familiar to Marlow are made visible through an analysis of his approach to cannibalism and their boundaries are infringed and transgressed, whose process can be understood in terms of food absorption. I am going to show how discourse and ideology play a significant role in the story – discourse in dual meanings: dialogue and colonial discourse, or Victorian ethics. In this novella we see the colonial discourse that separates civilised "us" from savage "others" lose its principle before the idea of cannibalism.⁴

3. Cannibalism and Marlow's response

In *Heart of Darkness* cannibals appear, but we should understand them as a representation of primitive Africa rather than a reality or Conrad's belief in their existence. Conrad depicts cannibals in this work of fiction, but there is no clear evidence that he did so from his own experience, even though quite a large portion of this work is said to be based either on his hands-on experiences or on his readings of reports, travelogues, and some other writings by his contemporaries such as H. M. Stanley.⁵ Instead, as Kazuhiro Yoshimoto indicates, it will be more productive if we focus on the point that in this novella cannibals function as an "important

⁴ To focus on dialogue is actually an effective way to consider a relationship between discourses. Mikhail M. Bakhtin discusses the concept of dialogue between discourses or within one discourse. Dialogue in the novel, he states, "can never be exhausted in pragmatically motivated dialogues of characters. [. . .] A dialogue of languages is a dialogue of social forces" (364-65).

⁵ Also see Gill and Sherry for the possible sources of *Heart of Darkness*: In Stanley's travelogue, *Through the Dark Continent* published in 1878, whose influence on *Heart of Darkness* is often indicated by Conradian scholars, he mentions the existence of cannibals in the region of his travel. However, as Walter Arens shows, he "did not observe cannibals in the act, but relied primarily for his information on the word of Arab slavers in the area." Arens also points

keyword to define ‘savagery’ by the west” (219). Indeed, Kristen Guest states in a reference to other scholars who have studied cannibalism, for example Arens and Hulme, that the term *cannibalism* is “inextricably bound up with discourses of colonial oppression” that were used to justify killings of “savage” others (2). A member of the black crew on the steamboat of which Marlow is the captain asks him to catch an African native they spot on the riverside. He asks it because, as he says in no uncertain terms, he and his African colleagues on board want to “Eat ‘im” (Conrad, 42).⁶ Gill draws from this description a conclusion that there can be “no doubt” that Conrad was convinced that some of the native Africans in the Congo were cannibals (1; 7). Yet, after his detailed research of the historical background of the novella, he reserves his opinion as to whether Conrad actually encountered any cannibals or cannibalistic practice during his stay in the lower and upper Congo. Tsuneo Masaki suggests that Conrad deliberately describes Africa as more primordial than it actually was, compared to the descriptions in his diaries “The Congo Diary” and “Up-river Book” in which he wrote down his experience in the Congo river and in its vicinities and to writings which show the development of that area at that time. Undoubtedly, he intended to represent Africa as uncivilised and dehumanising in comparison to culturally civilised but equally dehumanising Europe, and apparently he did so even at the sacrifice of factual accuracy. Together with the scary appearance and incomprehensible cries of the indigenous tribes of the Congo (at least incomprehensible to Marlow), cannibalism in this novella must have been at least part of such readily available dramaturgy in order to present Africa as a setting full of horror and darkness to his European readers.

Eating that includes anthropophagy potentially diffuses the boundary between food and its eater in its nature. A topographical perspective reveals a relationship between food and the body that takes it in, in which the boundary between the two is blurred into indeterminacy and the two entities merged. Before food is eaten, it exists outside the body. There is a clear distinction between the food and the eater. The food can be touched and smelled. The skin of the eater is the boundary. When the food is eaten and then digested, it travels through the body, is acted upon by digestive enzymes and absorbed into the body through the walls of the intestine and bowels. Once it has been digested, it is assimilated to the body and begins to work as part of it. In this way, the act of taking food annihilates the former distinction between the food and its consumer, between the object and the subject. Cultural cannibalism in particular is now

out an interesting fact that the slave traders:

had a vested economic interest in discouraging European encroachment in their preserves, since it posed a threat to the lucrative trade in human beings. Showing no favorites on this score, the Arabs also spread the word among the local groups that Stanley and his men were cannibals, which might explain to some extent his often harsh reception during his adventures. (87)

⁶ Without any further reference, “Conrad” in the round brackets means quotations from Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*.

understood among scholars as an act of taking in somebody else's power, usually that of a member of the opponent group in war, whose ritual is in fact based on the "recognition of corporal similarity." In *Heart of Darkness*, once a corporal similarity is shown between Europeans and Africans or the coloniser and the colonised, on the one hand the European idea of humanity and restraint is also found in African cannibals and, on the other hand, the colonisers' indulgence in their cruel pursuit for fame and wealth is compared to the savagery in the jungle. By thus problematising the superiority of the coloniser over the colonised, the idea of cannibalism promotes "a visceral reaction [...] precisely *because* it activates" their horror of consuming others like themselves (Guest 3: italics original).

