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TWINNING RIDER HAGGARD'S AYESHA AND JOSEPH CONRAD'S KURTZ

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ABSTRACT

In an interview with Didier Eribon, Claude Lévi-Strauss admitted that he wished he had written Joseph Conrad's books. It seems that once he even started writing a "Conradian" novel entitled Tristes Tropiques, but the only known fragment of this novel would seem to be the description of a sunset, which has become part of another book of the same title containing reminiscences from his journeys. In what way, then, did Conrad influence this unusual book by Lévi-Strauss? There are certainly similarities between the works of both writers. Apart from a similarity of literary form and cultural substance, we can find a unique "optical experience" (Dariusz Czaja) in their descriptions of sunsets, which I interpret as a substructure of their studies of the world, culture and human knowledge..

Keywords: cultural anthropology, Conrad studies, Tristes Tropiques

TWINNING RIDER HAGGARD'S AYESHA AND JOSEPH CONRAD'S KURTZ

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Heart of Darkness (1899) and *She* (1887) demonstrate many similarities that extend beyond narratological virtuosity. Yet, the two books have failed to inspire more than passing comparisons. To some extent this is symptomatic of all scholarship dealing with Conrad. Edward Said, whose PhD dissertation and first book were on Conrad, explains: "Conrad has been systematically treated as everything *except* a novelist with links to a cultural and intellectual context. His politics, aesthetics, and morality have been analyzed not as the products of thought, with roots in an intellectual ambiance, but rather as a series of accidents that happened to a Pole writing in England between the nineties and 1924" (71). A contributing factor for treating Conrad as an *ex nihilo* creator may arise from the difficulty of finding concrete extra-fictional links between his and other persons' texts; Conrad did not keep a private diary during his writing career and there is no catalogue of what books Conrad's personal library contained. One can always consult Conrad's personal letters for explicit evidence of influence. Conrad's preserved correspondence, however, never mentions Haggard or any of his works. Yet, this hindrance does not disprove a direct influence any more than the absence of similar linkage disproves the common opinion that Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* (1911) builds on Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866) or that Conrad's *Victory* (1915) builds on Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611).

Of course, one can reduce/explain the influence on *Heart of Darkness* to Conrad's experience under Leopold's Congo, voiced in his *The Congo Diary* (1890). Conrad's letters state that the novella gained its shape from his Congo experience. Yet, the critic who wants to gain Conrad's sympathies needs to be audacious. Conrad wished that literary critics were less pedantic and academic (in the worst sense of the word), and more "romantic" and "adventurous" (APR 96–97).

The University of Glasgow Professor Murray Pittock boldly insists that "the influence of Haggard's conception on Conrad [...] needs more specific attention than it has hitherto received" (208). Dr. Allan Hunter, author of *Joseph Conrad and the Ethics of Darwinism* (1983), (adventurously and romantically?) proposes that *Heart of*

Darkness is a "deliberate choice to parallel and even parody the best-selling Rider Haggard novel *She*" (15). Hunter maintains that there are "a large number of phrases that occur in *She* which should jolt the memory of anyone who has read *Heart of Darkness*" (27). Hunter also comments on the stories' similar plots: "both books are journeys to the centre of Africa in search of a person, and in both works Leo and Marlow retreat into a Buddhist contemplative position" (27).

If we believe – as does Axel Heyst in *Victory* – that "There's nothing worth knowing but fact. Hard facts! Facts alone" (influenced by the opening of Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854): "what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life [...] In this life, we want nothing but Facts, Sir; nothing but Facts" (7)) – then, in order to tackle the question of textual influence, we should compare the texts themselves. Indeed, F.R. Leavis notes that "the best evidence of Conrad's reading is in the language, style and structure of his novels". We are unlikely to find anything other than textual/circumstantial evidence as Conrad has "always been economical in his disclosure of the extent of his real-life sources" (Berthoud 102). Conrad was, to paraphrase Ian Watt, characteristically unhelpful in revealing his sources. Just as Conrad's Kaspar Almayer forgets about his daughter's existence by erasing her footsteps in the sand, so Conrad covered up his own trail: "An author's method of work should remain an intimate thing" (C3 12), he writes in a private letter.

