

ETD Archive

---

2008

## An Analysis of "the Real," as Reflected in Conrad's Heart of Darkness

Beverly Rose Joyce  
*Cleveland State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/etdarchive>

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Joyce, Beverly Rose, "An Analysis of "the Real," as Reflected in Conrad's Heart of Darkness" (2008). *ETD Archive*. 422.

<https://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/etdarchive/422>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by EngagedScholarship@CSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in ETD Archive by an authorized administrator of EngagedScholarship@CSU. For more information, please contact [library.es@csuohio.edu](mailto:library.es@csuohio.edu).

AN ANALYSIS OF “THE REAL,”  
AS REFLECTED IN CONRAD’S *HEART OF DARKNESS*

BEVERLY ROSE JOYCE

Bachelor of Arts in English

Baldwin-Wallace College

May, 2002

Submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

at the

CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY

December, 2008

This thesis has been approved  
for the Department of ENGLISH  
and the College of Graduate Studies by

---

Thesis Chairperson, Dr. Gary Dyer

---

Department & Date

---

Dr. Rachel Carnell

---

Department & Date

---

Dr. Jennifer Jeffers

---

Department & Date

AN ANALYSIS OF “THE REAL,”  
AS REFLECTED IN CONRAD’S *HEART OF DARKNESS*

BEVERLY ROSE JOYCE

**ABSTRACT**

*Heart of Darkness*, as a framed narrative, questions perception and authenticity. It is difficult to discern Marlow’s individual voice, for it is buried within a layering of narration. Critics ascribe the words of the text to Marlow, claiming he is the one who, in Achebe’s words, dehumanizes Africans. Yet, the quotation marks suggest otherwise. Perception is relevant to an analysis of *Heart of Darkness*, for it is unclear whose point of view constructs the text, that of Kurtz, Marlow, or the frame narrator. Since the narrative is likely composed of multiple perspectives, it is difficult to determine whose reality it reveals. Marlow questions reality and whether it is feasible to convey one’s own life-sensations to another, as does Louis Althusser. Althusser discusses the difference between ideologically determined truth and authentic reality. Modernist writers, such as Eliot and Woolf, seem to agree with Althusser on how it is through great art that one might convey his own lived experiences to another. Marlow attempts to express his reality through his own art, or the story he creates about his time in the Congo. In the text, Marlow claims his goal is to allow others to see him; interestingly, Althusser claims real art allows for one to see, perceive, and feel another’s reality. Critics state Marlow is searching for a sense of self in the Congo; however, it seems Marlow actually hopes to find the real, in Althusser’s sense. While Marlow might glimpse the real in Africa, he seems disappointed to find reality is something he cannot have in the Western world. In fact, Marlow finds the truth of reality in Africa . . . that it is unreal. Marlow is an always already subject without an authentic voice, which seems to be what he finds horrifying.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TITLE PAGE .....	i
APPROVAL PAGE .....	ii
ABSTRACT .....	iii
CHAPTERS	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
II. TRUTH VERSUS REALITY .....	5
III. ALTHUSSER'S SENSE OF THE REAL .....	9
IV. MARLOW'S STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY .....	15
V. THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE .....	19
VI. HOW TO SEE MARLOW .....	27
VII. LANGUAGE AND PERCEPTION .....	32
VIII. ONE'S DEPENDENCE ON OTHERS .....	38
IX. AN ALTERNATIVE FRAME OF REFERENCE .....	47
X. THE IMPORTANCE OF ONE'S OWN VOICE .....	53
XI. DEFINITION BY NEGATION .....	58
XII. THE AFRICAN VOICE .....	62
XIII. CREATING MEANING THROUGH WORK .....	70
XIV. WHITE MEN CAN'T WORK .....	73
XV. MARLOW AND WORK .....	79
XVI. AFRICANS AT WORK .....	82
XVII. THE EUROPEAN VOICE .....	85
XVIII. AFRICANS AND THE REAL .....	94

XIX. WHITE SUBJECTS .....	99
XX. REFLECTION AND PERCEPTION .....	104
XXI. CONCLUSION .....	106
WORKS CITED .....	109

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

As I sit on wicker lawn furniture in the comfort of my suburban backyard in Ohio, I stare at the copy of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* resting on the glass-top table next to me. Hoping to work on my graduate thesis on this bright and sunny July afternoon, I simply cannot clear my mind. I keep thinking about the upcoming presidential election . . . you know, the one that is history-making. Earlier this morning, I was standing in line at the local supermarket. To ease the impatience of shoppers, televisions were strategically placed by the check-out lines. On this morning, the screens were smeared with images of the two candidates for this year's election, McCain and Obama. Their many advisers were spewing forth accolades about both. I could not help feeling sick about the issues at hand, which were being discussed on CNN: gas prices (after I just paid \$77 to fill up the tank in my shiny green, 1-year-old Jeep Grand Cherokee, which I purchased when the price of gas was a dollar less per gallon), the housing market (after I saw more than a dozen "For Sale" signs in the front yards of houses in my neighborhood), unemployment (after I ended a phone call with my currently unemployed 56-year-old father), and the current recession, which has yet to be labeled a true depression (as I look at my half-filled grocery cart I know will cost me over \$130 to feed my daughter, my husband, and myself for the week).

Of course, the Republicans believe they have a plan to fix the economy, and the Democrats are confident their plan is in the best interest of the public. As the commentators bickered back and forth about who was better than whom, I heard a middle-aged, white woman mutter to her equally middle-aged and white husband about how a black man would never act in the “best interest” of anyone other than his fellow “coloreds.” In the wake of the comments made by Obama’s former family friend and preacher, Reverend Wright, after Barack’s own speech on the issue of race (in which he emphasized how he is as much white as he is black), and in the midst of the first time in history when a black man has a true chance at the presidency and the “white” house, I could not help but look at her in disgust. I wanted to yell at her, to ask her how she could make such an ignorant comment, but I just kept my mouth shut, allowing her to remain closed-minded and uninformed, because I knew how, in the long-run, anything I said to her would not make a difference anyhow.

Again, intent on analyzing *Heart of Darkness*, I cannot help but think about the incident from this morning, and, as I again glance at this novella, I suddenly realize how it is as much *not* about race as this year’s election. Just as Americans need to clear their minds of the race issue when choosing for whom they will cast their ballots in November, readers of *Heart of Darkness* must do the same when cracking open the cover of this book. The key to both is focusing on the real issues at hand. Voters and readers must not get caught up in the distinctions between black and white; for, they risk (like so many unfortunately do) getting trapped in a grey area of unreality. So many Conrad critics, like the middle-aged, white woman, cannot see anything beneath that which is skin deep; as a result, they end up missing the point of *Heart of Darkness* altogether. While Achebe, and other critics like him, still condemn Conrad for his literary choice to use the word



“nigger” (in a book published in 1899), and discuss how Marlow is a racist character, and how, in turn, the text’s overall meaning is racist, the presence of the real, and what Marlow has to say about it, goes relatively unanalyzed. Much as the Republicans have decided to use race against Obama to divert attention from their own elitist policies, Achebe and his fellow critics take Conrad readers’ attention away from Marlow’s exploration of the real. Throughout *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow seems curious about the real, particularly in Althusser’s sense. Although the term had not yet been coined in 1899, it seems finding Althusser’s real is that on which Marlow is most intent. Choosing to focus on the distinctions between black and white, as Achebe and many other critics continue to do, only places readers in the “impalpable greyness” (Conrad, *Heart* 69) Marlow, himself, so much despises. The abundance of criticism that has been, and continues to be, written on racism within *Heart of Darkness* unfortunately diverts readers’ attention from the bleak, grey message of the narrative. This message seems to be “the most you can hope from [life] is some knowledge of yourself” (Conrad, *Heart* 69) in a world that determines who you are for you.

Several critics, including Bette London, assert “the ‘official’ reading of *Heart of Darkness* posits Marlow’s narrative as a journey into self” (London 50), or that it is simply another one of the many universal stories of the look inside one’s self. To a certain extent this may be the case, but I will assert Marlow strives for much more than a sense of self while in the Congo. It seems more like what Marlow searches for is the real, specifically in Althusser’s sense. Throughout *Heart of Darkness*, it seems Marlow is aware of the existence of the real. The horror Marlow seems to acknowledge at the text’s conclusion is how the real is difficult, if not impossible, to attain within an ideologically controlled society.

Just as the middle-aged, white woman's beliefs about "coloreds" have been influenced by the 1950's American society in which she grew up (one in which blacks were considered inferior to whites), Marlow's belief systems have been manipulated by his own society. This white woman is probably unaware of how her beliefs pertaining to African-Americans are not even her own, but have rather been fed to her by her society. While this woman will probably go to her grave never knowing she is a mouth-piece, Marlow not only seems to realize he is a subject to others, but also, at the end of the story, it appears he decides to no longer fill this role. Only after Marlow returns to Europe does he fully understand the paradox of the real: one cannot serve as a subject to society and function as an individual (which is a requirement of the real) at the same time. When he returns to the West, Marlow seems to understand truth and reality are not the same, and how the real is something which cannot be achieved within a society. This is because the world in which we live is relative or comparative, meaning things are deemed the way they are only when compared to something else. Because meaning is ascribed to things only through their comparisons to other things, these things are not real. Instead, their existence, or their truth, is dependent on another, making them relative. Thus, that which is so often considered reality is, in fact, rather truth. Because all of society is controlled by those belief systems its members automatically accept as reality, one's existence within a society is relative.

## CHAPTER II

### TRUTH VERSUS REALITY

The “indefinable meaning” (Conrad, *Heart* 66), or relativity, of all considered real seems to be problematic for Marlow. The idea of how things attain meaning only through their associations with other things and how members of a society blindly accept such meanings as reality appears to trouble not only Marlow, but other Conrad characters as well. John G. Peters explores how within his writings Conrad questions peoples’ ignorance of how they are automatons. Peters asserts this awareness is evident in Conrad’s “The Return.” When Hervey talks to his wife about “adherence to what is right,” she responds, “What is right?” Horrified, Hervey replies, “Your mind is diseased! Such a question is rot—utter rot. Look round you—there’s your answer, if you only care to see. Nothing that outrages the received beliefs can be right. Your conscience tells you that. They are the received beliefs because they are the best, the noblest, the only possible. They survive” (Peters 157). For Peters, “Hervey’s reasoning . . . is circular: values are right because they are received by society, and society receives these values because they are right” (126). The ramification of this circularity is uncertainty. “The truth of these values is uncertain. The world is not what it appears, and [it] is ultimately unknowable” (126), which, according to Peters, is Conrad’s ultimate concern (126). It seems Conrad, particularly in *Heart of Darkness*, understands the reality of how the world as we know it is *unreal*. Everything one acknowledges as real is, in fact, relative

or comparative, for it is manipulated by the society in which one lives. Because all things existing within a society must co-exist with, and are dependent upon, each other, all of society is vulnerable to manipulation. A society is essentially a web of connections; if one thing changes, all associated with this one thing will more than likely be impacted. This is what it means to be relative, or founded on truth. Truth can be manipulated, while reality cannot. For this reason, Conrad seems to find the world an irrational and indifferent place. Yet, it is one in which we must live, for we have no alternative. Peters asserts “Marlow recognizes such a universe and thus refers to life as ‘that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose’” (126).

The key seems to be perception. According to Marlow, the logic of his world is merciless because of its mysterious arrangement. If something, regardless of what it is, is arranged, it has been manipulated, for the arrangement of anything is unnatural. In the above mentioned passage, it is life, itself, which Marlow finds mysterious. Marlow deems the logic governing his life to be mysterious because it is not his own. In the case of society, that which arranges or controls the logic of society is ideology. The governing ideology of Marlow’s society arranges or constructs the truth within which he lives. The difference between truth and reality is illustrated in Marlow’s comment, “life is—that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose” (Conrad, *Heart* 69). Here, Marlow seems keenly aware of the discrepancy between the two. For Marlow, it seems truth is constructed or arranged. This truth is not his own; it rather belongs to someone or something else. It is the truth of the ideology of his society. According to Peters, “this is the key to Conrad’s concern about the uncertainty of knowledge, because not only can we know nothing with absolute certainty, we cannot know truth . . . with certainty” (125). This is because truth is not reality.

Truth and reality are two different things. While people often use these terms interchangeably, they are not exactly the same. The slight difference between the two is precisely what Marlow seems to find troubling. According to the *Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary*, truth is defined as “conformity to fact or actuality [,] a statement proven to be or accepted as truth [, or] fidelity to an original or standard” (“Truth”). In contrast, the same dictionary defines reality as “the quality or state of being actual [,] the totality of all things possessing existence or essence [,] the domain of actual or practical experience [, or] the sum of all that is real, absolute, and unchangeable” (“Reality”). The difference between truth and reality is, indeed, significant. As Peters states, we cannot know truth with certainty because truth is not certain (125). Since truth is not *the* original, it is changeable. It is a duplicate, or a rendering, of something else. Truth is arranged or manipulated by perception. People conform to truth and blindly accept truth as reality simply because they are taught to do so. The key difference is that reality is authentic. The real cannot be manipulated, for it is not relative or comparative. Reality is founded on actual human experience; thus, it is unchangeable. As such, it is original. It is absolute, and therefore it cannot be altered by those comparisons which pervade the realm of truth. As Wilson Harris writes, there is a disparity between “what [things] appear to be . . . [and] what they essentially are” (266). The appearance, or the external representation, is founded on truth. This is because the appearance, or the external (which others see), can be manipulated. For example, one can modify her exterior (hair color, complexion, garb, etc.) to make herself appear to be someone whom she most certainly is not. Do not all people, to some extent, alter their appearances in precisely this manner on a daily basis? In contrast, the essence of being, or who one naturally is, defines the real. One cannot possibly change who he is on the inside. Who

one essentially is, as Harris puts it, cannot be manipulated because it resides internally (266). This essence, or state of being, belongs to one's character or his individual, internal identity, which Woolf discusses in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" (12). Peters seems to claim the essence of human experience that occupies reality is important to Marlow. Peters asserts Marlow "looks for a way to identify meaning for human existence" (124) while in the Congo. Yet, Peters neither states exactly what that meaning is nor how Marlow intends to look for it. Reality, by its very definition, constitutes what it means to actually exist. Therefore, is it not the most meaningful part of human existence, for it is untainted by truth? As such, the real must be what Marlow looks for while in the Congo.

## CHAPTER III

### ALTHUSSER'S SENSE OF THE REAL

To claim Marlow searches for the real, it is first imperative to discuss what constitutes the real. While several theorists develop their own concepts of the real, Louis Althusser's interpretation seems to best illustrate the real for which Marlow searches. Within a letter written to Andre Daspre, Louis Althusser discussed "the problem of the relations between art and ideology" (1480). In this letter, Althusser asserts "authentic" (1480) and "not . . . average or mediocre" (1480) works defy the constraints of ideology. Such works he labels "real," indicating he does "not rank real art among the ideologies, although art does have a quite particular and specific relationship with ideology" (Althusser, "A Letter" 1480). The key word is "real." Althusser asserts how through the authentic one might escape ideological control, and how in order to do so one must create "real" art, not just art. In other words, it is outside of ideology (truth and knowledge) where one might find the real; for, Althusser substitutes the terms ideology and knowledge for one another, emphasizing both are different from art. According to Althusser, knowledge (and thus ideology) is based on fact and principle. Ideology is founded on "in the modern sense: scientific knowledge" (Althusser, "A Letter" 1480). As such, it consists of those truths society deems evident. Althusser seems to believe art resists such constraints. Althusser writes,

Art . . . does not give us knowledge in the *strict sense*, it therefore does not replace knowledge, but what it gives us does nevertheless maintain a certain *specific relationship* with knowledge. This relationship is not one of identity, but one of difference. (Althusser, “A Letter” 1480)

The difference is the “peculiarity of art [which] is to ‘make us see,’ ‘make us perceive,’ ‘make us feel’ something which *alludes* to reality” (Althusser, “A Letter” 1480).

In other words, within art, rather than ideology, one can search for the real.

Within the authentic and free from the constraints of logic, one can find the real; it seems Marlow is aware of this. In *Heart of Darkness*, does Marlow not state his own goal is to make his audience see (30)? Critics still debate what Marlow wants his audience to see. According to Althusser, seeing and knowing are not reciprocal because one belongs to knowledge while the other resides in the opposing realm of art. Therefore, based on Althusser’s sense of the real, Marlow’s goal appears to belong not to ideology or science, but rather to art. In a letter to Daspre, Althusser argues “the . . . difference between art and science lies in the specific form in which they give us the same object in quite different ways: art in the form of ‘seeing’ and ‘perceiving’ or ‘feeling,’ science in the form of knowledge (in the strict sense, by concepts)” (1481). In other words, art and science are both used to create objects or products, but in different ways; they differ in how they are made, as well as how they are acknowledged by their recipients.

While products of science are *constructed* based on established and widely accepted facts, principles, formulas, and truths, a product of art is *created* through imagination, ingenuity, daring, and the artist’s individual experience. Science is ideologically controlled, for the methods used to construct scientific products are indisputable; in science, one-plus-one can be nothing but two. Art, on the other hand, allows one-plus-one to equal anything the artist wants it to equal, based on his own



reality. Perhaps the artist believes one-plus-one equals three: husband plus wife, and the resulting child from their union. Maybe one stroke of red paint plus one stroke of blue paint equals purple. The difference is truth versus reality. Science is truth, which is the truth of the facts accepted as true because they always have been (much like the circularity of uncertainty suggested by Peters). Truth is widely accepted by the group simply because it always has been. On the other hand, art is reflective of reality because it is founded on the individual. It is a reflection of the internal reality of the artist. “Science deals with a *different domain* of reality” (Althusser, “A Letter” 1481) because it is an over-generalized sense of reality forced on the whole of society. Whereas “the object of art is ‘the individual’” (Althusser, “A Letter” 1481), the object of science is the human as subject.

According to Althusser, people living within a society are human subjects. Members of society are continuously under the “subjection [of] the ruling ideology or of the ‘practice’ of that ideology . . . for it is clear that it is in the forms and under the forms of ideological subjection that provision is made for the reproduction of the skills of labour power” (Althusser, “A Letter” 1485). In other words, there is no room for real art, in Althusser’s sense, in an ideologically controlled society. For those under ideological subjection, the only important skills are those necessary to reproduce “average or mediocre” (Althusser, “A Letter” 1480) products through the use of tried-and-true scientific methodologies. Althusser asserts people living within an ideologically controlled society are always already subjects precisely because the ideals of the society in which they live control every aspect of their existence. For Althusser, all facets of society are pre-determined, thus making free-will and choice impossible. In his article titled “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Althusser claims “you are I are

always already subjects, and as such constantly practice the rituals of ideological recognition, which guarantee for us that we are indeed concrete, individual, distinguishable, and (naturally) irreplaceable subjects” (1503). Interestingly, Althusser seems to overlook the discrepancy between what it means to be a subject and an individual. Althusser appears to claim people living within societies serve as always already subjects in order to maintain their sense of individuality. Is this not paradoxical, though, considering a subject can never actually be an individual? A subject is one who serves, and therefore is under the control of, another. An individual is the opposite, for he is not under the authority of another. Marlow, in some sense, seems conscious of this inconsistency. As a subject himself, Marlow seems to understand the only way to be an individual is to longer serve as a subject. Bette London claims Marlow desires to find a sense of self in the Congo, which is true. To go one step further, though, it seems Marlow wishes to distinguish himself as an *individual* self, which is actually the only real type of self there is.

