

WESTERN REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CONGO  
IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY FICTIONAL TEXTS

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## Abstract

Through the close analysis of four Western texts set in the Congo Free State, Belgian Congo, and Zaïre, this thesis examines how representations of the Congo and its indigenous people changed over the course of the twentieth century. The intrinsic relationship between language and Western culture is best reflected through the term ‘colonialist discourse,’ which is based on colonisers’ assumption of their own superiority, contrasted with the alleged inferiority of the indigenous peoples of the lands they colonised. The purpose of this thesis is to explore how fictional representations of the Congo in Western fiction both reinforces and undermines this colonialist discourse. The fictional texts analysed in this study are Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899), Hergé *Tintin au Congo* (1931), Graham Greene’s *A Burnt-Out Case* (1960), and Barbara Kingsolver’s *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998). In what follows, I examine the development of anticolonialism in European and American fictional texts over the course of the twentieth century, and utilise various theoretical frameworks from postcolonial critical theory to analyse the relationship between Western characters and indigenous Congolese in the selected texts. Guided by the works of key postcolonial theorists, such as Bill Ashcroft, Homi Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, Abdul R. JanMohamed, Edward Saïd, and Gayatri Spivak, I argue that cultural hegemony, Eurocentrism, and imperialistic attitudes are challenged and critiqued in Western fiction over the course of the twentieth century. My findings indicate that the hierarchical binary opposition between ‘Western’ characters in the Congo and indigenous Congolese is destabilised through transculturation, with the Self versus Other dichotomy becoming drastically less prevalent as the texts chronologically move towards the end of the twentieth century.

## Introduction

Postcolonial critical theory is a powerful tool for examining colonial subjectivities in fictional narratives. The way it incorporates methodologies, terminologies, and discourses from the fields of anthropology, philosophy, and history, allows the field to be wide-reaching. Postcolonial critical theory has a great deal of relevance in today's society as colonialism and its aftermath have a lingering impact on twenty-first century international relations and politics. Postcolonial critical theory heavily borrows from other forms of literary criticism: on one hand, Marxism has informed the development of subaltern studies; on the other, poststructuralism and postmodernism have contributed to this critical theory with key theoretical frameworks on systems of power and supremacy. Fundamentally, postcolonial critical theory focuses on how the Other is positioned. It frequently involves discussions on the identity of the Other and how the voice of this identity is represented, if at all. Through the mission of postcolonial critical theory to destabilise and reform Western academia's traditionally exclusionary epistemology, non-Western critics are able to contribute their voices and cultural legacies to discussions on their own cultures (Gandhi 10).

The term 'subaltern' refers to colonial populations who socially, economically, and geographically exist outside of a colony's hierarchy of power. Subaltern populations are denied a political voice as a result of socio-economic exclusion. The term was coined by political philosopher Antonio Gramsci in *Quaderni del carcere* as a synonym for the proletariat. Historical materialism frames colonial history from the perspective of the proletariat, a social class that Marxism claims only has means of subsistence through labour. However, subaltern scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak explains that within postcolonial critical theory, the term subaltern is not synonymous with this Marxist definition and the oppression this class experiences. She uses the word to describe people

oppressed by cultural imperialism, and claims that the Western working class – the proletariat in Marxism – is not subaltern as this group exists within the hegemonic discourse (de Kock 30-1). Spivak argues against the idea that the subaltern is any class being denied political representation, and instead focuses on the subaltern as entirely lacking a voice within the dominant social discourse. In order to be ‘heard,’ the subaltern must express their native knowledge to align with the Western, colonial way of knowing the world (Briggs and Sharpe 664). Spivak has the view that when the subaltern speaks, it ceases to be the subaltern (Binebai 208). Therefore, subalterns are defined as being marginalised people who have no voice – unable to speak and/or be heard. Jenny R. Lawy notes that voice relates to agency, representation, and power, and within anthropology is linked to textual representation. (195). Throughout this study, voice and agency will be thought of as entwined entities, where voice is a measurement of socio-political agency.

Subaltern studies academic Dipesh Chakrabarty claims that in the past, academic discourse has chiefly recognised Europe as its subject: “Europe remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories [...] There is a peculiar way in which all these other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called ‘the history of Europe’” (27). Throughout history, European academics have frequently framed their continent as “idealised” (Vogel 99). As Chakrabarty claims, such ‘historical’ representations of Europe have naturalised European imperialism and dominance. Western academia tends to marginalise non-Western discourses, which diminishes the role of pre-colonial, indigenous folklore and mythology. As a result, the colonised subject must conform to ‘Westernised’ discourses in order to have a voice.

The ways of knowing the world and Self in non-Westernised societies are “trivialised and invalidated” by Western discourse (Briggs and Sharpe 664). Spivak’s work mainly focuses on South Asian women: however, the theoretical frameworks she

employs can be applied to colonised subjects in other contexts. Central to Spivak's theoretical frameworks on the voiceless subject is the idea that Europeans have traditionally defined themselves in relation to the 'Other.' In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Spivak writes: "The colonizer constructs himself as he constructs the colony. The relationship is intimate, an open secret that cannot be part of official knowledge" (209). In this sense, alterity is constructed as spatial rather than temporal: the Western perspective of the colonised world is that it eludes time and thus progress (Maggio 423). Concepts such as 'civilisation' and 'self-identity' are defining factors in European discourse, which presumes these are not characteristics of the colonised ('third') world. As a result, colonialist discourse suggests that subaltern people are incapable of development and progress without the influence of European culture and academic discourse.

The idea of Eurocentrism, a form of ethnocentrism, is of critical significance for unpacking the relationship between Europe (the West) and the rest of the world (non-Western). Eurocentrism refers to a biased worldview that Western civilisation is superior to non-Western civilisations. Categorically, Eurocentrism narrowly focuses on Western Europe as comprising Western civilisation. In the scope of twentieth-century history, the concept of Western civilisation can be expanded to include first-world countries, meaning that often Central and Eastern Europe, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States also fall within this paradigm. European exceptionalism is chiefly a product of various social, economic, political, and cultural developments in Europe throughout the Early Modern Period. The European Renaissance, the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions, and the Ages of Reason, Enlightenment, Discovery, and Reflection all saw the rapid development of capitalism, technology and science, secularism, individualism, and parliamentary democracy in Europe.

Eric Jones refers to this period of development as the “European Miracle,” where many European nations – particularly those on the western side of the continent – had significant socioeconomic shifts (E. Jones 6). These socioeconomic shifts were capitalistic in nature, and saw the transfer of wealth upwards in the direction of an ever-smaller and wealthier capitalist class, while the working classes experienced impoverishment. Ancient Greek history has also informed attitudes of cultural superiority in the Western world. It has been claimed by European histories that “only the West inherited Greek legacy by means of an independent and continuous historical tradition” (Heit 733). This belief system in itself is Eurocentric and unequivocally inaccurate: it ignores the how Far East, African, and Islamicate civilisations advanced knowledge, culture, and politics (Tamari 83–85). Eurocentrism started in response to European achievements in the fifteenth century, stemming from beliefs in Europe that came centuries prior from the Church’s doctrine. Such doctrine were responsible for hierarchal thinking about race, where Africans were considered to be worthy only of servitude (Lockman 18). Espousing these beliefs as the Word of God enabled European exceptionalism and the subsequent conquest of the non-Western world in later centuries. The arrival of Islam in Europe threatened the Church, and as a result it was portrayed as a blasphemous religious. Pope Urban II said in his speech that fuelled the First Crusades of the eleventh century that Muslims were an “accursed race” that was “utterly alienated from God” (Munro). Distorted views of the Middle East and Islam have persisted over time (and are still present today), with historical accounts throughout the centuries depicting Islam as an inferior religion to Christianity, and the Middle East as a stagnant, backwards region. Historian Zachary Lockman claims that despite Islamic progress in philosophy, science, mathematics, medicine, engineering, the arts, and politics being exported to Europe through trade and conquest in the centuries prior to the



Early Modern Period, persistent attitudes towards Islamicate civilisation means that these contributions are hugely ignored in Western history (18–9). Despite this, Western discourse often, even today, continues to define itself around the idea that Europe is the core of human achievements and developments, triumphant throughout world history: as a result, European culture is inaccurately constructed as dualistically favourable to other cultures.

Since the 1970s, theories problematising Eurocentrism have played a major role in postcolonial critical theory and developmental studies. In particular, Eurocentrism is relevant to these fields on account of the binary oppositions that it suggests: civilised/uncivilised; developed/undeveloped; advanced/backwards (Sundberg 639-40). Although Eurocentrism, by definition, is anti-universalist, its problematic nature arises due to its universalistic implications. European imperialism has demonstrated how the worldview advocates for the imitation of Western models and values in non-European societies, despite the drastically different histories, cultures, and geographies of the societies these models and values are foisted upon. These Western models and values include capitalism, individualism, and globalism. As a result, Eurocentrism “may be seen as imperialism, exploitation, and the promotion of greed,” with the Western conventions being imposed on the non-Western world paving the way for the “advancement of the European ideal” (Ashcroft et al. 84). The imperial encounters between Europeans and indigenous Africans – which are the focus of this thesis – resulted in tragic consequences. Fuelled by Eurocentrism, discrimination based on racial hatred resulted from these encounters, imperialism promoted the interests of Europeans over indigenous Africans, and cultural dominance was weaponised to colonise Africa.

Even though the field of subaltern studies has been integral in the development of contemporary postcolonial critical theory, the role of poststructuralism in the

development of postcolonialism is also of significance. The works of theoreticians Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida have paved the way for how postcolonial critical theory approaches power relations occurring as a result of colonial encounters. Postcolonial critics frequently employ the Foucauldian way of understanding the ideology of Western supremacy to analyse the consequences of colonialism, “treating it as a kind of epistemological disorder of Western rationalism” (Vogel 99). In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Saïd considers the Western perceptions of the Orient “one of [the West’s] deepest and most recurring images of the Other” (1). Saïd utilises Foucault’s method of critical discourse analysis, concluding that the Orient is subjugated and dominated through the colonising West. Saïd is primarily concerned with ways in which the “discursive and textual creation of colonial meanings,” which reinforces the dominating role of European empires (Vogel 100). Postcolonial critical theory reveals the hidden structures of power and knowledge that inform how the ‘Other’ is socially and culturally constructed. The West’s claim to knowledge seems to have provided it with the power to control, rule, oppress, and represent colonised lands and people. The colonial literary canon’s representations of racist and pejorative nuances are destabilised by the poststructuralist theoretical frameworks of power and knowledge, and hegemony, and deconstruction, postcolonial critical theory seeks to challenge the racist and pejorative nuances found in Western portrayals of the ‘Other’ in popular literature.