Although Pittock and Hunter bravely suggest the necessity of comparing *Heart of Darkness* and *She*, they do not themselves exhaustively explore the theme. By limiting his evidence to about one page, Hunter utters an intuition rather than proving a hypothesis. In opposition to Hunter's agenda, my focus lies in comparing the two epicenters of evil – Ayesha, Hiya, "this modern Circe" and Kurtz, "that pitiful Jupiter", "the voice" – not the two holistic sketches or macro-narratives. While Haggard's prose is, in the best sense of the words, straightforward and open for indisputable interpretations, the same is not the case for Conrad's (pre 1913–1915?) rich poetic prose. F.R. Leavis famously remarked that Conrad's "adjectival insistence" obfuscates without informing. One could comment profusely on why Leavis' categorical view is incompatible with Conrad's literary achievement, devotion to *le mot juste* as well as ambition (voiced in *Notes on Life and Letters* – 1926) to write in a "sober", "impartial", "detached", "manly", "serious" and "faithful" language. However, Conrad's correspondence explains that *Heart of Darkness* is an attempt to portray a nightmarish dreamscape and that the main idea is wrapped in secondary notions. Since *Heart of Darkness* presents itself as a stream of consciousness, an instantiation of "delayed decoding", or an epistemological meditation – as a journey through the "unspeakable", "imperceptible", "invisible", "inconceivable", "indefinable", "inappreciable", "unexplored", "incomprehensible", "concealed", "innumerable", "inscrutable", "impenetrable" – conclusions about "Marlow's inconclusive experiences" (9) tend to diverge and leave room for academic debate.

Charlie Marlow illustrates *Heart of Darkness'* fogginess when he – among nameless characters, chapters, rivers, rites, experiences and landscapes – meditates on his understanding of Kurtz, the only other living person in the novella with a proper

name. Marlow describes Kurtz as a "voice" (86; 88; 131) or "shadow" (112; 121; 123; 138) / "shade" (91; 128) / "phantom" (144) / "apparition" (111) and speculates to the Nellie audience about his limited, blurred and dark vision of Kurtz: "I did not see the man in the name any more than you do [...] you fellows see more than I could then. You see me, whom you know" (48). Immediately following this sentence, the unnamed frame narrator reveals to the reader the irony in Marlow's statement: "It had become so pitch dark that we listeners could hardly see one another" (48).[1]

This quoted section illustrates that factoids about Kurtz are mediated through Marlow's mind and then through a second unnamed narrator's mind. Thus, given Marlow's understanding of Kurtz as a shadow, the reader who follows Marlow as he opens *the door into darkness* (16; 37) will not see Kurtz as a tangible person but as a shadow mediated through two narrators' understandings. That is, the difficulties commonly associated with intersubjective communication proclaim the reader's mediated picture of Kurtz to be distorted and shadowy; to lie on the opposite side of the spectrum from the clear, immutable Platonic form.

In short, although Hunter has done admirable work on this theme before, there is still opportunity for "adventurous" criticism. As a tribute to Hunter, this essay reflects on whether Kurtz can be constructed as Ayesha's shadow. In doing so, it will predominantly compare Kurtz and Ayesha's minds of darkness and their engagement with violence.

SOLITUDE AND AMBITION MINCE KURTZ AND AYESHA'S MINDS

"'Do you know what you are doing?' I whispered. 'Perfectly,' he answered" (Conrad 122)

Before mapping the mental states of these two mad creatures, we need to acknowledge their intelligence. In opposition to Kantian ethics and Augustine's neo-Platonism an abundance of rationality does not produce "goodness" or "kindness" in these two stories. Ayesha's "brain was supernaturally sharpened" (196) and Kurtz was, if we are to believe the many people who have met him, a "universal genius" (135). Marlow feels forced to stress to his four Nellie friends: "I wasn't arguing with a lunatic either. Believe me or not, his intelligence was perfectly clear" (124).