Assuming Marlow wants to assert himself as an individual, separate from others and free from subjection, the question is: how can he possibly undertake such a monumental task? Althusser says “individuals are always-already subject” (“Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” 1505), yet what constitutes an individual and a subject proves him incorrect. Thus, Marlow’s goal at first seems impossible. However, when we refer back to Marlow’s goal, the means through which he can develop his own sense of self is apparent. Again, Marlow claims his goal is to allow his audience to see (Conrad, *Heart* 30), yet he neglects to mention what he wants us to see. According to Althusser, art permits sight; seeing allows one to find the real. In his quest for the real, Marlow must first distinguish himself as an individual to then create a product (his tale)

that qualifies as Althusser's real art. Only then can Marlow venture into the real, in Althusser's sense. As a subject, it seems Marlow would find it necessary to differentiate himself from his others, particularly those to whom he is a subject. Marlow is subject to the manipulation of numerous characters in *Heart of Darkness*, particularly the anonymous narrator and Kurtz. Marlow seems lost in "the voice of the narrator who transmits the story" (London 51) and within Kurtz's journey upriver. Marlow belongs to the stories of these men, yet his role in both is secondary. Marlow is literally a subject within their stories; as such, he is subjected to the manipulation of both men. The result is Marlow does not own his tale. Both Marlow and his story are subjects to Kurtz and his tale, which Brooks suggests. According to Brooks, Marlow simply repeats a journey Kurtz has already undertaken; therefore, Marlow's own travel into the Congo lacks originality (244). In the words of Althusser, Marlow's expedition is not real because it lacks authenticity. For something to be considered authentic, it must be the *real* thing, not an imitation or a reproduction. According to Althusser, something average cannot be authentic because the average is typical, usual, and expected. The average is not innovative; it is the authentic which is novel, new, or frontier (Harris 263). Authenticity is one of a kind, based on individuality; according to Althusser, this is where reality resides. On the contrary, something average is deemed as such based on its comparison to others. One must conduct "a judgment, a comparison, in which two things are measured by each other" (Eliot 114) in order to deem one thing superior to another. To deem something average implies there are other things which are above and below average; as such, the average is based on a group, which, according to Althusser, is where truth is found. Because Marlow's journey is a continuation of Kurtz's, it is inauthentic; for, it is based on a duo. Marlow and his tale are also subject to the anonymous narrator,

for only through his words do we meet and see Marlow. The result is Marlow seems lost in an impalpable greyness (Conrad, *Heart* 69) that prohibits us from actually seeing him instead of these other men. Rather than continuing to criticize Marlow's supposed emphasis on the different ends of the color spectrum (black and white), we should look at the grey center; for, it seems this is where we might see the lost Marlow.

## CHAPTER IV

### MARLOW'S STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY

It seems Marlow struggles with identity, particularly the loss of identity he experiences as a subject to others. Several critics explore this idea. Bette London suggests Marlow's greatest conflict pertains to his "own manhood" (48). London asserts Marlow feels emasculated because of his secondariness to Kurtz. "Marlow registers a masculine protest against his enforced dependency—against his (feminine) relational position to Kurtz's absolute authority" (London 46) and against his "constructed role: to wait on Kurtz" (46). London seems to believe Marlow lacks a sense of self because of his dependence on, and his tale's intimate connection to, Kurtz. She says "the real terror of this situation, as Marlow presents it, turns out to be *Marlow's* loss of sexual and racial identity" (46). According to London, Marlow uses his voice to assert his own authority in the attempt to regain his own identity. Marlow invokes "his own audience . . . protests his position of powerlessness and passivity" (London 46). "Destined to repeat the story of Kurtz, Marlow reinscribes the limiting conditions of his own authority" (London 46) and uses his voice to separate himself from Kurtz. He does so in order to reclaim himself as an individual. London explains by "making his voice the instrument of power and the locus of all conflict" (47), Marlow attempts to shift the focus of the audiences' attention from Kurtz and the anonymous narrator onto himself. London's argument is founded on

language, particularly voice. According to her, Marlow must assert himself as an individual in order to regain his sense of manliness, and he seems to do so through language. Marlow “reinvents himself, constructing ‘Marlow, the narrator’ as the voice of cultural authority” (London 42). It seems Marlow does so to break free from the confines of both the anonymous narrator and Kurtz, or to assert himself as separate from both of these men. London asserts Marlow desires to claim his narrative voice with authority, precisely because it has been lost. It seems Marlow refuses to remain a powerless always already subject to both Kurtz and the anonymous narrator. It appears Marlow wants to claim his narrative as his own, and, as London points out, the use of his voice to assert himself hints toward such a desire on his behalf.

Referring back to Althusser’s theories, it seems one can attain the real through the use of his voice. Through the oral transmission of “the ‘lived’ experience of human existence itself” (Althusser, “A Letter” 1481), one’s audience is given the opportunity to see “the spontaneous ‘lived’ experience” (1481), and its “peculiar relationship to the real” (1481). In other words, through the telling of one’s tale, he creates real art, in Althusser’s sense; for, from one’s own sense of reality he transmits his lived, or real, experiences. How one interprets his lived experiences and expresses them to others is spontaneous; as such, the telling of these experiences is authentic. Spontaneity is not rehearsed, repeated, or imitated; therefore, it is original and authentic. Telling a tale of one’s own lived experience is not controlled by science or knowledge; as such, it belongs to the real, in Althusser’s sense. Of interest, then, is Marlow’s concern with voice, both Kurtz’s and his own. According to London, Marlow uses his voice to assert himself as alpha-male, or to reclaim his own masculinity; for, from her perspective, he struggles with gender identity. Instead, it seems more likely Marlow struggles with identity in general, rather than a

particular facet of his sense of self. Because Marlow's narrative is subject to both that of the anonymous narrator and Kurtz, Marlow's story lacks individuality. Since we only get an image of Marlow on behalf of the frame narrator, we never actually *see* the real Marlow. As such, Marlow does not have an identity. Marlow cannot exist as an individual because he is a subject to both Kurtz and the anonymous narrator; for, a subject can never actually be an individual. Marlow seems to understand he must first distinguish himself as separate from both men before others can acknowledge his reality; for, only after Marlow's individuality is recognized can his own tale even be heard. Only then can we deem his story real. Thus, it seems Marlow asserts his individuality through the use of language. Marlow appears to use his own voice to affirm his independence from Kurtz and the anonymous narrator. In doing so, it seems Marlow desires to find not only his own identity or sense of self, as London suggests, but also the real. For Marlow, language seems to be the key to unlocking the door between truth (subjection by others) and reality (independence).

The problem is how Marlow's subjection occurs *after* he speaks to the men on the boat, one of whom is the frame narrator. On one hand, Marlow must tell his tale in order for it to be considered art at all. To go even further, Marlow must convey his lived experience to allow the men on the boat to see, perceive, and feel his reality through his story. On the other hand, once Marlow tells his tale it is vulnerable to manipulation by these other men. Simply by telling his tale, Marlow's reality falls subject to the truths of these men, one of whom is the frame narrator. Marlow must expect if any of these men happen to convey his story to others his words will undoubtedly be altered. As such, any retelling of his story would contain truth rather than reality because it would be an adaptation of his original narrative. Then, in a sense, any future telling of Marlow's tale on behalf of another could be considered a lie, for it would not reflect Marlow's own

reality, but rather the truth of the one telling Marlow's tale for him. This includes the narrative *Heart of Darkness*. Marlow says, "You know I hate, detest, and can't bear a lie, not because I am straighter than the rest of us, but simply because it appals me. There is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies—which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world" (Conrad, *Heart* 29). Marlow equates lies with death, implying something is deprived of life through the telling of a lie. Marlow, himself, is prohibited from really living when his tale is retold by the anonymous narrator. It is difficult to actually see Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* (despite how this is what he says he wants most), for we are only offered an inauthentic rendering of him. It seems Marlow understands the importance of language in determining reality; for, in the above mentioned passage he seems to imply through genuine language one can find life, or reality.



## CHAPTER V

### THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE

The genre of *Heart of Darkness*, alone, hints toward the extent to which language is significant to the narrative. Reminiscent of the great Greek oral tradition, *Heart of Darkness* is a framed narrative conveyed orally to its audience by the narrator. In the narrative, we have an anonymous narrator knitting yarns (Conrad, *Heart* 1) about a fellow seaman, Marlow. Through this narrator's voice, we meet the character named Charles Marlow. From this anonymous narrator, we learn Marlow is an uncharacteristic wanderer, who through his "passion for maps" (Conrad, *Heart* 11) finds himself aboard a steamer traveling up the Congo River. Only through this anonymous narrator's storytelling do we encounter Marlow's voice and hear about Marlow's experiences (Conrad, *Heart* 11). While Conrad indicates the writer's "task . . . is . . . to make you hear, to make you feel; it is, above all, to make you see" (Conrad, *Nigger* 3), he seems to deny Marlow the means to attain this goal. Instead of receiving Marlow's tale directly from him, we rather are given a second-hand account. We do not actually hear Marlow's own voice or see him as an individual character; instead, we perceive him only through the voice of another.

Marlow's story is not his own because it is told by another man who has "stepped into his shoes" (Conrad, *Heart* 13) and is telling his tale for him. While Marlow can tell

his tale all by himself, the anonymous narrator passes it on to us, not Marlow. Marlow is able to tell the passengers on the ship his story; if he was not, then the unnamed narrator would not have Marlow's tale to relate to us. Yet, Marlow is unable to convey his tale directly to us. If he was, then he would have done so. Marlow is seemingly unable to speak directly to the audience. For this reason, Marlow's narrative is dependent on the anonymous narrator. Without this narrator and his voice, Marlow's story, and thus *his* own voice, would remain unheard. As such, speech is important to *Heart of Darkness*. Without spoken language, the frame narrator never would have heard Marlow's tale; in turn, readers would never receive this man's adaptation of Marlow's story. Thus, language is important to a tale when it is recited orally, particularly when a story is retold by someone other than the original storyteller. From the beginning, we are told the frame narrator knits yarns about Marlow. While some assume this implies the anonymous narrator simply conveys Marlow's story, it is naïve to ignore the double meaning of the phrase "knitting yarn." A yarn can be, and often is, fictitious in nature, which suggests the frame narrator creates some of the story he attributes to Marlow. It is difficult to discern how much of the text is knitted yarn, or is fabricated; as such, one must acknowledge the text, itself, cannot be taken at face value. We must not overlook how we have one person conveying another's tale. As such, *Heart of Darkness* is founded on a group, rather than on an individual. As such, this narrative seems founded on truth, rather than reality.

Language, by its very nature, is social. More than one person must be present for it to occur. According to Ferdinand de Saussure, "language . . . is the social side of speech, outside the individual, who can never create nor modify it by himself; it exists only by virtue of a sort of contract signed by the members of a community" (961). Thus,

it seems spoken language belongs to knowledge, rather than art. Language is controlled by the ideology of the society in which it is used, and it is governed by the linguistic rules of the language used by the members of the society. Spoken language is concrete (de Saussure 961), and therefore it does not belong to Althusser's understanding of the real. Social interactions must involve a collection of people, or at least a duo, and thus verbal communication is not founded on the individual; rather, it focuses on the group. Therefore, spoken words exist outside the individual, whereas, according to Althusser, the real resides within.

Once an idea is spoken, it no longer renders reality; instead, it falls subject to the perceptions of others, and thus becomes truth. There is a mingling of truth and reality, due to the presence of two different points of view (the perception of the person who is speaking and that of the person who is listening, and vice versa), making the boundary between the two difficult to discern. To go further, the retelling of one's original words presents an even deeper conflict. In the case of storytelling, authenticity can be problematic. The storyteller's original tale is certainly vulnerable to the perceptions of the members of his immediate audience. However, the threat to his reality does not necessarily end there. His initial audience members have the potential to retell his tale to others. The retellings of the original tale (based on the initial audience members' own senses of reality and societal truths) are also vulnerable to the truths of *their* audience members. As such, a layering of truth and reality develops, based on perception. Thus, one cannot help but question how much of this narrative belongs to Marlow's own sense of the real, and how many of the words constitute the truth of the unnamed narrator. Because the text, itself, has most likely been adapted by the frame narrator, based on his own ideologically controlled perception of Marlow's original tale, it lacks authenticity.

The tale once was authentic . . . when Marlow told it. However, Marlow's tale is assuredly changed by the anonymous narrator. Describing the narrative as a yarn, alone, implies it has been modified. Because parts of the tale have most likely been adapted, it can no longer be considered authentic; instead, it is a rendering of the original.

Therefore, the tale is no longer real; rather, it takes the form of Marlow's most detested lie. Because Marlow tells us he hates lies, it is probable he would not want his tale to be deemed as such. For, if Marlow's story is unreal or viewed as simply a yarn, he also becomes fictitious. This seems to be what Marlow detests so much about lies . . . his own reality, and, in turn, his identification as an individual dies along with his real art. As such, it seems Marlow desperately tries to preserve his own, original story. Marlow must claim his narrative before others can see him; for, according to Althusser, sight provides for reality. Because one doubts how much of *Heart of Darkness* is actually Marlow's tale, the reality of not only the story, but Marlow as well, is called into question.

Because Marlow's narrative can only exist in conjunction with that of the anonymous narrator, he is this man's subject. Marlow's entire narrative is under the control of the anonymous narrator because it is communicated to us only through this man's voice. Unfortunately, it seems we would not have Marlow's narrative at all if the anonymous narrator did not report it. Again, we seem to find ourselves back inside Peters' circularity of uncertainty. If it were not for the frame narrator's voice, we would not have Marlow's story at all; yet, because we receive the tale only through this narrator's voice, Marlow's tale lacks authenticity, for it reaches us only as a rendering of the original. Marlow seems to have no choice but to serve as a subject to the anonymous narrator; for, without him, Marlow does not exist at all, let alone reside in the real. The problem is to serve as a subject automatically denies one the ability to exist as an

individual. Because Marlow's narrative is vulnerable to the manipulation of the anonymous narrator, Marlow and his story serve as always already subjects to him and his tale. As a subject to the anonymous narrator, Marlow cannot exist as an individual, in the proper sense of the term. Individuals possess a sense of *individuality*; they have traits, interests, preferences, and characteristics setting them apart from other people. They acquire their sense of individuality over time, through various experiences. The freedom to fully develop this sense of self is necessary for one to be an individual. According to Althusser, the freedom to gather "spontaneous 'lived' experiences . . . is not a *given*" ("A Letter" 1481), for "ideology slides into all human activity" (1481), making it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for one to exist as an individual while living within an ideologically controlled society. Interestingly, this logic seems to reflect the same circularity of uncertainty discussed by Peters. Althusser writes,

in order to answer most of the questions posed for us by the existence and specific nature of art, we are forced to produce an adequate (scientific) *knowledge* of the processes which produce the 'aesthetic effect' of a work of art. In other words, in order to answer the question of the relationship between art and knowledge we must produce a *knowledge of art*. ("A Letter" 1482)

Here, Althusser seems to acknowledge the blurring together of truth and reality, or of art and knowledge, with which Marlow seems to struggle. Marlow seems lost in the impalpably grey area between truth and reality, making his existence inscrutable (Conrad, *Heart* 9). Because his story is trapped inside the anonymous narrator's tale, Marlow does not have the freedom necessary to assert himself as an individual. Therefore, Marlow seemingly is unable to develop the sense of self imperative for one to function as an individual. Thus, Marlow is not readily distinguishable from the anonymous narrator; as such, he rather is simply a subject who, in this context, cannot ever be an individual.

The issue to keep in mind is one cannot be certain how much of Marlow's tale is

modified by the unnamed narrator. This uncertainty is the product of Brooks' circular pattern mentioned earlier. All we have is the text, on which to base impressions of the characters found within it. The plot is Marlow's, yet it is conveyed by someone else. Because we do not receive the story from Marlow, it does not belong to the real; it rather belongs to truth, based on the anonymous narrator's sense of what is true. Althusser asserts the authentic is real, whereas the average is not. Marlow's own tale is the authentic original (or the real), while the frame narrator's retelling of Marlow's tale is the average, impersonal version, for it is a second-hand account. If we were to receive Marlow's tale directly from him it would belong to the real, for it would be authentic. The perception of the frame narrator would be irrelevant and his influence on the tale would be nonexistent. If Marlow was to convey his own story directly to the reader the only relevant perception would be the reader's. As such, Marlow's tale would be founded on the individual, and correspondingly it would reside within Althusser's sense of the real. Unfortunately, Marlow's real art, or his story, gets lost within the truth of this other man. The narrator's retelling of Marlow's original tale is founded on the group, and quite a large one at that, for it includes the perspective of Kurtz, Marlow, the unnamed narrator, and the reader. As such, the framed narrative deprives Marlow of not only an authentic narrative voice, but of individuality as well. As a result, Marlow is also denied access to Althusser's real, for only an individual has the potential to exist within the real. Because the anonymous narrator can use Marlow for his own benefit and is free to manipulate Marlow's tale as he sees fit, he ascribes to Marlow the role of subject.

Interestingly, Marlow does the same thing to Kurtz. Only after Marlow hears Kurtz discourse does he tell his own tale. Just as the frame narrator most likely modifies Marlow's story for his own benefit (based on his own sense of truth), one can be fairly

certain Marlow changes Kurtz's story to fit his own (again, based on his own truth). It seems Marlow admits to manipulating Kurtz's words when he says,

I've been telling you what we said—repeating the phrases we pronounced—but what's the good. They were common everyday words—the familiar vague sounds exchanged on every waking day of life. But what of that? They had behind them, to my mind, the terrific suggestiveness of words heard in dreams, of phrases spoken in nightmares. (Conrad, *Heart* 65)

Here, Marlow seems to admit using his own mind (perspective) to interpret Kurtz's speech. It appears Marlow uses his own sense of reality to judge Kurtz's tale to make sense of his stories full of "indefinable meaning" (Conrad, *Heart* 66). By doing so, though, Marlow applies his own truth to Kurtz's reality. When Marlow retells Kurtz's original tale and alters Kurtz's "magnificent folds of eloquence" (Conrad, *Heart* 67) to fit within his own plot, Marlow transforms Kurtz's originally authentic tale from reality into truth. Marlow is free to manipulate Kurtz's tale as he sees fit, much like the frame narrator is able to adapt Marlow's story to suit his own. Marlow seems to fear this loss of one's own story, and thus one's own voice. Perhaps this is because Marlow witnesses it first-hand when he uses Kurtz's tale to make his own. Maybe this explains Marlow's choice to embed pieces of himself in his own tale. Marlow appears to anticipate future adaptations of his narrative, for he fixes himself within the story he conveys to the men on the boat. There are deviances in narration throughout the text hinting toward Marlow's attempt to preserve his own voice. The loss of one's voice seems to disturb Marlow. This can be seen when Marlow says he would be humiliated if he were to have nothing to say at the time of his last opportunity for pronouncement (Conrad, *Heart* 69). Is not Marlow's last chance to speak *Heart of Darkness*? Any retelling of Marlow's own tale, including this text, would be his last chance to speak. Marlow seems to recognize the possibility of his voice getting lost in any such retelling, for this is the case with Kurtz

in Marlow's own retelling of Kurtz's tale. Perhaps this is why Marlow seems to go to such great lengths to distance himself from both Kurtz and any future tellers of his own tale (including the frame narrator) in his original story. It seems Marlow desires to serve as more than a narrative device, or as the transmitter of one tale to serve as a subject in another.



