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SYMBOLISM AND IMAGERY IN *HEART OF DARKNESS* AND *APOCALYPSE NOW*

I. Symbolism

It is a frequent phenomenon in the world of art that one work influences the creation of another. Often it seems that the two such works cannot be of equal quality since, when compared, one work tends to be perceived as of a higher artistic value than the other. The situation is extremely complicated if one attempts to compare two works as different as a work of fiction and a motion picture. Often the latter is unappreciated in comparison to the former. The reason may be that the techniques used in each case are very dissimilar. Yet, the effects created by the application of different literary and cinematic techniques may be of similar power and artistic quality. The purpose of this work is to analyse, compare and contrast various techniques used in creating symbols and the imagery in two works closely related to one another on several levels, namely: *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad and *Apocalypse Now* by Francis Ford Coppola. The theoretical basis for defining notions such as: symbol, metaphor, sign, iconic sign is provided by Umberto Eco's approach to semiotics and semiology.

As with almost any other aspect of *Heart of Darkness*, there seems to be much controversy among the critics concerning the symbolism of this novella. The controversy is caused by the almost unlimited possibilities of interpretation of particular symbols; such polyphony of meanings, however, is the core of the phenomenon known as the symbol. A symbol is that which stands for something else, something which can be defined by the one who decodes its meaning. Eco argues that a symbol becomes one when an unlimited number of interpretations is possible and when at the same time its presence in the text does not interfere with the semantic integrity of the text, and thus it can be understood in its literal meaning (U. Eco 1999:199). Eco further claims that for a symbol to exist several conditions apply. First of all, a symbol needs to be a trope which when understood literally suggests more than its literal meaning denotes and provokes further analysis. Secondly,

it appears when three rules, being: be competent, be comprehensible and say only what the given communication circumstances demand, become distorted. The distortion of all three of these rules implies purpose rather than error. When there is no single interpretation of this situation one deals with a symbolic mode. Eco suggests that the symbolic mode describes something that in a given context should not have the place it does (for example: a given description is not reliable, or it takes up too much space or it is ambiguous in its meaning) and so it becomes epiphanic (ibidem 193). Thus, a symbol, by its nature, is open to various interpretations that differ from interpreter to interpreter, but to a great extent the interpretation is controlled by the text itself.

The majority of critics fully agree that Conrad's novella is rich in symbols although their meanings are understood and interpreted very differently, which, considering Eco's views, is a perfectly natural situation, only strengthening the idea that Conrad created something more that just a story about a journey in the Congo. This is precisely the reason for so many interpretations of *Heart of Darkness*. Ian Watt in his essay *Impressionism and Symbolism* in *'Heart of Darkness'* argues that:

> *Heart of Darkness* [...] belongs to a specifically symbolic tradition of fiction, and it is the only one of Conrad's novels which does. (I. Watt 1988:324)

Conrad's characters and their fate mean more than their immediate selves and actions described by the narrator, and consequently have deeper implications and represent more general ideas and situations. However, Conrad makes it very difficult to decipher these hidden meanings. Or, as with a symbol as such – there exist many interpretations of the same character, scene or passage. Ian Watt notices many symbolic associations in particular passages – more than critics do generally, and to some extent he criticises them for too narrow a scale of interpretation. He believes that too many critics want to find one definite interpretation of a particular phenomenon in the novella and still try to call this phenomenon a symbol. He sums up other critics' approaches in the following way:

> This kind of critical interpretation assumes that the symbolic reference of the verbal sign must be closed rather than open, and that it arises, not from the natural and inherent associations of the object, but from a pre-established body of ideas, stories or myths. (ibidem 1988:324)

Watt's point is very strong here and corresponds with Eco's understanding of the openness of a symbol, yet the scope of this paper does not allow for a detailed interpretation of each symbolic passage in *Heart of Darkness*. The topic may be treated in general terms only so as to point out similarities or differences in comparison to the symbolism of *Apocalypse Now*.

The novella's symbolic associations may be discussed at two levels: the general and the particular. At the general level, *Heart of Darkness* can be viewed as a symbolic journey within one's self and towards the inferno created by civilisation on earth. In other words, it is a symbolic journey into the depths of the human soul and civilisation and the roots of evil dormant there. That at the core of the meanings lies civilisation in its entirety is suggested by the omission of any proper names, except for Brussels, in the entire novella. Neither places nor people are given proper names, which suggests that the story implies more than the events might denote. Conrad uses expressions such as "Inner Station" about places or "the brick maker" or "the main accountant" about people, thus removing his story from the immediate context of Africa, and to paraphrase Watt – he liberates it from the bonds and irrelevancies of the purely circumstantial and contingent, so that the story can be recognised as representative of larger ideas and attitudes.

At the particular level – the level of details – one may distinguish various elements in the novella that clearly stand for something other than their literal meaning denote and suggest the symbolic mode in use. These are colours, objects, characters and their appearance. They can be understood within the framework and context of the narration, and yet they evoke in the reader the feeling that there is much more to them; they obviously stand out from the immediate context of the story. They provoke various associations (something that Eco would poetically call "the haze of meanings"). The reader may choose not to read the novella in the symbolic mode and the text is still comprehensible on both the literal and rhetorical level. Yet, if read literally, the novella seems banal and almost boring. There is little action. The narrated events are not even very exciting. Among them there appear colours, objects and characters which seem so "intrusive" that one is forced to treat them as representative of some further meanings; one is tempted to interpret them.