Saïd does critique Foucault’s “passive and sterile” view of power (121): he claims that Foucault does not consider class struggles, or economic and colonial domination (221). Saïd also emphasises the role that geography plays in the construction of colonial discourse: in the “Empire, Geography, and Culture” section of *Culture and Imperialism*, he proposes the idea that geography and place are concepts that are not only related to culture but also to identity formation. Geographic location – or “politics of location,” as

critic Shehla Burney refers to it – is intrinsically connected to how one’s status and persona are defined in postcolonial critical theory. The link between culture and geopolitics is significant in understanding social constructions of reality in postcolonial critical theory.

In this thesis, postcolonial critical theory will be used to investigate the role that culture, social, and geopolitics play in the relationship between the history of colonisation and the colonialist discourses of the twentieth century. The decline of European colonialism and the subsequent resistance to imperial domination throughout the twentieth century challenged traditional perspectives on postcolonised subjects. Postcolonised subjects are people who have experienced marginalisation and been silenced through oppression and skewed power dynamics – and for whom these experiences continue today, despite the shift away from the most overt forms of colonial organisation. Postcolonial critical theory challenges the assumptions about colonised peoples present in narrative discourses throughout – and following – European colonialism. Specifically, it considers the stereotypical portrayal of indigenous peoples, and colonisers’ interactions with colonised subjects. Burney views postcolonialism’s role in examining these discourses as ‘probing’ the “symbiotic love-hate relationship” between the coloniser and colonised, and perhaps even the postcoloniser and postcolonised (46).

As Saïd discusses in *Orientalism*, postcolonial critical theory examines the nuanced structures of knowledge and power that shape the social construction of indigenous peoples as the Other. Although it is influenced by postmodernism and poststructuralism, postcolonial critical theory stands apart from these other critical theories in the way it examines the subjugation and oppression of the postcolonial subject, both historically and today. The likes of Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha Abdul JanMohamed, and Frantz

Fanon were instrumental in revealing the oppression, suffering, and subjectivity of colonised peoples, examining the ideas of identity and self-image within the psyches of these people and how colonialism removes their voice from history and politics.

European colonisation had an enormous impact on Africa: throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the continent was ravaged by European powers – specifically, Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. The effects of the Scramble for Africa are still being felt today, with modern-day conflicts stemming from the rapid colonisation and subsequent decolonisation of the continent over a matter of several decades. Analysing Western literary representations of Africa over this time period reveals changing attitudes towards the indigenous people of this continent: specifically, demonstrating how perceived racial differences between Europeans and Africans were conceptualised. Congolese writer and scholar Yves-Valentin Mudimbe refers to “the colonial library” as a core mechanism of colonialism (Praeg 8). By this term he means the totality of Western knowledge as produced and transmitted through literature: bodies of texts and an epistemological order that constructs Africa as a symbol of otherness and inferiority in Western discourse. Postcolonial critic Leonhard Praeg characterises the colonial library as “the set of representations and texts that have collectively ‘invented’ Africa as a locus of difference and alterity” (8). This refers to the various ways – chiefly scientific, anthropological, and religious – through which colonists sought to define Africans and their behaviour. These definitions have served as a referential point to inform current discourses on Africa and about Africans. The subsequent knowledge formation within this colonial library was engineered to represent “Africans as a singular people, who are primitive and who are inherently at an antithesis to western civilization” (Hlatwayo). This colonial discourse manifests itself in Western writings about Africa. The frameworks of the colonial library have influenced the

Western portrayal of the Congo, depicting its indigenous peoples as the uncivilised Other. The simplistic binaries used to position Africa and Africans can be seen throughout the twentieth-century Western literary canon.

Through the works of postcolonial critics such as Chinua Achebe, there has been a “recuperation and reinscription” of the African Other in the Western literary canon (Hussein 382). The gradual changes in the geopolitics of world power and the decline of the “three worlds system” saw a paradigm shift during the second half of the twentieth century (Ede 88). Publications like Fanon’s 1961 *The Wretched of the Earth*, Saïd’s 1978 *Orientalism* and Ashcroft et al.’s 1988 *The Empire Writes Back* affirmed this paradigm shift, alongside the rise of *Négritude* and other anti-colonial theoretical frameworks in the Francophone world. As a result, Western epistemology was challenged by an emergent postcolonial critical theory.

Fictional texts function as cultural artifacts. They are receptacles of human experiences. As a collective literary canon, fictional texts chronicle emotional journeys, not just within a single lifetime but also over decades and centuries. Fiction captures the voices of those before us. It exposes truths and attitudes within past societies, revealing the rifts, tensions, and fusions from historical narratives. In this sense, fiction and nonfiction are not necessarily oppositional, but instead can be complementary. Often, the writer – specifically, the novelist – functions as a kind of documentarian of complex pieces of history: their works of fiction being repositories. Their sentences record the shadows and highlights of the past without the expectation of objectivity. This is not to efface the fictional, imaginative, and literary aspects of novels: however, the novelist’s social and political milieu is often significant when unpacking the deeper meaning of their works.

In his 1948 essay, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature*, Jean-Paul Sartre argues that literature is political. Through this mode of writing, the author expresses their experiences to others. Sartre also challenges the idea of aesthetic purism, claiming instead that a novel reflects a writer's external reality. He notes that "*les grands écrivains voulaient détruire, édifier, démontrer* [the great writers wanted to destroy, edit, demonstrate]" (Sartre 14). Literary critic Roland Barthes expands on this viewpoint, proposing that literature is written under an "historical reality and political implications" (Chowdhury 2). Barthes claims in "*De l'œuvre au texte*" that there are two modes of writing: one aims to deconstruct the past, by rewriting history according to the writer's own perspectives; the other follows the trajectory of the literary canon, expanding on and drawing from writings of the past and contributing to a 'metanarrative' (Barthes 224-32). In this way, literature can be used to either perpetuate or undermine the predominant discourse within a writer's society.

European traders, explorers and missionaries wrote stories about their experiences in Africa as early as the sixteenth century. Such stories were hugely influential in developing the Western image of Africa and Africans. With particular focus on the slave trade, the history of relations between Africa and Europe is undeniably one of invasion, imperialism, and colonialism, with European politics and economics guiding these modes of exploitation<sup>1</sup>. Even though non-fictional accounts of Africa were plentiful

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<sup>1</sup> The terms 'imperialism' and 'colonialism' are frequently used interchangeably. However, in this thesis, Edward Saïd's definition from *Culture and Imperialism* will be used: "imperialism means the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; colonialism, which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory" (6).

through modern history, fictional portrayals of Africa were also used to promote the political and economic interests of Europe.

Abdul R. JanMohamed claims that in this sense fiction “attempts to mask the contradiction” between the theoretical aims of colonialism and brutal implementation of these by “obsessively portraying the supposed inferiority and barbarity of the racial Other [...] insisting on the profound moral difference between self and Other” (84). The result of these fictional colonialist discourses was that Africans were portrayed as stereotypes, understood by European readers as “savages” (Lindfors 24). There are two ways that this savage is represented: firstly, as the noble savage – “mankind” as sin-free, removed from Western corruption; and secondly, as the less romanticised brutal savage – cannibalistic, dangerous, and barbaric. Colonialist discourses divides indigenous peoples along this supposed dichotomy (Ashcroft et al. 191–93). The posthumous lecture notes of German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel – published in 1892 and entitled *Philosophie der Weltgeschichte* – offers this description of indigenous Africans:

The Negro [...] exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality – all that we call feeling – if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character (93).

Hegelian metaphysics claims that “[t]he History of the World travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of history” (Hegel 103). Hegel views Europe as the highest form of civilisation and is the model other societies should strive towards. It is on this basis that imperialism and colonialism were frequently justified as ‘civilising missions.’

Since the time of its “discovery” by Europeans, through the era of colonial occupation, and into the present day, the Democratic Republic of the Congo – historically referred to as the Congo Free State (1885-1908), Belgian Congo (1908-1960), Congo-Léopoldville (1960-1971), and Zaïre (1971-1997) – has been a projection screen for Western ideologies, preconceptions, and fictions. Shortly before his death in 1961, Frantz Fanon commented that “Africa has the shape of a gun and the Congo is its trigger” (Fanon 6). The Democratic Republic of the Congo is a large country in Central Africa without geographical, ethnic, and linguistic unity. As with the case of many modern African countries, the Congo’s borders were arbitrarily and hastily drawn up by European colonists without considering historic, ethnic, or tribal identities. During Europe’s Scramble for Africa between 1884 and 1914, the Congo Free State (*État indépendant du Congo*) was pillaged and brutalised by Belgian King Léopold II, who possessed the colony as a personal concession and encouraged his gendarmerie (*Force Publique*) to subjugate the population by means of violent atrocities throughout the 1890s (Stanley).

Alice Seeley Harris’ infamous 1904 photo depicts Nsala, a Congolese man, staring at the severed hand and foot of his five-year-old daughter as punishment for not fulfilling the daily rubber quota. This poignant photo illustrates the sheer brutality and inhumanity of this subjugation:

Her name was Boali. She was five years old. [...] they killed her. But they weren’t finished. Then they killed his wife too. And because that didn’t seem quite cruel enough [...] they cannibalized both Boali and her mother. And they presented Nsala with the tokens, the leftovers from the once-living body of his darling child whom he so loved. His life was destroyed. They had partially destroyed it anyway by forcing his servitude but this act finished it for him (J. P. Smith 54).





(Harford)

An international human rights campaign forced King Léopold II to surrender his personal possession of the Congo in 1908, and it was handed over to his Belgian government. Gérard Prunier notes that the “Congolese welcomed Belgian colonization as a lesser form of evil” (Prunier 3). According to Georgi Verbeeck, the transition of power helped curb the brutal exploitation and “arbitrary use of ruthless violence” seen under Léopold’s concession (Verbeeck 294). However, “paternalist policies” continued to characterise the colonial system, with the Congolese people excluded from local governance and very much treated as aliens in their own land (Verbeeck 294).

The Belgian colonial empire was woefully unprepared for “winds of change” sweeping the African continent in the late 1950s and early 1960s (de Boeck 8). In 1959, violent riots broke out throughout much of Belgian Congo. As a result, 30 June 1960 was set as the date for independence. The transfer of power was hastily arranged, and for this reason the Congo’s sovereignty was doomed from the moment of its inception. Poorly qualified African leaders were unable to prevent the newly independent Congo-Léopoldville (named to contrast it with the ex-French Congo-Brazzaville) from slipping into civil unrest and the foreign intervention that followed was inevitable. The Congo Crisis from 1960 to 1965 was closely linked to the Cold War, with the Belgian support for secessionist regimes a poorly concealed attempt to sustain some influence in the region (Verbeeck 294). The 1961 assassination of Congo-Léopoldville’s first leader, Patrice Lumumba, symbolises the mismanaged decolonisation process of the Congo.