## CHAPTER VI

### HOW TO SEE MARLOW

Interestingly, “early critics had little interest in Marlow, viewing him as a mere narrative device. And of course he *is* a narrative device—in the most direct sense, what we see of him is simply a person talking. Like Kurtz, he is a voice” (Brudney 332). However, Marlow is worthy of attention precisely because he *is* a narrative device. Marlow’s story cannot exist without the other, making him an always already subject to both Kurtz and the unnamed narrator; interestingly, in turn, the frame narrator and Kurtz are always already subjects to Marlow. All three men are equally dependent on each other in order for their stories to be heard. Marlow needs Kurtz’s tale on which to base his own, and the frame narrator needs Marlow’s story to tell. If it were not for Marlow and the frame narrator, Kurtz’s story would not reach us at all. While Marlow is a narrative device, one must remember the frame narrator and Kurtz are certainly little more than such devices. Yet, the *frame narrator’s* story reaches the audience, not Marlow’s or Kurtz’s. Sure, we receive bits and pieces of their original stories, but this is all. It is the unnamed narrator’s adaptation of the original tales of both Kurtz and Marlow we read and see. While Marlow insists he wants us to see him (Conrad, *Heart* 30), this seems to be a difficult task because his story is told by, and from the perspective of, the anonymous narrator. The difference between truth and reality is difficult to

discern, especially when it is unclear where one ends and the other begins. It seems Marlow urges us to differentiate the frame narrator's truth from his own reality; for, only through this process can we ever really see him. However, the layering of narration traps Marlow inside the narrator's tale; as a result, we are prevented from seeing Marlow. At best, we receive a rendering of him, causing us to doubt the authenticity of both Marlow and his tale.

We desire to hear Marlow's authentically real tale, for it is seemingly impossible. It is only natural to want what one cannot have; initially, it seems Marlow's goal of allowing us to see him is unattainable. We want to receive his real art, or his original tale, and he appears to desire, more than anything else, to give us just that. As the story progresses, "it rapidly becomes clear that Marlow's 'imagine's' [tales] are not so much invitations as commands; the act of narration constitutes the audience as a collective yes-man, invoked only to confirm preimposed structures of reality" (London 43). Without us to acknowledge both Marlow's individuality and the authenticity of his tale, he would have no hope of achieving a presence within the real.

Because Marlow uses Kurtz's story, it seems he anticipates the retelling of his own tale. In fact, Marlow seems to plant himself within his original tale so he might be rooted within any further renderings of his story. Marlow appears to foresee others retelling his story, just as he shares Kurtz's tale. Marlow seems to comprehend how a piece of himself would be lost by others doing so. Perhaps Marlow realizes Kurtz's voice is lost in his own tale. In fact, Marlow admits, "I have a voice too, and for good or evil mine is the speech that cannot be silenced" (Conrad, *Heart* 38). When Marlow says he also has a voice, he indicates his voice co-exists with another's. Emphasizing Marlow's voice is the one that cannot be lost implies the other's can. The lost voice within

Marlow's is Kurtz's. Like Kurtz, Marlow is also a person perceived by others (namely, the frame narrator) as no more than a voice (Conrad, *Heart* 30). As such, Marlow must frightfully anticipate getting lost (Conrad, *Heart* 37) inside someone else's tale. It seems this loss of identity, or voice, is what Marlow fears the most. Bette London suggests Marlow loses a sense of his own masculinity because of his dependence on others. This may be, but, even more so, it seems Marlow predicts a loss of *self* through his forced connection with the future listeners of his current audience. Therefore, Marlow seems to disengage himself from any, and all, future tellers of his tale (including the frame narrator) during the initial rendering of his experience in the Congo. Marlow seems to shape his tale with an eye to how his listeners might distort it if, and when, they pass it on. It appears Marlow tries to ensure his authenticity through his use of language. Marlow seems to understand he cannot be an individual until he distinguishes himself as separate from his other(s) in any future renderings of his tale; in turn, he and his tale will remain outside the real until he does so. It seems, then, Marlow anticipates his loss of identity and reality through the retelling of his tale by another. Marlow appears to recognize if his story is retold he will be no more than a voice inside someone else's story, just as Kurtz is little more than this in his own.

According to Althusser, stepping outside the confines of ideology, science, knowledge, and truth, in the attempt to *make* authentic objects ("A Letter" 1480) constitutes the real. Only once one uses his individual "conceptions, ideas . . . productive forces" (Engels and Marx 768) to create "real art" (Althusser, "A Letter" 1480) is he free from ideology. What Marlow must make in order to attain Althusser's sense of the real is his own narrative. Marlow must use ingenuity to ensure his voice is the one we hear; for, only then can we acknowledge him as an individual. Thus, "Marlow's task proves

nothing less than the manipulation of reality, the restructuring of experience: to *make* his audience hear what *he* hears, feel what *he* feels, see what *he* sees” (London 42). Marlow must distinguish himself from his others for us to see him. Until Marlow and not the anonymous narrator is seen, we cannot see. We must get a glimpse of Marlow’s reality, or the real art of his lived experiences, if we are to deem him real. Only after *we* recognize Marlow as independent from this narrator does he have the potential to be an individual, for we must find the real with him. If Marlow’s story is not real, then he is not either. Interestingly, Marlow seems to understand this is a monumental, if not impossible, task. Marlow says, “your own reality [is] for yourself—not for others—what no other man can ever know. They can only see the mere show, and never can tell what it really means” (Conrad, *Heart* 31). Again, Marlow seems to comprehend the difference between truth and reality. For Marlow, the meaning (or reality) is internal, while the truth (or the show) is external. Marlow seems to acknowledge how reality is founded on the individual, stating no person can fully perceive another’s reality. However, this seems to be precisely what Marlow desires. Marlow says he wants us to see him; according to Althusser, sight resides in the realm of the real. It seems the real art, through which Marlow might allow us to see, perceive, and feel his lived experience, is his story. It seems Marlow desires for his narrative to allow for these responses. Just like the rivets he so desperately wants (Conrad, *Heart* 30) but is deprived of, Marlow desires to convey his life-sensation; yet, Marlow finds it impossible to do so (30).

Because the unnamed narrator reproduces Marlow’s voice, the audience never actually hears Marlow speak. As such, we are distanced from Marlow. Marlow is dependent on the anonymous narrator, and he, in turn, is equally reliant on Marlow; consequently, the two often blend together, making it difficult to distinguish one from the

other. Although we do not literally see the anonymous narrator for the majority of the story, we nonetheless are constantly aware of his existence due to the ever-present quotation marks. In turn, the presence of these quotation marks prevents us from seeing Marlow. Because we are given everything from the unnamed narrator's perspective, all we know of Charlie Marlow comes from this other man's point of view. As such, it is difficult for us to validate Marlow's reality without directly seeing or hearing him. Interestingly, Marlow finds a connection between seeing and hearing, and he seemingly reaches out to us through this unique relationship. In fact, when Marlow overhears the Manager and his nephew "talking about Kurtz" (Conrad, *Heart* 33) he seems to "see Kurtz for the first time" (34). Marlow's eavesdropping allows him to catch "a distant glimpse . . . of . . . that man [Kurtz]" (Conrad, *Heart* 34). As such, through language Marlow initially sees Kurtz. Language allows Marlow to perceive Kurtz as an individual prior to meeting the man, and despite Kurtz's name not being pronounced even once (Conrad, *Heart* 34) during the overheard conversation. Thus, for Marlow, language, or voice, seems to provide for perception, or sight.

## CHAPTER VII

### LANGUAGE AND PERCEPTION

The impact narration has on readers' perceptions is important since "narration . . . is a major factor in the perception of subjects" (Peters 62). It is intriguing how

narration plays a significant role [in perception] because human subjects are both objects and subjects at the same time. They are physical subjects in the eyes of others . . . but at the same time these objects are themselves perceiving subjects and [are] therefore inherently different from other physical objects. (Peters 62)

In other words, people are both subjects and objects, depending on which perception is taken into account at the given moment, either a first or third person point of view. In silence, both can operate simultaneously, with no interruption to either perspective. However, narration makes it difficult for the two perceptions to coexist; for, once something is said, reality is manipulated due to the differing viewpoints of those perceiving the words.

It seems Althusser addresses the importance of perception in his writings on the real. Althusser asserts real art must "make us 'perceive' (but not know) in some sense *from the inside*, by an *internal distance*, the very ideology in which [it is] held" ("A Letter" 1481). In other words, the potential to create real art (paintings, sculptures, poems, music, literary works, dances, etc.) resides inside us all. We all have the capacity to create the authentic, or to assert our own reality. Yet, once the real is

conveyed, it risks becoming truth, for it can, and often is, manipulated by the governing ideology, or knowledge, of the society in which we live. Thus, although language can be used to express the lived experience of human existence (Althusser, "A Letter" 1481) that "possesses a reality *peculiar to itself*, with a *peculiar domain* of reality in which it has a monopoly" (1481), speaking about one's reality makes the lived experience vulnerable to manipulation by the perception of others. This is because reality is not relative, or comparative. Instead, reality is individualized. Reality is not surface-truth, imposed upon a population simply because it always has been. Reality is unique precisely because it resides *within*, and, therefore, is based on the individual. An individual, according to the proper sense of the term, is capable of finding the real because he is distinguishable from others. The difficulty is conveying one's reality to another, because once one attempts to make others perceive, see, or feel his reality, he risks the real getting trapped within the constraints of truth, due to perception. While one oftentimes needs to use language in order to convey his reality to others, the use of language potentially can destroy the reality altogether. In other words, once something is talked about, it often fails to really exist any longer. Thus, it appears the real cannot be talked about, because once it is it no longer is real, due to the various perspectives of those receiving the speech. Because the speaker and the listener, in any given situation, are enmeshed with one another, they are reliant on each other for the lived experience to be conveyed at all; yet, once the experience is transmitted, the boundary between truth and reality is unclear.

Virginia Woolf reflects on the difficulty of conveying one's reality to another in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown." In this essay, Woolf draws a comparison between those artists she labels Edwardian and Georgian. She asserts the Edwardian writers "were interested in something outside" ("Mr. Bennett" 12), unlike the Georgian writers who

were “interested in things in themselves; in character in itself; in the book in itself” (12). Woolf seems to differentiate between artists who focus on the internal and the external, clearly favoring those who deal with individual character (“Mr. Bennett” 9). She even called for an overthrowing of the old, Edwardian methods (“Mr. Bennett” 19), claiming these conventions would no longer serve a narrative purpose. Woolf says the Edwardian convention of writing about the external brings about ruin, or death (“Mr. Bennett” 16). In this essay, Woolf seems to comment on how truth and reality differ. While reality resides internally, truth is found outside. Woolf criticizes Bennett for claiming “it is only if the characters are real that the novel has any chance of surviving” (“Mr. Bennett” 10), which can be seen in her rebuttal: “I ask myself, what is reality? And who are the judges of reality? A character may be real to Mr. Bennett and quite unreal to me” (10). This variability of reality, which Woolf points out, is the result of individuality. The real is founded on the individual; therefore, it differs among people. It is not generally accepted by the population; if it were, it would be truth. This is precisely how truth and reality are different. Marlow, himself, says it is impossible to convey one’s own reality to another (Conrad, *Heart* 30), precisely because it is not the other’s reality. Yet, Woolf clearly advocates using one’s own feelings and not convention (“Modern Fiction” 212) to create works that “come closer to life” (213). She says we must “look within” (“Modern Fiction” 212) to find that which is not materialistic, unimportant, or trivial (210). Woolf seems to suggest although it is nearly impossible to convey one’s own reality to another, one still should try. For, until one expresses his sense of reality to another, how can he be certain what he deems reality actually is the real?

Hence, we find ourselves back inside Peters’ circularity of uncertainty. The improbability of conveying one’s reality to another, or of actually finding reality for



one's self, seems to be what Woolf refers to when she asks, "What is the point of it all?" ("Modern Fiction" 211). Woolf finds the point to be that people should try to make it meaningful, whatever "it" might be. She advocates using new, even wild, methods to create authentic works of art ("Modern Fiction" 218). The focus, however, must be on the internal. Woolf says, "everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; every quality of the brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss" ("Modern Fiction" 218) when creating real art. It seems Woolf agrees with Althusser on how real art (and thus the real) is found internally. When Woolf analyzes how two people can look at one object and "see something that escapes them [the other]" ("Modern Fiction" 217), she suggests reality is founded on individual perception. The difficulty is in conveying one's own reality to another. This is because, in doing so, one's individual sense of reality falls victim to that something (as Woolf puts it) which escaped one in the first place. That something belongs to the other's reality, which now, due to the welcoming of perception via language, manipulates one's own sense of the real. While one might try to shelter his reality within himself, in order to preserve it, if one wishes to *exist* in the real, others must acknowledge him as such. As Althusser writes, one must make others see, perceive, and feel his reality.

It seems Marlow is aware of this co-dependency when he says, "we exist only in so far as we hang together" (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 223). It seems Marlow understands the nature of society . . . people who belong to the same ideology exist only through their connections with each other. If Marlow is conscious of his dependence on the other members of his society, and he, at the same time, wishes to convey his lived experience to others, it would seem likely he would contemplate the means through which he could extricate himself from his other(s) in order to do so. Within *Heart of Darkness*, it appears

Marlow attempts to make such a break. Throughout the story, Marlow's own voice shines through the narrative. As a result, readers catch a rare glimpse of him as an individual, distinguishable from the frame narrator. Marlow appears to understand he must first separate his tale from the anonymous narrator's before he may authenticate himself, for the one will allow for the other. In other words, Marlow must separate reality from truth. Marlow must convey his lived experience to us within the truth (the manipulated story) of the anonymous narrator. While Marlow cannot know for certain his story will be reported by the frame narrator (or any of the other men on the boat), he can anticipate such will be the case. Based on how Marlow relays parts of Kurtz's tale within his own, he can logically predict these men will do likewise with his story in the future. Evidence throughout *Heart of Darkness* suggests Marlow is aware he must stake a claim in his own narrative. From his use of Kurtz, Marlow seems to understand future audiences of his tale (including us), will "fail to see things as they are because [they will not be] really looking at things as they are: things [will] appear through a distorting filter of self" (Brudney 323). What we see when we read *Heart of Darkness* is the way things are according to the truth of the anonymous narrator, not Marlow's reality. As a result, Marlow gets lost in translation, precisely because this is what *Heart of Darkness* is . . . a rendition of Marlow's lived experiences, or his reality. Thomas Nagel insists, "recognition of the other person's reality . . . is essential" (383), because it validates one's own reality. "Simone Weil writes that when we see that another person is real we cannot help but respond" (Brudney 324), because it makes us see not only their reality, but also our own. According to Althusser, such occurrences "make us 'perceive' . . . in some sense *from the inside*" ("A Letter" 1481) the reality according to which the other operates. While this sounds easy enough, it is difficult, if not impossible, to see another

person's reality, because oftentimes the real is hidden beneath truth. This seems to be the problem Marlow faces. Repeatedly, Marlow speaks as if he tries to project his voice through the framed narration, so his own intonation might resonate from that of the unnamed narrator. From his experience with Kurtz, Marlow seems to realize his voice is the only available method in the attempt to claim his story as his own. Thus, Marlow uses language in a wild, new manner (advocated by Woolf) in order to establish not only an identity, but also a presence within the real.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ONE'S DEPENDENCE ON OTHERS

The breaks in the framed narrative indicate such a maneuver. While Ian Watt suggests Marlow's narrative belongs to the genre of meditation (87), Daniel Brudney claims "the tale seems equally in the genre of confession, [with] Marlow seeking to explain and justify himself" (333). Throughout the narrative, "Marlow sinks into himself, as if telling the tale in soliloquy, and then snaps back into intercourse and identification with others . . . and at times he is snapped back by an auditorial remark" (Brudney 333). There are moments when Marlow sneaks through the boundaries of narration to assert himself as separate from the anonymous narrator. It seems he attempts to differentiate himself from the unidentified narrator, "and it is the *difference* of his voice . . . that constitutes Marlow as a knowable entity" (London 32). Marlow "is never straightforward. He alternates between garrulity and stunning eloquence, and rarely resists making peculiar things seem more peculiar by surprisingly misstating them, or rendering them vague and contradictory" (Said 29). These discrepancies in narration hint toward Marlow's attempt to set himself apart from the frame narrator. "The madness of Marlow's text . . . becomes the spectacle his audience sees; . . . broken by interjections . . . fluctuating wildly between self-justification and report . . . jumping fitfully between times and thoughts" (London 34), it seems Marlow tries to free himself from the lines of

his narrator's tale. Through such narrative techniques, Marlow disengages himself from his ideologically imposed position as one who "attend[s] to the other . . . and . . . concern[s] oneself *for* the other" (Brudney 326) to claim his narrative as his own, and thus assert his individuality. By doing so, it seems Marlow tries to create real art (an authentic story), in Althusser's sense, and, in turn, attempts to venture into the real. Unfortunately for Marlow, though, it seems once he detaches himself from the anonymous narrator he automatically becomes fastened to Kurtz. Because Marlow tells his story after hearing Kurtz's, this man's words also occupy Marlow's tale. Until Marlow can also separate himself from Kurtz, his tale fails to really be his own. As such, it lacks meaning. It seems determining what something really means (Conrad, *Heart* 31) is of utmost importance to Marlow. For, without meaning, we are unable to see Marlow through the telling of his tale.

It seems Marlow views his voice as the mode through which he can find reality. For Marlow, it seems language is the key to meaning. Yet, according to Said, Marlow "acknowledges the tragic predicament of all speech" (23) when he says, "it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence—that which makes it truth, its meaning—its subtle and penetrating essence" (Conrad, *Heart* 30). It seems Marlow desires to be an individual, one who can allow his audience to see his reality. Yet, Marlow finds this task impossible, as he, himself, puts it, for his reality is masked in truth . . . the truth of others, who are the anonymous narrator and Kurtz. "Marlow implicitly calls into question his ability to 'convey' his experience" (Pecora, "The Sounding Empire" 149) to others because his story is both based on the tale of someone else and told by a third person altogether. Pecora asserts *Heart of Darkness* is told from

a perspective deliberately preserved but also deferred and detached . . .  
[and] the most immediate effect of this peculiarity in the ontological status

of the voice of bourgeois consciousness—ineffable precisely because ‘genuine’—is a textual questioning of intentionality, of one’s ability to say (or discover) what one means, of one’s ability to communicate the ‘real’ experience. (“The Sounding Empire” 149)

In other words, we cannot see the real Marlow because instead we are presented with the anonymous narrator’s rendering *of* him. Likewise, we can never actually know Marlow’s tale, for the one we receive is from another’s mouth, influenced by his own bourgeois ideology. It is impossible for Marlow to convey the meaning of his life-sensation, or, according to Althusser, his lived experience, because we are distracted by the truth of someone else’s words.