[1] Since Kurtz is not exactly an emissary of light (to use a colonial term), this statement can be understood literally, as well as ironically. The wilderness has "become a place of darkness" (10) and Kurtz resides at the heart of darkness. Kurtz has been "assaulted by the powers of darkness" (90) and "[i]t was a moment of triumph for the wilderness" (138): Kurtz became "a shadow darker than the shadow of the night" (138). Kurtz assimilated with his environment and the heart of darkness became descriptive of both his address and person: "the barren darkness of his heart" (128). If Kurtz is darkness, then one sees him better when it is pitch dark. To understand darkness, one needs to darken one's vision, as "going at it blind [...] is very proper for those who tackle a darkness" (8). This might be why Kurtz, being himself darkness, "struggles blindly with himself" (125). Thus Marlow's friends might have visualized Kurtz better, due to the thick darkness surrounding the Nellie.

Marlow believes that Kurtz's intelligence is not in opposition to "evil" or "darkness", but may be conducive to it: "you may be too much of a fool to wrong – too dull even to know you are being assaulted by the powers of darkness. I take it, no fool ever made a bargain for his soul with the devil: the fool is too much of a fool, or the devil too much of a devil – I don't know which" (90); "Of course, a fool, what with sheer fright and fine sentiments, is always safe" (65). Ayesha, in the same spirit, attributes her violent actions to her superior mind: "the almost infinite mind grows impatient of the slowness of the very finite, and I am tempted to use my power of pure vexation" (169).

Although Marlow and Ayesha single out rationality as a scapegoat for violence, it is an oversimplification to locate the origin of darkness in Ayesha and Kurtz's minds. Marlow stresses that it is Kurtz's soul that is unlawful, suffering, mad, tempestuous, satiated with primitive emotions, knows no restraint and has been corrupted by a devilish incantation – whereas Kurtz's mind is gifted and generous. Ayesha's mind is at times described as dark: "the very colour of her mind [...] torture-torn and hateful, as I had seen it when she was cursing her dead rival by the leaping flames" (192). However, it is, to a larger extent, Ayesha's soul – not mind – that has been corrupted: "her dark soul" (160); "a soul in Hell" (170); "passion and hatred [have] been stamped upon my soul" (288).

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Ayesha and Kurtz are, if I am allowed to use such multi-faceted Conradian nouns, united by their "solitude" and "isolation". Ayesha admits that "for two thousand years have I had none to converse with save slaves and my own thoughts" (191). She has lived "without companionship" (201) and developed the habit of talking to herself. Ayesha has bred her closest servants for stupidity and muteness, not for conversational ability. Whereas Ayesha has been alone for two thousand years, Kurtz – "the lone white man" (57) residing at his "desolate station" (57) – has only been by himself for two years: "He had been wandering about that river for nearly two years alone, cut off from everybody and everything" (99).[2] Although Kurtz talks to many people in the wilderness, he never talks with them: "'Don't you talk to Mr Kurtz?' I [Marlow] said. 'You don't talk with that man – you listen to him [answered the Russian 'harlequin' stationed close to Kurtz]'" (98). The vision of Kurtz as the single voice of the Inner Station – the Kurtzian universe – lines up nicely with the dictionary definition of the Harlequin: the *mute* character in pantomime. The novella stresses this image: "There he [the harlequin] was before me, in motley, as though he had absconded from a troupe of mimes" (101).