Several colours are ever present throughout the story and their appearance is rather conspicuous. As Eco suggests, systems of colours function as semantic systems connected with various facts and have contrasting connotations depending on the society in which they are used, whether one considers primitive societies or modern, western ones (U. Eco 1999:391). In some societies white may be associated with wedding ceremonies, in others with mourning, black with mourning in some – with wedding ceremonies in others. Conrad uses these two colours: black and white, in a very conspicuous and striking way. In the Judeo-Christian tradition these two colours have the connotation of evil and good, respectively. White often stands for purity, innocence and the better side of the human soul. Black is usually associated with evil and the darker side of humanity. In *Heart of Darkness* these two colours still bear their traditional meanings, yet in some cases their immediate implication is rather obscured or even reversed. What is white on the surface does not necessarily have to be the embodiment of goodness and what is black is not necessarily evil.

In the initial stages of his journey Marlow observes black people who are pictured as the victims of the work system introduced by the white civilisation. Black people are the ones who are exploited beyond imagination, yet they do not rebel against those who take advantage of them. They are portrayed as good-natured and hard working. Thus, it seems that only the outside is black. One is tempted to think that inside their souls are white – pure, innocent, not yet corrupted. In these initial stages the whites, on the contrary, are depicted as extremely cruel towards the people of Africa and they exploit the blacks. So – the white of their skin covers what is black, meaning: evil, inside – rottenness, greed, and cruelty. This sort of inversion is so striking that it becomes symbolic and is strengthened by details which allow one to read between the lines and suggest further associations. One such item is a white string of cotton around the starving black boy's neck:

> The black bones reclined at full length with one shoulder against the tree and slowly the eyelids rose and the sunken eyes looked up at me, enormous and vacant, a kind of blind, white flicker in the depths of the orbs, which died out slowly. The man seemed young – almost a boy – but you know with them it's hard to tell.[...] he had tied a bit of white worsted round his neck – why? [...] It looked startling round his black neck, this bit of white thread from beyond the seas. (J. Conrad 1983:45)

Conrad uses here black and white very consciously. The white string of cotton seems out of place on the black boy's neck and the narrator clearly emphasises it. The white string becomes a symbol which may suggest the purity of the dying man's soul – his soul is white although he himself is black. He is too young and innocent to be evil.

As far as white people are concerned – their whiteness is pure falsehood. The best example is provided by the accountant whose collars and cuffs are white:

> I saw a high starched collar, white cuffs, a light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clear necktie, and varnished boots. (ibidem 45)

says Marlow.

Every outside aspect of this man is white and clean and suggests the most proper behaviour of a civilised person. Yet, truly, this white man is cruel and heartless; he expresses neither compassion nor interest when a dying man (black, of course), too ill even to moan, lies on the floor in his office. His reaction is that of annoyance and anger, and his comment on the circumstances is as follows:

> The groans of this sick person he said distract my attention. (ibidem 44)

The black and white inversion is not a rule, however. In other cases when black appears the usual connotation of evil, corruption, depravation

and villainy holds true and is not obscured, and whatever is black becomes a premonition of some kind of tragedy or evil activity. When Marlow visits the office of the Belgian Company, he notices two women knitting black wool. The colour becomes a presentiment of the dark fate that awaits him in the Congo. The same is suggested by the cause of his predecessor's death who died in a quarrel over two black hens – a rather rare colour in this species. Also, the very first real thing connected with Kurtz that Marlow comes across on his journey is Kurtz's oil painting whose background is all black. And, finally, blackness looms over Kurtz's dwelling: the dry heads on the poles around the house are black and there is a black hole in the roof. Thus, black is encountered by Marlow on every stage of his journey and reminds or warns him of the evil hidden both in his and each man's soul.

Conrad also introduces in the text other colours and expressions connected with them, whose appearance may be variously interpreted, thus becoming symbolic. Yellow appears for the first time on the map in the Brussels office, as marking the Congo area, and thus Marlow's destination. Later on this colour accompanies him constantly in the shape of ivory. Ivory – the treasure of Africa, which made the whites behave in ways unbecoming of civilised people. The possession of ivory guaranteed vast fortunes for which the whites were ready to steal, murder, and exploit. Yellow in association with ivory is mentioned so often that it makes one think that it represents corruption, decay and damage done by the whites. It is the colour of destruction in the name of civilisation and of the desire to possess more and more. Yellow is the colour of materialistic endeavours on the part of those supposedly civilised.

Various colours – multicoloured patches – are an attribute of the harlequin. In the green and misty jungle the bright colours on his clothes emphasise that he is out of place there and may symbolise his foolishness, gaiety, naiveté and quickly changeable moods. This brightness is extremely conspicuous among the dark surroundings. The gaiety associated with them contrasts with the murky atmosphere of the jungle and the gloominess and apathy of its inhabitants.

And finally, the word *pale* that often appears in the novella may be symbolically associated with death. Biblically the pale horse and the rider on it are considered to be the symbol of death and it seems so also in *Heart of Darkness.* Conrad seems to draw on the biblical interpretation of the pale horse and utilises this traditional colour symbolism in his novella. The ivory Company Manager's look is pale. This may foreshadow Kurtz's death. Also the Intended looks pale: *She came forward, all in black, with a pale head, floating towards me in the dusk. She was in mourning.* (ibidem 117) Her paleness, similarly, symbolises death – of a double impact, however. She is half-dead with her grief after Kurtz's death. It is only Marlow who brings her back to life with his lie by saying that Kurtz's last words were her name.