Perhaps this explains why Marlow is almost obsessed with language and the spoken word. As he travels upriver, Marlow comments on how he anticipates meeting and speaking with Kurtz. In fact, once Marlow embarks on his journey into the Congo, his trip becomes a quest in search of something of value, in epic-likeness, which is Kurtz. It seems Marlow, once in Africa, is unable to exist as a separate entity apart from Kurtz. Marlow’s voyage is no longer his own; instead, Marlow’s intended search for ivory becomes an exploration toward Kurtz, who, interestingly, is his predecessor. Marlow realizes his journey is not revolutionary; instead, it is one already begun by Kurtz. Marlow simply repeats the steps Kurtz already took; as such, he becomes an always already subject to Kurtz. Although Marlow’s experiences in the Congo are strikingly different from Kurtz’s, these two men are nonetheless connected to one another. Despite how different their characters and purposes are, both men are associated with each other. The automatic link one makes between Marlow and Kurtz is inappropriate, for it is founded only on their physical journeys up the river, not on their characters, points of view, or purposes. They are two different people, who think and behave in opposing ways, and yet Marlow and Kurtz remain connected to one another in our eyes. The

unfortunate result of this association is Marlow's own perspective and purpose get lost, for his journey becomes simply an extension of its predecessor . . . Kurtz's. It is as if Marlow's own journey is nothing more than a sequel to Kurtz's. As Marlow moves further into the Congo, "Kurtz . . . provides a magnetizing goal of quest and inquest since he not only has led the way up the river, he has also returned upriver instead of coming back to the central station as he was supposed to do" (Brooks 72). Marlow does not know "the very reason for [him] being sent on his journey upriver is to detect the meaning and the consequences of Kurtz's return upriver—a presiding intention in his voyage of which Marlow becomes aware only in its midst" (Brooks 72). Marlow "is in a state of belatedness or secondariness in relation to the forerunner; his journey is a repetition, which gains its meaning from its attachment to the prior journey . . . [and, therefore,] Marlow's plot repeats Kurtz's story, takes this as its motivating force" (Brooks 72).

Marlow must depend upon Kurtz's story if he is to claim his own narrative voice and tale. In a sense, then, Marlow is trapped in a similar predicament with Kurtz as with the anonymous narrator. While his journey into the Congo is simply a repetition of Kurtz's, his story is also reproduced by the unnamed narrator; neither is authentically Marlow's . . . not his journey, nor the narrative retelling of the journey. Marlow is an always already subject to both of these men; for, without them, he has no story at all. Unfortunately, once Marlow is able to free himself from one (the anonymous narrator), he and his story are still quite fastened to the other (Kurtz). No matter how far Marlow travels upriver, the destination remains Kurtz; as such, Marlow's journey, despite how hard he tries, remains an extension of one already underway. Marlow is unable to break free from Kurtz's story because his own is always already attached to it. In Althusser's

sense, Marlow is a subject to Kurtz whether he likes it or not. Marlow is unable to distinguish himself as independent from Kurtz, or as an individual. According to Althusser's theories on symbolic order, Marlow resides immediately beside Kurtz because his narrative and his identity (in our eyes) depend upon Kurtz's own tale. Without his quest toward Kurtz, Marlow does not exist; his reality is intertwined with Kurtz's. And, as such, he does not have a reality at all, for the real is founded on the individual rather than the group because it is not relative, or comparative. Marlow does not have his own truth; rather, it is one Kurtz (whether consciously or not) imposes upon him by nature of their codependence on one another.

Yet, interestingly, in *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow asserts "we live, as we dream—alone" (30). While Marlow seems to acknowledge in one text, *Lord Jim*, "some sort of link to others is a condition of one's own reality" (Brudney 324), Marlow contradicts himself here, in *Heart of Darkness*, by claiming people can only exist by themselves. Perhaps what Marlow suggests is in order for an individual, in Althusser's sense, to actually live, he must do so alone; for, once one exists in conjunction with others, he is instantly subjected to the governing ideology (or truth) of the union. Marlow seems to find this sense of human isolation disappointing, stating "it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence" (Conrad, *Heart* 30) to another. Marlow finds it unfeasible to do so, for once one attempts to convey his life-sensations, or lived experiences, to another, the attempt "makes it truth" (Conrad, *Heart* 30). Marlow goes on to say, "your own reality [is]—for yourself—not for others—what no other man can ever know" (31). Here, Marlow seems to acknowledge truth and reality are two different things, emphasizing how one (reality) resides inside, while the other (truth) is found externally. It seems Marlow understands how only once a person



distinguishes himself as separate from his others can he be an individual, according to the definition of the word. In a sense, only once one determines who he is not can he fully understand who he is. After this awareness is established, one can attempt to access the real.

Marlow seems to understand he must accept Kurtz, and his story, before he can attempt to distance himself from both. Only by knowing Kurtz's story can Marlow distinguish his own tale as separate from it. Because Marlow's narrative is reliant on Kurtz's, he must first learn of Kurtz's plot in order to fully develop, and attach meaning to, his own. Thus, Marlow is highly motivated to reach Kurtz, in order to hear what Kurtz has to say about his own journey. Marlow emphasizes how important it is to reach Kurtz in time, so he might speak with Kurtz. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow says,

I had traveled all this way for the sole purpose of talking with Mr. Kurtz . . . that was exactly what I had been looking forward to, a talk with Kurtz. I made the strange discovery that I had never imagined him as doing, you know, but as discoursing . . . the man presented himself as a voice. (48)

What Marlow must hear from Kurtz is his story; for, without it Marlow's own tale lacks significance and meaning. The story is precisely what Marlow cares about. Without it, Marlow does not have a tale on which he might base his own. In fact, Marlow admits he is not "very interested in [Kurtz]" (Conrad, *Heart* 33) as an individual. Marlow even says, "he [Kurtz] was just a word to me" (Conrad, *Heart* 29). Marlow is not concerned with Kurtz "the man." Marlow rather values Kurtz "the voice." What Marlow finds "curious [or worthy of interest about] . . . this man [Kurtz] . . . [are his] moral ideas" (Conrad, *Heart* 33). Marlow is concerned with Kurtz's purpose, for it fuels his own story. Since Kurtz's story is the prequel to his own, Marlow must be curious about the purpose of Kurtz's journey, for it is directly (whether justifiably or not) connected to his own. Only by understanding Kurtz's experiences can Marlow distinguish his own

incidents in the Congo as different. Only then can Marlow differentiate himself, and the real art of his own story, from Kurtz's. From this separation, Marlow can assert the authenticity of his own tale, or his lived experience, in the effort to find Althusser's real.

Many critics explore this dependence on another for validation of one's own significance. According to John W. Griffith, "in so many of Conrad's works, the interest lies in that space where . . . identity is threatened by defamiliarization" (19).

Griffith goes on to cite John L. Wengle, stating how

the stability of an individual's sense of identity depends directly on the 'innumerable identifications' he has established with the familiar, personal and impersonal, concrete and abstract, animate and inanimate objects of his past and present existence. When [one's] identifications are threatened . . . his sense of identity will be challenged . . . [one's] sense of identity depends significantly on the responses and reactions he produces in and receives back from people surrounding him . . . it is true that we depend upon others for clues as to our identity. (19)

Griffith and Wengle both agree one's own sense of self is relative, or comparative, for it is dependent on how one is perceived by others. When Marlow leaves Europe, or his familiar surroundings, to venture into the foreign African Congo, his sense of familiarity is disrupted. As such, Marlow's identity is challenged. Without others like him, against whom Marlow may compare himself, his sense of identity becomes vulnerable. The only ones who are, at first glance, most like Marlow are the other Europeans, including Kurtz. However, Kurtz is actually so different from Marlow that the comparison between them is unsuitable. This sense of isolation seems to be exactly what Marlow finds disappointing. Marlow lacks a proper point of comparison, from whom he might develop his own sense of self. Both Griffith and Wengle seem to believe the development of one's own sense of identity is dependent on the way in which one is received and perceived by others. Although neither Griffith nor Wengle directly discuss the role of communication in the acquisition of identity, it seems interaction between

one's self and his others is necessary for either familiarity or unfamiliarity to occur. From their writings, it seems familiarity (similarity, and resulting acceptance) produces a solid sense of self, or identity. In opposition, unfamiliarity (dissimilarity, and resulting non-acceptance) creates a threatened sense of self, or identity. The significance is the connection things have with other things, and how this bond impacts those involved . . . or the meaning of the association, particularly in regard to the interaction between the two things. Unfortunately for Marlow, his story is connected to Kurtz's simply because they are alike in our eyes. Kurtz and Marlow are both: men, European, white, story-tellers, wanderers, explorers, etc. From the reader's perspective, Marlow is real only because of his connection to Kurtz, and vice versa.

The need for familiarity, discussed by Griffith and Wengle, forces Marlow's journey to exist, and take on meaning, through its relation to Kurtz's. Kurtz, himself, is arbitrary, for he could have been any one of the many white men from Europe in the Congo. In fact, Marlow even admits Kurtz is no more than a word to him (Conrad, *Heart* 29). Although Marlow says the name Kurtz means "short" in German, hinting to readers his name is symbolic on some level, Marlow appears to contradict himself by saying Kurtz is "very little more than a voice" (Conrad, *Heart* 48). Also, while Marlow says, "whatever he [Kurtz] was he was not common" (Conrad, *Heart* 51), he again contradicts his own assertion by stating, "all Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz" (50), insinuating Kurtz is quite ordinary. It seems Kurtz, the man, is arbitrary to Marlow. Kurtz could still serve Marlow's purpose if he was one of the other Europeans. Marlow rather values Kurtz's story, or what he has to say about his journey into the Congo, because it is the motivating factor behind his own voyage. Ferdinand de Saussure proposes meaning is constructed along the string of signifiers through the process of

drawing comparisons to other signifiers in order to distinguish entities as separate (969). He asserts, “language is a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others” (969). Is this not precisely what Griffith and Wengle propose . . . one’s own identity, or sense of self, is based on one’s connection to others? Just as terms depend on each other to form intelligible language, people rely on one other to develop a sense of identity. One must compare himself to his others to distinguish himself as different. This comparison is not only natural, but also necessary if one is to exist as an individual. Marlow must conduct such an act of comparison if he is to establish a sense of self, and if he wishes to find his own voice. Only through such comparisons can meaning be ascribed to Marlow’s own journey, and only then can a perception of external reality be established for both Marlow and his lived experiences.

## CHAPTER IX

### AN ALTERNATIVE FRAME OF REFERENCE

Many critics, including Chinua Achebe, take Conrad's choice to "set Africa up as a foil to Europe" (252) and to depict "Africa as 'the other world,' the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality" (252) as proof "he was a thoroughgoing racist" (257). Achebe goes even further, claiming the entire text is racist, and, as a result, he asserts *Heart of Darkness* "can [not] be called a great work of art" (257). Achebe uses Marlow's choice of words, which, according to him dehumanizes Africa and Africans (257), to support his belief that this text does not belong in any school's curriculum. Achebe is correct when he asserts Marlow's tale cannot be considered great art, but the evidence he uses to support this claim illustrates he overlooks the actual reason why. Some may go further than Achebe, claiming Marlow's tale is not art in any sense. Yet, is not the act of storytelling an artform? Are not storytellers just as deserving of the title "artist" as painters or sculptors? Marlow's tale *can* be considered a great work of art, and at one point in time it most certainly was . . . when he, himself, conveyed it. The layering of narration, unfortunately, strips Marlow's narrative of its classification as a work of art that is great. Because something most certainly must be real for it to be considered great, Marlow's manipulated tale does not belong among the great works of art.

According to Althusser, one can find the real within art; likewise, truth resides within knowledge. Because, as Achebe puts it, Marlow's "account is given to us through the filter of a second, shadowy person . . . the primary narrator" (256), the text lacks authenticity. Therefore, the story we receive resides within truth rather than reality. The words of the unidentified narrator's truth cannot mistakenly be attributed to Marlow's sense of the real. Just as truth and reality are not the same, despite how often they are used interchangeably, the primary narrator and Marlow are two different people who oftentimes blur together because of the framed narration. Although the choice of words used to depict the Africans and the Congo can be perceived by some as derogatory, one cannot automatically assume they are Marlow's own descriptions. One must not forget the text is a framed narrative; as such, the truth contained within it is that of the primary narrator, not Marlow. Marlow's original tale (which was based partly on the story Marlow received from Kurtz) was the one he told the men on the boat, one of whom was the frame narrator. The words comprising the text, or the retelling of Marlow's originally authentic tale, reach the audience through the filter of second-hand, and even third-hand, narration. The quotation marks indicate Marlow does not provide a direct description of either this portion of the world or its people. Instead, the depictions of Africa and the Africans, which many critics, including Achebe, find so offensive, come from Marlow's other and subjector, the anonymous narrator. One cannot be certain the unidentified narrator distorts what Marlow says; likewise, though, one cannot be sure he does *not* alter Marlow's words. This, again, illustrates the circularity of uncertainty suggested by Peters. Aside from those rare moments when Marlow distinguishes himself from his other, using his voice to sneak through the layers of narration to reveal himself to us, one cannot say with conviction what else in the text reflects Marlow's reality. This

uncertainty takes away from the authenticity of the tale; as such, it prohibits the narrative from being real art, for it would need to be original to be considered real. The problem is Marlow's tale, Kurtz's story, and the narrative offered by the frame narrator are not the same. These separate episodes unfortunately end up intertwined with, and mistaken for, one another. It is almost impossible to distinguish between them. For the reader, these three separate stories end up blurring into one impalpably grey tale. As a result, Marlow finds himself in the "blank space . . . of darkness" (Conrad, *Heart* 11-12) he so much desires to explore; yet, once he finally gets there, he is horrified. It seems Marlow discovers he is no longer an individual once in the Congo. Marlow seems horrified to find his identity is fastened to that of another . . . Kurtz.

While some critics argue Marlow is simply a manifestation of the primary narrator's imagination, the difference in voice throughout the narrative indicates otherwise. Achebe asserts

Conrad appears to go to considerable pains to set up layers of insulation between himself and the moral universe of his history. He has, for example, a narrator behind a narrator . . . but if Conrad's intention is to draw a cordon sanitaire between himself and the moral and psychological malaise of his [Marlow's] narrator his care [is] . . . wasted because he neglects to hint however subtly or tentatively at an alternative frame of reference by which we may judge the actions and opinions of his characters . . . Marlow seems . . . to enjoy Conrad's complete confidence. (256)

Achebe seems to claim Marlow is a racist character because Conrad, himself, was a bigot. Achebe appears to argue that Conrad speaks through Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*. It seems Achebe suggests Conrad hides behind Marlow and safely within the layers of narration to reveal his racist viewpoints without being held accountable for them. Achebe's use of the word "if" to suggest *Heart of Darkness* illustrates Conrad's racist attitudes is interesting. In doing so, Achebe, himself, much like Conrad, uses

language to distance himself from his claim. By writing “if,” Achebe provides himself a comfortable margin for error. Achebe asserts his opinion, but he does so in hypothetical terms. Achebe’s actual claim seems to be that Conrad is really the primary narrator; he seems to suggest Marlow is invented solely to take the fall for Conrad’s racist comments, or to shelter Conrad from resulting criticism. In other words, Marlow is invented to take the blame. This sounds quite clever, but it does not explain Marlow’s urgency to assert his independence from the layering of narration. It does not account for “the gap between the voices of the two narrating presences . . . [for] Marlow’s accents and tones . . . [for] Marlow’s voice *inside* this narrator’s literary mode” (London 56). If Marlow is fabricated, why draw attention to his separateness from the primary narrator? Why emphasize his overwhelming desire to break free from this narrator? If Marlow is simply an invented scapegoat, it does not make sense why Conrad would emphasize his understanding of perception and how it impacts truth and reality; for, by doing so, readers also question how much of the tale, including its descriptions of Africans, is reality, and, likewise, how much of the story is founded on ideologically determined truth. If Conrad’s sole purpose was to reveal his own racist attitudes, why would he allow Marlow to demonstrate, as Bette London argues, how “neither ‘truth’ nor ‘experience’ can be considered absolute” (36)? The answer is Conrad would not. It seems more probable Marlow interjects the unnamed narrator with his narrative asides (London 56) because he and this narrator are two different people. Unfortunately, because the narrative is framed, their two voices often collapse into one (London 56), which is what Marlow seems to find so horrifying.

Achebe asserts “the lurking hint of kinship, of common ancestry” (252) Marlow discovers between himself and the Africans is what he finds both ugly and horrifying.



Yet, Marlow indicates a “narrative that seem[s] to shape itself without human lips” (Conrad, *Heart* 30) causes him to experience a feeling of “faint uneasiness” (30). Another’s failure to “see him . . . [to] see the story . . . [to] see anything . . . [is what creates in Marlow a] commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible” (Conrad, *Heart* 30). The failure of another to see him is what appears to scare Marlow. What Marlow seems to find so horrifying about the failure of another to see him is his resulting loss of identity. Marlow seems to fear a potential loss of self within the words of another person’s narrative about him. One must notice how Marlow does not say he feels uneasy about a narrative taking shape without *the use* of human lips; he also does not specify whose narrating lips make him feel uneasy. Marlow is not horrified by mental telepathy; instead, what appears to scare Marlow is the telling of his own tale by *another* human’s lips. Achebe criticizes Conrad for his “neglect to hint however subtly or tentatively at an alternative frame of reference by which we may judge the actions and opinions of his characters” (256). However, Marlow’s attempt to distance himself from his others proves otherwise. Marlow seems to want an alternative frame of reference, and it (the different frame) is what Marlow attempts to provide for us. Yet, it seems Marlow finds himself stuck in Peters’ circularity of uncertainty when he acknowledges how one cannot convey his own reality to another. This can be seen when Marlow says, “it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one’s existence” (Conrad, *Heart* 30). If Marlow cannot convey his own lived experiences, how could someone else possibly do so? This is what seems to disturb Marlow . . . the idea of someone else misrepresenting him and his lived experiences to others, and, in doing so, robbing him of his identity.

As a result, it seems Marlow attempts to segregate himself from both the unnamed

narrator and Kurtz to provide readers with an alternative frame of reference. To do so would validate his individuality, thus authenticating him. In alignment with Althusser's perspective of the real, it is necessary for one to displace himself from others in order to establish a sense of self, or to be authentic and independent. Only then can one create real art, or find the real. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow seems to carry out this active process of comparison. While Achebe claims Marlow emphasizes only differences "between white people and black people" (256) in the text, it is apparent Marlow segregates himself from Europeans as well. One cannot overlook how the two "others" Marlow attempts to distance himself from the most are white: Kurtz and the anonymous narrator. The only tool available to Marlow in this process is his voice. It seems Marlow knows he must take back his "voice [which has become] the possession of the first narrator" (London 56) in order to attain Althusser's real, and how he must do so by "tak[ing] over the first narrator's voice . . . [making the text] read ambiguously" (56).