[2] If, like Allan Hunter, one wants to argue that *Hearts of Darkness* is a deliberate parody of *She*, then one may discuss the possibility of Conrad using the digit two to subtly link the two stories. Marlow's journey to Kurtz and back to "civilization" took two months. Horace and his team return after two years in the wilderness. We thus have two corresponding binaries: two thousand years – two years and two years – two months. The smaller binary refers to Marlow and Horace's time spent in the wilderness. The larger binary refers to the time spent in the wilderness by Ayesha and Kurtz. Both are multiples of two, temporal and corresponding in relative action and size.

Solitude, a recurring theme in Conrad's *oeuvre*, expectedly produces unhappiness for Kurtz. When alone you need to fall back on your *inborn/innate strength* (65; 76; 90) avers Marlow. It seems that Kurtz, despite living at the Inner Station, lacked inner strength: "his soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness, it had looked within itself [...] it had gone mad" (124).

Kurtz has no "restraint" (94; 107; 125) and that applies, it seems, also to his indulgence in sorrow. The Russian confirms that unhappiness has come to define Kurtz's wild wilderness existence: "This man suffered too much. He hated all this, and somehow he couldn't get away" (105). It comes, then, as no surprise that Kurtz sums up his existence, in "his final burst of sincerity" (125) and "last opportunity for pronouncement" (132), with the well-known repetition: "The horror! The horror!" (130). Ayesha also laments her life towards the end of it: "Oh! to have lived two thousand years, with my passion eating at my heart, and with my sin ever before me" (168). Marlow observes in Kurtz's face "an intense and hopeless despair" (130), and Ayesha's suffering is of a caliber that her face cannot hide: "Though the face before me was that of a young woman [observes Horace] [...] it had stamped upon it a look of unutterable experience, and of deep acquaintance with grief and passion [...] [her smile seemed to say] 'memory haunts me from age to age, and passion leads me by the hand – evil have I done, and with sorrow have I made acquaintance from age to age'" (159); "the agony, the blind passion, and the awful vindictiveness [...] the tortured look of the upturned eyes" (166). It is thus clear that Ayesha and Kurtz are not only both friends of loneliness, but also deeply acquainted with personal suffering.

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Ayesha and Kurtz's colonial ambitions match those of Cecil Rhodes, who wished to colonize the stars. Ayesha and Kurtz define their starry ambition in their inability to be complacent or satisfied. Ayesha admits that she has lived for two thousand years with "an unfulfilled desire" (201). When it comes to Kurtz, "there was something wanting in him – some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence. Whether he knew of this deficiency himself I can't say" (107). Kurtz and Ayesha's life trajectories (at least the ones shown to the reader) reveal that their individual deficiencies refuse to be overcome – and serve as consistent guarantors for unflagging ambitions.

Marlow, in the spirit of someone who has renounced his will, maintains a buddhistic pose (8; 146) whilst narrating. In contrast, he cannot forget "the colossal scale of his [Kurtz's] vile desires" (138). Kurtz's fiancée cements Marlow's understanding: "You know what vast plans he had. I knew of them too" (143). Ayesha is no worse; she dreams of world-empire and praises the English for their colonial empire ("tis a great people, is it not? with an Empire like that of Rome!" (254)) as well as the people of Kor ("A great people were they. They conquered till none were left to conquer" (184)). She intends to one day colonize the entire earth and install Leo as the supreme feudal leader. Horace and Leo are informed, by Ayesha, about her plans to come to England and impose her way of ruling there: replacing democracy and mon-

archy with eternal tyranny. Horace, however, does not praise empire building in and of itself, and is concerned about Ayesha's plans:

> The terrible *She* had absolutely made up her mind to go to England, and it made me absolutely shudder to think what would be the result of her arrival there [...] In the end she would, I had little doubt, assume absolute rule over the British dominions, and probably over the whole earth, and, though I was sure that she would speedily make ours the most glorious and prosperous empire that the world has ever seen, it would be at the cost of a terrible sacrifice of lives. (255)

Haggard and Ayesha here give the British reader an opportunity to identify him or herself with the colonial victim (somewhat analogous to how Bram Stroker entertains the fear of Dracula colonizing England and the Western world). We see the same fear, that the Western colonizer would not be satisfied with the exotic wilderness, in Marlow's visual memory of Kurtz's unbounded ambition: "I had a vision of him on the stretcher, opening his mouth voraciously, as if to devour all the earth with all its mankind" (137).