Conrad's writing uses colours very effectively. He utilises their traditional connotations; he builds up very powerful visual images through them. One

of the most striking images created through the juxtaposition of colours is the appearance of the colourfully dressed harlequin in the gloomy jungle. Shortly before the Russian is introduced Marlow describes Kurtz's dwelling:

> Through my glasses I saw the slope of a hill interspersed with rare trees and perfectly free from undergrowth. A long decaying building on the summit was half buried in the high grass; the large holes in the peaked roof gaped black from afar; the jungle and the woods made the background. (ibidem 89)

The atmosphere of the place and all the events that preceded Marlow's arrival there (the arrow attack, the helmsman's death and funeral) are extremely sombre and pessimistic. The description of Kurtz's place is almost colourless, except for the black holes, but still the impression is of a dark, unpleasant location. And in these surroundings and circumstances there appears the harlequin:

> His clothes had been made of some stuff that was brown holland probably, but it was covered with patches all over, with bright patches, blue, red, and yellow, – patches on the back, patches on the front, patches on elbows, on knees; coloured binding around his jacket, scarlet edging at the bottom of his trousers; and the sunshine made him look extremely gay and wonderfully neat withal, because you could see how beautifully all this patching had been done. (ibidem 90)

These bright colours give the impression that the sun is shining in the darkness for the first time. The young man is like a ray of sunshine among the dark trees – as if he was the embodiment of happiness and hope in the dark land.

Colours, however, are not used alone to create symbolic associations. They are usually combined with various objects; Kurtz's oil painting provides a good example. The blackness filling the background is only the completion of a bigger unity. The entire picture is symbolic and being so it may be interpreted in various ways. It depicts a blindfolded woman bearing light:

> Then I noticed a small sketch in oils, on a panel, representing a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The background was sombre – almost black. The movement of the woman was stately, and the effect of the torch-light on the face was sinister. (ibidem 54)

The fact that it was Kurtz who had painted the picture suggests that it may express his knowledge of the stupidity and blindness of the Company's representatives who tread the unknown territory blindfold. In contrast to them he descends the depths of darkness with his eyes open, fully conscious of his deeds. On a more general level, the woman may stand for the entire

European civilisation that entered the black land – Africa – in order to colonise it; that is, to bring enlightenment (the torch) to those who lead their lives in primitive ways. The stately manner and movements of the woman suggest civilised ways. The Europeans are, however, blind to the fact that the Africans have their own customs and culture and that is why the woman is blindfolded. The white men refuse to accept that their appearance in Africa is just an intrusion upon the tradition of the land.

Moreover, other objects – shoes, a pail with a hole in it, grass, and flies – also gain symbolic associations in the story, although their meanings are more dubious, yet their appearance in the text is striking. This is precisely why these objects become symbols. These are open symbols – there can be no single deciphering of them. Yet, they are narrowed by the context of the story.

Shoes, for example, are mentioned throughout the course of the narration at various points. Marlow throws his shoes full of the dead helmsman's blood into the river. This may be understood as a symbolic act on his part. Sailors get rid of their shoes when they are in a critical situation. It happens mostly when the ship is about to sink – shoes hinder swimming. Perhaps in his gesture Marlow unites himself with the sailors and unconsciously admits that he is indeed in dire straits. His situation is difficult, yet he attempts to follow civilised ways (the action suggests so), and thus manages to avoid Kurtz's mistake. The helmsman is killed by the tribesmen. By throwing the shoes covered in blood into the river Marlow severs himself from the primitive ways and cruelty of the blacks.

Again, shoes appear when the Russian asks Marlow for a pair of shoes at their farewell:

> "I say, haven't you a pair of shoes you could spare?" He raised one leg. "Look". The soles were tied with knotted strings sandal-wise under his bare feet. I rooted out an old pair at which he looked with admiration before tucking it under his left arm. [...] He seemed to think himself excellently well equipped for a renewed encounter with the wilderness. (ibidem 104)

In this case the shoes may be a symbol of guidance or the reminder of the cultured ways rare in the jungle. They become symbolic, since they are conspicuously funny as the only equipment with which to encounter the hostile jungle. One is tempted to think that some weapon or medicine would be of much more use in such an environment. But all the Russian needs and asks for are shoes. The Russian seems to need to follow someone's example: first his teacher was Kurtz, but then he needs someone else, someone who, unlike Kurtz, may still serve as a civilised guide. That is Marlow. And, moreover, his desire to possess shoes may indicate the refusal to unite himself with the wilderness and to adopt the savage way of life. It is as if he needed some token of civilisation represented by Marlow to protect him from becoming a devil incarnate like Kurtz.

In consequence, shoes are connected with all the major characters – also with the brooding presence of Kurtz. Always concerned with details, Marlow notices:

> One morning he gave me a packet of papers and a photograph – the lot tied together with a shoe-string. (ibidem 111)

Conrad always chooses words very carefully, so in this case a shoe-string must have some other meaning than merely a literal one. Kurtz might have used anything to tie the bundle: string, rope or grass abundant in the jungle. Conrad chooses a shoe-string. Perhaps for Kurtz this last attribute of civilisation was like some sort of umbilical cord that connected him with his motherland – Europe – and after all, he was unable to cut himself totally off from it and kept it till the very end.

Undoubtedly, Conrad is a master of detail. Each word adds something to the story. There are few unnecessary details in the novella, so in writing he uses linguistic signs at two levels: to tell the adventure story and to give this story a broader context and meaning through symbolic associations connected with the words and expressions that he chooses.

Films, as any other works of art such as paintings or literature, can be rich in symbols as well, depending on the artistry of the director. As Huss and Silverstein stress in their study of film:

> Any sensuously apprehended detail is an image. [...] In cinema, any sound or picture or part of picture [...] is one kind of image, [...] like poetry and painting, cinema uses concrete details so that they function as symbols, thought-bearing images that stand for a complex of associations. (R. Huss, N. Silverstein 1968: 82)

In each kind of art details may be used to such extent and in such a way, that they may lose their effect and instead of bearing symbolic meanings they become clichés. This can often happen with cinematic art, as in motion pictures symbols are more universal than personal. In its history it has created a series of symbolic images that have been used so often that they have become stereotypes. Thus, Huss and Silverstein:

> Furthermore, particular objects often are made into conventional or trite symbols. Pages of calendars blow off, the hands of clocks move, wind blows the leaves from trees (to indicate the passage of time or change of seasons. (ibidem 88)