Marlow's journey to the centre of Africa in order to save Kurtz, a competent colonial agent who presides over the ivory-collection work in the upper stream of the Congo river, is the main plot of *Heart of Darkness*. His journey going up the river is not only a symbolic travel backwards in history to observe the roots of mankind, namely the time before civilisation. It is also marked as ingestion through the oesophageal Congo river to the stomach of the darkness. In other words, the storyline itself suggests an image of eating. Already after a few pages from the incipit, readers are presented with such an image that the Congo river is associated with eating as Marlow is seized with the ominous idea:

there was in it [Africa] one river especially, a mighty big river that you could see on the map, resembling an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country and its tail lost in the depths of the land. And as I [Marlow] looked at the map of it in a shop-window it fascinated me as a snake would a bird — a silly little bird. (Conrad, 12)

The journey to the centre of Africa is rendered "taking food in," just as Marlow, who is about to set out on a journey to Africa, is metaphorically expressed as a bird that is about to be swallowed by a snake. In the scene of Marlow's observation of the map, he is simultaneously mesmerised by whatever darkness awaits him in Africa just as Eve once was by the serpent's seduction, and anticipates danger that is involved in this fascination. He identifies himself as food and wills to dive into the eater, while he also feels the peril of it.

Marlow's imagination of himself being taken in by Africa has an interesting resonance with the author Conrad's view of geography in the sense that in both cases geography is understood with metaphors of the human body. In fact, Conrad repeatedly used such metaphorical expressions when he wrote about issues relating to geography, and his frequent use of body metaphors in this context endorses the fact, as is shown later, that in *Heart Darkness*, too, Africa is represented as a human body in which the dark side of Europe's idealism

manifests itself most. For example, in “Geography and Some Explorers,” a reminiscence of his youth, he recalls the geography classes he found boring at school as “a bloodless thing, with a dry skin covering a repulsive armature of uninteresting bones” (12). Later, similar to Marlow, Conrad was fascinated by European explorers travelling in Africa:

My imagination could depict to itself there worthy, adventurous, and devoted men nibbling at the edges, attacking from north and south and east and west, conquering a bit of truth here and a bit of truth there, and sometimes swallowed up by the mystery their hearts were so persistently set on unveiling... (Conrad, “Geography,” 13)

The explorers *nibble* at Africa, and in return Africa swallows them up. Conrad uses this cannibalistic metaphor in his description of the relationship between the Europeans and Africa.

What is also worthy of note in this example is that he imagined both sides – Europeans and the African continent alike – as cannibals but that the young Conrad regarded the European “cannibalism” as heroic acts of progress, discovering truth, whereas he did the cannibalistic act of Africa as regress. Interestingly enough, we can identify these two contrasting images in *Heart of Darkness*. On the one hand, the above-mentioned excerpt from *Heart of Darkness* serves as a premonition of the reality Marlow is confronted with in Africa later in the story. On the other hand, the first unnamed narrator, who is a colleague of Marlow on board on the Thames, praises the past explorers of Britain: “The tidal current [...] had known and served all the men of whom the nation is proud, from Sir Francis Drake to Sir John Franklin” (Conrad, 8).⁷ The readers of this novella soon learn that this is a mere delusion, when in the next scene the “sun set; the dusk fell on the stream” and Marlow takes over the narration to talk about the irredeemable experience he had in Africa (Conrad, 8). This then overwrites the first narrator’s naiveté. In other words, as the story progresses, we relive Conrad’s maturity from youth to adult: his deeper understanding of colonialism and European society.

The relationship between cannibalism and dialogue in *Heart of Darkness* is suggested in the scene where Marlow first encounters cannibalism as an immediate issue. His consideration is triggered literally by a dialogue with an African. On the way to the Inner Station along the Congo river, blacks are employed as members of the crew on Marlow’s ship. When the ship is

⁷ John W. Griffith explicates the possible connection between this reference to Captain John Franklin and cannibalism in *Heart of Darkness*. On the way to the Arctic, Franklin’s ships, the *Erebus* and the *Terror*, were caught in the ice and none of the crew returned alive. A search party later found out a trace that suggested the crew might have had to succumb to cannibalism. Griffith argues that “many Victorians would probably have been familiar with the rumours of the degeneration” of Franklin’s team (165-66). In fact, in “Geography and Some Explorers,” Conrad writes that “the fate of Sir John Franklin was a matter of European interest, and that Sir Leopold McLintock’s book was translated into every language of the white races,” and that he himself read the book many times in his childhood (11); for a similar argument, also see Hewitt.