Kurtz and Ayesha's desires are of such strength that they have colored their outer appearances. Kurtz has an "ivory face" (130), a torso "carved out of old ivory" (111), and his bald head "was like [...] an ivory ball" (96) – an insinuation about what Kurtz occupies his mind with. It is noteworthy that Horace consistently describes Ayesha's skin-tone as ivoryesque. Ayesha's arms are reminiscent of ivory tusks (167; 229; 290). Ayesha has an "ivory hand" (149), "ivory bosom" (253), "ivory breast and shoulder" (291). On top of this Ayesha has furniture inlaid with ivory and her guards have ivory needles, ivory rods and ivory wands. The consistent equation with Ayesha's body and ivory cements the motif of her – "the imperial *She*" (298) who has an "imperial shape" (158) and moves with "imperial grace" (159; 228) – as a single-minded colonizer of Kurtzian caliber.

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> ... "the word 'ivory' rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it" (Conrad 39)

Beliefs in Christianity underpinned the colonial mission. As the British mid-nineteenth-century prime minister John Russell put it: "The aim of colonization [...] was to encourage religious instruction and let the subjects partake of the blessings of Christianity" (qtd. in Nandy 34). The Haggardian hero Hiya however does not fit the colonizing stereotype, given that she might have been an atheist; the Jews called her "heathen" (152) and chased her out of Egypt on this basis. Further, Ayesha's belief in moral relativism ("who can say what is evil and what good?" (154)) is difficult to reconcile with a belief in Christianity. Nevertheless, Horace, although Christian at heart,[3] also entertains ideas of moral relativism, as when he observes that the

[3] Horace explains religious history to Ayesha: Jesus "came poor and lowly, and they [the Jewish people] would have none of Him. They scourged Him, and crucified Him upon a tree, but yet His words

Amahaggers act under a different moral code than he is used to. Discussions with Ayesha "had confounded and almost destroyed my moral [Christian] sense" (229), states Horace. Given the logic of *She*, then, a belief in moral relativism is not necessarily opposed to Christianity.

Kurtz does not propagate Christian values and may also be a non-believer: he had, according to Marlow, "a soul that knew no restraint, *no faith*, and no fear [italics mine]" (125). Indeed, one wonders how Kurtz could construct and sign the argument, in his paper for The International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs, if he were a devout or "amateur" Christian. In this paper, he proposes that the colonizer should utilize the fact that he is viewed as a God by the natives. The Bible, however, condemns thoughts of presenting oneself as God. Impaling foreigners also seems irreconcilable with Christian values. Michael Lackey argues that Kurtz initially goes to the jungle "like a typical Christian missionary, as a minister of light, Truth, and civilization" (34). Although Marlow speculates that Kurtz "had come out [to the "wilderness"] equipped with moral ideas of some sort" (54), it is far from certain that Kurtz went for Christian reasons. The novella suggests instead (if we are to trust Kurtz's untrustworthy fiancée)[4] that Kurtz went for mercenary reasons: "it was his impatience of comparative poverty that drove him out there" (142). On his way to Kurtz, Marlow stumbles upon a colonizer who believes it is self-evident why anyone would enter the tropic: "I couldn't help asking him once what he meant by coming there at all. 'To make money, of course. What do you think?' he said, scornfully" (34). The "extravagant salary" (74) did perhaps not go unnoticed by Kurtz (who works on percentages). As Marlow concludes: "Evidently the appetite for more ivory had got the better of the – what shall I say? – less material aspirations" (106). Kurtz's soul close to death is "avid of lying fame, of shame distinction, of all the appearances of success and power" (128).