Fortunately, the technique and artistry used in *Apocalypse Now* allow to avoid such obvious scenes that would suggest stereotypes rather than symbolic associations. Coppola creates symbols, but they are far from clichés. It is possible because Coppola rarely uses single objects on their own, but creates associations by building scenes and placing those objects in some particular context. Separate elements are not nearly as effective in cinematic art as a series of them, which is very strongly emphasised by Huss and Silverstein:

> The meaning and effect of a movie image, whether auditory or visual, is often established by a series of shots rather than by a single shot. (ibidem 90)

And this is true as far as symbols in *Apocalypse Now* are concerned, although in some particular cases the director draws the viewers' attention to single objects. Yet, as mentioned before, it is usually the entire scene that has symbolic associations in the film. The opening scene of the film – the collage of separate shots depicting various aspects of war – mirrors Willard's state of mind, who is unable to think of anything else but the war. Each aspect of civilian life reminds him of the horrors he has witnessed in Vietnam and refreshes his memories. Coppola uses in this scene various single techniques in order to create a scene that may be understood symbolically. For example, the scene comes to a climax when a spinning fan filmed from below becomes the iconic sign of a flying helicopter. An iconic sign, as defined by Eco, builds a certain model of relations between graphic phenomena, which corresponds with the model of perceptive relationships that one builds while recognising or retrieving from memory a given object (U. Eco 1996: 136). Willard looking at the spinning fan remembers helicopters, as the fan is similar to the model of the object imposed on his memory. But this iconic sign is comprehensible not only for the film character. The fan brings the same association to the viewers, thus becoming more universal.

It may be argued that using this particular iconic sign (a fan as a representation of a helicopter) is a cliché, as it seems such a common visual representation of the object. But this iconic sign is not used alone. It is only one element of a bigger unity – it is knitted among other shots that lead to this climax. The iconic association of the climax is strengthened by an auditory stimulus because the closer the camera gets to the fan the louder the sounds of a helicopter become. Thus, in a single scene the director combines auditory and visual images to create a mind tainted by Vietnam. This scene in its unity becomes symbolic, as its meaning is deeper than simply showing one soldier destroyed emotionally by Vietnam. It shows the total destruction and ruin that war, any war for that matter, brings about. The destruction is violent and lasting. War kills literally, but also psychologically and emotionally. Technically, creating this symbol was complex; the scene is built from a series of shots (Willard on his bed, Willard fighting with an imaginary enemy, explosions outside the window, the spinning fan, Willard's silent scream), using a mixture of auditory stimuli and different editing techniques. However, the meaning is rather obvious; it represents the fatality of war. But it maybe both the Vietnam war or war in a more universal sense. The deciphering here is not as complicated as in the case of Conrad's symbolism. The symbol is not infinitely open in Eco's understanding; it is narrowed by the circumstances of the film.

Coppola's technique is such that sometimes clusters of signs, in other words signs whose meanings is more complex than that of a single sign

(if compared to written language they would correspond with sentences rather than words) acquire symbolic features in particular scenes of the film. Eco argues that all images or representations of given phenomena, become complex units of meaning, which can be further divided into signs or iconic signs. Such units provide context for those signs and become their communicative surrounding, and thus a system that helps recognise particular signs (ibidem 158). Coppola uses clusters of signs to achieve particular effects. The table, for example, at the dinner scene becomes much more than simply the representation of a table with food. It means more than a sentence: this is a table covered with food in the generals' room. This 'visual sentence' is further divided into signs: shrimps and wine shown in close-up; they denote food but connote much more. They are open to various interpretations and so become symbols. They symbolise the affluence of the generals and their power to get what they want even in the most difficult circumstances. They stand for the generals' selfishness and love of power. A table covered with exquisite food has traditionally been associated with wealth and power. But this meaning is strengthened when such a table appears at the headquarters during wartime, when ordinary soldiers are starving and eating canned food, and resemble skeletons rather than well-nourished people, such as generals are (they are shown as fat, too fat it seems). The separate signs (dishes) as well as the entire unit (the table in the room) are quite intrusive. It seems hard to avoid the feeling that the shrimps and wine mean more than merely refreshments, as the camera dollies on the food and freezes for some time before moving to show the entire scenery of the room. Thus Coppola builds his symbols.

Apart from taking advantage of clusters of signs, series of shots or iconic signs combined with auditory effects, the director uses the soundtrack alone symbolically. The lyrics of the songs that accompany some scenes break the immediacy of the context and move the meaning of these scenes to a more general level. When the song *The End* by *The Doors* accompanies the opening scenes of *Apocalypse Now* and the words: *this is the end, my only friend, the end* can be heard, they mean something quite different than the literal *end*. The words are used ironically, and they seem to mean exactly the opposite – the war never ends. The soundtrack raises various associations – the beginning of the film is to be the end that cannot be. War is a phenomenon that accompanies humanity from the very beginning of its existence and nothing suggests that it will change. It is even more ironic for Willard – for whom, as a professional soldier, there cannot be any end unless it is his death. On another level – *this is the end* may be understood as a premonition for Willard. The mission to kill the colonel is supposed to be the end of the way Willard has lived so far. It is to change the way he has so far experienced the war and in some, yet unspecified way, it is to influence his life for ever. For the viewers *the end* is the beginning of the unknown.