enveloped in thick fog and cannot move an inch forward, horrible shouts by natives on the bank reach the ears of the crew. Then an event occurs in which Marlow discovers empirical evidence that the black crew are cannibals. I quote the scene at length because it shows the complexity of Marlow's thought process:

Their head-man, a young, broad-chested black, severely draped in dark-blue fringed cloths, with fierce nostrils and his hair all done up artfully in oily ringlets, stood near me. 'Aha!' I said, just for good fellowship's sake. '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, and leaning his elbow on the rail looked out into the fog in a dignified and profoundly pensive attitude. I would no doubt have been properly horrified had it not occurred to me that he and his chaps must be very hungry [. . .]. Why in the name of all the gnawing devils of hunger they didn't go for us — they were thirty to five — and have a good tuck-in for once amazes me now when I think of it. [. . .] And I saw that something restraining, one of those human secrets that baffle probability, had come into play there. I looked at them with a swift quickening of interest. (Conrad, 42-43)

Two points about this scene are particularly worthy of attention. First, in *Heart of Darkness* it is a prerequisite that Africans are cannibals; the fiction does not even bring this assumption into question. Apparently the text follows the typical colonial discourse in which cannibalism functions as an indicator of savagery and bestiality. In other words, it is an indication that justifies separation of "them" from "us." The descriptions of the black headman as "broad-chested black, severely draped in dark-blue fringed cloths, with fierce nostrils" and "a bloodshot widening of his eyes and a flash of sharp teeth" are at least convincing in this respect; he is rendered barbarous and ferocious as if an ogre or a demon so as to emphasise his inhumanity. This is exactly what Arens states about cannibalism in discourse used for representing others. He concludes that "the assumption by one group about the cannibalistic nature of others can be interpreted as an aspect of cultural-boundary construction and maintenance" (145). For that matter, Conrad is not a deviant from his contemporary discourse of cannibalism, and, to borrow from Said's interpretation of *Heart of Darkness*, in a broader sense "its politics and aesthetics are, so to speak, imperialist" (24).

However, while Conrad does not problematise the fact of cannibalism in the colonial setting as truism, Marlow's response to the issue is somewhat tangential to the colonial discourse. Marlow substitutes physiology for emotion, and later ethics for physicality. First, Marlow is not horrified by this "truth." He knows the black crew "must be very hungry." His

thinking, here at least, does not follow the line of colonial discourse that emphasises racial differences. Instead, his attention to this situation is focused on the physiological matter. His thought process working here is even psychological and humanistic. It is true that he shows some hesitation to treat the blacks equally as humans and does not forget to add that he “had often ‘a little fever,’ or a little touch of other things” (Conrad, 43), suggesting equal treatment of Africans can be justified only in hallucination. However he also narrates, “I looked at them as you would on any human being with a curiosity of their impulses, motives, capacities, weaknesses, when brought to the test of an inexorable physical necessity. Restraint” (Conrad, 43). What can be understood in this scene is a shift of the framework of thinking from the emphasis on otherness to an ethical issue. This also means discovery of a common thing as humans – restraint – between Europeans and African natives.

Second, Marlow accepts humanity of the cannibals. His consciousness is not directed towards the paranoia that the white crew on board would be in constant danger of being eaten by the black crew, but towards the fact that the whites have *not* been eaten by them. In Africa he is confronted with two realities that are mutually exclusive, at least for him: the fact that these Africans are cannibals and the fact that they refrain from eating the whites on the same ship. He tries but cannot understand that restraint can prevent cannibalism, for he has experienced extreme hunger in a shipwreck. What matters is that he presents cannibalism not as evidence for discriminating against them, but as further discussing common things between the coloniser and the colonised by attempting to apply the same ethics to both groups. He has the “suspicion of their not being inhuman,” even though he also calls it “the worst of it” (Conrad, 37).

In these senses, Marlow’s understanding of ancient Britain is also different from what dominated the idea of most of his contemporaries. Their colonial discourse in a way rested on the premise that differentiated Europeans from the colonised both spatially and temporarily. The list of the statements “such-and-such customs practised outside the west, usually uncivilised, were once done in the pre-historic times of Europe” has no end. Thus, in 1865, when an archaeologist concluded about the remains found in the Yorkshire region of Britain, “in these broken skulls and disjoined bones we have the results of feasts,” this assertion was immediately rejected for two reasons. For one thing, cannibalism must not be practised customarily in the western world. For the other, the remains dated back to the Iron Age, 2,000 years ago, which immediately preceded the Roman era. It was “all too recent” (Arens, 121). On the other hand, Marlow reminds his listeners on the *Nellie* on the Thames that historically England became civilised not in a distant past. In England, he says, “darkness was here yesterday” (Conrad, 9). Rather than emphasising temporal remoteness between Britain and Africa, he sees proximity. Already early in its story, *Heart of Darkness* is working towards removing the dichotomy between “civilised” Europe and “savage” Africa.⁸