Marlow stops by the Eldorado Exploring Expedition and listens to "the nephew" and "the uncle" converse in intended secrecy about Kurtz. In this conversation they, who are described by Marlow as sordid buccaneers, lament Kurtz's inhuman and reckless attitude to colonizing: "'Each station should be like a beacon on the road towards better things, a centre for trade of course, but also for humanizing, improving instructing'. Conceive you – that ass! And he [Kurtz] wants to be manager! No, it's – Here he got choked by excessive indignation" (58). Kurtz's colonizing methods are

and His works live on, for He was the Son of God, and now of a truth He doth rule half the world, but not with an Empire of the World" (Haggard 152). Since Horace, here, equates biblical history with worldly history and avers that Jesus was the Son of God, it is fair to assume that Horace was a Christian. Horace also calls himself "a Christian man" (172) and quotes the Christian Bible to explain why it is wrong to kill "innocent women [Ustane]" (206).

[4] It is a contended issue whether Kurtz's fiancée is deluded about him or trustworthy in her testimony. On the issue of what motivated Kurtz to leave for the wilderness she is, perhaps, to be trusted. The clue to this is to be had from Conrad's other stories. Mr Verloc in *The Secret Agent* gets the question "What made you go in for that sort of thing – eh?" and then "Mr Verloc's husky conversational voice was heard speaking of youth, of a fatal infatuation for an unworthy – 'Aha! Cherchez la femme,' Mr Vladimir deigned to interrupt". The same rationale for slipping into "darkness" or "sin" is given in *Lord Jim.* Not only Kurtz's fiancée, but also Conrad considers the passion for pecuniary gain to be a serious contender for catalyzing someone into darkness.

also described as unsound by a nameless station manager, and from these unflattering incidents one is forced to conclude that Kurtz is – not even speciously – trying to maintain the pretence that Christian faith underpins his mission.

Kurtz "had no restraint" (94) and this separates him from the ascetic tradition of Christianity. Kurtz's insatiable greed for ivory is not in accord with the universally known Christian dictum: "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God". Kurtz flouts Christian modesty since he "stepped over the edge" (132), goes "beyond the bounds of permitted aspirations" (124), entertains "images of wealth and fame [...] [and] desired to have kings meet him at railway-stations on his return from some ghastly Nowhere" (128).

Judeo-Christian morality is in Nietzschian terminology a revolt against immodesty, brutality, selfishness, greed and ambition – nouns that define Kurtz's wilderness existence. Although colonizers often accomplished their missions on the pretence of propagating Christianity, one cannot see any attempt by Kurtz to try to establish himself as a Christian missionary. This, however, does not prevent the readers from seeing Kurtz as the epitome of a colonizer. Since we accept that Kurtz is a non-flattering representative of the colonizer, we cannot assume – on the basis that colonialism is tied to Christianity and Ayesha was a heathen – that Haggard did not construct Ayesha to criticize colonialism.

We have now established that Ayesha and Kurtz are mentally very similar creatures. They match each other in ambition, unhappiness and loneliness. It further seems as though both Ayesha and Kurtz are devoid of any religious belief. However, why Ayesha is an imperial antihero, like Kurtz, is perhaps most clearly established by their similar ways of exerting violence, rather than by their similar mental states. After all, a brutal colonizer is (one may argue) above all characterized by his or her acts, rather than his or her mental life or way of thinking. I will now try to show that these tormented tormentors exert violence in much the same way.

WANTON VIOLENCE AND JEJUNE JUSTIFICATIONS

Ayesha and Kurtz perceive the indigenous people as sub-human, which allows them to dispose of them capriciously. As with many colonial missions, "the conviction of the inferiority of the Other justifies the enterprise" (Kaplan). Kurtz ends his seventeen-page report for The International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs with the postscript: "Exterminate all the brutes!" (92), and thereby reveals his opinion of the natives. Similarly, Ayesha considers the Amahaggers to be brutes rather than human beings. She breeds them as if they were dogs and calls them "dogs" and "serpents" (177). Animalization was symptomatic of the colonizing practice: "The colonizer [...] in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as *an animal*" (Cesaire 57).