Also, *I can't get no satisfaction* by *The Rolling Stones* that is used as the

soundtrack in the scene on the boat when someone is surfing behind it, another person is dancing, most probably under the influence of drugs, and Willard is observing the young soldiers as if they were crazy and totally immature, acquires a symbolic meaning. The lyrics represent the young generation's drive to satisfy their needs, to play and have fun, irrespective of the situation, and the attempt to do so through sexual intercourse, drugs and alcohol. The scene combined with the lyrics shows how immature the young soldiers are. Much as the young people try, they can never fulfil their desires, especially during war. The soundtrack emphasises this notion very strongly. But, on yet another level the scene (in which the soundtrack is vital) makes one think how the Americans felt about the Vietnam War. Many, especially young ones, believed that it was not their war. They were taken by force from their homes and schools. They did not want to kill or most probably get killed. They wanted to behave the way people back at home did. They needed to forget, at least for a short while, the absurdity of the situation they happened to be in. Yet, they could find no satisfaction, as the quiet moments could abruptly be over, as indeed they were, again exposing them to ever present death.

The film closes with a song by *The Doors* again, thus creating a kind of musical frame for *Apocalypse Now*. But now, when the mission and the journey are finished, it is finally the end – for the colonel at least – and in some way for Willard. It is still not, however, the end of the nightmare which is war in a general sense. And it is not the end for the viewers who will feel the influence of the film longer still and for whom the experience does not end with the last shot.

And finally, music itself, not merely the lyrics of a particular song, is used symbolically in the film. It provides a very powerful means for creating various associations. Wagner's music that Killgore plays over the loudspeakers while his helicopters attack the Vietnamese village brings to mind the double effect of civilisation: culture-creating and self-destroying. Classical music represents the rich cultural heritage that is juxtaposed with the cruelty and destruction that civilisation is capable of. The scene evokes the concept of the duality of humanity: the ability to create and annihilate. It is more powerful and striking when one considers the context: it is European music at its best introduced to Asians, during the attack in which the Western civilisation completely destroys the one existing in the area for thousands of years. The analogy with Conrad is clear. Wagner's art is used in lieu of the blindfolded woman.

Cinematic techniques allow Coppola to take advantage of colour in a symbolic way, as well. As in the novella, black is meant to suggest traditional associations with evil and hell-like atmosphere or quality. All the photographs of Colonel Kurtz, given to Willard to study, are black and white. The final sequences of the film, in which the colonel appears are rather colourless, similar to the way Conrad described Kurtz and his dwelling.

The interior of his house is shot in such a way that greyish colours are most distinctive. Black and grey shadows and silhouettes give the place a sinister quality, as if it were a centre of evil. Moreover, the colonel is filmed with his ivory-coloured head against the grey background – and becomes the lord of the hell-like place – the devil.

The colour symbolism is strengthened simultaneously by auditory stimuli. When the dwelling is shown, a loud sound of buzzing flies can be heard. The presence of the insects may be easily justified by the dead bodies scattered in the area, on which they feed. Symbolically, however, the sound may be associated with Colonel Kurtz as being the Lord of the Flies – the devil himself. This notion is emphasised when the flies appear in their natural form, not merely as the sound. Colonel Kurtz, sitting in the darkness of his room, is catching and killing the insects flying freely inside. Evil, decay and destruction all come to one's mind if one is willing to look for more meanings than the literal understanding of the scenes allows.

Thus, various techniques are employed in *Apocalypse Now* to remove the characters from the context of Vietnam and create for them a more universal level. Similarly to the situation in the novella – the journey in *Apocalypse Now* becomes a journey towards the centre of hell created by men on earth. It is meant to be a journey of self-knowledge for the viewers and the film's characters alike. The film's symbolism is based on a variety of possible techniques which complement each other to create a unity that operates at different levels of meaning.

II. Imagery

When it comes to the imagery in both the film and the novella, as in the case of symbolism, the critics are not unanimous in their opinions.

> For all its high-priced splendour, Coppola's film cannot match either the rhythms or the power of Conrad's prose. Ironically, a couple dozen words are worth a thousand pictures

argues Sanford Pinsker (S. Pinsker 1981: 57). The above opinion is highly critical indeed and it is shared by many critics who believe that Conrad's imagery is so powerful and unique that it can hardly be matched by anything else, let alone moving pictures. Conrad uses a very extended vocabulary and chooses words very precisely. He takes advantage of rather strong words dramatically, so as to build startling images. The imagery of *Heart of Darkness* is based on the symbolism (discussed earlier), the use of metaphors and simile, as well as a particular habit of pairing characteristic of the writer.

The very first passages of the novella are rich in various forms of figurative language, and it remains so throughout the entire work. One of the

most often used tropes is the metaphor. Eco emphasises that a metaphor can never be interpreted in its literal sense because it never says the truth semantically and its lie is obvious (U. Eco 1999:199). As this is the nature of metaphor it cannot be argued that Conrad's metaphors are in any way different in their semantic structure, otherwise they would cease to be metaphors. Yet, they possess some other quality as well. The metaphors created by Conrad are such that they give birth to certain almost visual images, for example: lights of ships on the river are *a great stir of lights going up and going down* (J. Conrad 1983:29), *the monstrous town* – London in the evening during the sunset is described as *a brooding gloom in sunshine, a lurid glare under the stars* (ibidem 29).

Almost all the topics touched upon by the writer are at some point treated metaphorically – the sea is called *the mistress of his* [sailor] *existence* (ibidem 30), the Congo river is *an immense snake uncoiled* (ibidem 33), Marlow in his youth – *a silly little bird* charmed by the snake (ibidem 33) and later on he is *a piece of good fortune for the Company* (ibidem 38). Also, the director of the Belgian Company is introduced in a metaphorical way as *an impression of pale plumpness in a frock-coat* (ibidem 36) and his secretaries are *guarding the door of Darkness* (ibidem 37). In two of the examples – Marlow and the Congo River the metaphor creates an iconic sign – a bird and a snake respectively. Many more examples of such metaphors could be quoted here, as they complement manifold descriptions, and thus are dispersed in various passages of the novella. These expressions enable the reader to visualise certain images and get a deeper insight as to the meanings intended by the author.