As many critics suggest, what made Conrad different from many other colonial officials and imperialists may be largely due to his background as a Polish who suffered Russian rule in his childhood and later gained a place in English society. His father was a Polish political activist during the time of the Russian domination in Berdychiv, part of Ukraine that belonged to the Kingdom of Poland at that time, and was sent to Siberia together with his family. Conrad later went to France to become a seaman, and then to England. He began writing in English, which was not his mother tongue, and observed the colonial enterprise as someone coming in from outside. It can be well assumed that because of his position as an outsider, he was able to make Marlow take a different approach to the conventional discourse of cannibalism. Fairly clearly, in *Heart of Darkness* he is not in the least writing about cannibals to make the novella a cheap sensational entertainment for European readership.

We should not hasten to conclude that *Heart of Darkness* is entirely anti-colonialist, however. Marlow is ambivalent about dialogue with the African natives. As Said's critical view reveals, Conrad reserves his opinion on anthropophagy by "quite carefully qualify[ing] Marlow's narrative with the provisionality" precisely because "Conrad also had an extraordinarily persistent residual sense of his own exilic marginality" (24). His denial of further engagement in the conversation with the colonised, I would say, shows a limit of Marlow's clairvoyance as a critical observant of colonialism, which Said also attributes to "Conrad's tragic limitation" (30). Marlow learns from the above-mentioned dialogue with the headman that the black crew are cannibals. This triggers his pondering on the reality that an act of cannibalism has *not* been done. Certainly, the way to obtain an answer to this contradiction would be to extend his conversation with the headman and to ask him about this question, just as he could do "for good fellowship's sake." Interestingly, however, Marlow does not continue the dialogue. Instead, he goes into an internal monologue to further ponder on this issue of cannibalism and restraint. In this crucial moment when he has to admit his "remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar," he declares that he has "a voice" and that the voice inside him "is the speech that cannot be silenced," which means none other than his reliance on work ethics (Conrad, 38). When he realises this, the black headman becomes no longer the person Marlow shares a conversation with but a mere object of his observation: he "looked at them [the black crew] with a swift quickening of interest." He is interested in them only because they present a good

⁸ Allan Hunter also refers to this point. In the analysis on Conrad's ethics in comparison to ethics of his nineteenth-century contemporaries, Hunter shows a difference between Conrad's view of ancient Britain and T. H. Huxley's. While Julius Caesar's invasion to Britain was a target of nostalgia "safely from the warm side of the window" in Huxley's lecture paper titled "Evolution and Ethics" presented in 1893, Conrad's emphasis is on the closeness between the time of Caesar's invasion and his own time: "Marlow places emphasis on precisely the point that Huxley is anxious to avoid, namely that the separation between savagery and civilization is in our own case only nineteen centuries - very little indeed on the evolutionary time-scale" (Hunter, 18).

example that may help him reach an understanding of the apparent contradiction between ethics and extreme hunger.

Marlow's shift from dialogue to internal monologue implies his decision, consciously or unconsciously, to abandon the possibility of communication across racial difference.⁹ It also implies his choice to secure his position as a master of the master narratives by preventing any possible danger that might disturb it. In other words, Marlow and the headman do not transgress the border between subject and object, nor do they cooperate with each other in invading the sacred realm of the colonial discourse, either. To enter into the internal monologue in this crucial moment, Marlow fails to present himself as genuine egalitarian or anti-racist ahead of his time. Alternative answers given by the black crew could raise racial problems. Perhaps it is an African taboo that prevents the black crew from attacking the whites to eat them. It may alternatively be due to the fear of whites which the harsh colonial exploitation and destruction planted in the African mind. These perspectives would be obtained by Marlow through dialogue with the black crew. More importantly, Marlow could have given a "voice" to the African. However, he only asks himself, "Was it superstition, disgust, patience, fear — or some kind of primitive honour? No fear can stand up to hunger, no patience can wear it out, disgust simply does not exist where hunger is, and as to superstition, beliefs, and what you may call principles, they are less than chaff in a breeze" (Conrad, 43). As a result, he fails to reconcile cannibalism with the fact that there has been no attack by the black crew despite their extreme hunger. To be fair with Marlow, he discovers humanity in blacks as stated above despite the fact that he sometimes depicts them as inferior to himself. Still, it is hardly deniable that for him they remain an object of curiosity and observation, and this is why Chinua Achebe later criticises Conrad as "bloody racist" since in his work, blacks are nothing but part of the backcloth of Marlow's adventures (Achebe, 124).