As stereotypical colonizers, they use the natives as tools to advance their own ends on the pretext of being morally superior. Kurtz uses his deifying tribal natives to

raid villages to pander to his insatiable greed for ivory. For Ayesha the Amahaggers are, in her words, "dogs to do my bidding till the day of my deliverance comes" (156).

Kurtz pushes the argument that imperialism (which is necessarily tied up with violence – Macmillan 5), is morally justified. In his report to the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs*,* Kurtz excitedly writes: "By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded" (92). Marlow, from reading the report, gets "the notion of an exotic Immensity ruled by an august Benevolence" (92), a Leviathan.

According to Ayesha's rhetoric, her presence in Africa, like that of Leviathan in the Hobbesian world, has a stabilizing role for the people. The Amahaggers would, without Ayesha's presence, live in the *status naturalis* defined by the *Bellum omnium contra omnes.* This, at least, is the (largely unconvincing) view Ayesha holds: "ye [Amahaggers] are all evil – evil to the core – the wickedness bubbles up in you like a fountain in the spring-time. Were it not for me, generations since had ye ceased to be, for your own evil ways had ye destroyed each other" (178). In this sense, Ayesha concludes, the "cruel rage of the tyrant may prove a blessing to thousands who come after him" (205). Although Ayesha is extraordinarily violent, her violence is, in her unreliable words, not the consequence of a violent and vengeful temper ("Believe not that I would be cruel, and take vengeance on anything so low. What can it profit me to be avenged on such as these?" (179), but a necessary evil to control the violent Amahaggers for their own sake. Ayesha's violence is, however, excessive and scorned by Horace for this reason. Ayesha's moral justification for exerting violence on her "rebellious children" (177) is, in the end, not more comforting than the explanation that the shrunken heads in Kurtz's garden "were the heads of rebels" (109).

Ayesha and Kurtz's access to relatively advanced science allow them to rule as unopposed dictators. As Kurtz puts it: "we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings – we approach them in the might as of a deity" (92). Analogously, Ayesha is in control of science that even to the Cambridge don Horace ("a rational man, not unacquainted with the leading scientific facts of our history" (162)) appears as magic, and lets her subjugate the Amahaggers.

This scientific advantage gives them absolute imperial power. Leo's father emphasizes that: "the people [...] are ruled over by a *beautiful white woman* [...] who is reported to have power over all things living and dead" (38). Similarly, Kurtz is the master of his jungle: "my ivory, my station, my river, my – everything belonged to him" (89), even the indigenous people: "those people of mine" (89). The Russian confirms that Kurtz can take the life of anyone in the wilderness: "there was nothing on earth preventing him killing whom he jolly well pleased" (104). "[W]isdom [...] is power" (Haggard 123) and it is no coincidence that the superior power that Ayesha and Kurtz exert is based on a scientific advantage. Since it is a well-known fact that colonialism was made possible due to the colonizers' scientific advantage (McClellan and Regourd), Ayesha and Kurtz's possession of a scientific advantage cements the picture of them as colonizers.

The etymological root of 'imperium' further makes it clear why Ayesha and Kurtz possess absolute imperial power. The word 'imperium', conceived in the republic of the late Roman period, refers "to the absolute right of independent princes to rule within their territorial jurisdiction [...] without recognizing any higher earthly authority" (Macmillan 21). Ayesha is described as "being unconstrained by human law" (205) and says that she is "above the law" (255). Thereby she is following the imperial Roman law, which held that the monarch was above the law (*Princeps legibus solutus est*). Similarly Kurtz possesses an "unlawful soul" (124); "There was nothing either above or below him [...] He had kicked himself lose of the earth" (124). Kurtz is guided by his own moral code and seeks, like Ayesha, nothing more than "justice": "I want no more than justice" (138) – defined in such a way that it exclusively favors Kurtz, of course. Thus, Kurtz and Ayesha are their own highest earthly authority and exercise absolute power over the natives, the land and themselves: they are imperial colonizers in the truest sense of the word.