## CHAPTER X

### THE IMPORTANCE OF ONE'S OWN VOICE

Therefore, it seems Marlow uses language, particularly voice, to claim his own tale. Marlow, however, does not simply see his own voice as important; throughout the tale, Marlow finds Kurtz's voice just as significant as his own, if not more so. This is because Marlow must hear Kurtz discourse if he hopes to distinguish his own journey from Kurtz's; for, Marlow's tale unfortunately is attached to Kurtz's. Yet, Marlow reflects on whether or not this is even feasible when he says, "Sometimes I ask myself whether I had ever really seen him—whether it was possible to meet such a phenomenon" (Conrad, *Heart* 63). It is interesting how Marlow does not focus on Kurtz's voice, as he does in so many other passages about meeting with Kurtz. In fact, Marlow replaces "hearing" Kurtz with "seeing" Kurtz, as if through Kurtz's voice he might find something for which he searches. For what might Marlow be looking, and so desperately want to reveal? His identity; for, Marlow must distinguish himself from Kurtz in order to be deemed authentic.

Another important part of this passage is how Marlow refers to Kurtz as a phenomenon rather than as a man. In fact, most of the time Marlow denies Kurtz a human existence. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow describes Kurtz as a phantom (59), a shadow, an indistinct vapor (64), and a savage (58). Marlow even gives Kurtz

animalistic qualities, depicting him lacking restraint (Conrad, *Heart* 57) and crawling on all-fours (64). Marlow says Kurtz is a “wandering and tormented thing” (Conrad, *Heart* 65), and he finds no striking similarities between Kurtz and himself. In fact, it seems Marlow desperately tries to contrast himself with Kurtz, in the effort to segregate himself from this other.

Although Marlow does “affirm that Kurtz [is] a remarkable man” (Conrad, *Heart* 69), only *after* he hears Kurtz discourse does he make this claim. In fact, only after Marlow hears Kurtz speak does he tell his own story. It seems Marlow constructs his own tale off of the one related by Kurtz, no doubt altering Kurtz’s original words to suit his own. Just like the anonymous narrator, who most certainly modifies Marlow’s tale to create the narrative we receive, Marlow very likely alters Kurtz’s story in order to create his own. Interestingly, Marlow robs Kurtz of the same human, individualized recognition the frame narrator denies Marlow. For, only after Marlow hears Kurtz speak, and thus receives Kurtz’s tale, does he bestow upon Kurtz any human recognition and validation. Why? Simply because Marlow has extracted from Kurtz what he needs in order to distinguish himself from him. Only after Marlow removes himself from his connection with Kurtz can we consider him an individual; in turn, only then can Marlow’s tale be deemed authentic. In fact, once Kurtz is dead, Marlow simply says, “I went no more near the remarkable man who had pronounced judgment upon the adventures of his soul on this earth. The voice was gone. What else had been there?” (Conrad, *Heart* 69). To Marlow, Kurtz is no more than a voice. What Kurtz has to say about his journey, in contrast to Marlow’s own voyage, Marlow deems important. “Once Kurtz is dead, Marlow wants no part of his voiceless corpse” (Pecora, “*Heart of Darkness*” 1009), because his voice and the meaning it bestows upon Marlow and his own tale are the

only things Marlow finds useful about Kurtz. Voice “thus becomes . . . much more than an aspect of literary technique or the positive human core of a debased imperial policy. It becomes the focus for an investigation of human identity” (Pecora, “The Sounding Empire” 165).

Voice is essential to the act of story-telling. An orally related tale comes to life only through its teller’s voice. Without a voice, the tale would fail to exist at all, whether in truth or reality. Because voice has the power to bring things to life, it comes to suggest life itself. Many critics explore how literary works often reflect the belief that “the spoken word [is] . . . a sign of presence” (Pecora, “*Heart of Darkness*” 998). Interestingly, Marlow seems to view “the spoken word as the proof and sign of an inviolable human presence in the world” (Pecora, “*Heart of Darkness*” 1000). Perhaps this explains Marlow’s borderline obsession with talking. As Marlow travels further into the Congo, his utmost concern is not his safety, his health, or even his duties as a steamboat captain; instead, his primary focus is conversing with Kurtz. Although Marlow claims his attention is absorbed by his duties with the steamer, he spends the majority of the narrative thinking about, or speaking with, Kurtz. Anticipating the chance to speak with Kurtz seems to consume Marlow, precisely because his existence in our eyes depends upon Kurtz’s voice. In *Heart of Darkness*, “voice thus becomes . . . much more than an aspect of literary technique, or a noun that refers to human utterance. It becomes an object of scrutiny, the focus for an investigation of identity and presence” (Pecora, “*Heart of Darkness*” 1001). Without hearing of Kurtz’s lived experiences in the Congo, Marlow has no basis on which to compare his own lived experiences in this region. Without such a comparison, Marlow is not real, for things only exist in relation to other things. Marlow must hear Kurtz’s real, or receive his real art (his story of the

Congo). At best, though, Marlow finds only truth within it, for once Kurtz's tale is told, it no longer renders reality; for, spoken words reside within knowledge or truth because they are vulnerable to the perception of listeners. Once Marlow hears Kurtz's story, he must look inside himself (for the real resides within) to discover what his real is, based on what Kurtz's truth is not. Marlow must pass judgment on Kurtz's story to then recognize the reality of his existence (Pecora, "*Heart of Darkness*" 1001).

According to T. S. Eliot, any artist must perform such an act of comparison. He asserts "no poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to dead [prior] poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead" (115), or those artists who came before him. This is precisely Marlow's plight. He must contrast himself with Kurtz in order to construct his own work of real art, so he might pass it on to the audience. In order for us to see Marlow, we have to acknowledge him and his story as separate from all others, including Kurtz. It appears Marlow knows he must use his voice to set himself apart from Kurtz. Marlow seems to recognize how Kurtz's tale and his own are "two things . . . measured by each other" (Eliot 115). This can be seen when Marlow says he must differentiate his "truth with his own true stuff—with his own inborn strength . . . [through his] voice . . . [his] speech cannot be silenced" (Conrad, *Heart* 38). Quite interestingly, Marlow seems to find his voice has the potential to create real art from that stuff that resides within, or the authentically real.

In *Heart of Darkness*, it seems "voice [is] the sign of presence, an implicit critique that emanates from Marlow's confrontation with Kurtz as a lone voice in the wilderness. What Kurtz's voice means, and how Marlow chooses to understand its significance" (Pecora, "The Sounding Empire" 165), is that through which Marlow seems to determine

his own sense of self. Marlow seems to take from Kurtz's discourse what he needs to separate himself from Kurtz and assign meaning to his own journey into the Congo. "The sound of Kurtz's words . . . retains some hope of self-knowledge . . . a 'self' that in the end will appear" (Pecora, "*Heart of Darkness*" 1009), which seems to explain Marlow's eagerness to hear Kurtz speak. Once Kurtz is dead, Marlow has no further use for him. Interestingly, Marlow only values the remarks of this "remarkable man" (Conrad, *Heart* 73). Critics tend to view Marlow's claim that Kurtz is remarkable as a form of praise. However, perhaps this description is meant to be degrading, for it illustrates exactly what Kurtz is to Marlow . . . a remark, or a voice.

## CHAPTER XI

### DEFINITION BY NEGATION

The extent to which Marlow emphasizes voice leads to criticism of the narrative's failure to ascribe an effective use of language to Africans. Many critics, including Achebe, claim Marlow "dehumanize[s] Africa's native population" (Said 165) when he denies Africans the ability to formulate intelligible language. Achebe uses Marlow's "withholding of language from [these] rudimentary souls" (262) to claim he is racist. Yet, Achebe occupies only three-and-a-half paragraphs of his entire essay titled "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" to discuss this issue. He briefly skims over the subject, implying what others directly state. According to Patrick Brantlinger, through the portrayal of Africans as incapable of using language, Marlow "maintains a sharp division between savage and civilized; his white heroes penetrate the darkness as representatives of vastly higher levels of social evolution" (192). The frame narrator certainly implies Africans can barely speak, but one cannot be certain which of the story's tellers (Kurtz, Marlow, or the frame narrator) takes this ability away from the Africans. Again, the circularity of uncertainty clouds our judgment, for it is unclear whether the unnamed narrator, Marlow, or even Kurtz, denies Africans the ability to talk. Indeed, it is quite unfortunate how the Africans are generally not permitted to speak intelligently; however, there is a much greater issue at hand. Their lack of speech is one



of those comparisons Marlow must make between himself and others in order to be an individual. According to Althusser, these comparisons are necessary for Marlow to develop his own sense of self. Therefore, the only way Marlow can develop an authentic identity, to, in turn, achieve a presence within the real, is by comparing and contrasting himself from those around him, including the Africans. Marlow, like *anybody else*, must actively participate in the process of definition by negation to develop a real sense of self.

Others may deem this claim detrimental to my argument. Some may read this assertion, and find it to be a simple restatement of Achebe's point. Critics might refute my assertion, asking: if such definition-by-differentiation is necessary, does it have to be Marlow's racist kind of differentiation? The answer is no, it does not have to be; but, it unfortunately is. However, one cannot be certain whether the words used to express these differences, supposedly by Marlow, really come from Marlow. Because *Heart of Darkness* is a rendition of Marlow's original tale, built off of Kurtz's initial story, and told from the perspective of a different narrator altogether, one should assume significant parts of the story are modified based on the truth, or ideology, of these various narrators. Marlow's choice to compare and contrast himself with his others (both white and black) does not confirm he is prejudiced or racist. It proves he is human. In fact, his choice to compare himself to others ultimately helps readers see him, which is his goal to begin with (Conrad, *Heart* 30). It cannot be overlooked how, according to Althusser's sense of the real, one must be an individual before he can access the real. Thus, one must distinguish himself as a separate entity from his others to exist within the real. This requirement, much like the current presidential election alluded to earlier in the essay, defies the constraints of race. It resides in the grey area between the distinctions of black and white. *Anyone* who hopes to exist within the realm of the real, regardless of what

race he is, must partake in the process of identification by negation; if not, he will never access Althusser's real. This is because significations are only sustained by their reference to other significations (de Saussure 965). In other words, things only exist in relation to other things because they "are intimately united, and each recalls the other" (de Saussure 964). One, no matter whom he might be, must look to his others for a validation of self. One must distinguish who he is not to then determine who he, indeed, is. This basis of comparison is a necessary step in the process of differentiating one's self from others, and, thus, in the pursuit of the real.

Since the process of definition-by-differentiation is necessary for *anyone* to achieve the real, Marlow's choice to emphasize the differences between himself and the Congolese has much less to do with race than with universal human nature. If Marlow was to only contrast himself with Africans, then Achebe's claim against him as racist might be valid. However, Marlow also emphasizes disparities between himself and other whites. While Marlow depicts himself as dedicated to his work, he imagines the other Europeans in the Congo as quite unproductive. While Marlow values language and voice, including his own, he portrays the other Europeans (with the exception of Kurtz) having nothing important to say. In fact, Marlow suggests the other Europeans in the Congo are merely futile (Conrad, *Heart* 40). It seems Achebe, as an African himself, brings his own personal belief systems (bourgeois ideology?) with him to the pages of *Heart of Darkness*, much like the middle-aged, white woman, mentioned at the opening of this essay, will bring her own personal convictions to the polls on November 4<sup>th</sup>. Of course a reader naturally applies his own sense of the real, as well as the truths of his society, to the works he reads. One would expect him to do so. However, the problem is Achebe seems to take personal offense to the words used to describe the Africans in the

text; so much so, he points the accusatory finger of prejudice at the wrong person. Because of the uncertainty of narration, Achebe cannot be sure whether the derogatory descriptions of the Africans belong to Marlow's reality, to Kurtz's reality, or to that of the primary narrator. Had Achebe looked at the discrepancies in narration mentioned by London, Said, and others, to explore whether or not the offensive terminology appears within linguistic points of deviance, perhaps his harsh claim against Marlow would be valid. However, Achebe does not do this; in fact, he seems to disregard the significance of the quotation marks altogether. Achebe claims he wants an alternative frame of reference, by which he might differentiate the layers of narration from one another; yet, he does not seem to look hard enough for it. Although Achebe acknowledges the presence of the quotation marks when he criticizes Conrad's choice to hide himself behind layers of narration, he does not seem to address how they create Peters' circularity of uncertainty. The quotation marks, alone, cause readers to question whose perspective occupies the text. Achebe's choice to ignore how the narrative layering posits Marlow in a "dark place" of non-existence seems to be what Marlow fears to begin with . . . his loss of identity within another human's truth, or through another person's lips.

Yes, Marlow does contrast himself with the Africans, but he also focuses on differences between himself and other Europeans, whom he meets along the way up river. It seems much of the criticism written on *Heart of Darkness* overlooks how Marlow discredits many of the white characters in the text. Marlow chooses to depict the majority of the Europeans in quite unflattering ways. Yet, critics seem to focus on how Marlow describes the Congolese, particularly emphasizing his choice to prohibit them from using what he deems sophisticated language.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE AFRICAN VOICE

While Marlow does bestow the use of intelligible language upon European characters (Kurtz, the Manager, the company's chief Accountant, the Old Doctor, and even Kurtz's Intended), he seemingly fails to attribute this same ability to Africans. In fact, there are only two times when any of the Africans speak to Marlow. The first is when the steamer is caught in the fog and the passengers believe they are going to be attacked by other natives on shore; one of the cannibals (comprising the vast majority of his crew) asks Marlow if he may catch whomever might be on shore waiting to attack them so he and his fellow cannibals may "eat 'im" (42). This is the solitary instance when a verbal conversation takes place between Marlow and an African within the story. The second instance is when an African announces Kurtz is dead. Every other time the Africans speak they seem to lack the necessary skills to converse with Marlow and his fellow whites. The Africans are described as simple savages (Conrad, *Heart* 52) who communicate in a primitive manner, through "burst[s] of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling" (37). Their speech sounds like noise, cries (Conrad, *Heart* 44), and howling (48), and "strings of amazing words that resemble no sounds of human language" (66). The narrator says their language is governed by "primitive emotions" (Conrad, *Heart* 67), consisting of an "exchange [of] short grunting phrases" (42).

Frequently, the Africans are shown as unable to speak. One example is in the scene within which the Fireman dies. Whereas Kurtz is granted a death scene laden with speech, within which he has the opportunity to spew out his dying, last words, the Fireman is deprived such a chance. As the Fireman lies dying, Marlow says,

we two whites stood over him and his lustrous and inquiring glance enveloped us. I declare it looked as though he would presently put to us some question in an understandable language, but he died without a sound, without moving a limb, without twitching a muscle. (Conrad, *Heart* 47)

Not only are the Africans often depicted as incapable of speaking, but they are also frequently described in such a way that would keep them from ever possessing the skill to do so. For example, they are referred to as “black shapes” (Conrad, *Heart* 20), as phantoms and angles (21), and as “bronze figures” (60). As such, they take the form of objects, or things, that do not, and will not ever, possess the ability to speak.

Oftentimes, the Africans are even given animalistic characteristics. They possess “wild glances and savage movements” (Conrad, *Heart* 59), and some of them, including the Fireman, are actually compared to various animals. Marlow says the Fireman “was an improved specimen; he would fire up a vertical boiler. He was there below me and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat walking on his hind legs” (Conrad, *Heart* 38). According to Achebe, such a description is offensive because it likens a person to an animal; not just any person, an African person. According to Achebe, Marlow presents Africans as bestial (252). Achebe seems to find the comparison, itself, offensive, rather than what is implied by the comparison. To me, being likened to an animal is not as degrading as being denied the human ability to carry out the act of comparison necessary to assign a signifier to its signified. According to the theories of de Saussure, animals are unable to derive meaning from communication because they lack this skill. Therefore, the primitive

communication used by animals is not meaningful. Animals can communicate with one another, but they are unable to create language. As such, they are incapable of using their voices to convey their lived experiences; thus, animals cannot exist within the real.

When Achebe claims *Heart of Darkness* is “a story in which the very humanity of black people is called in question” (259) he is correct, but the basis on which he makes this assertion is faulty. It seems more like the narrator of the story questions the reality of Africans, for without a voice it seems they are denied access to the real. The problem is readers cannot be sure which narrator denies the Africans access to the real: Marlow, Kurtz, or the frame narrator.

Yet, the communication the Africans do use is quite real *to them*. In fact, their modes of communication seem more real and less ideologically controlled than those used by Europeans. While Marlow does not understand the Africans’ dialect (Conrad, *Heart* 61), which can be seen when he asks Kurtz if he comprehends their “roaring chorus of articulated, rapid, breathless utterance[s]” (66), this only implies Marlow speaks a different language than they do. It, however, neither proves he is racist nor that the Africans are incapable of communicating. On the contrary, Marlow describes their utterances as articulate, proving the Africans do use language. Here is a specific discrepancy in narration, hinting toward a shift in narration. Amidst all of the insulting descriptions of the Africans, here mysteriously appears wording that is not derogatory. It might be easy to imagine these variances suggest Marlow has inconsistent views, but their nature makes it hard to believe the validity of this assumption. Someone is either racist, or he is not. There is no grey middle-ground when it comes to racial prejudice. It is hard to imagine Marlow, in one scene, willing to casually kill one of the Africans if only there was a carrier nearby to remove the body (Conrad, *Heart* 23), and then

lamenting the death of his valued African helmsman in another (51). These striking variances seem to suggest the text contains both the real of one narrator (Marlow) and the truth of two others (Kurtz and the unidentified man).

Another such example is the scene with the African woman. At first glance, Marlow seems to deprive her of the ability to communicate. Marlow says,

she stood looking at us without a stir and like the wilderness itself, with an air of . . . purpose . . . she made a step forward. . . . Suddenly she opened her bare arms and threw them up rigid above her head as though in an uncontrollable desire to touch the sky, and at the same time the swift shadows darted out on the earth, swept around on the river, gathering the steamer in a shadowy embrace. A formidable silence hung over the scene. She turned away slowly, walked on following the bank and passed into the bushes to the left. (Conrad, *Heart* 60-61)

It is hard to picture Marlow, in one scene, depicts Africans as useless shapes “loitering in the shade” (Conrad, *Heart* 21), and then later admits this African woman has a purpose. It is difficult to envision the same narrator who says women are out of it, or should be out of it (Conrad, *Heart* 49) permitting a woman (whether black or white) to serve a genuine purpose. Again, such disparities suggest a shift in narrative voice; they illustrate the alternative view of Africa and Africans Achebe says he wants, yet fails to acknowledge. While it seems difficult for one narrator to imagine the speech used by the Africans is sophisticated, it seems the other finds the interactions of the Africans quite meaningful. According to Althusser’s sense of the real, the communication used by the African woman resides within the authentic. Her mode of communication defies truth, for it is unspoken; yet, it is most effective. This woman can communicate with her fellow Congolese without speaking directly to them. Once she throws her arms up toward the sky, her fellow tribesmen hiding in the bushes scatter about, which suggests this, particular, movement signals them to do so. In this case, there is a connection between

the signifier and signified. Although a primitive type of communication is used, it nonetheless takes place. And, according to Althusser, it is the most real type of communication there is, for it is not vulnerable to the manipulation of external truth.