European anticolonial sentiments came several decades prior the Congo Crisis, with nineteenth-century writers conveying the perceived injustices of colonialism in the Congo. Daniel Vogel claims that Joseph Conrad was one of the first postcolonial writers (101). In his writing, Conrad criticised the often ruthless colonial expansion of European empires. In 1896, a few years before he published *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad wrote “An Outpost of Progress.” This fictional text can be interpreted as a political statement in which Conrad undermines the idea of empire and colonialism. The short story presents two European traders, Kayerts and Carlier, who are outposted in Africa at a trading station situated beside an unnamed river that unmistakably represents the Congo river. After their steamer disappears into the horizon and the two men are left alone, the reader gains a sense that these characters are out of their depth, incapable of their mission of “bringing light, and faith and commerce to the dark places of the earth” (Conrad, *An Outpost of Progress* 94). Foreshadowing the fate of Mr. Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*, Kayerts and Carlier gradually lose their minds amongst “the great emptiness” of the ‘dark continent’ (Conrad, *An Outpost of Progress* 15). It is this late nineteenth-century representation that perhaps becomes the most emblematic *topos* in the Western collective imagination of Africa. Furthermore, this *locus communis* image of Africa functions as a representation of colonialism. In *Imagining the Congo*, Kevin Dunn notes that the ‘discursive landscape’ of colonial-era Congo persists through the Western literary canon, haunting representations of the country and indeed the entire African continent.

Through the way he challenges imperialism and colonialism, Joseph Conrad can be considered one of the first ‘postcolonial writers’ of the Western modern literary canon. (Vogel 101). It must be stressed that Conrad was by no means the only writer of this era to undermine European colonial expansion. There were several publications predating Conrad’s novels that are also critical of Léopold II’s colonial regime in the Congo.

George Washington Williams penned a letter to Léopold II following his travels to the Congo Free State, where he discussed in details the exploitative crimes that he saw being committed by the *régime*. However, there are few pieces of fiction that have been referred to or mentioned by postcolonial critics as much as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* novella. Not all of these references have admired Conrad's approach. Famously, while lecturing at the University of Massachusetts in 1975, Chinua Achebe referred to Conrad as a "bloody racist" (Achebe). Though not the first time Conrad's work had received this type of criticism, Achebe's accusation gave rise to heated debates that have shaped the trajectory of postcolonial critical theory.

Achebe's argument focuses around the tendency for "Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations" (2). Vogel expands on Achebe's stance, stating that such negations "exist in many canonical texts, particularly those whose action is set on the black continent" (106). In colonial-era Western fiction, Africa is frequently portrayed as the antithesis of European civilisation. Primitiveness, isolation, and darkness are canonical motifs in Western representations of the Congo throughout the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Furthermore, the motif of the "journey back in time to places that are still ruled by the mysterious forces of nature" shapes representations of the Congo through this period (Vogel 106).

The canonical portrayal of the Congo follows in the 'footsteps of Mr. Kurtz': from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* through to contemporary representations of the Congo as "Africa's broken heart" (Butcher) with rivers stained red from blood and where "New Barbarism continues to thrive" (de Boeck 3). The image of the Congo that permeates fictional texts of the colonial era is so powerful that it practically renders other representations of reality invisible. The themes that Conrad explores capture colonial encounters, but their continued relevance today allows these themes to also speak on the

epistemological questions surrounding colonialism. De Boeck notes that such epistemological questions focus on “the (im)possibility of knowledge production and of representation when it comes to issues of identity, alterity, and diversity” and “the authentic and the hybrid in the encounter between the Self and Other” (3). These epistemological questions form the basis of postcolonial critical theory.

Considering the prominence of *Heart of Darkness* in the Western (post)colonial literary canon, it is undeniably a worthwhile pursuit to trace the development of how the Congo is portrayed in twentieth-century fictional texts. The Congo occupies a special position in the scholarship of Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and other first generation African postcolonial theorists. Not only does the Congo Free State (and later Belgian Congo) epitomise the workings of colonialism, but its trajectory throughout the twentieth century also conveys the socio-political struggles of a former colonial enterprise. For many, the historical moment that saw the Congo gain independence represents an optimistic postcolonial vision in Africa with “alternative African futures,” even if this dream has since evolved into “a nightmare” (de Boeck 4).

Hergé’s *Tintin au Congo* suggests that, while European audiences responded negatively to the perceived atrocities of Léopold’s Congo Free State, attitudes towards imperialism and colonialism remained largely unchanged by the 1930s. Hergé’s portrayal of the Congo is permeated by the workings of colonialism. This *bande dessinée* (comic series) was published in *Les Petit Vingtième* between June 1930 and June 1931, before being published in a collected volume in late 1931. Notable for the enormous cultural gap between titular character Tintin and the indigenous Congolese people he encounters, this comic was revised and colourised in the following decades, with some of the overtly racist caricatures toned down. The representation of Congolese people in Hergé’s *bande dessinée* is useful for tracing the Congo’s portrayal in the Western literary

canon insofar that it conveys how the African Other is stereotyped and constructed within a pro-imperialist hegemonic discourse.

Postcolonial scholar Sanghamitra Ganguly claims that these attitudes were shaped and maintained by “popular culture and mainstream media upholding European supremacy and the divine mission to civilize the dark-skinned peoples” (104). A prototypical image of colonised peoples was necessary for the idea of colonisation to be made acceptable to the European public, and the *bande dessinée* becomes the ideal medium to portray this image due to its historically light-hearted and playful nature. *Tintin au Congo* also celebrates the notion of Western imperialism in its portrayal of Tintin as a ‘white saviour,’ through whose agency the mission of civilising the indigenous peoples prevails in the *bande dessinée*’s narrative discourse. The album functions as a work of Western propaganda for Belgian colonialism in the Congo, insofar as a European man repeatedly saves Tintin’s life: first using a rifle to fend off a half dozen crocodiles, and later rescuing him from falling down a waterfall. While the album does not touch on any of the atrocities carried out by Belgian colonists during their occupation of the Congo, it does perpetuate the Western image of Africa: a land belonging to the pre-civilisation era, populated by uneducated, dark-skinned ‘natives.’ If Achebe is correct in identifying Conrad’s novella is racist due to its portrayal of the Congolese people, Hergé’s *bande dessinée* is certainly also guilty of this.

Querry, the protagonist of Graham Greene’s 1961 novel *A Burnt-Out Case*, travels up the River Congo just as Conrad’s Marlow had some sixty years earlier. However, the Congo had experienced considerable changes over those decades. In the late 1950s, colonialism in its “classical phase” was coming to an end in Africa. Colonialism in Africa changed form at this time, being reshaped into “neo-colonialist” forces such as transnational corporate investment and Cold-War era client politics. On this, Ashcroft et

al. note that this neo-colonialism denotes “the new force of global control operating through the local élite” (57). However, the binarism between Europe and Africa is still present within the Western literary canon during this period. Finnish scholar Olli Löytty views Querry as both a modern subject and “last colonialist” (83). Having suffered a burnout during his career in Europe, Querry “returns to his colonial possessions to die” (Lindfors 40). Anne-Marie Lindfors claims that a traditional method for ‘othering’ Africans in fiction is to keep them removed from the focus of the narrative: “they were only objects in the background reminding of the exotic setting” (Lindfors 40). Greene also portrays Africa itself as a dark continent – in opposition the *enlightened* Europe – in much the same style as Conrad. The narrative’s focus on leprosy allows that disease to function as a metonymy for Africa, which Greene thereby presents as a ‘sick’ continent. Greene’s novel demonstrates how the intertextuality of colonial discourse is shaped by former representations of Africa. Greene’s representation of Africa, while more implicit than *Heart of Darkness* and *Tintin au Congo*, maintains the role of Africa as Europe’s antithesis.

Between 1961 and the late 1990s, the field of postcolonial critical theory experienced considerable developments: Fanon, Saïd, Spivak, and Bhabha all published their seminal works during this period. It comes as little surprise that fictional works written at the tail-end of this period are much more critical of colonialist discourses and challenge the Western literary tradition of earlier works. Barbara Kingsolver sets her 1998 novel *The Poisonwood Bible* during the Congolese Independence Movement, particularly during the initial search for liberation from European colonialism. The novel spans from 1959 to 1985, and is primarily set in Mobutu’s Congo (Zaire) and the surrounding countries. Setting her narrative during this immensely transformative period in the Congo’s history allows Kingsolver to reflect the historical social unrest and

rebellion of the nation's decolonisation process. One of the key struggles of the decolonisation process in the Congo was the concern over national identity. Mobutu promoted a state ideology called *Authenticité* that attempted to rid the country of the lingering vestiges of colonialism and Western culture. This search for identity is a recurring theme in postcolonial literature.

Literary critic Pamela H. Demory claims that *The Poisonwood Bible* is a reinterpretation of *Heart of Darkness*, considering the ways in which the novel's themes pay homage to Conrad's novella while it also challenges his representation of colonisation and portrayal of Africa. Kingsolver's novel shows development in the Western literary canon's representation of the Congo through the way its narrative discourse focuses on the relationship between the indigenous Congolese population (the colonised) and the "invading culture" (the colonisers) (Pagan 13). Kingsolver's novel portrays what Homi Bhabha refers to in *The Location of Culture* as "the process of identification" in colonial relations, where the coloniser departs from what they know (Self) and begins relating to the Other (64). To achieve this, the coloniser must understand and relate to the colonised. This is precisely the basis on which Kingsolver develops the female narrators of her novel: Orleanna, Rachel, Adah, Leah, and Ruth-May. Kingsolver merges Western and Congolese identities in her novel, which is most apparent in the characterisation of Ruth-May. This process, referred to by Bhabha as 'hybridity,' is part of what makes *The Poisonwood Bible* an excellent example of postcolonial fiction within the Western literary canon. Comparing and contrasting this novel with earlier portrayals of the Congo in the literary canon illustrates how the development of postcolonial critical theory has shaped the representation of Africa in twentieth-century European literature.