Actually, shutting himself up in his internal monologue secures Marlow in his familiar way of thinking. He worships work ethics and depends on it every time he feels it necessary to be free from the voice of the surrounding darkness:

You wonder I didn't go ashore for a howl and a dance? Well, no – I didn't. [. . .] I had no time. I had to mess about with white-lead and strips of woollen blanket helping to put bandages on those leaky steam-pipes – I tell you. I had to watch the steering and circumvent those snags and get the tin-pot along by hook or by crook. (Conrad, 38)

He hears cries of the African natives hidden in the riverside of the Congo river when he sails up

⁹ Kazuhiro Yoshimoto also indicates this point: Marlow "does not consider the indigenous Africans as equal communication partners" (208-209). He argues that in *Heart of Darkness* most of their "voices" are rendered either pre-linguistic or incomprehensible sound, which Marlow only describes but neither "transcribes" nor "translates."

along it. Yet he insists that a voice “that cannot be silenced” in him helps him forget the temptation of the darkness. He explains this “deliberate belief” as engagement with hard work. He believes that the work ethics helps him escape from pleasure and indulgence. Walter E. Houghton explicates, together with its religious connotation, how significant work was for Victorians and how work counted as a measure against indulgence: work has the “value of being safeguard against temptation – and all the better if it is constant” (245). He also states that the Victorian work ethics of self-control contributed to “the progress of civilization” and that the idea of progress “gave all men, not just industrial leaders and workers, a high sense of mission: to take part in the great march and struggle of mankind up from barbarism to civilization” (250).¹⁰ Marlow’s worship of the work ethics of restraint is understandable in this regard, and so is his reliance on the ethics when he wants to protect himself from falling into savages. It also means that the work ethics that he holds as his tenet protects him from being influenced by perspectives of the African natives. This is only made possible because he refuses to engage himself in further dialogue with them.

His belief in work ethics is maintained by eliminating others’ perspectives. The elimination is also achieved through the projection of a colonial myth onto the black headman. Marlow depicts him as showing “a dignified and profoundly pensive attitude,” which, Marlow narrates, is the reason that he decides not to engage himself any more in the conversation with him. This description can be understood as Marlow’s (not the headman’s) creation of a wall between himself and the headman, namely his justification of no further intention to dialogue. In Marlow’s view, the headman seems to keep the white crew at bay so much so that Marlow feels it impossible to coax what the African has in mind out of him. In reality, however, it is Marlow that is pondering. The description of the atmosphere the black headman produces mirrors Marlow’s attitude to opt out a possibility to exchange dialogue with him. Of course what the black headman appears to be thinking never reaches Marlow. Without a dialogue, his thought and the black man’s apparent thought have no point of encounter with each other. His retreat from the dialogue with the headman into the internal monologue is a return to the work ethics of restraint, which enables him to consider the lack of an act of cannibalism on the ship with his familiar way of thinking.¹¹

I have shown that Marlow’s solitary thinking is made possible by the absence of

¹⁰ Ian Watt states about this point: “This socially imposed restraint is directly opposed to the instincts of ‘natural man’” (162). Brook Thomas presents a similar statement, too, that “for Marlow restraint is associated with work, the work of civilization that separates the West from the savage forest” (253).

¹¹ Chinua Achebe’s criticism of Conrad as “bloody racist” seems correct in terms of this retreat, even if his identification of Marlow with Conrad leaves the door open for further discussion. He pinpoints Marlow’s ambivalence to Africans: “The kind of liberalism espoused here by Marlow/Conrad touched all the best minds of the age in England, Europe, and America [. . .] but almost always managed to sidestep the ultimate question of equality between white people and black people” (124). Along Achebe’s statement, what should be drawn attention to is that Marlow criticises the fact

dialogical contacts with the African natives around him. However, this in fact contains a possibility of change within itself. The introduction of the Victorian ethics into his thought process discloses another similarity between the coloniser and the colonised. If he recognises restraint, an important ethic to be civilised, in the minds of the African natives, he has to consider the possibility that Europeans could also be driven by the same devilish inner impulse such as cannibalism as Africans are. To accept this uncivilised nature as a common thing between Europeans and Africans leads to the disappearance of the boundaries between them. Kilgour's statement on cannibalism can be applied to an understanding of Marlow and the relationship between Europe and Africa. She argues that the cannibal "presents a disturbing fiction of otherness because it both constructs and consumes the very possibility of radical difference" ("Forward," viii). When his thought reaches this conclusion, he begins to see "horror" in Europe; whites themselves can be represented as equally abominable. In the next section, we will take a close look at Kurtz, the embodiment of this fear as an exemplar of the coloniser fallen to be an agent of the abominable.