Simultaneously, the metaphors are strengthened and the imagery made even more striking by the similes that appear often in numerous descriptions. These provide an almost poetical quality to the objects mentioned. For example: the names of the ships that the Thames hosted *are like jewels flashing in the night of time* (ibidem 29); colonisation *is like a running blaze on a plain, like a flash of lightning in the clouds* (ibidem 30); the Roman military camp is lost in the wilderness *like a needle in a bundle of hay* (ibidem 30) and Roman soldiers colonising Britain *must have been dying like flies* (ibidem 31). It is easy to notice that Conrad's simile quite often refers to light and darkness and to natural phenomena. Even Marlow himself is *something like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle* (ibidem 39). These references to darkness and light have symbolic meanings as well, similar to white and black mentioned before, light being usually associated with enlightenment and peace or some dramatic change, arguably for the better, darkness being associated with something unknown and sinister. However, also in the case of light and darkness there appears inversion of associated meanings: colonisation, after all, being *a flash of lightning,* was not a positive phenomenon for all concerned.

On the other hand, less complex similes also appear – comparing some phenomena to everyday objects, and thus giving the images a down-to-earth

quality: a staircase in Brussels is *as arid as a desert;* one of the women's dresses in the office *was as plain as an umbrella-cover* (ibidem 35), or the doctor had *a chin shaped like the toe of an old boot* (ibidem 37). Thus, similes of different kinds become an inseparable part of almost any description.

Conrad's descriptions are indeed very powerful and have a significant impact both on the atmosphere of the story and the reader's mind. In the story they provide a special quality of gloominess and even terror. The reader's attention is captured immediately. The most eerie descriptions refer to the wilderness and the jungle. The very first encounter with it sets up the framework which suggests that Marlow's experience, or anybody's for that matter, in the jungle is to be of a very strange, almost mystical, kind:

> There it is before you – smiling, frowning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid, or savage, and always mute with an air of whispering. Come and find out. This one was almost featureless, as if still in the making, with an aspect of monotonous grimness. The edge of a colossal jungle, so dark-green as to be almost black, fringed with white surf, ran straight, like a ruled line, far, far away along a blue sea whose glitter was blurred by a creeping mist. The sun was fierce, the land seemed to glisten and drip with steam. Here and there greyish-whitish specks showed up clustered inside the white surf [...]. (ibidem 40)

The choice of verbs, the colours, the simile, the metaphor – they are all crammed into this one, short description, creating a very vivid image in which there are hints suggesting the mystery and the profundity of what is to happen. It would be indeed quite difficult to convey the same atmosphere and tone through a series of motion pictures. The jungle could not whisper on the screen *Come and find out* without the scene becoming ridiculous for the viewer. Nor could the string of adjectives referring to the jungle be visualised on the big screen.

Adjectives are used by Conrad in a very specific way. On numerous occasions he pairs adjectives with a similar meaning, thus giving them a very eerie touch and evoking a feeling of uneasiness. Typical examples include: *empty and desolate, shabby and careless, cool and collected, exceptional and gifted.* This habit of pairing also includes other adjectives whose meanings are not so close, such as: *swift and indifferent, foolish and cheery, uncanny and fateful.*

Conrad's pairing is not limited only to parts of speech; it also includes the characters, objects and actions. This enriches the imagery and creates a very fine structure. The only two women closely connected with Kurtz are paired in order to be contrasted. Kurtz's African mistress creates a gorgeous image of a person dressed in colourful clothes and rich jewellery. The Intended, on the contrary, is in mourning, so she wears black clothes and no jewellery at all. While the black woman is passionate and full of life,

the white one is composed and almost half-dead. Yet, both are deeply in love with Kurtz and would readily devote their lives to him. The black one is all passion, vitality and sexuality. The white one is passive, uncertain and submissive. They are completely different and the only thing they have in common is their love for Kurtz and the fact that he loves (though in different ways) them both.

The paired objects are also numerous – the most vivid ones being the flies. In the accountant's office *big flies buzzed fiendishly, and did not sting, but stabbed* (ibidem 46). They are clearly paired with the flies in the messroom of the boat at the time when Kurtz dies: *A continuous shower of small flies streamed upon the lamp, upon the cloth, upon our hands and faces* (ibidem 112). In both cases the flies denote death. The story is as if framed through this pairing – Marlow's first encounter with the cruelty of white men in Africa begins with big flies, and his experience there ends with Kurtz's death accompanied by small ones.

Furthermore, Conrad's imagery involves the pairing of actions. One of the examples is that of Kurtz's women's last reactions. The black woman *put out her arms* and then *stretched tragically her bare arms* (ibidem 109), as if she wanted to grab the retreating boat with her lover on board. The Intended while talking to Marlow about the late Kurtz *put out her arms as if after a retreating figure, stretching them back [...]* (ibidem 120). Even Marlow himself, in his mind, pairs the action he is witnessing with another one: *resembling in this gesture another one, tragic also [...] stretching bare brown arms over the glitter of the infernal stream, the stream of darkness* (ibidem 120). And thus, the two actions are juxtaposed to provide the contrast between the two women and to some extent bring them together in their sorrow.

The imagery of *Heart of Darkness* is, ironically, based on a kind of oblique approach. Nothing is told directly. The reader must decipher particular scenes himself and draw certain conclusions. Even in the descriptions, the author never uncovers all his cards. There is always something left in the darkness. That is why Conrad very often chooses words for which he is criticised by the critics – words that denote phenomena not easily describable, namely: *incomprehensible, inconclusive experiences, innumerable, impenetrable, inextricable, unfathomable* or *inconceivable.* According to some critics such expressions obscure the story. Yet, on the other hand, it could be argued that expressions like these provide a fertile field for the reader's imagination. It is the reader who is to visualise the indescribable, who is to decide what *inconclusive experiences* are exactly like.