## Chapter One: *Heart of Darkness*

Joseph Conrad's 1899 novella *Heart of Darkness* occupies an unusually ambivalent position in modern literature. Clearly it continues to engage readers over a century after its first publication: the Modern Library, for example, lists it in their 1998 publication of the twentieth-century's *100 Best Novels*. On the other hand, various distinguished scholars, such as Chinua Achebe, denounce the novella for its racist and imperialist themes. Conversely, scholars such as Peter Firchow and Edward Saïd oppose these claims and instead argue that Conrad's novella functions as an anti-imperialist treatise. One thing is certain: *Heart of Darkness* functions as a provocative meeting ground for literary critics, cultural anthropologists, and historians focusing on the woeful and complex relations between Europeans and Africans at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In his influential essay "An Image of Africa," Chinua Achebe asserts that the portrayal of colonised Congolese people in *Heart of Darkness* is racist. Achebe draws attention to the Eurocentric discourse in Conrad's novella, which projects an image of Africa as "the other world" – the antithesis of Europe – "where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are mocked by triumphant bestiality" (Achebe 338). However, Achebe's perspective on *Heart of Darkness* is not shared by all scholars: Edward Saïd defends Conrad's novella, arguing that it was a product of its time. Saïd historicises and contextualises Conrad, arguing that his novella indicates he could see the evils of imperialism (Svensson). This chapter will consider both sides of the debate.

To firstly focus on Achebe's claims, using the word 'racist' as a critique of Conrad's novella is problematic and not overly meaningful. The meaning of the word is



by no means self-evident since the concept has changed over time. Hannah Arendt refers to the notion of “race-thinking” in describing the *La Belle Époque*-era perspectives on racial differences.<sup>2</sup> According to Arendt, race-thinking, unlike racism, does not elevate one race as a ‘master race’ to make another inferior. It instead considers differences between ethnicities without establishing a clear hierarchy or dichotomy (Brantlinger 373). Peter Firchow claims that race-thinking was “so widespread and normal in developed countries [during Conrad’s lifetime] that a word like ‘racism,’ which connotes a negative way of thinking about race, was simply not needed” (4). Firchow brings attention to the fact that ‘racism,’ as both a term and ideology, did not appear in English literature until 1936, over ten years after Conrad’s death. This does not suggest that racism – a theory that there are distinct human races, and some are superior to others – did not exist prior to 1936, but instead indicates that this kind of thinking was so widespread and commonplace that a critical term for it was not available. This would mean that what is considered racism (post-1930s) did exist before then, but there was simply no term available to describe it. The term ‘racialism,’ which has similar negative connotations to ‘racism,’ emerged in 1907: however, this term implied the race-thinking was on account of territorial threats from different races, which is certainly not the case for the racist attitudes the Europeans had towards Africans. There is little doubt that what *Heart of Darkness* depicts is indeed racism: specifically, the European characters’ treatment of, and attitudes towards, Africans in the Congo. However, scholars such as Morgan Svensson stress the need to historicise and contextualise *Heart of Darkness*

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<sup>2</sup> *La Belle Époque* (English: The Beautiful Era) is dated from the end of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871 to the outbreak of World War I in 1914 (Wires). This overlaps with the Victorian and Edwardian eras in Great Britain. However as my research focuses on wider European literary history, this French term is more appropriate.

before denouncing its purported racism (Svensson 6–7). Part of this process is understanding the language Conrad uses to describe racial differences, and whether this language indicates a hierarchal difference between the Europeans and Congolese that could be considered racist by today’s standards. Furthermore, it must be asked whether, to what extent, and in what ways the novel itself seems to condone, condemn, or unconsciously reproduce this language?

In response to Achebe’s denunciation of *Heart of Darkness*, Cedric Watts argues that Conrad’s narrative discourse rises above racism and “transcends prejudice” (Watts, “A Bloody Racist”: About Achebe’s View of Conrad’ 208). Watts claims that the novella functions as an exposé of imperialist greed. In the first chapter of the text, Marlow describes the “conquest of the earth” – imperialism – as “the taking it away from those who have different complexion and slightly flatter noses than ourselves,” concluding that colonialism in the Congo is “not a pretty thing when you look into it too much” (Conrad 7). Such literary criticism emphasises that the political ideologies underscoring *Heart of Darkness* are complicated: this is, at least partly, due to the ambiguous style of its narrative discourse. To draw upon Fredric Jameson’s scholarship on Conrad’s *Lord Jim* (1900), the term “impressionism” can be used – albeit, somewhat loosely – to discuss the narrative discourse in *Heart of Darkness*. Literary impressionism depicts a scene or character through details “intended to achieve a vividness or effectiveness more by evoking subjective and sensory impressions than by creating or representing an objective reality” (Merriam-Webster 583). According to Patrick Brantlinger (1985), for some contemporary readers this impressionist writing style is a praiseworthy quality. The impressionist structure of *Heart of Darkness* functions as a means for Conrad to evade the moral responsibilities of his writing. The narrative discourse of *Heart of Darkness* is filtered not only through Marlow’s narrative, but also through that of an unnamed frame

narrator. This poses a challenge insofar that it is difficult to ascertain if Marlow, Conrad, and/or the primary narrator share a common perspective on race, nationality, and imperialism.

Drawing on postcolonial critical theory, this chapter will investigate the roles of imperialism and colonialism in *Heart of Darkness* to examine both sides of this debate. Paul Kirschner claims that *Heart of Darkness* is “a journey into Marlow’s unconsciousness,” and accordingly this chapter will examine how Marlow’s character development is produced through the discourse’s representation of *État indépendant du Congo* (E.I.C.; Congo Free State) and the colonised Congolese persons inhabiting it (Kirschner 43). Marlow’s spiritual journey in the novella mirrors his physical journey. His quest for Kurtz is internalised as a search for *self* – a search for truth. The notion of selfhood I am relying on here is derived from the ‘Constitutive Other’ in phenomenological philosophy, where the identification of selfhood is determined through the non-conformity of the other relative to (perceived) societal norms (Bullock et al. 620). In Marlow’s case, his encounters with Congolese people establishes his sense of selfhood through a socio-cultural dichotomy. Dichotomies are established between Europe and Belgian Congo in *Heart of Darkness* in terms of culture, ethnicity, and landscape, and also between the ‘original’ and ‘sham’ Kurtz. María Antonia Alvarez Calleja posits that for Conrad, the ‘darkness’ in his novella’s title refers to “savagery [and] primitivism,” established through dichotomies of “light/dark,” “civilized/uncivilized,” and “good/evil” (8). I argue that these dichotomies are also perpetuated in later representations of Belgian Congo in modernist literature.

## 1.1. Historical Background

Joseph Conrad's 1890 journey to the Congo – detailed in his 1890 publication, *Congo Diary* – played a significant role in the conception of *Heart of Darkness*. For this reason, an overview of the cultural hegemony and dominance that characterises this period in the region is essential. The state of affairs in late nineteenth-century Congo was the product of centuries-long imperial explorations and conquests, with roots in the fifteenth-century encounters between Europeans and Africans. South African scholar Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni claims that the fifteenth-century exploration of the Congo River-mouth by Portuguese navigator Diogo Cão saw the beginning of “Western modernity [exporting] its darker aspects to the non-Western world”, ultimately ushering in the new world order seen in the late nineteenth-century colonial conquests of Africa (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 39). Initially peaceful, encounters between Europeans and Africans developed into the “political, social and cultural domination” that would engulf the region (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 39). This domination is exemplified through the murder, torture, and other atrocities committed in E.I.C. from 1885 to 1908 under the sovereignty of King Léopold II of Belgium. Ndlovu-Gatsheni suggests this period of brutal imperial domination was carried out under the guise of civilisation and progress.

As imperialists saw it, the notion of civilisation and progress was a gift that Europe could export to the non-Western world. Civilising missions served as the justification for violent colonial conquests: the “pacification of barbarous tribes and the taming of savages” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 40). Acts of imperialism and colonialism were justified by the supposed lack of rationality seen in the inhabitants of the Congo Basin. This form of developmentalism has its roots in Enlightenment-era philosophy, and was entwined with burgeoning capitalist ideologies of the late nineteenth-century. Influential

historians of the 1970s, such as Walter Rodney and Andre Gunder Frank, compare the power hierarchy resulting from the Scramble for Africa in the late nineteenth-century to the processes of mercantilism and the slave trade seen in previous centuries. Such processes aided in the development of Europe, often at the expense of Africa(ns).

In *The Idea of Africa* (1994) Congolese-American philosopher and writer Valentin-Yves Mudimbe reflects on a 1876 meeting in Brussels. This meeting was on international geography and colonialism, setting in motion three main projects: “the exploration of Central Africa, the introduction of European civilization in the area, and an explicit commitment to oppose the slavery practices still going on” (Mudimbe 105). Shortly following this meeting, the Belgian committee *Association Internationale Africaine* (A.I.A.) launched expeditions along the east coast of Central Africa. The A.I.A. was recognised by the Berlin Conference (1884-5), a conference that acted as the catalyst of the late-nineteenth century Scramble for Africa. The Scramble for Africa saw the superpowers of Europe – Britain, France, Portugal, and Spain, amongst others – form colonies throughout the African continent.

In the case of E.I.C., colonial domination was carried out under the guise of a religious mission. However, historical sources suggest that Léopold II was motivated by the Congo’s natural resources. Through two committees established by Léopold II in the early 1880’s – *Comité d’Études du Haut-Congo* and *Association Internationale du Congo* – Belgian sovereignty was established in the Congo Basin. Consequently, by 1885 Léopold II held sovereignty over *État Indépendant du Congo*, which was his personal concession. According to historian Martin Ewans (2002), Léopold II was interested in the lucrative ivory trade in Central Africa, as well as the mineral resources in the region. By the mid-1890s, rubber extraction was the colony’s most profitable industry (Ergo).

Léopold II extracted a “fortune” from E.I.C. throughout this period, chiefly from the ivory and rubber trades (Ergo). This was made possible through his exploitation of the state’s indigenous people – a theme in *Heart of Darkness*.

Prior to his death in 1878, Pope Pius IX expressed his “benevolent and sympathetic attention” for the *œuvre civilisatrice* of Léopold, which was being carried out through his committees’ explorations and conquests in the Congo (Mudimbe 106). Having lost a great of influence in Europe over the previous centuries, the Vatican wished to expand the influence of Catholicism in Central Africa. For this, it relied on Léopold’s sovereignty in E.I.C. Beginning in 1879, *Pères Blancs* – disciples of the Primate of Africa, Bishop Lavigerie – were stationed in E.I.C. Their mission was to work alongside Léopold’s colonists for the conversion of the region: “transforming its space, its inhabitants, and their cultures” (Mudimbe 107). By 1891, many of the *Pères Blancs* were Belgian nationals. In the name of faith, young Belgian men and women migrated to E.I.C., convinced by a sense of Western hubris that they could engineer drastic changes in the consciousness and space of Africans. Their mission was to expand the realm of influence of both Belgium and the Holy See.