Not permitting Africans to speak is typically seen as derogatory on Marlow's behalf. Yet, Althusser's sense of the real reveals how the ability to convey one's intended meaning without the use of voice actually allows one to preserve his reality. Many critics, including Achebe, view the lack of African speech as racist, seemingly equating them with animals; yet, such critics do not point out how Kurtz, the man whose voice is referred to obsessively throughout the text, is also characterized in an animalistic way. In fact, when Marlow follows Kurtz through the jungle, the scene is ironic because Kurtz is, in fact, circling around Marlow, almost as if he is a predator hunting down its prey. In this scene, while following the "broad trail through the grass . . . [to] the beat of the drum" (Conrad, *Heart* 64), Marlow catches a glimpse of Kurtz ahead of him, who vanishes into the darkness. Marlow says,

I kept to the track though—then stopped to listen . . . I thought I could see a kind of motion ahead of me . . . I actually left the track and ran in a wide semicircle . . . so as to get in front of that stir, of that motion I had seen—if indeed I had seen anything. I was circumventing Kurtz as though it had been a boyish game. (Conrad, *Heart* 64)

Just then, Marlow comes upon Kurtz, who is already in front of him. Although Marlow believes he has cleverly cut Kurtz off (Conrad, *Heart* 64), Kurtz actually outsmarts and corners Marlow. Only after Marlow is trapped does he understand "the danger [he walks into] in its right proportion" (Conrad, *Heart* 64). Kurtz is not only equated with an animal in this scene, but he also takes on the most primitive of qualities . . . the basic instinct to kill. Perhaps this encounter fuels Marlow's claim of Kurtz having gone native. Interestingly, Marlow admits "he [also] was getting savage" (Conrad, *Heart* 25) in the



Congo. Yet, Marlow seems to emphasize how he differs from Kurtz . . . he, unlike Kurtz, does not pass the boundary between civility and savagery. Stressing how he and Kurtz differ in this regard helps us distinguish between the two of them; it also allows us to differentiate between Marlow and the Africans, as Achebe points out. Yet, Achebe fails to acknowledge how Marlow compares Europeans to animals as well as Africans. It appears Marlow compares both Africans and Europeans to animals in order to segregate himself from *all* of his others, so we might see him instead of them.

Marlow depicts both black and white characters in animalistic ways. The difference between these two comparisons, though, seems to be voice. While the animalistic white characters can still speak to one another intelligently, the black characters seemingly cannot. Critics, including Achebe, argue the withholding of language from Africans (262) helps prove Marlow, and thus the text, is racist. Achebe faults Marlow for bestowing upon Africans not intelligible language, but a dialect, or “something appropriate to the sounds . . . Africans make” (262). Achebe seems to believe Marlow robs Africans of their humanity by not allowing them to use a form of language equitable to that of Europeans. However, this narrative choice on Marlow’s behalf can be viewed in a different way. Marlow’s decision to depict the Africans not speaking actually allows them to reside within the real. Interestingly, this is a privilege Marlow does not correspondingly bestow upon the Europeans. In fact, it seems Marlow finds only truth within whites’ speech. For example, Marlow views Kurtz as simply a voice, or an ideologically controlled mouth-piece for the truth. This is not how Marlow views the Africans. Marlow seems to find the Africans allow him to see something the Europeans do not.

It appears Marlow is deeply affected by his presence in Africa. T. S. Eliot's description of the impact real art should have on an individual seems to best describe Marlow's response to the Africans. Eliot writes, "The effect of a work of art upon the person who enjoys it is an experience different in kind from any experience not of art. It may be formed out of one emotion, or may be a combination of several" (117). Again, the emphasis is on the internal. Marlow seems to experience new emotions in Africa, unlike those felt in Europe. It is in Africa where Marlow catches a glimpse of the real. Only after he ventures into the Congo does Marlow acknowledge the overwhelming realities of the strange world (Conrad, *Heart* 36) in which he lives. Through his experiences in the Congo, it seems Marlow comes to understand what Hervey, in "The Return," also finds horrifying . . . the world is a mysterious, illogical place precisely because one's reality is pre-determined by ideology. Only after he leaves the familiarity of Europe does Marlow seem to recognize the difference between truth and reality. According to Ian Watt, a person must experience a sense of alienation in order to be an individual (6). Likewise, Griffith asserts one must be de-familiarized to attain a sense of self (19). To find the real, Marlow must experience a sense of isolation. It is necessary for Marlow to alienate himself from his familiar surroundings, so he might view his society from the outside, as a stranger. Only then might Marlow be able to discern between those truths held evident by his society (simply because they always have been) and his own sense of reality. Perhaps this is why Marlow has a hankering to travel to the blank space on the earth (Conrad, *Heart* 11). What better way is there to isolate one's self from everything familiar than to travel to the biggest, most blank space on the map? While some might fault my logic, claiming it is racist for Marlow to find the real in Africa, I find Marlow compliments this continent, and its people, by portraying it as the

only place on earth where one can actually see things the way they really are.

## CHAPTER XIII

### CREATING MEANING THROUGH WORK

According to Althusser, one must be an individual in order to create authentic works of art; for, real art, in Althusser's sense, is founded on the internal rather than the external. Reality is centered on the individual, while truth is based on the group. Only individuals can create real art, or convey their own sense of reality to others. The key word is create. One must find a way to collect his lived experiences to then *make* something reflective of his reality. For Althusser, this is real art. Again, while art and science are both used to make products, they are employed in different ways; the resulting products differ on the basis of truth and reality. Science renders universally accepted truth, whereas art illustrates individual reality (since art is founded on the internal). Marlow seems to understand this difference; as such, it appears he decides to make his narrative a reflection of his own reality. In fact, the narrator asserts how "the whole meaning of [the yarns of seamen lies] within the shell of a cracked nut" (Conrad, *Heart* 9). This statement seems to acknowledge the difference between truth and reality . . . real meaning resides within. Yet, the narrator continues by mentioning how Marlow finds "the meaning of an episode not inside like a kernel but outside" (9). This statement initially seems to contradict my claim reality resides internally. However, when one acknowledges Marlow's dilemma, as an always already subject to both Kurtz and the

anonymous narrator, it makes sense for him to believe reality can exist outside. For, the meaning of *Marlow's* episode does not reside inside the text itself; instead, it can be found outside of it. Marlow's reality, or his lived experiences, cannot be accessed within the words of another person. Marlow's tale, or his real art, must exist as its own, separate entity. Therefore, what Marlow must create to fully detach from any, and all, others is his own, original story. If Marlow understands being productive is necessary to achieve the real, it is interesting how throughout the narrative he implies the Europeans lack the agility to work. In doing so, he prohibits the Europeans, not the Africans, from ever finding the real, for the text depicts the Africans as quite productive.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow emphasizes the value of work nearly as much as he focuses on language. Marlow seems to agree with Althusser, which can be seen when he says, "I like what is in the work—the chance to find yourself" (Conrad, *Heart* 31). It appears Marlow finds value in work; for, through it he can attain that for which he searches, which is a sense of real self. Althusser, Marx, and Engels seem to agree one can attain reality through work. Marx and Engels claim,

men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, not consciousness by life. (768)

In other words, only once men use their individual "conceptions, ideas . . . productive forces" (Engels and Marx 768) to create authentic products can they experience "conscious existence . . . in their actual life-process" (768). According to Marx and Engels, only once men claim their products as their own, *including* their intercourse, can they exist as "real living individuals" (768). Interestingly, Marx and Engels seem to agree with Marlow about the impossibility of conveying one's own life-sensation to another. They assert one's "consciousness is considered solely as *their* consciousness"

(768), again stressing the difference between the internal and external, or reality and truth. If one might access reality through work, or via his authentic products, then, from the perspective of Achebe, would it not make sense for Marlow to bestow upon *whites* the ability to work productively? From Achebe's perspective, yes; however, the opposite is true. Marlow denies whites the ability to work, while he, at the same time, permits the Africans to labor efficiently. According to Althusser, Marx, and Engels, one must create authentic products to truly *be* an individual, and to exist within the real. According to Achebe, it seems Marlow, as a supposed racist, would give the white characters the ability to create. However, the African characters are the ones deemed worthy of the real, for they are the characters who work most productively.

## CHAPTER XIV

### WHITE MEN CAN'T WORK

Throughout *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow depicts Europeans as incapable of working. At the story's opening, the passengers aboard the *Nellie* (a lawyer, an accountant, and a director), are shown not working. In fact, although they are professionals, they take a respite from their work in London, which explains their presence onboard the ship to begin with. This does not imply, of course, they never work, for in London they do have lucrative careers. The point is their professions are founded on the truths of England's ideologically controlled society. The work of lawyers, accountants, and directors is founded on the rules, guidelines, facts, laws, statistics, etc. that occupy the realm of science, rather than art. That they have the time to set sail on a nautical journey indicates how their jobs are not as demanding as one would assume, given the stature such positions tend to imply. Much like these nautical passengers, the two women in the Company's office do not appear to possess the ability to create unique products from their lived experiences. In fact, both of these women seem to embody death, incapable of life altogether. As Marlow approaches the Company's office, he sees

a narrow and deserted street in deep shadow, high houses, innumerable windows with venetian blinds, a dead silence, grass sprouting between the stones [reminiscent of the grass growing through the ribs of the corpse in

the prior scene] imposing carriage archways right and left, immense double doors standing ponderously ajar (Conrad, *Heart* 13).

Marlow seems to descend into Odysseus' underworld, with two silent women guarding the spirits of the dead in Teiresias' place. The scene is overwhelmingly dark and silent. In fact, these two women do not speak at all; as such, they lack the ability to access the real. While one of the women is shown laboring (she is knitting when Marlow enters the office), she does so "with downcast eyes" (Conrad, *Heart* 13). Interestingly, she uses only black wool (again signifying death) to sew her mundane fabric product; she does not appear to derive enjoyment or satisfaction from her knitting. Marlow's aunt, another white woman from the story, also does not work. Although we know she is literate, for Marlow secures his job in the Congo through her correspondence with governing officials, she is not depicted conducting any work. In fact, she concerns herself with socializing, evidenced by the tea parties she hosts for those who occupy her social circle. She seems to symbolize the ruling bourgeoisie of an ideologically controlled society, or truth, which is the opposite of the real. Interestingly, though, readers are told "it's queer how out of touch with truth women are" (Conrad, *Heart* 16). Once again, there seems to be a disparity in narration. On one hand, the narrator seems to emphasize the extent to which women are controlled by society's truths. This is illustrated through the triviality of Marlow's aunt, the mysterious seclusion of the office's women, and the delusion of Kurtz's Intended. Yet, on the other hand, he expresses how women have the potential to access Althusser's real when he claims "they [women] live in a world of their own" (Conrad, *Heart* 16). Since the real, in Althusser's sense, is founded on the individual, women, according to this passage, seem capable of accessing the real. While Marlow seems to understand there is a difference between truth and reality, it appears perhaps the frame narrator does not. The words "real" and "truth" are used throughout the text



relatively equally; while the word “real” appears in the text thirty-three times (sometimes within the word reality), the words “true” and “truth” appear twenty-eight times. While Marlow seems to comprehend truth is on the surface, or is external, it seems perhaps the anonymous narrator does not, which could account for the varying uses of these two concepts. The point is we must acknowledge such differences in narration to recognize the text contains, to varying degrees, more than one man’s story. We then should look for specific points of deviance within which one might find Marlow’s perspective. One such difference is in the whites’ inability to work.

Once in the Congo, the portrayal of the Europeans’ capacity to work is no better than those whom Marlow encounters prior to arriving in Africa. The Company’s chief accountant is a prime example. His dress, alone, from his white cuffed dress shirt to his varnished boots, indicates he does not partake in physical labor. Mentioning the accountant’s big, white hand (Conrad, *Heart* 21) also emphasizes how he does not get his hands dirty through labor. While this accountant carries out book-keeping (21), he lives a trivial desk-life. The correct entries (22) the same accountant marks in his books are of no value in this part of the world and under these circumstances. Although the accountant maintains the pretense that he has a genuine purpose in the Congo, his actual physical presence in this part of the world is unnecessary. It is easy, when reading this scene, to assume the accountant keeps his sanity by immersing himself in his work. This may be true, but it is irrelevant. The main point is while the accountant deems himself significant, he actually is not. According to Europe’s truth, he and his line of work might be important, but according to the reality of the Congo surrounding him, he and his “work” are completely useless.

The brick-maker’s job is just as trifling as that of the accountant. Marlow says,

the business entrusted to this fellow was the making of bricks—so I had been informed; but there wasn't a fragment of a brick anywhere in the station, and he had been there more than a year—waiting. It seems he could not make bricks without something, I don't know what—straw maybe (Conrad, *Heart* 27).

On one hand, the brick-maker is unable to make bricks because he lacks the resources to do so; yet, on the other hand, he is not the only European incapable of carrying out the duty for which he is trained. In fact, Marlow says there are “sixteen or twenty pilgrims . . . [who are] all waiting . . . for something” (Conrad, *Heart* 27). And, even if the brick-maker did possess the materials required to make bricks, his line of work is exactly what Althusser, Marx, and Engels classify as mindless and unoriginal. Bricks are constructed from a cast mold; as such, they all look the same. The process of making bricks does not require one to use imagination. It also does not foster self-expression. One does not need to call upon his lived experiences in order to make bricks. Bricks most certainly are not artistic. While art is not the only thing produced by work, it is necessary (according to Marx and Engels) for a man to conceive, to think, to use his productive forces (768) while working if he hopes to create products reflective of his “actual life-process” (768). If not, he will lack a real existence. Thus, the brick-maker and his fellow unproductive whites lack just this, an existence. Marlow even lumps them together in the generic category of “pilgrim,” emphasizing they are all essentially the same, and, as such, are quite insignificant. Preventing these Europeans from being individuals keeps them from accessing the real.

The Russian is another white character depicted as inefficient. By saying the Russian exists within “the uttermost depths of despondency” (Conrad, *Heart* 53), Marlow seems to suggest this man lacks what is necessary to exist within the real. According to Althusser's sense of the real, one must be motivated to create something different and

authentically one's own. The Russian will never attain the real because "his very existence [is] improbable, inexplicable, and altogether bewildering" (Conrad, *Heart* 54). Marlow even describes this Russian as an insoluble problem (54). Marlow says, "it was inconceivable how he had existed, how he [the same Russian] had succeeded in getting so far, how he had managed to remain—why he did not instantly disappear" (54). Thus, not only is the Russian incapable of carrying out meaningful work, but he also seems so inept Marlow is surprised he even exists. Marlow is unsure how the Russian has survived in the Congo of his own devices thus far. If anyone is incapable of achieving a presence within the real, in Althusser's sense, it surely is the Russian, who, unlike the Africans, is very much white.

While Conrad is known to depict Europeans who do not have to work, in *Heart of Darkness* he goes beyond simply giving readers a glimpse of the privileged, upper class bourgeoisie. While Marlow's independently wealthy aunt might not *have* to work (and therefore she does not), the text's other white characters do not have this luxury. The passengers aboard the *Nellie* are educated; yet, they need to operate within their chosen professions in order to survive. The accountant, the brick-maker, the Russian, and the other two dozen (or so) pilgrims are all in the Congo precisely because they need to work. They, like Marlow, do not comprise the elite, bourgeois upper class. Yet, they all seem unable, or unwilling, to perform their duties. They are shown lazy or incompetent, and it seems they serve no real purpose in Africa. This is in contrast to the African woman, whom Marlow specifically states does have a purpose. As such, the Europeans are denied access to Althusser's real. Because the Europeans Marlow encounters in the Congo idle about and accomplish nothing of much significance, they can never even begin the journey into the real. They are unlike Marlow, who works diligently precisely

because he seems to understand work can grant him access to the real.

## CHAPTER XV

### MARLOW AND WORK

Yet, Marlow, like the other European characters in *Heart of Darkness*, is shown lacking the motivation to work. In fact, Marlow even says about work what many of the European characters, particularly those previously mentioned, seem to think when he says,

No. I don't like work. I had rather laze about and think of all the fine things that can be done. I don't like work—no man does—but I like what is in the work—the chance to find yourself. Your own reality—for yourself—not for others—what no other man can ever know. They can only see the mere show, and never can tell what it really means (Conrad, *Heart* 31).

On one hand, Marlow admits he would like to idle about aimlessly, like the other Europeans. Marlow does not find the physical act of performing his duties desirable; for, as he puts it, who wants to work if they do not need to? Marlow seems to call upon all of humanity here. Regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, religious beliefs, or gender, *all* people are required to perform some kind of work. The type of work, as well as the amount, might vary among people, but the fact that everyone must perform duties (according to various definitions of the term) is undisputable. The degree to which one carries out his job functions, and the value of the product created, is significant when looking at how work can lead one into the real. Although Marlow admits he does not like

work, he nonetheless *does* work. Marlow does not simply give up on his rivets, he does not allow his steamer to sink, he does not permit his crew of cannibals to give up hope, he does not deviate from his pursuit of Kurtz, and he does not abandon the Congo. Instead, Marlow takes what he is given (which is limited), and he makes the best of the situation. Marlow performs his duties as a steamboat captain to the best of his ability, and he succeeds. Marlow derives personal satisfaction from his accomplishments with his crew and the steamer, and, because of his dedication and subsequent triumphs, he is led closer to an existence within the real. For, from these triumphs Marlow creates his real art, or the tale of his lived experiences. Through work, it seems Marlow catches a glimpse inside himself, which is where the real resides. Marlow's work seems to act as a mirror, giving him a reflection of himself. Marlow indicates just this when he says work allows one to look inside one's self. This self-reflection is what Althusser describes as seeing, perceiving, and feeling, and it is precisely what the other Europeans lack. Marlow is able to find himself within the work he performs. Marlow discovers who he essentially is in the Congo; because of the work he performs there, Marlow is able to see his own, individual reality.

Marlow, unlike the other Europeans, seems to understand the connection between work and the real. Unlike them, he does not abandon his duties, although deep down he might desire to do so. Instead, he dedicates himself to his work, while the other whites in the Congo avoid it. In fact, Marlow even says he would have liked to "go ashore for a howl and a dance" (Conrad, *Heart* 38). Marlow continues by explaining why he did not abandon his work like the rest of the whites in the Congo; he says he "had no time" (38). Marlow says he "had to mess about with white-lead and strips of woolen blanket helping to put bandages on those leaky steam-pipes . . . had to watch the steering and circumvent

those snags and get the tin-pot along by hook or by crook” (38). Marlow does not slack off because he has an important job to do; others depend on Marlow. It does not appear Marlow does work simply for work’s sake, especially in light of how he claims to dislike working. Rather, it seems Marlow turns to his work because of the “surface-truth . . . in these things” (Conrad, *Heart* 38) reflected through working. Marlow seems to understand through work, like language, he can access the real. Interestingly, Althusser also asserts through language and work one might assert one’s self as an individual, and thus access the real. Perhaps this is why Marlow constructs a narrative illustrating him at work: as a storyteller, as a steamboat captain, as an explorer, as a mechanic, and as an instructor to many of the Africans. Marlow seems to acknowledge the intimate connection between language and work, which is both can grant one access to the real. Perhaps this is why Marlow wants to claim his narrative so badly, for it has the potential to allow others to both hear about his lived experiences and see him working diligently. In turn, we might acknowledge Marlow as a real individual rather than as just a fictitious character within someone else’s story. If Marlow knows work allows one to really find himself (Conrad, *Heart* 31), it seems fitting Marlow would portray himself as capable of working. Achebe might interject, claiming of course Marlow, a *white* man, has open access to the real. Yet, Marlow is neither the only character who works productively nor the only one possessing the ability to exist within Althusser’s sense of the real.