This vague approach is noticed in some particular situations as well. Marlow never complains directly that the Company Manager was unwilling to come to Kurtz's rescue; and actually tried to postpone Marlow's journey as far as possible, even though on the surface he pretended to be very involved in Kurtz's fate. Conclusions about the Manager's attitude are left for the reader. The narrator helps by providing hints so as to enable the proper or

rather intended conclusions to be drawn. Thus, Conrad counts constantly on his reader's sharpness and intelligence.

One of the examples of Conrad's oblique approach is the fact that Kurtz was able to canoe three hundred miles up the river accompanied only by native rowers and then he sent the canoes piled up with ivory seven hundred miles to the central station. If that was possible, the Manager could easily have sent canoes with provisions for Kurtz, had he only wished to help his best employee. Not only had he no intention of doing that, he also did all he could to prevent Marlow from rescuing Kurtz by sinking the boat first, and then not providing the rivets needed. It is not all very clear because nothing of this kind is told directly. It is left for the reader to work out why Kurtz is left alone in the jungle and why it is Marlow whose destiny is to help him.

The oblique approach is also introduced by the use of various gestures and objects. Since Conrad hardly ever calls a spade a spade, he provides numerous clues that are to convey the meanings he intended. Never does he directly mention the inefficiency of the white people in Africa and their Manager's lack of competence. Yet, he paints with words the images of rusting machinery scattered in the grass and points out the fact that the white people use buckets with holes in them to extinguish the fire at the station. All these details woven into the story enable the reader to read between, and even beyond, the lines. They direct the reader's attention in a particular direction in order to draw the intended conclusion, similarly to the way indexes function.

Thus, the sensitivity, imagination and the ability to think and decipher what is only vaguely mentioned become key elements in comprehending the truths in *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad never names the evils connected with Kurtz. He only speaks of *unspeakable rites, abominable terrors, abominable satisfactions*. What these words mean is to be determined by the reader. So, paradoxically, even though the images created by Conrad are so vivid when it comes to descriptions of people or places, the oblique approach leaves the most important things – the theme, ideas and meanings – as if enveloped in mist and they only come into the light when one manages to get through this opaque screen.

In *Apocalypse Now*, contrary to the novella, a different kind of imagery exists. Unlike Conrad, Coppola does not hide anything and this is probably the reason why it is so heavily criticised by Pinsker and others. The imagery is based on the visual perception emphasised by the soundtrack which is an integral part of each scene. Some of the scenes – usually those not concerning the boat journey – are quite monumental and very theatrical in their quality. The approach of the director is direct. The characters say openly what is on their minds without trying to conceal anything that bothers them. This specific openness, seemingly, reveals all the meanings intended by Coppola. Yet even this directness allows for deeper thoughts and numerous associations inspired by the images displayed on the screen.

The very nature of film art makes it one of the most realistic means of communicating ideas, since nothing can be hidden from the camera once it is included in the shot. However, what is displayed before the camera is decided by the director who builds up the imagery using the means that film making provides. Thus, even though a kind of oblique approach could have been employed in *Apocalypse Now*, had the director wished to use it, the imagery in most cases is realistic. Coppola decides to be quite explicit in the way he uses film techniques – he seems to leave nothing for the imagination of the viewer.

Where Conrad only vaguely speaks of some terrible rituals, Coppola shows them. The native people are shown dancing and chanting and in the climax of the scene the caribou's head is chopped off. The scene is terrible in its realism, full of darkness and blood. However, the film imagery is much deeper than a realistic display of the ritual decapitation of the animal. This act is cross-cut with the shots of Colonel Kurtz's assassination by Willard in such a way that the two killings happen simultaneously. Thus, two parallel realistic scenes become one and create new associations. The animal killed during the ritual becomes Kurtz – and Kurtz becomes an exterminated beast. The scene becomes a visual trope, which Eco would classify as a double metonymy of an identifying function (U. Eco 1996:181).

Besides, the sacrificial killing of the animal taking the shape of Kurtz may be understood as the sacrifice that humanity must provide in order to purify and save itself. It is the price that must be paid for innate evil. There can be no end of evil as long as Kurtz is alive. Consequently, the cross-cut realistic images create another way of perceiving and understanding the scene.

Imagery in *Apocalypse Now* is, moreover, based on realism combined with dream-like elements. The jungle, for example, is shown simply as it looks in nature, without any distortions – from the perspective of a man watching it from a relatively peaceful place – the boat on the river. Its immensity is emphasised by the shots taken from above the river, displaying visually its vastness and dark greenish colour. It is simply a part of nature – with all its beauty exposed during the sunset or sunrise. This way of filming does not suggest the qualities with which Conrad constantly associates the Congolese jungle: primordial savagery, deeply rooted evil and hostility. Only once does the image of the jungle in *Apocalypse Now* come close to Conrad's vision. It happens in the scene when Willard and Chef leave the boat and walk through the thick forest where they are suddenly attacked by a tiger. Here the tree trunks look immense, and unlike the bird's eye view shots, they are terrifying when compared to the smallness of a human being. The immensity of the jungle and the forces of nature become almost tangible. Besides, in this case, the colour imagery is also similar to Conrad's – the tree trunks and the leaves are nearly black – the people are for the first time in the heart of darkness; the background is bluish, almost nightmarish. The entire scene gives an impression of hostility; the jungle is petrifying.

It seems that the jungle, seen from the boat, is more like a holiday advertisement for some picturesque region, while once a man leaves the boat (the home), he enters an entirely different world – the world of fear and danger.