*Heart of Darkness* reflects not only what Conrad saw and recorded in *Congo Diary*, but also the atrocities that began appearing in the British press in 1888. The revelations of these atrocities would reach a climax twenty years later, when international outcry resulted in the Belgian government’s taking control of Léopold’s concession and establishing Belgian Congo. During the E.I.C. period, it is believed that up to eight million Congolese persons were tortured and murdered through the forced labour system (Morel 7). Scholarship suggests that Conrad was on the side of this outcry. He was sympathetic towards the Congo Reform Association (C.R.A.), which was established in

1903. Edmund D. Morel, the association's leader, wrote in *King Leopold's Rule in Africa* (1904) that *Heart of Darkness* was "the most powerful thing ever written on the subject" of the brutalities throughout the E.I.C. period (Stape et al. 199).

As I will argue in the chapters that follow, modern works of fiction set in Belgian Congo, such as Hergé's *Tintin au Congo*, Greene's *A Burnt-Out Case*, and Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* all respond to *Heart of Darkness* through their portrayal of imperialism and colonialism. Given *Heart of Darkness* is a highly influential work, the way the text represents colonialism and imperialism needs to be examined to form a foundational framework of how colonial Congo was, and still is, imagined in this Western literary canon.

## 1.2. Imperialism and *Heart of Darkness*

The title *Heart of Darkness* is a metaphor. According to Daniel Vogel, the title refers to Africa as a "primitive and isolated Black Continent" and also to the evil that is supposed to be latent in every human being (Vogel 106). The title also refers to a speech given by Léopold II in 1876, where he proclaimed the need to "pierce the darkness enshrouding entire populations" (Lewis 35). The story begins on the River Thames which, as described in the narrative, has historically been "one of the dark places of the earth" (Lewis 33). Peter Ackroyd notes that the name of the river is derived from the pre-Celtic *tamasa*, which means "dark river" (Ackroyd 60). The River Thames foreshadows Marlow's arrival in Africa, conjuring imagery of an Ancient Roman soldier arriving in the darkest corner of an empire. Early on in the novella, the River Thames is juxtaposed with the River Congo, which Conrad describes as one of the dark places of the Victorian era: "Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a

great silence, an impenetrable forest” (Conrad 65). This introduces a key element in *Heart of Darkness* for postcolonial analysis: the differences between western civilisation and the primeval representation of the Congo Basin. Conrad applies this primeval representation of Congo’s landscape to the Congolese people:

The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to looking upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there – there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were – No, they were inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it – this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity – like yours – the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly (63).

This presents the limits of Marlow’s perceptions. He expresses an ingrained sense of superiority to the Congolese he encounters. However, a sense of self-awareness is also present. In contrast to the stance that indigenous Congolese are ‘inhuman,’ Marlow conveys a sense of kinship with them. He observes that European discourse dismisses the Congolese as primal beings, yet in his description here they are certainly human. In other words, Marlow suspects that they represent something innate in humans, even if it has long been repressed in “civilised” European peoples. The dichotomy underscoring the Self-versus-Other mentality of colonial discourse is fractured through Marlow’s focalised narrative. Despite this, a ‘developmental’ superiority remains: an idea that Europeans are somehow more developed. Of course, this is later contradicted by the things he sees Europeans doing as he approaches the ‘heart of darkness.’



This focalisation highlights the ambivalence of the imperialist themes in *Heart of Darkness*. Drawing on Achebe's criticism, Caryl Phillips claims that scholars who have defended *Heart of Darkness* against accusations of racism tend to base their arguments around the narrative framing techniques and Conrad's anti-imperialist purpose. In his 2003 article "Out of Africa" for *The Guardian*, Phillips writes: "Achebe makes it clear he is not fooled by this narrative gamesmanship, or the claims of those who would argue that the complex polyphony of the storytelling is Conrad's way of trying to deliberately distance himself from the views of his characters" (Vogel 107). Achebe makes a case for Conrad's ambivalence towards the colonising missions in E.I.C., which he concedes is an examination of European contact with the atrocities of Léopold's colony. But he rejects the dehumanisation of Africans for the purpose of plot development, describing the novelist as one "who attempts to resolve [...] important questions by denying Africa and Africans their full and complex humanity..." Achebe's argument is therefore that, by utilising the Congo and the Congolese as props in a Eurocentric narrative discourse, Conrad's purpose in writing *Heart of Darkness* becomes more uncertain. This raises important questions. Does Conrad deny humanity to the inhabitants of Léopold's Congo? Does he utilise them as mere props in his novella? Or is the omission of focus on individual Africans part of an anti-imperialist commentary?

Some critics, such as Cedric Watts, defend Conrad against accusations of racism by claiming that Africa and Africans are used merely as vessels to access the disintegration of Kurtz's mind. Achebe notes that using Africans in this way – as vessels to characterise Kurtz with Marlow's narrative – eliminates the "African as a human factor," dehumanising Africans and using them as "prop[s]" to develop Marlow's character: he claims that this is evidence of "European arrogance" (Achebe 9). Scholarship on colonialism by Martiniquais academic Frantz Fanon echoes a similar

sentiment. Using French-occupied Algerian as a case study, Fanon attempts to find links between human rights and universal human subjectivity, suggesting that through imperialism, European culture is forced upon the “uncultivated land of colony” (Yeh 204). He opposes the “humanity subject in the perspective of European free humanism” because through being colonised, indigenous people are dehumanised (Yeh 203). Yeh refers to this as a “paradoxical curse” insofar that it results in colonised persons losing their “ability of interpretation or description of their own image and thought”, or otherwise reliant on the coloniser’s frame of reference for self-description (Yeh 203, citing Gibson 7).

Given that prevalent modern Western thought regarded Europe as the centre of the world, the presence of European superiority complexes in these colonial contexts comes as little surprise (Stone 85–86). In *Black Skins, White Masks* (*Peau noire, masques blancs*) Fanon notes that “White civilization and European culture have forced an existential deviation on the Negro: [...] what is often called the black soul is white man’s artifact” (14). Conrad was one of few Europeans to have been given the opportunity to travel to the Congo towards the end of the nineteenth century, to “see with his own eyes how the achievements of civilisation were being brought to central Africa.” (Vogel 109) His journey, as presented in *Congo Diary*, details “irritation and disgust” with the colonial regime, and nowhere in this diary do we find explicit comments to suggest that Conrad himself was prejudiced against indigenous Africans (Vogel 110). Rather, a cross-examination of *Congo Diary* and *Heart of Darkness* suggests that Conrad was severely critical of colonialism in E.I.C.

In *Postcolonial Criticism*, Nicholas Harrison claims that “by today’s standards, Joseph Conrad was, in fact, racist, in ways that were all but inevitable given that he lived

where and when he did” (3). However, he adds that those who wish to espouse Achebe’s denunciation of *Heart of Darkness* must first historicise and contextualise the concept of racism. The novella’s impressionistic and non-linear narrative allows the reader to see the weakness of colonial discourse. Conrad does detail the physical and epistemological violence that characterised the coloniser-colonised relationship in E.I.C.:

Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees, leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair. Another mine on the cliff went off, followed by a slight shudder of the soil under the feet. The work was going on. The work! And this was the place where some of the helpers had withdrawn to die. They were dying slowly – it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, – nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom (Conrad 44).

The several months Conrad spent in the Congo region shaped his perception of the chaotic, insincere, and violent tendencies of the colonisers. This passage hints at Conrad’s anti-imperialist sentiment, yet at the same time also reinforces Achebe’s claim that Africans are employed as mere “props” in *Heart of Darkness* (Achebe 117). Critic Wiesław Krajka similarly notes that in *Heart of Darkness* “real interracial communication does not take place, as the culture of the black people is not explored in any depth” (Krajka 245). Achebe and Krajka do not express any disagreement with Conrad’s novella’s exploration of European ambivalence towards the colonising mission. Instead, they focus on how Conrad reduced Africans to mere literary symbols, denying them any sense of humanity in his novella. This omission of African subjectivities is perhaps the most significant issue with *Heart of Darkness*. This position also suggests

that it is possible to be critical of Western culture and colonial practices without necessarily promoting the colonised culture's worth or humanity in a thorough way.

Prior to making any conclusions about how Conrad manages the African characters in *Heart of Darkness*, the question of whether the narrator's views reflect Conrad's own must be considered. Serbian philologist Bojana Aćamović claims that Marlow is an unreliable narrator. This is not because of Marlow's underreporting or overreporting, but rather his difficulties in evaluating, and interpreting certain events and characters (Aćamović 249). If Conrad deliberately constructs Marlow as an unreliable narrator, this indicates that the character is not supposed to be representative of Conrad's own views. Vogel notes that "Achebe makes a serious mistake in trying to identify the voice of Marlow as that of Conrad himself," a claim that is reinforced in Conrad's *Notes on My Books* (Vogel 110). In this 1921 publication, Conrad discusses Marlow as a fictional character: "a mere device, a *personator*, a familiar spirit, a whispering *daemon*" (Conrad, *Notes On My Books* 3). If this claim is valid, it becomes difficult to argue that Marlow's narrative can be ascribed to Conrad's own perspectives.

Even though *Heart of Darkness* contains autobiographic elements – most notably the overlap between Conrad's own experiences and political viewpoints, and those of Marlow – there is evidence in the novella that Conrad distances himself from Marlow and also from the frame narrator:

The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns by exception), and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow

brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the special spectrum of moonshine. (33)

Marlow is described in this passage as being unlike other seamen. To Marlow, the point of a story is the 'shell' itself – the narration. The haziness being described corresponds to the emergence of Marlow's narrative. This is a haziness that lingers around Marlow's intradiegetic voice as well as the unnamed frame narrator throughout the entire novella (Vogel 111). Marlow's storytelling proposes to bring to light details that would have otherwise remained shrouded in haze. Conrad's use of the frame narrator highlights that the way Marlow reveals his story is as much a part of the novella as the story itself. Marlow's story challenges the assumptions of the frame narrator, and the reader comes to view these differing perspectives as representations of the way man relates to the non-Western world and the people living in it. According to the unnamed narrator in *Heart of Darkness*, the British nation is "racially superior to others" (Nae 46), and has thus far succeeded in bringing civilisation to the "uttermost ends of the earth" (Conrad 43). In response to this perspective, Marlow claims that the British Isles were a place of barbarity prior to Roman conquest: civilisation, according to Marlow, "is just an accident arising from the weakness of others" (Conrad 7). Rather than attributing European civilisation to racial and cultural superiority, Marlow accounts for the developmental differences between Europe and Africa as an historical accident.