4. Kurtz and dissolving boundaries

Throughout the novella, Kurtz occupies the centre of Marlow's consciousness. It is through the dialogue with him that Marlow realises that his belief in the work ethics cannot necessarily protect him from falling into darkness. Marlow admits that the purpose of his journey is to meet him in the heart of Africa: "For me it [the steamboat] crawled towards Kurtz — exclusively" (Conrad, 37). In his understanding, Kurtz is a victim of the devouring darkness. When darkness "got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation" (Conrad, 49), this metaphor is a clear indication of his incorporation to the darkness through being eaten. Marlow tells his colleagues on the *Nellie* that Kurtz is actually indulged in native ceremonies. The details of them are only suggested by the heads placed on stakes around his office but, as Conradian scholars claim, they give us hints of his practice of cannibalism.¹²

Originally, Kurtz is a firm believer of the values of the west: "He is an emissary of pity, and science, and progress" (Conrad, 28). He supports predominant ideas concerning the colonial undertaking and believes the need of *mission civilisatrice*, whereas he also believes in his deeper mind the necessity to destroy the natives ("[e]xterminate all the brutes" is written in the margin

that the colonial agents have caused the blacks' hunger as they applied the pseudo-European monetary system to the African life and paid their wages not with food but with wires as currency. Ironically, Marlow is also showing the same kind of colonial hypocrisy when he applies the European work ethics to the blacks' psychology in order to understand them.

¹² E.g. Watarai, 92-93.

of his report [Conrad, 51]). To sum up, he embodies most of Europe's ideals in the time of colonialism in the sense that he believes both the radical and conservative aspects of colonialism and executes them as a colonial agent in Africa. In fact, he not only represents various European thoughts of the times, but is literally a creation of various European nationalities:

His mother was half-English, his father was half-French. All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz, and by and by I learned that most appropriately the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs had entrusted him with the making of a report for its future guidance. (Conrad, 50)

On the other hand, he is also the reification of the anxiety people in Europe shared toward degeneration. He himself "goes native" and indulges in savage practices. The metaphor that he is seduced by darkness presents to Marlow an intense vision that the colonial discourse Kurtz embodies is subsumed under by greed and evilness and that he is indulged in native customs that are only acceptable outside the ethics of the west. He is charmed by "the spell, the heavy, mute spell of the wilderness that seemed to draw him to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions" (Conrad, 65).

He himself then becomes a cannibal both in literal and metaphorical senses. Marlow sees him "open his mouth wide – it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him" (Conrad, 59). In this way, the relationship between Kurtz and the darkness is best understood in the metaphor of eating, that is, that of a prey and a predator.¹³ When he becomes a victim of darkness, he begins to function as part of its unsatiated stomach, and turns himself into a greedy agent who wishes all fame and wealth in the world. He does not even allow his Russian acolyte to own some ivory, which is a gift from the chief of a neighbouring village for shooting birds and other animals. He demands it, aiming a gun to the Russian (Conrad, 56). He cannot endure the idea that someone else possesses ivory except himself. Therefore it would be no wonder that *Heart of Darkness* places Kurtz at the Inner Station, which is located in the geographical centre of Africa. In the journey going up the Congo river, Marlow identifies himself as food being swallowed by a serpentine creature. His voyage is heading to the centre of the body, namely the stomach. The novella emphasises this relationship as it describe Kurtz as "greedy" and "hollow at the core," using the metaphor of eating and the stomach again (Conrad, 67; 58). The description is also an indication

¹³ In the relationship between a prey and a predator the predator always has the initiative; it is the master of the game of the power relationship. However, it is ambiguous in this text whether Kurtz is a mere prey or not. Several descriptions in the novella insinuate that he rather willingly invites his victimisation. In this respect I would rather safely suggest that Kurtz and the darkness conspire with one another in order to establish their relationship of eating, and that hence *Heart of Darkness* does not go so far as to describe a total reverse of racial hierarchy.

that his greed can never be satisfied, for he keeps unfathomable darkness inside.

We can see a phenomenon here again in which subject (the person who eats) and object (the food eaten) are no longer distinguishable. Kurtz enters the world of darkness and degrades himself as he becomes the king of the African natives from the neighbouring villages, and yet he continues to think about submitting articles to journals and newspapers, which once published would contribute to promoting colonial discourse and earn him a fame as a vanguard who disseminates European supremacy across the world (Conrad, 68). Just as the nutrition of food becomes part of the consumer's body, the colonial discourse Kurtz incarnated before he was devoured by the darkness still remains in him even after he was eaten. When the greed which colonialism had been hiding in the name of the noble cause was taken in by the darkness together with Kurtz, it appeared to the surface and now cooperates with the greed of the darkness, which drives Kurtz to desire everything both in the savage world and in the civilised European society. It even becomes impossible to distinguish colonialism from darkness. There is in fact no telling which represents darkness in Kurtz. The predator, darkness, and the prey, colonialism, work together in Kurtz, who is now part of the darkness. This must be the image Conrad attempted to present as darkness in his work.