Ayesha and Kurtz's methods of ruling are grounded in violence. Both rule with fear: "How thinkest thou that I [Ayesha] rule this people? I have but a regiment of guards to do my bidding, therefore it is not by force. It is by fear" (179). Similarly, the collection of shrunken heads outside of Kurtz's abode testify to a similar policy of governance. Both demand that their subjects should crawl in their presence. Just as Billali, the chief of the Amahaggers, crawls in the presence of Ayesha, "the chiefs came every day to see him [Kurtz]. They would crawl" (108).

Billali, Ayesha's closest man, echoes the position of Kurtz's native "mistress". She has often been classified as a mistress by literary criticism, but this classification has been interpreted as a Eurocentric reading (Fothergill 53). Another possibility is that she is the chief of the natives responsible for implementing the raids on Kurtz's behalf. This reading is supported by the fact that she is still in possession of power and respect over the other natives after Kurtz's death – just like Billali is left with power after Ayesha's death.

Although Ayesha and Kurtz are separated from the natives by unequal access to power, they still engage in native "barbarities". Kurtz indulges himself in a Dionysian midnight dancing feast with the natives, and Ayesha sets up a nocturnal "savage fetish dance" (219) for Leo, Horace and Job, where the natives set fire to mummies. In both Ayesha and Kurtz's dancing feasts, the main narrators (Horace and Marlow) are appalled on several levels – physical, mental and moral: "it appealed to the moral as well as physical susceptibilities" (Haggard 219); "the moral shock I received, as if something altogether monstrous, intolerable to thought and odious to the soul, had been thrust upon me unexpectedly" (Conrad 120). Both Horace and Marlow, who serve as the reader's civilized guides to the uncivilized, here point out – with their intense and multi-leveled reactions – that Ayesha and Kurtz are indulging themselves in unforgivable barbarities. It is thus clear that Ayesha embraces barbarism, "seated in her barbaric chair above them all" (177), much in the same way that Kurtz "had [literally] taken a high seat among the devils of the land" (90).

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As a tribute to Pittock and Hunter's bold claims, I have tried to show that light can be flashed on the darkness and loneliness that unite Ayesha and Kurtz. This unexplored territory (if you will, "a blank space of delightful mystery – a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over" (Conrad 10)) tempted me to journey into its heart and surround myself with its utter savagery: Ayesha and Kurtz, their violence, greatness, suffering, exceptionality and madness.

Marlow's impressionistic, dreamy, buddhistic and enigmatic depiction of Kurtz clearly shows that Ayesha is his twin of darkness. Ayesha – just like Kurtz – is ambitious, mad, remarkable, solitary, parasitic, obsessed, unhappy, brutal, tragic, powerful, legendary, solipsistic and ivoryesque. Ayesha and Kurtz cement themselves as colonizers by being non-indigenous, viewing the natives as disposable sub-humans and expressing their moral obligation to rule them. Like any true colonizer they rule due to a scientific advantage and with fear. Their unflagging, starry colonial ambitions ensure that they will not stop until they have colonized the earth. Although Ayesha is "clothed in immoral youth and godlike beauty" (294) and Kurtz "draped nobly in the folds of gorgeous eloquence" (139), these seductive cloaks do not hide their ugly and fetid brutality. In short, Conrad – consciously or unconsciously – twins these characters and leaves the reader with a choice of nightmares. What this essay does not answer, however, is whether this twinning is "significant", or the outcome of two writers working in the same cultural ambiance.

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