According to John G. Peters, the frame narrative in *Heart of Darkness* results from Conrad's overarching epistemological investigation into the limitations of knowledge and perspective. Rather than providing the reader with a narrative that universalises the experience of "phenomena," Conrad intentionally demonstrates the limitations of an individual's knowledge and experience (Peters 23). Realist writers draw

on the past experiences of readers, reinforcing the idea that all individuals experience phenomena in the same way. Peters claims that Conrad “reverses this process and hence also reverses its results” (Peters 23). Frame narration allows Conrad to separate himself from the novella’s narrators. He first distances himself from the events that take place through making Marlow the narrator; he then distances himself by having the frame narrator retelling Marlow’s narration. Furthermore, Marlow’s storytelling itself is not entirely first-hand – some details are learnt by Marlow through other characters’ stories. This layered, framed narrative style is how the reader is presented with a myriad of perspectives on Kurtz.

Initially, the frame narrator is unenthusiastic about Marlow’s story: “we knew we were fated, before the ebb began to run, to hear about one of Marlow’s inconclusive experiences” (Conrad 51). However, as the novella progresses the frame narrator becomes less cynical about Marlow’s storytelling. The development of the frame narrator’s perspective demonstrates the subjectivity of a narrator’s attitudes and perspectives. By the end of the novella, the frame narrator appears to have a perception closely aligning with Marlow’s, with the language they use while narrating even becoming more similar to Marlow’s. The frame narrator and Marlow seem to blend together for the reader, becoming a single entity: a single narrator. Yet the use of quotation marks throughout the narrative discourse by the frame narrator keeps the reader acutely aware of their existence. The reader cannot ignore that the narrative is not being directly provided by Marlow, but rather through the frame narrator. All the reader knows of Marlow comes from the frame narrator’s perspective, and in this sense the reader never truly validates Marlow’s narrative.

As a result of the way *Heart of Darkness* is narrated, the reader can never be sure of whose attitudes and perspectives are being expressed. It could be Kurtz, Marlow, the frame narrator, or Conrad conveying their perspectives on the Congo and its inhabitants. Achebe fails to consider this in his denunciation of the novella: he acknowledges the use of quotation marks when claiming that Conrad hides himself by Marlow's narrative but does not fully consider the extent of this uncertainty (Joyce 61). Furthermore, while it is true that Marlow others the Europeans he encounters, he also notes differences between himself and the other European characters in the novel.

From the novella's opening pages, it is evident to the reader that Marlow's viewpoint on imperialism differs from that of the frame narrator. Marlow draws a parallel between the late nineteenth-century capitalist imperialism of the company in Congo, and the type of imperialism practiced by the Roman Empire:

They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force [...] It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind – as is very proper for those who tackle darkness. The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much (Conrad 3).

This narrative emphasises the ideals of modern imperialism while also clearly conveying that Marlow opposes the violent, 'civilising mission' that this entails. The picture presented here is dystopian: it provokes a consideration of the gap between idealised imperialism and its practice. The cynical representation of colonialism can be interpreted as a critique of imperialism: "is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much"

(Conrad 65). When Marlow earlier states that violence, aggravated murder, etc. are “very proper for those who tackle darkness,” he is speaking ironically: the European colonists consider themselves light-bearers and present a façade of progress and culture, yet they seem blind to the depravity of their actions. Marlow’s ironic use of the word “darkness” brings us back to the question of whose darkness is really at work in colonial contexts. These anti-colonial perspectives – which the reader principally accesses through Marlow’s narrative – support the claim that *Heart of Darkness* does indeed function as an anti-imperialist treatise.

*Heart of Darkness* presents the European colonisers of the Congo as interested in “augmenting their wealth” rather than bringing civilisation to the “savage world” (Nae 47). Instances of this anti-imperialism are experienced through some of the characters Marlow encounters. Examples include the Dane who died as a result of a conflict that arose over two hens or Marlow’s travelling companion who falls ill while tramping to the station: “I couldn’t help asking him once what he meant by coming here at all. ‘To make money, of course. What do you think’ he said, scornfully” (Conrad 15). Idealised colonialism, with its civilising missions, is quite absent within Marlow’s journey, and instead imperialism is presented as economically-motivated, greedy, and abusive. Nevertheless, as Andrea White notes, while Marlow is cynical about the merits of imperialism, he acts passively towards the perceived injustices by obediently following instructions (179). In this way, Marlow becomes an “accomplice of imperialism” (Nae 48).

### 1.3. “Choice of nightmares”: Marlow, Kurtz, and Politics

Kurtz’s role in *Heart of Darkness* serves an allegorical purpose: he functions as a foil to the form of imperialism practised by the company. As a result, Marlow finds himself



faced with a “choice of nightmares” (Conrad 43). On one hand, there is the company’s capitalism, which is imperialist in nature; on the other, the supposed humanistic utopianism of Mr Kurtz. The role of capitalism in *Heart of Darkness* is apparent in the form of imperialism practiced by the company, and indeed reflects the historical exploitation that was ongoing during this period. By the 1890s, Léopold II had established the *Force Publique* (F.P.) in E.I.C. to protect his economic interests and reduce the chance of any uprisings. One of the main tasks of the F.P. was to exploit the Congolese people as *corvée* labourers to promote the rubber trade. Genocide scholar Adam Jones notes that “[t]he result was one of the most brutal and all-encompassing *corvée* institutes the world has ever known [...] Male rubber tappers and porters were mercilessly exploited and driven to death” (42). Marlow’s encounters with the company illustrate how the imperialism being practiced is driven by economics, and underlying this imperialism is racialised politics.

Marlow’s encounter with the company doctor reinforces the corrupt practices of imperialism in the E.I.C. The doctor is interested in determining the anatomical characteristics of different nations. This scene reflects historical reality at the time the novel is set: on the basis of Hegelian philosophies, some nineteenth-century anthropologists were concerned with what is referred to as scientific racism. Unilineal evolution – also referred to as classical social evolution – was a nineteenth-century social theory regarding the evolution of societies and cultures. The likes of Charles Darwin, Arthur de Gobineau, and Karl Vogt contributed towards this school of thought, which would later develop into twentieth-century eugenics studies. Tzvetan Todorov, a Franco-Bulgarian literary critic and historian, concludes in *Nous et les autres* that unilineal evolution sought to prove that “due to its low level of civilization and impossibility of progress, the black race should serve as workers subdued by the superior white race and

contribute to the race's progress" (Nae 49). Herbert Spencer's concept of Social Darwinism spread throughout Europe in the mid-nineteenth century, heightening the Western attitude that non-European societies were "jungle[s]" and the Europeans were the "fittest" to survive (Rizzo 1). Early in the story, Marlow expresses these societal attitudes, viewing the Congolese people as "grotesque" (14), "horrid" (36), and "ugly" (37). However, by the end of his narrative it is apparent he has a great deal of sympathy for them. As a result of his experience, Marlow overcomes his prejudices enough to acknowledge a "claim of distant kinship", and urges his audience to recognise "their humanity – like yours" (37). Sri Lankan scholar Charles Ponnuthurai Sarvan praises the representation of Africans in *Heart of Darkness* because, while Conrad "was not entirely immune to the infection of the beliefs and attitudes of his age", he was "ahead of most in trying to break free" from the dominant European discourse on Africans (Sarvan 285).

The company doctor is interested in Marlow, whom he regards as the "representative of a race that hadn't come under his studies so far" (Nae 49). This indicates that the doctor had not examined many Europeans before. Having surveyed the works of French racialists, such as le Bon, Buffon, Renan, and Taine, Todorov claims that in the late-nineteenth century, races were associated with nationalities (Todorov 219). The company doctor's interest in examining Marlow reinforces this idea – his views on race and nationality are not motivated by animosity, but rather scientific inquiry:

'I have a little theory which you messieurs who go out there must help me prove. [...] Pardon my questions, but you are the first Englishman to come under my observation...'

I hastened to assure him I was not in the least typical. ‘If I were,’ said I, ‘I wouldn’t be talking like this with you’ (Conrad 10).

Thomas W. Thompson distinguishes between the Romantic doctrine of racialism exhibited by the company, which is chiefly scientific in nature, and the development of racism throughout the twentieth-century, which is the pseudoscientific doctrine of racial superiority (3-4). This racialism is obviously a precursor to the modern notion of racism, undeniably having negative connotations. The term racialism is listed in the supplement to the 1987 *Oxford English Dictionary* as occurring for the first time in 1907, being defined as the “belief in the superiority of a particular race leading to prejudice and antagonism towards people of other races” (Thompson). In this way, the company doctor represents the practised imperialism in *Heart of Darkness*, incorporating the scientific (albeit problematic) late nineteenth-century ideas on European racial superiority.

Kurtz’s humanist utopianism opposes the racialist and capitalist ideals of the company. Kurtz represents the corruption of English liberal ideals of the time: “pity, and science, and progress” (P. Lewis 215). Catherine Belsey defines humanism as “a commitment to man, whose essence is freedom. Liberal humanism proposes that the subject is the free, unconstrained author of meaning and action, the origin of history” (8). Kurtz’s type of humanism is entwined with socialist ideals: he opposes biological determinism and instead believes that ‘subaltern’ cultures can overcome social inequality through the help of those in positions of greater power in the colonial hierarchy. Kurtz’s socialist views can be seen in this passage from *Heart of Darkness*:

But it was a beautiful piece of writing. The opening paragraph, however, in the light of later information, strikes me now as ominous. He began with the argument that we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, ‘*must*

*necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings – we approach them with the might of a deity,’* and so on, and so on. *‘By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded,’* etc., etc. From that point he soared and took me with him. The peroration was magnificent, though difficult to remember, you know. It gave me the notion of an exotic Immensity ruled by an august Benevolence. It made me tingle with enthusiasm. This was the unbounded power of eloquence – of words – of burning noble words. There were no practical hints to interrupt the magic current of phrases [...] and at the end of that moving appeal to every altruistic sentiment it blazed at you, luminous and terrifying, like a flash of lightning in a serene sky: *‘Exterminate all the brutes!’* (34).