The dialogue with Kurtz problematises the validity of the ethics Marlow worships. Kurtz becomes a victim of the metaphorical absorption of the darkness because, as Marlow explains, he "lacked restraint" (Conrad, 57). His greed wins out over his self-control as a civil European. As already mentioned, Marlow depends on this ethics in order not to succumb to darkness. However, as he hears from other colonial agents, there is no man as competent as Kurtz. He is a "universal genius" and works so hard for his fame that he is able to send an incredibly huge amount of ivory of the "prime sort" to the Central Station (Conrad, 71; 33). His greedy and destructive acts of attacking villages in order to collect ivory and indulgence in abominable rituals go hand in hand with his hard work as a colonial agent and, therefore, his greed for fame and promotion in Europe. His metamorphosis from a firm believer in the colonial cause to a savage king of the natives in Africa stems from the perfect performance of his assigned work. In him, Marlow is unable to see a clear boundary between hard work and moral degradation. Kurtz shows a case in which a man can simultaneously fall to evilness and be a hard worker. Marlow's belief in the work ethics cannot serve as a preventive measure from darkness any more. On the contrary, with his encounter and dialogue with Kurtz, his tenet undergoes dissolution as it is influenced by what Kurtz represents. The more Marlow knows Kurtz and the more conversations they have, the more clearly Marlow sees a vision of blurring boundaries between the darkness of Europe and that of Africa, and the more suspicious than his own belief in the work ethics becomes. Hence, when he returns to Europe, he becomes bewildered and resents about "the sight of people" who "devour their infamous cookery" and "dream their insignificant

and silly dreams” (Conrad, 70). Through these images of eating, he becomes aware of, as Collins rightly indicates, “the moribund culture of Europeans” (156).

Marlow understands Kurtz’s influence on himself through the same metaphor of eating. He feels that he seems “at one bound to have been transported into some lightless region of subtle horrors, where pure, uncomplicated savagery was a positive relief” (Conrad, 58). The expression “transported into some lightless region” can be understood as showing that he is haunted by the image of becoming food of the darkness and being taken into its stomach. Naturally, this vision upsets Marlow, who attempts to secure himself within the familiar ethics. However, here intervenes dialogue. Long before he actually meets Kurtz, Kurtz is recognised less as his physical existence than as “words” for Marlow. He aims at the centre of Africa not to see Kurtz’s appearance but to hear him and have a talk with him:

I made the strange discovery that I had never imagined him as doing, you know, but as discoursing. I didn’t say to myself, ‘Now I will never see him,’ or ‘Now I will never shake him by the hand,’ but, ‘Now I will never hear him.’ The man presented himself as a voice. Not of course that I did not connect him with some sort of action. Hadn’t I been told in all the tones of jealousy and admiration that he had collected, bartered, swindled, or stolen more ivory than all the other agents together. That was not the point. The point was in his being a gifted creature and that of all his gifts the one that stood out preeminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words – the gift of expression. (Conrad, 48)

What simultaneously disturbs and fascinates Marlow, as a man who frequently seeks for spiritual repose in the thought he is so dependent on for protecting himself from the invitation by the darkness of Africa, is Kurtz’s words. Said sees in *Heart of Darkness* a very example that what constitutes faith in empire is a discourse, created by words and narratives, and that it is radically unstable:

Conrad’s way of demonstrating this discrepancy between the orthodox and his own views of empire is to keep drawing attention to how ideas and values are constructed (and deconstructed) through dislocations in the narrator’s language. (29)

Even after his return to Europe, Marlow is obsessed with Kurtz’s “voice” although the man who possessed it is long dead on the journey down the river and his body is buried in the Congo: “I was on the point of crying at her [Kurtz’s Intended], ‘Don’t you hear them.’ The dusk was repeating them in a persistent whisper all around us” (Conrad, 75). Kurtz’s eloquent voice that

in fact entails insanity urges Marlow to keep a dialogue with him. Marlow is now supposed to find peace of mind, surrounded in the western culture, but Kurtz's mixed image of greedy colonialism and savagery continues traumatising Marlow.

While Conrad's representation of Africa as darkness cannot bear postcolonial criticism, at least his own criticism is directed to the colonial agents including Kurtz Marlow encounters in Africa. To be more precise, Conrad describes the bilateral effect on human psychology – and evilness on it – between this exotic dehumanising setting of Africa and the colonial desire that the colonial agents do not even hesitate to hide. The desire does not only mean their insatiable greed for wealth, positions, and fame; it is also what Robert Young calls “colonial desire.” In his critique on nineteenth-century western culture whose title is none other than *Colonial Desire*, he shows that an obsession with hybridity can be found at the very core, or “heart,” of Victorian racial theory. Kurtz in fact does not present a simple image of a European who is mesmerised by darkness and goes native. He presents an assimilative image of evilness that does not restrain its greed both in Europe and in Africa. Marlow's simultaneous fear and attraction to Kurtz can be best understood with this term, colonial desire.