This nightmarish atmosphere is strengthened the closer the boat gets to the colonel. In Cambodia, even observed from the boat, the jungle is no longer inviting. The colours change slightly from rich green into greyish. Mist appears, to complement the sinister and at the same time dream-like atmosphere. However, it is not the crippling, terrifying mist of *Heart of Darkness*. In Cambodia, the mist is rather pinkish-grey, as if coloured by the rich colours of the sun. Here the dream-like quality is overwhelming. The movements of the people slow down, also the boat moves much slower than before and even comes to a standstill at times. It seems that everybody is high – the journey turns to a narcotic vision – a trip. Everything looks unreal. The realistic approach becomes less conspicuous with the introduction of colours that are not actually characteristic of the jungle.

Coppola uses various film techniques and possibilities to create the images that on the one hand give a human touch to the tragedy – that is the war – and, on the other – make the experience very universal, as if it belonged to all human beings. One example may be the fashion in which Killgore's attack is filmed. The Vietnamese village is depersonalised – people perform their daily duties, school children gather in the yard, life goes on as in any other well-ordered place. The buildings and the people are shown from a distance, and one gets the impression that this place could be anywhere in the world. The village is shown from above, so during the attack the people running look like ants. However, when the first people get hurt or killed, especially Americans, their bodies and faces are shown in close-up, so that their deaths become their personal tragedies. The close-ups provide the link with the war situation – the immediacy of death. People are killed as individuals.

The same approach is taken advantage of to convey the idea of madness. The close-ups of clearly mad Killgore intermingle with the general shots of the destruction he has caused to fulfil his desires. He personalises madness. However, the image of the entire jungle burning after the napalm attack is no longer associated with Killgore's personal idiosyncrasies. It suggests the madness of war as such – destruction for the sake of destruction. Here, the imagery operates on two levels. On a realistic level it visualises the effect of napalm bombing, and – ironically – aesthetically provides a beautiful display of colours and shapes. On a metaphysical level, it makes one think of some terrible cataclysm, especially when one realises how deadly napalm is. The cataclysm is inflicted on earth by humanity which is consequently destroying itself by devastating its own environment. The visual imagery in this case is closely connected with the words uttered by Killgore, whose comment is:

> I love the smell of napalm in the morning.

This gives a touch of absurdity to the entire situation. It also makes one

realise how war influences those who are inside its hell. Killgore is clearly mad, taking pleasure in destroying seemingly not realising what he is doing.

An integral part of the film imagery is the soundtrack – both the dialogues and the music. The soundtrack in *Apocalypse Now* is very complex. It consists of dialogues, whispers, classical music, rock-and-roll, realistic sounds accompanying particular actions, as well as complete silence.

As has already been mentioned, the opening scene of the film is accompanied by music performed by *The Doors*. This music is intermingled with the sounds of the helicopter (the spinning fan). The tempo becomes faster and faster as more and more war images appear on the screen and they lead to the climax, which is a silent scream. Willard, unable to free himself from the war horrors, screams in his desperation – his face in a close-up, with his mouth wide open. However, no sound can be heard. The entire composition is powerful and overwhelming. Complete silence is rather unusual in an action movie (which *Apocalypse Now* is, to some extent and in some aspects). That is why it plays such an important role in the film. The lack of any sound immediately draws attention. Shortly before the helicopter attack, when the helicopters are already airborne, the Vietnamese village with all the children in the playground is shown. Again no single sound can be heard. The silence is almost unbearable, as one immediately imagines the village bustling with the sounds of children, their teachers, or farmers. Then, gradually the sounds of helicopters in the distance mingled with Wagner's music become louder and louder. The juxtaposition of the silence and Wagner is striking in this particular situation. The lack of any sound is clearly like the calm before the storm. It becomes a silent premonition of the calamity about to happen.

Similar juxtaposition of silence and sudden or gradual sounds appears on several occasions in key situations: in the jungle before Willard and Chef are attacked by a tiger, on a Vietnamese sampan where the Americans in their panic have killed all the people, when Willard approaches Kurtz's dwelling and observes corpses hanging from the trees. In the last example, the silence is broken by the sudden chatter of the journalist (Conrad's Russian chattering in the jungle). And finally, no music, simply silence becomes a third actor during the key conversation between Kurtz and Willard. Shortly before the colonel tells his interlocutor about the acceptance of the horror, only the two faces can be seen, enveloped in the overwhelming silence.

Besides the soundtrack, characters and scenes in general, the imagery of *Apocalypse Now* involves a display of very bright colours. Unlike in Conrad's novella, where the colours are generally subdued and brightness appears only in the shapes of the Russian and the black woman, the film is rich in red, yellow and orange. As is common during any war, fire and blood are frequent, and consequently bright colours occasionally fill the whole screen. Moreover, the sun is depicted as a huge red and orange ball; almost a postcard picture. Only in the final scenes of the film do the colours become less

conspicuous – green, grey, black. This use of colours virtually divides the film into two parts: the first one full of brightness, which deals mostly with the Vietnam War and brings *Apocalypse Now* close to the genre of action movies; and, the second one – enveloped in semi-darkness, which deals with Kurtz and changes the film into a metaphysical tale or a psychological movie.

The imagery and symbolism created in the novella are based on different techniques to those in the film. What is interesting, though, is the fact that frequently the effects and impressions are similar. The images formed from words by Conrad and those generated through the use of cinematic technology and techniques by Coppola are powerful, striking and capture the audience's attention immediately. They bring to one's mind multi-level associations that lead to various understandings or interpretations. *Apocalypse Now,* although sharing some themes with *Heart of Darkness* is truly an autonomous work of art and should be perceived as such. The sharing of some themes, situations, and characters does not mean that the two works of art need to be identical in all other respects. *Apocalypse Now* is inspired and inspirited by *Heart of Darkness.* Conrad created a masterpiece using the written word as his only material. Coppola utilised visual and auditory imagery, as well as other cinematic techniques, to create a powerful film. Conrad's mastery in the novella allowed for the creation of a masterpiece among motion pictures. However, the film and novella can be fully appreciated only if analysed and enjoyed as two separate works, although closely related to each other.

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