Here, the idea of imperialism is driven by benevolence and conveyed by Kurtz in a persuasive manner. Kurtz’s writing expresses his humanistic and socialistic political viewpoints. However, through Marlow’s narrative it is clear that such a viewpoint is problematic: “luminous and terrifying”. After tasting power, Kurtz’s desire to enlighten the ‘Other’ becomes genocidal in nature: “Exterminate all the brutes!” is scrawled into the account much later, indicating a transition in his attitude towards his stance (Conrad 34). However, there is an implied consistency: Kurtz is inclined to view himself – or rather, himself as he imagined he was seen by “savages” – as a deity. He has shifted from being the loving, paternal deity to the avenging, death-dealing ‘supreme being,’ much as the Old Testament God does in the Bible<sup>3</sup> Kurtz brings darkness to the Congo, rather than light. Like Marlow, he travelled to Africa in search of adventure and to complete

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<sup>3</sup> For example: “The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord is avenging and wrathful; the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies” (Nahum 1.2)

“humanizing, improving, instruction” acts (Conrad 91). However, he becomes corrupted by power and abandons his philanthropic ideals, instead positioning himself as a demigod to the Congolese.

The politics that Kurtz idealises initially read as a welcome relief from the imperialism practised by the company. However, through Marlow’s narrative it eventually becomes clear that the practice of such humanism would be dystopic – not unlike the trajectory of socialism in twentieth-century, real-world dystopias (for example, the Soviet Union). Other characters seem to be aware of Kurtz’s political influence: “The visitor informed me Kurtz’s proper sphere ought to have been politics ‘on the popular side’ [...] – ‘but heavens! how [sic] that man could talk. He electrified large meetings. He had faith – don’t you see? – he had the faith. He could get himself to believe anything – anything. He would have been a splendid leader of an extreme party’” (49). Kurtz is characterised as a charismatic and influential leader, but the relationship between him and follows is that of master and disciplines. His followers obey his “whim and caprice”, and to them Kurtz represents a “saviour who, on the basis of his own missionary zeal, commands their fanatical allegiance to his ideals” (Spegele 331). This representation of Kurtz is quite a contrast to the ideal of “socialism”: instead, it appears to be more of a populist dictatorship style. Kurtz’s exploitation of the indigenous Congolese – making them his willing prisoners – results in his own demise: by the time Marlow meets him, he is dying. However, prior to his death Kurtz recognises his own depravity – his moral failure – crying, “The horror!” (Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* 151). Marlow notes that Kurtz’s cry is “an affirmation, a moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions” (Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* 65)

As previously discussed, Marlow supports the notion that the differences in development between Europe and Africa are the consequence of historical accidents, rather than predetermination through a biological hierarchy. He remarks near the end of his narrative: “Destiny. My destiny! Droll thing life is – that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for the futile purpose” (69). Marlow’s analysis of events in his narrative puts emphasis on “the notion of character” (Lewis 235), referring to “character,” “innate strength,” and “restraint” throughout his narrative. Lewis notes that “He respects the accountant’s ‘starched collars and got-up shirt fronts’ as ‘achievements of character’ that seem to enable the accountant to maintain not only his appearance but also his integrity ‘in the great demoralisation of the land’” (235, Conrad 21). Marlow’s idea of a developed, civil society seems to be based upon his notion of restraint.

Lewis claims that Marlow chooses Kurtz when faced with his ‘choice of nightmares’ based on nationalism: Kurtz is half-British (215). Furthermore, Kurtz’s “moral ideas” appeal to Marlow (Conrad 33), in contrast to the company, whose moral ideas on racialism are disavowed by Marlow. Marlow realises that the Congolese natives onboard his steamboat have nothing to eat: yet, despite being cannibals, they do not choose to eat any of the crew members: “And these chaps, too, had no earthly reason for any kind of scruple. Restraint!” (29) This ‘restraint,’ the moral compass of the Congolese, prevents them from indulging in cannibalism: in such isolated circumstances, fear of discipline is negligible, and so it is only their morality that conquers the urge to eat. Marlow’s description of such morality is a counter to the racialism espoused by the company doctor.

According to Lewis, Marlow is a liberal nationalist: this reflects Conrad’s own views on nationality and liberal democracy (213). This English form of nationalism is

ideologically threatened by both the company and Kurtz, which is why Marlow faces his ‘choice of nightmares.’ Citing works by Conrad, such as *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad* and *Joseph Conrad on Fiction*, P. Lewis makes the claim that both Marlow and Conrad associate England with values of “efficiency,” “liberty,” “sincerity of feelings,” “humanity, decency, and justice” (ibid). Nae notes that Conrad was sceptical of human nature (50): unlike humanists (such as Kurtz), Conrad did not believe that liberal democracy was “the unconstrained expression of human nature” (Belsey 8).

Marlow’s narrative “is careful to distinguish between the efficient and humane English” (P. Lewis 213), whom he characterises as ruling by law and wanting to get “some real work done” (Conrad 13), with “other European imperialists” (P. Lewis 213). The Europeans working for the company in *Heart of Darkness* are shown to “plunder their dependencies purely for their own material advantage,” (ibid) while treating the indigenous Congolese people as “enemies” and “criminals” (Conrad 20). P. Lewis refers to the type of politics espoused by the company doctor as threatening to Conrad’s beliefs on English culture, while the socialistic politics represented by Mr Kurtz threaten the cultural differences relating to English character and institutions that “Victorian liberals had prized.” (214) In Victorian England, Paine’s influential *The Rights of Man* (which, a century earlier, had played an integral role in the French Revolution) was seen to threaten the “rights of Englishmen” (Burke 28). Kurtz embodies this liberal socialist threat to English modernism.

*Heart of Darkness* presents the clash of these political viewpoints as a “bearing on issues of identity (self) and alterity (other).” (Nae 51) The capitalism of the company is underscored by racialism, while the socialism of Kurtz is supported by humanist notions of innate goodness and the benevolence of the individual’s willpower. Marlow’s

narrative illustrates how these political viewpoints both clash and overlap: exploitation in the case of the former and genocide (extermination) in the case of the latter. The prevailing political viewpoint in Marlow's narrative is neither of these, according to Nae, but rather an "instrumental view on history and nationhood that claims that ethnic and national identity are produced in time, rather than biological givens" (ibid). Nae posits that it is with this viewpoint of Marlow's that Conrad identifies. *Heart of Darkness* politicises the horrors of Léopold's E.I.C. and contrasts these with the more constructive British Empire, where "one knows that some real work is being done" (Conrad 25).

Marlow distinguishes between two 'Kurtzes,' an 'original' and a 'sham': "The shade of the original Kurtz frequented the bedside of the hollow sham whose fate it was to be buried presently in the mould of primeval earth." (67) Marlow initially refers to Kurtz as "the initiated wraith from the back of No-where [...] could speak English to me" (Conrad 50). Contrasting this, Marlow shortly thereafter "rehumanizes Kurtz" (Firchow 81) by using a masculine pronoun: "the original Kurtz had been educated partly in England and – as he was good enough to say himself – his sympathies were in the right place" (Conrad 50). It can be assumed that by 'original,' Marlow is referring to Kurtz's national and ethnic origins. The claim that "his sympathies were in the right place" suggests that the original Kurtz is politically pro-British, practising the British virtues exemplified by Marlow and his compatriots onboard the *Nellie*: he was, through Marlow's eyes, "one of us" (to borrow the phrase from Marlow's narrative in *Lord Jim*) (74). The contrast in Marlow's narrative (67) also suggests that the 'original' Kurtz was not a sham. The original Kurtz, with his British values, was influenced by a fatal flaw – hubris – and "became an immoral brute who decapitated people, possibly ate parts of their bodies, certainly stuck their heads on poles, stole large quantities of ivory by main force, and took to participating in unspeakable rites." (Firchow 83) Marlow ponders



whether this fatal flaw would have taken place if Kurtz had remained “in his place,” and not ventured alone into the heart of darkness.

Kurtz’s lack of restraint is contrasted with the restraint shown by the cannibal crew not murdering and consuming their shipmates. Marlow ascribes the restraint of the cannibal crew to “some kind of primitive honour” (43), reflecting the bond these men share through origin and tradition. However, Kurtz’s isolation – especially from his own “ethnic tribe” (Firchow 84) – leads to the demise of his values and morality. To strengthen the argument of Conrad (consciously or subconsciously) including autobiographical themes in *Heart of Darkness*, the type of isolation experienced by Kurtz parallels Conrad’s own exile from his native Poland.

Firchow claims that this notion of psychological isolation exemplifies the anthropological idea of “detrribalisation” wherein both Kurtz and Conrad were separated from their tribes/compatriots and motherland from which they drew “moral strength” (85). Kurtz’s duality – original and sham – is presented as a result of this detrribalisation. A parallel is established between Kurtz and the only casualty onboard the riverboat: the African Helmsman. Firchow claims that “Like Kurtz, the Helmsman is inordinately impressed with his own talents [...] when he is in the company of others, but is utterly unable to carry out his responsibilities when he is not.” (85) The Helmsman finds himself isolated following the sudden death of his predecessor, the Danish captain Fresleven. He joins the Belgian Pilgrims in firing rifles at attackers on shore: this is how he meets his demise. He has adopted the foolish technique for emptying his rifle from his new ‘tribe,’ the Belgian Pilgrims, and for this reason “Conrad sentences him to death” (ibid).

Conrad establishes this theme of detrribalisation in *Heart of Darkness* to illustrate how both Congolese and Europeans are affected by a breakdown of the stable order of

society. Fleishman (1995) refers to this breakdown as anarchic, being located at the opposite pole of the notion of “organic community” (79). Güven (2018) expresses that this sense of anarchy is latent in an individual, with anarchy and individualism being “implicated in each other”, unleashing acts of “terrorism” when order decays. This decay is shown in the above examples of Kurtz and the African Helmsman (267). Caught up in the corrupting influences of colonialism, Kurtz becomes a terrorist when isolated from his ‘tribe’ in the interior of Central Africa.