CHAPTER XVI  
AFRICANS AT WORK

Contrary to the unfavorable descriptions of whites as inept at working, the Africans are depicted as quite crafty. Marlow's choice to mention there are roughly twenty useless white pilgrims loitering around the station is interesting, for this is precisely the number of cannibals comprising his crew on the steamer. Marlow says when the steamboat got caught in the brush, "twenty cannibals [would be] splashing around and pushing" (Conrad, *Heart* 36) to set it free. While the twenty white characters loaf around aimlessly, useless in the Congo, the twenty black cannibals work hard. Marlow says they are "fine fellows . . . men one could work with" (Conrad, *Heart* 36), and he states he is grateful to them (36) for their efforts.

One specific African who is shown able to carry out production is the Fireman. After a few months of training, Marlow claims he is capable of firing up a boiler (Conrad, *Heart* 38). Marlow portrays this Fireman as "hard at work . . . full of improving knowledge . . . useful because he had been instructed" (39). Marlow describes this Fireman's work habits as intrepid (38), implying he dares to be different. Marlow depicts the African woman in much the same way. Marlow says she is proud, superb, wild-eyed, and magnificent (Conrad, *Heart* 60). She seems to possess a "tenebrous and passionate soul" (60), unlike the many Europeans, who are repeatedly described as mundane.



Although this woman is not shown to carry out physical labor, the extreme influence she has over the other Africans hiding in the bushes surrounding her hints toward her power and initiative. She holds her head up high and walks the earth proudly (Conrad, *Heart* 60), which implies she already possesses the sense of self necessary to achieve a presence within the real. She also seems unique, which is necessary to the real; her distinctiveness is suggested by her costume, especially in comparison to that of the insipid accountant.

The African woman's

hair [is] done in the shape of a helmet, she [has] brass leggings to the knees, brass wire gauntlets to the elbow, a crimson spot on her tawny cheek, innumerable necklaces of glass beads on her neck, bizarre things, charms, gifts of witch-men, that [hang] about her. (Conrad, *Heart* 60)

Marlow describes her garb as bizarre, or different, which helps prove she is original; Althusser stresses authenticity is imperative to the real. The African woman's dress is authentically artistic; it reveals her sense of reality to viewers without her uttering one word. Thus, her reality is free from the constraints of perception, unlike Marlow's real art (his narrative). The African woman's reality is openly displayed; she does not have to speak to achieve both what Althusser determines is the purpose of art and Marlow's own goal, which is to make us see.

Thus, while "Marlow . . . emphasizes how work creates meaning for human existence by allowing the individual to carve out an entity that is uniquely that individual's, and through that individuality to create a meaning for the self" (Peters 144), one must acknowledge how Marlow ascribes the ability to work, and thus to develop a sense of self, to Africans, rather than to Europeans. Achebe argues Marlow dehumanizes Africa and Africans within *Heart of Darkness*. However, Marx and Engels discuss how one can develop a sense of self through his work; thus, it seems Marlow allows Africans to access the real. If one lives within an ideologically influenced society, he cannot be an

individual, for he is always already a subject to his society. According to Althusser, Marx, and Engels, the only way to break free from one's governing ideology, or to attain a real sense of self, is through the original creations of one's work (including one's own story). Marlow prohibits Europeans from experiencing reality when he denies them the capacity and/ or motivation to work. Yet, Marlow shows Africans as resourceful and eager to work; he also suggests they are daring enough to venture into the realm of the real. This is seen through his descriptions of the African woman, the Fireman, the helmsman, and the cannibals. It seems Marlow gives the gift of the real to the Africans, for it seems in Africa he finds it himself.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE EUROPEAN VOICE

As already mentioned, “the African characters . . . are . . . rendered almost without intelligible language” (Brantlinger 271), while the European characters are able to speak. However, one must examine what Marlow depicts the Europeans saying, and if what they say is meaningful to Marlow. Marlow obsesses over hearing Kurtz speak. Marlow “fretted and fumed and took to arguing with [him]self whether or not [he] would talk openly with Kurtz” (Conrad, *Heart* 40), and he said he “would be desolated if anything should happen to Mr. Kurtz before [they] came up” (43). In fact, when Marlow believes Kurtz is dead, prior to reaching his station, Marlow indicates he experiences a feeling “of lonely desolation somehow [as if he] had . . . been robbed of a belief or had missed [his] destiny in life” (Conrad, *Heart* 48). Marlow continues by describing what Kurtz possibly has to say to him as a “gift” (48). Yet, once Marlow speaks with Kurtz, he seems overall disappointed by what he hears. Marlow finds

the voice that speaks out of the heart of darkness is a hollow one, the voice of the abyss [that is] . . . devious, shadowy . . . eloquently egotistical, capable both of high idealism and of lying propaganda, which speaks from the center of the heart of darkness to sum up and to judge. (Brantlinger 271)

Marlow receives truth from Kurtz’s speech, despite how he hopes to find the real.

Marlow seems so disappointed by Kurtz’s speech that after he hears Kurtz speak he is

done with Kurtz altogether. Kurtz, the signifier, is arbitrary; instead, his voice, or the signified, matters most to Marlow. Once Marlow extracts what he needs from Kurtz's story in order to construct one of his own, Marlow desires "to surrender personally all that remain[s] of him [Kurtz] . . . to . . . oblivion" (Conrad, *Heart* 71). Marlow wants nothing from Kurtz but his remarks pertaining to his own journey into the Congo; for, only then can Marlow develop one of his own, in the attempt to distinguish himself as separate from Kurtz.

Some critics use Marlow's desire to talk to Kurtz to claim Marlow is racist toward Africans. The rationale seems to be: Marlow's eagerness to hear Kurtz speak about the Congo instead of hearing what Africans say about their homeland indicates he views them, and what they have to say, as less than worthy of his attention. Marlow can seem prejudiced when he bestows language upon Kurtz and correspondingly withholds it from Africans. However, perhaps the extent to which Marlow emphasizes Kurtz's voice focuses one's attention on the lack of African speech more so than would otherwise be the case. Without all of Marlow's comments on how much he wants to hear Kurtz talk, perhaps readers would not be so insulted by the Africans' lack of speech. Marlow does not seem to intentionally strip Africans of their humanity when he depicts them not speaking. If this was Marlow's goal, he would have kept them from communicating altogether. Why grant Africans the ability to communicate in certain ways, but not others? Critics can claim prohibiting Africans to speak to Europeans automatically deems them inferior. Yet, one must look at the communications of *all* people within the text to formulate an accurate analysis of the role of language to the text. It seems Marlow deems what Kurtz has to say to him as more important to his development of individuality than the stories offered by Africans. As such, Marlow focuses so much

attention on Kurtz's voice that he seems to neglect those of Africans. Yet, Marlow does not strip Africans of the ability to communicate altogether. Marlow does show the Africans communicating. In fact, Marlow depicts the Africans' modes of communication as meaningful, natural, and beautiful, particularly when contrasted with the verbalizations of the Europeans.

Much of the Europeans' speech is shown as superficial, for it is ideologically manipulated; as such, it lacks authenticity. The Europeans' speech is oftentimes sparse, if present at all. When the white characters do speak, Marlow seems to find only truth within their utterances. Their speech lacks reality, which is what Marlow seems to be searching for. Therefore, it seems Marlow cannot accomplish this goal by speaking with Europeans, including Kurtz. The whites' speech, although displaced from Europe, is still influenced by the governing ideology of Europe. As Brantlinger points out, Kurtz's voice is "full of high idealism and of lying propaganda" (271). In fact, Marlow emphasizes Kurtz's ability to sum up, or arrange. As mentioned much earlier in the essay, Marlow is confused by the unnatural arrangement of logic. Marlow deems the logic governing his life mysterious because it is not founded on his sense of reality; instead, it is based on socially constructed truth. Kurtz's summing up is based on the truth of ideology, for it is a manipulation of the original. A summing up, by its very nature, is a summary, a paraphrase, or a skimming over; it is not the originally authentic. As such, Kurtz's talks with Marlow reflect only truth, not reality.

Because the European characters, including Kurtz, continue to serve as always already subjects to the ruling bourgeois ideology of Europe, their speech is of no value to Marlow in his search for the real, or in his plight to develop a sense of self. The way Marlow describes the whites' speech illustrates he finds what they have to say useless.

Oftentimes, Europeans do not speak at all. For starters, the passengers aboard the *Nellie* are unable to converse intelligently, much like the Africans. This group of pilgrims is comprised of educated individuals; yet, they “exchange a few words lazily” (Conrad, *Heart* 7) and are “fit for nothing but placid staring” (8). During the cruise, these passengers are silent on board the yacht (7); they simply accept the yarns they are fed, not even taking “the trouble to grunt” (9) a reply. Occasionally, they pipe in with off-hand comments or remarks. They are seen gesticulating (Conrad, *Heart* 28), but individually they seem incapable of mustering together an informed, reflective thought, much less partaking in a meaningful conversation. For, if they were, would not Marlow, *the supposed racist*, have been sure to mention it?

The passengers aboard the *Nellie* are not the only white characters unable to effectively communicate. The two white women in the Company’s office are also silent (Conrad, *Heart* 13). When Marlow gives the slim woman his name, she does not respond, but rather “turn[s] round without a word” (13) and leads him into a waiting room. She does not tell Marlow to enter the doctor’s office; instead, she uses “a skinny forefinger [to beckon him] into the sanctuary” (14). The other woman does not interrupt her knitting to even acknowledge Marlow. The doctor who examines Marlow is much the same. While the doctor does converse with Marlow, the content of his speech is lacking. He takes on the quality of a “quack-doctor,” who chuckles at his own jokes; the doctor mumbles (Conrad, *Heart* 15) while speaking and comes across as foolish (15). The doctor’s queer questions seem to annoy Marlow. Although the doctor does say something “sententiously” (Conrad, *Heart* 15), it is nothing original. Rather than to think for himself, the doctor quotes Plato to make himself appear more intelligent. Like Marlow, himself, the doctor is unoriginal. The doctor clutches to the words of

someone else (Plato), just as Marlow clings to Kurtz and the anonymous narrator.

The Manager of the Central Station is also depicted in an unflattering manner. The Manager's speech is full of digressions (Conrad, *Heart* 24), suggesting his train of thought is difficult to follow; as such, his speech is difficult for others to comprehend. The Manager is "curious [and] . . . commonplace . . . in voice" (Conrad, *Heart* 24). Marlow says this Manager is quiet (25) most of the time; when the Manager does speak, he fails to acknowledge the listener. This Manager "[pays] no attention to [Marlow's] explanations" (25), and, in one scene, while Marlow is trying to speak to him, he plays with a stick of sealing-wax (25). The Manager apparently cannot make a conversation reciprocal. Although the Manager is shown delivering speeches, they contain the commonest phrases (Conrad, *Heart* 24). Thus, what the Manager says has no impact on his audience. The Manager's speech lacks a necessary component of the real, which is meaning. At best, the Manager's speech causes his crew to feel uneasy (Conrad, *Heart* 24), including Marlow. Marlow says this Manager's speech is so indecipherable and vague that he "can't explain [the] . . . indefinable, faint expression of his lips" (24). Again, we see Marlow bothered by words getting lost in lips. Discussed earlier, Marlow indicates how the prospect of narrative being shaped without human lips makes him feel uneasy (Conrad, *Heart* 30). The Manager's words also make Marlow feel uneasy, for the same reason. It seems the language used by the Manager makes Marlow uneasy because he finds it to be indefinable. The Manager seems to speak through a filter that siphons the meaning from his words. This filter is what seems to upset Marlow. Marlow says the Manager's words are futile (Conrad, *Heart* 25). One must recognize Marlow's goal is to ensure his own words are not seen in the same way. It seems Marlow does not want to be deemed "a chattering idiot" (Conrad, *Heart* 26), as is the Manager. Chatter is

meaningless noise; one who chatters might as well be saying nothing. Interestingly, Marlow says he fears having nothing to say (Conrad, *Heart* 69). It is easy to interpret the “nothing” Marlow refers to literally, as silence. Yet, one can interpret Marlow’s fear in a different way. It seems Marlow finds saying some thing and actually saying *something* are not the same. In actuality, a “something” is different or authentic, which implies it is the real; in contrast, a “some thing” is mundane and commonplace, which implies it is truth. Again, it seems Marlow understands truth and reality are not synonymous.

Kurtz’s Intended also struggles with language. In fact, Marlow deprives her of her own voice. Just as Marlow’s narrative voice is intertwined with those of Kurtz and the anonymous narrator, he attaches Kurtz’s voice to that of his Intended. When Marlow first meets this woman, he says, “I saw her and him in the same instant of time . . . I saw them together—I heard them together . . . while my strained ears seemed to hear distinctly, mingled with her tone of despairing regret, the summing-up whisper of his eternal condemnation” (Conrad, *Heart* 73). While Kurtz’s Intended can speak, Marlow manipulates her voice. As Marlow listens to her, he seems to apply Kurtz’s truths (from his summing up) to what she says. Marlow seems to make her Kurtz’s subject, for what she says is influenced by Kurtz’s words from the Congo. Kurtz’s voice haunts hers; as such, her speech is manipulated by his truths. Marlow mentions how the room seems to darken throughout their conversation, which signals he does not listen to her speak. Marlow clouds over her reality with Kurtz’s truths. Marlow says, “with every word spoken the room was growing darker” (Conrad, *Heart* 73), and the darkness deepens during the course of their conversation (74). This darkening seems to illustrate how her words do not enlighten Marlow. Marlow does not seem to value her words. In fact, Marlow describes the speech of Kurtz’s Intended as a murmur, a whisper, a low sound



(74). Marlow's emphasis on volume also seems to signify his unwillingness to hear her voice. Marlow even says Kurtz's Intended has to repeat herself numerous times (74), which suggests he does not listen to her.

It seems Marlow does not value what Kurtz's Intended has to say. The topic of their conversation is Kurtz; as already mentioned, Marlow has little interest in Kurtz following his death. In life, Kurtz was simply a voice to Marlow; in death, Kurtz is nothing. Once Kurtz is dead, he no longer remarks; therefore, Kurtz is no longer useful to Marlow. While Kurtz did have a life prior to the Congo, with a fiancée whom he loved, it would be unwise for Marlow to acknowledge this fact. Doing so would allow others to see Kurtz as human, as an individual. As such, others would view Kurtz as more than just a voice. Recognizing Kurtz's humanity could prevent Marlow from accomplishing his own goal, which is for us to see him; for, in order for us to see Marlow, we must not see Kurtz. One must overshadow the other. Perhaps this is why Marlow so frequently refers to Kurtz as a shadow (Conrad, *Heart* 59, 65, 67). Marlow seems to understand he must separate himself from Kurtz as much as possible to distinguish his own voice and his own story from Kurtz. Thus, the Intended's speech actually threatens Marlow's identity, for it has the potential to prevent him from attaining his own, distinct identity apart from Kurtz. It seems Marlow wants Kurtz to remain simply a voice, so that, in contrast, we can see him as much more. If we are to see Marlow as an individual, we cannot acknowledge Kurtz as such; for, only one of these men can be the authentic original. Thus, if Marlow acknowledges Kurtz as more than a voice, his own "sense of identity will be challenged" (Griffith 19), for "the stability of an individual's sense of identity depends directly on the 'innumerable identifications' he has established with the familiar . . . objects of his past and present existence" (Griffith 19).

The comparison that matters most to Marlow is between Kurtz and himself. This is because Marlow's story is built off of his. Kurtz must remain simply a remarkable man, or someone who can sum up and arrange his speech, if Marlow is to become anything more. Kurtz must reside in the realm of truth for Marlow to find the real.

While Marlow values Kurtz's speech, we must recognize Marlow listens to Kurtz speak out of pure selfishness. To preserve the authenticity of his tale, Marlow robs Kurtz of his own. In fact, the only character (regardless of race or gender) whose words Marlow finds significant are Kurtz's. This is because Marlow's own words have been built off of Kurtz's. In a similar manner, the frame narrator's words are based on Marlow's. Again, Marlow seems to comprehend, first-hand, the link between one and his others. Interestingly, Marlow seems to understand how in order for one person to rise another must fall. This is apparent when he says, "your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others" (Conrad, *Heart* 10). This passage seems to indicate Marlow uses Kurtz's tale to construct his own. Marlow seems to understand he must overshadow Kurtz to ensure he is the one who shines through the narrative. Perhaps this is why Marlow finds it necessary to claim Kurtz is not worthy of idolization (Conrad, *Heart* 58), yet asserts that he is (7). Marlow seems to assert his own superiority over Kurtz so we might see him instead of Kurtz. In turn, Marlow must anticipate such an action on the part of future tellers of his tale, as discussed earlier. Thus, the voice that matters most to Marlow is his own. It seems Marlow emphasizes Kurtz's speech because his own voice is founded on it. Achebe criticizes Marlow for emphasizing Kurtz's voice, but apparently he does so in order to draw attention to his own. Marlow does not need to describe the Africans communicating, for his voice is not hidden in theirs. The Africans do not prohibit Marlow from claiming his own narrative; in turn, they do not

prevent him from accessing the real. Yet, Marlow does illustrate the Africans communicating, and in ways that far exceed the superficial, meaningless use of language exemplified by the majority of the whites.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### AFRICANS AND THE REAL

As a seaman, Marlow quite assuredly enjoys nature and the outdoors. Marlow seems to find serenity (Conrad, *Heart* 8) on the deck of a ship, with the salt air blowing against his face. Marlow appears to foster a sense of affection (Conrad, *Heart* 8) for the sea, considering it his home (8) and his mistress (9). One can argue the sea is everything to him: mind, body, and spirit. For Marlow, the whole meaning (Conrad, *Heart* 9) of life, existence, and humanity can be found at sea. “To him, . . . meaning [can be found] outside” (Conrad, *Heart* 9), in nature. Interestingly, Marlow is unable to connect with other Europeans on land or aboard the ship, yet he can speak to the sea. Marlow experiences a feeling of “isolation amongst all these men with whom [he has] no point of contact” (Conrad, *Heart* 17). In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow says “the uniform somberness of the coast [keeps him] away from the truth of things” (17). Marlow seems to equate the sea with reality, and land with truth. It seems while at sea Marlow is able to flee from truth into the realm of the real. It seems when Marlow is immersed in nature, particularly at sea, he can best attain a sense of real self. Marlow says, “the voice of the surf heard now and then was a positive pleasure, like the speech of a brother. It was something natural, that had its reason, that had a meaning” (Conrad, *Heart* 17). Perhaps this is because at sea nothing is arranged or summed up. It just naturally *is*. Marlow

values, respects, and loves the sea because it speaks to him in a way he understands. It seems the sea allows Marlow to see, perceive, and feel. Marlow seems to find the sea to be real.