5. Conclusion

In this article I have examined two tenets that influence Marlow's way of thinking: colonialism and the Victorian ethics of restraint and hard work. They are never stable, however. As they are diversely subject to what can be understood as metaphorical eating process, the boundaries they ostensibly create are dissolved. The way of presenting cannibalism in *Heart of Darkness* simultaneously differentiates Europe from Africa and assimilates the two. The work ethics that is drawn upon through Marlow's narration and adventure is subjected to other perspectives, influenced by them, and consequently loses its framework. The comparison of the cannibals with the describer gradually “undermines the strong sense of difference carried by the surface argument” (Hulme, 6). In this way *Heart of Darkness* describes discursive instability.

We can come back to Achebe's statement of indecisiveness about this novella here. His comment is at least inaccurate in this respect. This novella does describe equality – equality in an ironic sense because it is achieved not by admitting other peoples' rights but by letting themselves be eaten by and assimilated with others. For Marlow, this invasion from outside Europe is both unwelcome and enlightening. He is daunted to discover savagery in the seemingly civilised European society. Throughout this work it is always negatively associated with darkness. The opening and the ending scenes on the *Nellie* are gradually and then completely surrounded by darkness due both to the sunset on the Thames and to the state of mind of the listeners on board after they have listened to the irredeemable episodes of Marlow's

journey. This should come as no surprise to us now that we understand this novella with a metaphor of eating. They are captured in the dark stomach of the darkness and already a part of it. *Heart of Darkness* tells us about the fear towards encroachment from outside Europe that has existed in the minds of Europeans for over a century and further afield. On the other hand, interestingly Marlow also says that he sees a glimpse of hope in his experience. He tells his listeners on the *Nellie* that “yet it seemed to throw a kind of light” (Conrad, 11). His opinion is again ambivalent. Reading *Heart of Darkness* requires us to come to terms with this indeterminacy, and it is also a charm of this work. What gives this masterpiece this ambivalence is the metaphorical digestion – the force of this novella that traps so many elements in the hybridity of meanings.

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◇

ジョセフ・コンラッドの『闇の奥』にみられる「消化された言説」

J A 日下

本稿は、ポーランド生まれのイギリス作家ジョセフ・コンラッドによって十九世紀末に書かれた『闇の奥』を食物摂取の壮大な比喩と捉え、作品にみられる主義や言説が作り出す植民地征服者と被征服者、あるいはヨーロッパとアフリカとを区別する境界が崩壊する様を描いていると論じる。本稿は、食物摂取の中でも特にカニバリズムに焦点を当て、ポストコロニアル研究がカニバリズムのもつ他者との境界形成と境界を消し去る力という、相反する二面性を持つことを明らかにしてきた成果に依拠した論を展開する。加えて、ディスコース (discourse) が意味する「言説」と「談話」の二つを関連させた議論をおこなう。『闇の奥』では第二の語り手マーロウを通じて、コンラッドが植民地主義の言説や当時ヨーロッパ社会の発展を支えていた仕事の倫理が内包する欲望や心の闇を暴きだし、それらが本来作り出すはずの他者としてのアフリカとの境界が逆に「闇」という共通の力によって取り込まれ、判別不能となっていくことを示しているといえる。こうしたことはマーロウがコンゴ川流域で出会う食人者、さらには象牙収集を任務とするやり手のエージェント、クルツとの邂逅を通じて明らかになる。食人者とのやり取りからマーロウが植民地主義を暗に批判する一方で、仕事の倫理によって自らを闇の誘惑から守ろうとすることが伺えると同時に、彼の思考は逆にヨーロッパ人とアフリカ人との間に共通点を見出すことに繋がっていく。クルツとの出会いはマーロウにヨーロッパ文化・主義の代弁者たる人物がまさに仕事の倫理を全うした結果、闇に飲み込まれていき、さらには自ら食人的行為に及ぶに至った様を見せつける。このように、マーロウの中でヨーロッパとアフリカの境界線が震んでいく像はカニバリズムとの関わりによってもたらされ、補強されていく。そしてそれらはクルツや食人者との対話（の拒否）によってマーロウの思考に揺ぎを生み出すことになる。『闇の奥』はカニバリズムの幻想を描いた古典的作品の例として様々な文脈で言及されてきたにもかかわらず、従来のコンラッド研究では本作品のカニバリズムはほとんど扱われてこなかった。本稿はそうした従来の傾向に進展をもたらすだけでなく、作品全体をカニバリズム的な比喩で捉えることにより、マーロウの思考にみられる両義性やコンラッドと植民地主義の曖昧ともいえる関係を理解する上での新たな視点を提供している。