Quite interestingly, Marlow compares Africans to the sea. He says the Africans shout and sing with “an intense energy of movement that [is] as natural and true as the surf along their coast” (Conrad, *Heart* 17). In the Congo, surrounded by “black shapes” (Conrad, *Heart* 20), Marlow feels as much at home as at sea. In fact, when at sea, do not all things, at a distance, resemble black shapes? Although the Africans speak in a foreign tongue, it seems Marlow experiences a sense of belonging in their presence. The kinship Marlow says he shares with the Africans is unlike that offered by the whites; for, the Africans seem to remind Marlow of that which he is most familiar . . . the sea. Marlow seems to identify with the Africans because they communicate naturally, not through an ideologically controlled filter of artificiality. One should recall how Marlow finds European life futile because it is mysteriously arranged (Conrad, *Heart* 69). In contrast, African life is natural. Marlow describes the Africans’ voices as vibrations (Conrad, *Heart* 48), seemingly equating their voices with the pounding of the surf upon the hull of a ship or the shore. Marlow appears to find the Africans are “free as air” (Conrad, *Heart* 20), just like a ship at sea. Although the Africans’ speech is described as a “rushing noise” (Conrad, *Heart* 20) and “a violent babble of uncouth sounds” (22), these are the only intonations audible (20) to Marlow, precisely because they remind him of the rushing of the sea wind and the babble of sea water. The Africans are familiar to Marlow, and, just like the sea, he says he possesses a “remote kinship” (Conrad, *Heart* 38) with them. Perhaps this kinship is frightening to Marlow simply because he realizes it is a stronger bond than he will ever have with his “fellow” whites. The whites are not

Marlow's fellows; instead, they are his others. Marlow finds few similarities between them and himself, besides the obvious match in skin color. Within the Europeans' voices, Marlow finds only ideologically determined truth. Marlow feels isolated even in their presence, precisely because he finds them, not the Africans, incomprehensible (Conrad, *Heart* 10). In contrast, it is in Africa, and within the communication of the Africans, where Marlow finds individual reality. The Africans are Marlow's brothers (Conrad, *Heart* 17) because they speak to him like the sea (17). Marlow deems the Africans different because they are distinguishable from one another, unlike the "white men [who are] so much alike at a distance that he [can] not tell who [they] might be" (Conrad, *Heart* 19). The whites blend together in a haze, indistinct from one another because they are all the same. In contrast, Marlow seems able to differentiate the Africans from one another. The Africans' faces might be described as grotesque (Conrad, *Heart* 17), but at least they are discernable, unlike those of the Europeans.

In Africa, Marlow reflects on life and his sense of self. It seems Marlow begins to comprehend what a farce, or what a "show," his ideologically controlled society is, and how oppressive has been his life in a world of straightforward facts (Conrad, *Heart* 17). Once in Africa, Marlow seems to recognize the difference between truth and reality. As such, Marlow seems to equate Africa and the Africans with reality. Agreeing with Achebe, it seems Marlow places Europe and Africa at opposite ends of a social spectrum. While Achebe feels Africa is deemed the inferior of the two continents, it seems Marlow places Europe in this position. If Marlow views Europe as superior to Africa, why is he unable find the real there? Marlow cannot access the real in Europe, and he cannot find it within the Europeans in the Congo. Where Marlow seems to find the real, in Althusser's sense, is in Africa among the Africans. It seems Marlow admires the Africans for their

independence of self, quite paradoxically, seeing as though they are enslaved by the Europeans, who are, in turn, imprisoned by their own warped ideology (a *reality* of which they are completely unaware). Interestingly, Marlow mentions how “all Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz” (Conrad, *Heart* 50), and yet he does not indicate all of Africa contributed to the making of the Africans. Neglecting to provide the correlation, in a novella so often criticized for its distinctions between black and white, is significant. It suggests Kurtz and the other Europeans are all alike, while the Africans are not. In fact, although Marlow says Kurtz “won’t be forgotten” (Conrad, *Heart* 51) after his death, he does not suggest Kurtz’s being gone saddens him. Yet, Marlow genuinely misses his dead “late helmsman awfully” (Conrad, *Heart* 51). Marlow says,

I missed him even while his body was still lying in the pilot-house. Perhaps you will think it passing strange this regret for a savage who was no more account than a grain of sand in a black Sahara. Well, don’t you see, he had done something, he had steered. (Conrad, *Heart* 51)

While it seems Marlow cannot wait to be rid of Kurtz following his death, he seems to cling to the African helmsman after he is dead. Perhaps this is because the helmsman reminds Marlow of what he most desires . . . a real purpose. Marlow says the helmsman did something meaningful with his life. The helmsman had a real purpose, unlike so many of the white characters in the text. The helmsman was devoted to efficiency (Conrad, *Heart* 10), which Marlow seems to admire. The helmsman was unique because he served an actual purpose. Although the helmsman was, on a grand scale, insignificant, he was nonetheless important to Marlow. The key difference is the Europeans, whom Marlow claims are futile, believe themselves to be of the utmost import. In contrast, the helmsman does not believe himself to be anything more than he is. Marlow seems to admire this pure sense of self. So many of the Africans seem to be keenly aware of who they essentially are, such as the helmsman, the African woman, and the cannibals (who

have more self-restraint than the whites).



CHAPTER XIX  
WHITE SUBJECTS

It seems the only real characters in the story, in Althusser's sense, are the Africans. This is because they are individuals. Achebe claims Marlow robs the Africans of their humanity when he prohibits them from speaking intelligently. Although Marlow does not show the Africans talking in an intellectual manner, he does illustrate they can speak. Marlow simply cannot understand their language. What the Africans do say is not conveyed through a filter, as is the speech of the Europeans, which allows their words to remain authentic. As such, the Africans do not live in an "inconceivable world that ha[s] no hope in it and no desire" (Conrad, *Heart* 70). Although critics view Marlow's choice to say the Africans belong to an earlier time (Conrad *Heart* 42) insulting, this can be seen as a privilege. For, one can only access the real through the authentic or the original. As such, the beginning (Conrad, *Heart* 35), or the prehistoric (37), is where the original resides. Placing the Africans at the beginning, or in the prehistoric, grants them access to the real. Likewise, Marlow can see the reality of their lived experiences, which he does not get from the Europeans. Marlow repeatedly says the Europeans' speech is impenetrable (Conrad, *Heart* 68) and impalpable (69), implying he does not deem what they say meaningful. It seems perhaps Marlow does not want to end up like them, as just another detestable white man with nothing to say (Conrad, *Heart* 10). In fact, when

Marlow returns to his “sepulchral city” (Conrad, *Heart* 70) filled with people he has grown to resent, Marlow seems to realize how much he *was* like his “fellow” Europeans. Marlow appears to now comprehend the extent to which his prior life was always already determined. Marlow claims he now understands how “insignificant and silly [are the] dreams” (Conrad, *Heart* 70) of those living within an ideologically controlled society, for they are dreams they are instructed to dream. It appears Marlow now comprehends how ignorant all of these unreal *individuals* are; for, in fact, none of them are individuals at all. Like the middle-aged, white woman in the supermarket from the beginning of this essay, they are simply subjects who robotically go through the motions others have taught them. Nothing, for them, is meaningful; thus, nothing is real either.

Marlow’s once beloved homeland is now filled with people who are nothing more than “commonplace individuals going about their business in the assurance of perfect safety” (Conrad, *Heart* 70). Marlow seems to mock how these people believe they are individuals by describing them as commonplace; for, a real individual cannot be common. Marlow is offended by how these people believe they are special or significant (Conrad, *Heart* 70). Marlow continues by telling how he is unable to restrain himself from “laughing in their faces so full of stupid importance” (70). Despite all of the weird, suggestive (Conrad, *Heart* 23), and horrid faces (37) Marlow encounters while in the Congo, he never once laughs at the Africans, much less directs disgust toward them. At the end of the text, Marlow seems to rebel against his former life filled with somber uniformity (Conrad, *Heart* 17). From his time in Africa, it seems Marlow understands the unfortunate and discouraging truth of “civilized” existence, which is that the real is an untruth with *or* without language, with *or* without work, because it cannot be attained at all when one resides within an ideologically controlled society. All of society is

governed and manipulated by ideology (or knowledge, according to Althusser), and there is seemingly no escape from this endless, circular pattern.

Marlow seems to learn the horrifying *truth* about the real from the Africans . . . it cannot exist within an ideologically controlled society. Only when Marlow returns from the Congo does he perceive his former society from a new perspective . . . from the outside (Conrad, *Heart 9*). A society is founded on socialization, which necessitates the co-existence of people. A society cannot be founded on one person; it must be constructed of numerous people, often many. Since, according to Althusser, the real is founded on the individual, one living within an ideologically controlled society could not attain the real. This is because life within a society based on knowledge or truth contradicts the premise of the real, which is the internal. Socializing occurs on the outside, among various people; as such, it is founded on the external and the group. Therefore, the real cannot exist in a society with a set ideology. Instead, it resides inside the individual, according to Althusser. If one grew up within a society, yet desires to immerse himself in the real, he is caught in a “Catch-22” predicament. Language governs the functioning of societies; without socialization, a society could not exist. Yet, a society denies its members individuality through the use of language; for, all spoken language is subject to manipulation by the truths of those who hear the language used. Thus, it appears the only way one through which one might find the real is displacement.

For Marlow, this means leaving Europe, which he does via his journey into the Congo. Once removed from the ideology of one’s society, one can begin to search for a sense of self, or an existence within the real. This, however, is not enough. One cannot just hop on a plane to Zimbabwe, or some other far-off locale, and expect to find reality. This “alienation [is] not an endless discovery demanding expression, but merely the

initial premise” (Watt 7). The separation of one’s self from all that is familiar is simply the beginning of a lengthy process. One must alienate himself from his surroundings and “bear the constant notion of being or feeling a stranger, an outsider” (Watt 6) if he wishes to acquire a “conscious awareness that the inner being, the real ‘I,’ [is] alienated from the ‘me,’ the person as an object in society” (6). Many people are like Marlow or the middle-aged woman from the supermarket, buried within layers of censorship, unaware of how the role they play as a member of society (supposedly of their own free-will and as a result of their independent choice) is nothing more than slavery to ideology. Who we actually are, and who we have been led to believe we are, are two different things; one is truth and the other is reality. This understanding, however, is only the first. The road to the real is an adventure that takes time, patience, an open mind, and true reflection . . . both literally and metaphorically. To fully understand who one is, one must first comprehend who he is not. Again, all people must participate in the process of definition by negation in order to develop an honest sense of self. Since one cannot ever actually see himself, the closest thing one has to such a vision is a reflection. Marlow seems to acknowledge this concept when he says how reflection makes him feel creepy all over (Conrad, *Heart* 49). Perhaps the process of personal reflection disturbs Marlow because it reminds him of how his goal to make others see him is almost impossible. For, according to Althusser’s sense of the real, one must possess an authentic sense of self before he can portray his reality to others. Since one cannot ever directly see himself, it is impossible for anyone to possess this sense of self. Because a reflection is an imitation or a mirroring of the original, it is not authentic. As such, a reflection does not reside within the real; instead, it belongs to truth. Many critics suggest Marlow searches for a sense of self in the Congo; perhaps what Marlow finds is merely a

reflection of self, which he considers disappointingly creepy.

## CHAPTER XX

### REFLECTION AND PERCEPTION

Marlow compares himself to Europeans and Africans to determine who he is. It seems Marlow uses his others (both black and white) as a means of reflection. Marlow appears to look for an image of himself in them. Unfortunately for Marlow, he seems to find this reflection as much of a mistake as the one he makes with the fence (Conrad, *Heart* 57). Only after Marlow looks through a magnifying glass does he realize the knobs on top of the fence posts surrounding Kurtz's dwelling are actually skulls atop stakes (57). Marlow must look through a reflecting glass to discern the physical presence of the heads on top of the fence posts. Although Marlow suggests these skulls are symbolic (57), he does not explain what they represent. Marlow guesses the heads must have a profound meaning, but despite using the glass he is unsure of their significance. The meaning of the skulls remains mysterious, which Marlow says he does not find surprising (57). Clearly, Marlow is confused about the relationship between seeing and understanding. While Marlow claims his goal is to allow others to see him, and I have argued his own reality is what he wants us to see, this scene illustrates Marlow seems to find sight and perception are not exactly the same. While Marlow sees the skulls, he does not perceive them. Althusser suggests real art should provide for both sight *and* perception, implying they are not synonymous. Perhaps when Marlow says he wants

others to see him, he actually means he wants others to perceive him. Marlow seems disturbed by his own inability to understand the significance of the skulls. As such, it seems Marlow would be disappointed if his own meaning remained as unclear as the knobs. In this scene, Marlow seems to find all of society is based on those lies he so loathes. For, when he removes the glass from his eyes, the skulls return to their original form, as indistinguishable knobs. When Marlow returns to his homeland, he seems to find the people living there exist just as much without any kind of sense (Conrad, *Heart* 49) as the skulls on the spears. From this “savage” part of the world, Marlow seems to recognize how nothing makes sense, for meaning is constructed by ideology . . . it is merely a reflection of truth.

Marlow seems bothered by his understanding of how truth differs from reality. Marlow says he deems Europeans “intruders whose knowledge of life [is] to [him] an irritating pretence because [he] felt so sure they could not possibly know the things [he] knew” (Conrad, *Heart* 70). And, of course, they do not. Marlow’s “fellow” Europeans are unaware of the horrifying part of reality . . . they do not *really* exist. They exist only as a fabrication of society, because they, oftentimes unknowingly, consent to such a role. Just as Kurtz and Marlow are horrified by the paradox of the real, so is Hervey from “The Return.” He is horrified when his wife asks him what is right because it is the first time he has questioned what is right. When he thinks about it, Hervey is uncertain what is right because he has never thought about it before. Hervey has always been told what is right, which proves his society has predetermined a sense of right and wrong for him. Marlow seems to find the uncertainty of truth and reality as horrifying as Hervey.

## CHAPTER XXI

### CONCLUSION

The question thus becomes, what is to be done with the horrifying truth of reality once it is discovered? According to John G. Peters, “this knowledge must be accepted, but that is all” (158). Peters asserts it is “only consensus [that] holds community together” (158). Although Peters insists “this fact is not necessarily a negative consequence in Conrad’s works, [for a] mutual consensus helps to establish a kind of possible certainty” (158), there is nonetheless a resulting “impressionist blurring of boundaries between subject and object [as a result of the] communal consensus” (158). Peters seems to acknowledge what Althusser asserts in his writings . . . things only exist in relation to other things. According to Peters, likeness binds society, or things, together. Without these connections, society would not exist; in turn, nothing would be certain. Yet, through these connections certainty also becomes blurred, for this certainty is, as Peters says, possible rather than absolute. The certainty is relative, or comparative, because it is dependent on the cooperation of the group, rather than on the dedication of the individual. The difference is truth versus reality. As Peters says,

the common consent of community members . . . creates a meaning for human existence—not one that is absolute but nevertheless one that can function through cooperation. Throughout his works, Conrad presents an irrational and indifferent universe but still one in which human beings must exist. Knowledge is both subjective and relative because phenomena



are contextualized and filtered through human consciousness. At the same time, though, human subjectivity is the one common denominator in Conrad's universe [as in Althusser's]. Consequently, he [Conrad] locates meaning and value in its existence [which can only be found in the real]; he affirms those things that affirm human existence and rejects those that reject it. Thus through affirmation of humanity and through social consensus in affirming it, Conrad's works construct a universe that creates meaning for human existence, a universe that . . . shows us 'how to be' (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 214). (Peters 158)

Acknowledging the presence of the realm of the real is horrifying because to do so forces one to recognize how it, in essence, cannot be attained. Sure, someone, like Marlow, can find his own voice. One can develop a sense of self and maintain his own individuality, but this is the extent to which one can push the real. A man cannot force others to look inside him to see the reality of his lived experiences, just as Marlow cannot make the other Europeans look into the faces of the Africans only to find themselves staring back. One must be satisfied with one's own self-realization, or be a Marlow in the Heart of Darkness. Although the world in which we live is irrational and indifferent, or, as Marlow puts it, mysterious, it is, nonetheless, the world we are presented, and the one in which we must live. It seems, then, what Marlow wants his readers to see through the use of his own voice is how to really *be* (Conrad, *Lord Jim* 214). It seems Marlow wants a person to see how to *be* an individual, an authentic "somebody" rather than an arbitrary "some body."

Referring back to the scenario presented at the opening of this essay, with the horrifying realization of how one cannot attain the real, it appears Marlow would want Americans, in the year 2008, to perceive the *real* issues at hand, rather than to be immobilized by the divide between black and white. *Heart of Darkness*, unlike Achebe's convictions, is as much *not* about race as the current presidential race. This novella is about reality, and how one can and cannot exist within it. It seems what Marlow wants

his readers to gain is exactly what he, himself, desires . . . a voice, or an authentically individual existence free from outside manipulation. It appears Marlow does not want his audience, like himself, to be blinded by the insignificant truths, or unrealities, concocted to prevent them from seeing. In fact, was this not Marlow's own goal all along?

## WORKS CITED

- Achebe, Chinua. "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*." Joseph Conrad. *Heart of Darkness*. Ed. Robert Kimbrough. Third Edition. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988.
- Althusser, Louis. "A Letter on Art in Reply to Andre Daspre." Leitch, 1480-1483.
- "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." Leitch, 1483-1509.
- Brantlinger, Patrick. *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.
- Brooks, Peter. "An Unreadable Report: Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*." *New Casebooks: Joseph Conrad*. Ed. Elaine Jordan. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.
- Brudney, Daniel. "Marlow's Morality." *Philosophy and Literature* 2003: 318-340.
- Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. Ed. Robert Kimbrough. Third Edition. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988.
- *Lord Jim*. Ed. J. H. Stape. New York: Penguin Classics, 2007.
- *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*. Robert Kimbrough, ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1979.
- de Saussure, Ferdinand. "Course in General Linguistics." Leitch, 956-977.
- Eliot, T. S. "Tradition and the Individual Talent." *The Waste Land*. Ed. Michael North. A Norton Critical Edition. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001.
- Engels, Friedrich and Karl Marx. "The German Ideology." Leitch, 767-769.
- Griffith, John W. *Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma: 'Bewildered Traveller.'* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.
- Harris, Wilson. "The Frontier on Which *Heart of Darkness* Stands." Joseph Conrad. *Heart of Darkness*. Ed. Robert Kimbrough. Third Edition. New York: W. W.

- Norton & Company, 1988.
- Leitch, Vincent B., ed. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001.
- London, Bette. *The Appropriated Voice: Narrative Authority in Conrad, Forster, and Woolf*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1990.
- Nagel, Thomas. *The Possibility of Altruism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970.
- Pecora, Vincent P. "Heart of Darkness and the Phenomenology of Voice." *ELH* 1985: 339-1015.
- "The Sounding Empire: Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*." *Self & Form in Modern Narrative*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.
- Peters, John G. *Conrad and Impressionism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- "Reality." *Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary*. Ed. Anne H. Soukhanov. Boston: The Riverside Publishing Company, 1984.
- Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1993.
- "Truth." *Webster's II New Riverside University Dictionary*. Ed. Anne H. Soukhanov. Boston: The Riverside Publishing Company, 1984.
- Watt, Ian. *Essays on Conrad*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Woolf, Virginia. "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown." London: The Hogarth Press Tavistock Square, 1924.
- "Modern Fiction." *The Common Reader*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948.