The decay of Kurtz, from his ‘original’ to ‘sham’ form reflects the titular ‘heart of darkness’ in Conrad’s novella. The real darkness that Marlow encounters in the unchartered interior of Central Africa lies in the hearts of (so-called) civilised individuals. The intensity of Kurtz’s exploitation is apparent in Marlow’s first description of him: “I saw him open his mouth wide – it gave him a weirdly voracious aspect, as though he wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him” (Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* 130). The men were Kurtz’s own followers, and, in effect, Kurtz wanted to swallow them, thus creating a cannibalistic image of Kurtz. As Marlow stood before the Intended’s door, this image reappears: “a vision of him [Kurtz] on the stretcher, opening his mouth voraciously, as if to devour all the earth with all its mankind” (Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* 149). In this repeated manner, Kurtz is portrayed as a cannibalistic and demonic, devouring “the jungle’s bones, the ivory, and its flesh, the Blacks themselves” (Stark 538). In this respect, Marlow’s narration of Kurtz functions as anti-imperialist. It is only through Marlow’s eyes (focalisation) that we are able to ‘see’ Kurtz. For the reader as well as the audience listening to the frame narrative, Kurtz is merely a name for most of Marlow’s journey. As Marlow gets closer to meeting Kurtz, the more knowledgeable the informants become: through Marlow’s role as the focaliser, the reader too becomes more knowledgeable about Kurtz. For example, Marlow comments that the

wilderness draws Kurtz “to its pitiless breast by the awakening of forgotten and brutal instincts, by the memory of gratified and monstrous passions” (Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* 67). Throughout most of the novella, the reader’s perception of Kurtz is doubly-mediated: firstly through Marlow’s eyes and ears; secondly through the subjectivities of his informants. This narrative style functions to characterise Kurtz as enigmatic, benevolent, and attractive. However, the reader and Marlow eventually come to see Kurtz for the sham he really is, to a sort of lying idealism that can rationalise hellish behaviour.

Achebe claims that *Heart of Darkness* is problematic insofar that it dehumanises Africa and Africans as a result of Conrad’s racist ideals. Yet, to contest this perspective seems to carry with it the impossible task of constructing Conrad as a post-modern liberal author *avant la lettre*. The reason *Heart of Darkness* remains so influential in the twenty-first-century comes down to how polarising it is. It may be true that its narrative discourse has little positive to say about Africans. However, focusing on the novella’s historical context, narrative techniques, main characters, and literary parallels does support an argument that *Heart of Darkness* is anti-imperialist in nature. Does this mean that the novella is not racist – at least by contemporary definitions of the term? Absolutely not.

Conrad’s story is anti-imperialist in the way it condemns Kurtz’s murderous racism: however, Marlow’s focalisation dehumanises Africans. The novella’s non-European characters do function as vessels for the wider ‘quest’ trope of the novella – Conrad makes no effort to include Congolese subjectivities. Kurtz’s dying words can be seen to represent more than salvation and guilt, or condemnation of African ‘savagery’: they convey the sort of idealism that can rationalise atrocious acts of genocide and self-

perceived dominance. Integral in Conrad's development of Kurtz – from original to sham – is the idea that words and meanings can be separated: Kurtz manifests the impressionistic manipulation of language itself. The degree to which we are seduced by Marlow's perspective of Kurtz reveals to us our own guilts. As readers, we are just as responsible as Marlow in passively accepting seductive language. Marlow's subjective focalisation allows us to become aware of our own delusions and blindness. As modern-day readers, Conrad tears down our sense of moral superiority to those who tolerated the atrocities of the colonial mission in E.I.C.

The fact that there are very few other works of British fiction prior to World War One that come close to *Heart of Darkness* in functioning as anti-imperialist treatises is a measure of Conrad's achievement. As far as social criticism goes, the novella is undercut by its impressionistic prose. However, the self-scrutiny apparent in Marlow's narrative, the 'voice' at the heart of the novella, allows *Heart of Darkness* to remain relevant – and even influential – in a postcolonial context. It is difficult not to trust Marlow's narrative voice. He is described by the frame narrator as an exceptional storyteller who "resembled an idol", (3) and the reader tends to take Marlow's words at face value. Conrad begins the task of challenging a hegemonically Eurocentric literary culture in his novella: unravelling the dominant discourse on subaltern societies, and working towards a "remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar" (Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* 32).

Even though Conrad is guilty of showing the colonialist attitudes common to the late 1890s, he is ahead of many other writers from the same period in the way he portrays colonialism as something evil. Long before the emergence of postcolonial critical theory, Conrad made an attempt to challenge the colonialist literature from within. *Heart of Darkness* represents a step beyond Colonialist Literature in the sense that it analyses the

relationship between coloniser and colonised. The subsequent trajectory of the Congo's representation in Western narratives reveals a shift away from the colonial library towards new ways of representing the 'dark continent.' As a result, Conrad's novella sets the foundation for examining some of the complexities and contradictions found in later Western fiction representing the Congo and its colonial past. Examining the role of colonialist discourse within the following three texts – *Tintin au Congo*, *A Burnt-Out Case*, and *The Poisonwood Bible* – reveals an increasingly critical Western narrative on the colonial era.

## Chapter Two: *Tintin au Congo*

*Tintin au Congo* is a *bande dessinée* (BD) – a Franco-Belgian comic – created in 1930 by Belgian cartoonist Georges Prosper Remi, also known by the pen name Hergé. This BD is an example of how popular media communicates colonial discourses. Seemingly light-hearted, *Tintin au Congo* portrays Belgian Congo as a peaceful colony where indigenous Congolese people live harmoniously alongside wild animals and European colonists. Its narrative shifts away from the evils of imperialism portrayed in *Heart of Darkness*, and instead aims to offer a humorous – albeit, problematically Eurocentric – perspective of life in Belgian Congo. Enjoyable and even harmless on a superficial level, *Tintin au Congo* presents a wider issue within the postcolonial framework: colonised subjects are represented as ‘docile bodies,’ portrayed as antithetical to the European colonists. In this chapter, Foucauldian frameworks underpinning postcolonial critical theory will provide a lens through which the BD’s representation of the Belgian colonial discourse can be unpacked.

Pierre Halen, a French academic specialising in African literature, has claimed that *Tintin au Congo* is not even a proper colonial discourse because Hergé never visited Belgian Congo (292). However, American anthropologist Nancy Rose Hunt suggests the contrary, stating that “the author’s location of writing [does] not determine audience, identification, and available readings” (93). During the colonial period, the intricate relationship between imperialist powers and “their” colonies causes their ideas about Africa – especially racist and colonial ones – to influence European writers, and those writers also influence such ideas and therefore colonial attitudes and behaviours. The Belgian relationship to Congo means that a text set there by a Belgian writer/artist will be specifically involved in this exchange of stereotypes, images, narratives, attitudes,

ideologies, and so on. *Tintin au Congo* presents a humorous narrative designed to appeal to both children and adults. In this way, the BD serves as an alluring yet profoundly inaccurate source of information about life in Congo under Belgian rule. However, its purpose was not only to entertain. Indian literary critic Sanghamitra Ganguly claims that *Tintin au Congo* was designed to encourage the colonial and missionary spirit of the Belgian people (104). The BD's humour – racialised, and consisting of crude caricatures and degrading dialogue – remains relevant to readers in the twenty-first century. In 2007, Congolese student Bienvenu Mbutu Mondondo launched legal proceedings in Brussels, claiming its portrayal of Africans was “racist” and required banning (Beckford). The court ruled in 2012 that the book would not be banned, stating that it is “clear that neither the story, nor the fact that it was put on sale, has a goal to...create an intimidating, hostile, degrading or humiliating environment” (Vrielink).

Critical analyses on *Tintin au Congo* offer insight into local and international responses to colonial discourses. Praised as an icon and commodity, *Tintin au Congo* demonstrates how colonial discourses portray a Eurocentric view of colonised bodies. Through Hergé's pioneering *ligne claire* illustration style, Europeans and Africans are portrayed as binary opposites, thus perpetuating the Self versus Other dichotomy discussed in the previous chapter. Edward Saïd's seminal works on Orientalism and imperialism serve as theoretical frameworks for a postcolonial reading of *Tintin au Congo* that focuses on how the BD promotes the othering of non-Europeans. Additionally, Michel Foucault's works on power, knowledge, and discipline help explain the role that Hergé's Congolese caricatures play in representing ‘docile bodies.’ The politicisation of BDs will thus be investigated in this chapter, using postcolonial criticism to consider how seemingly innocent colonial discourses factor into the wider Western literary canon.

## 2.1. Theoretical Frameworks: Saïd and Foucault

Edward Saïd's *Orientalism* connects politics, culture, and imperialism with literary criticism. As a result of its interdisciplinary nature, this seminal text provides an overarching framework for analysing the colonist discourse of *Tintin au Congo*. Saïd analyses the complex relationship between Eastern and Western societies. In particular, he focuses on (mis)representations of non-European (Oriental) societies and cultures in order to justify Western societies' imperial and colonial ambitions. Through this proposed relationship, new methodologies are established for approaching the concept of colonialism and Eurocentrism in literature representing non-European societies and cultures. The physical act of colonisation is not the sole focus of *Orientalism*: Saïd addresses the cultural baggage that is brought to encounters between coloniser and colonised. The "imaginative geography" of the West dramatizes the differences between coloniser and colonised, where European perceptions of non-European societies are formed from accepted discourses. These perspectives reinforce the hierarchical binary opposition between the Western world and non-Western world. In *Orientalism*, Saïd demonstrates how the Western literary and cultural canon has "otherized" the non-European world, and in doing so misrepresented the Orient (5). Orientalism as a field is concerned with how Middle Eastern, Asian, and North African societies are essentialised by the West as being undeveloped and static. As a result, depictions of Oriental culture are in the service of imperial powers, expressing a sense of duty to improve – and thus westernise – such cultures.

*Orientalism* opens with a Karl Marx quotation: "They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented" (303). This epigraph sets the tone for Saïd's critique of the paternalistic and dominating Western system of representation: he posits



that Marxism is a form of this Western domination. The epigraph in *Orientalism* draws attention to Marx's view that the poor and downtrodden peasants could not represent themselves, and so it was the duty of Marxists to represent them. As well as using this excerpt as an epigraph, Saïd also refers to Marx's *Der 18te Brumaire des Louis Napoleon* in the introductory chapter of *Orientalism*:

The exteriority of the representation is always governed by some version of the truism that if the Orient could represent itself, it would; since it cannot, the representation does the job, for the West, and *faute de mieux*, for the Orient. "*Sie können sich nicht vertreten, sie müssen vertreten werden* [They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented]," as Marx wrote in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. (Saïd 21; italics mine)

The supposed inability of the Orient to represent itself, Saïd claims, has resulted in prejudiced outsider interpretations of the non-European world. This has ultimately shaped the cultural attitudes of European imperialism throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Tromans 24).

In his analysis of empire-building, historian Stephen Howe agrees with Saïd's claim that Orientalism is intrinsically linked to imperialism, positing that empires were established through the exploitation of places viewed by the West as undeveloped. Furthermore, wealth and labour were extracted from these 'undeveloped' societies for the benefit of Westerners (70–4). Despite E.I.C./Belgian Congo not being considered part of the Oriental world that Saïd discusses, the theoretical frameworks he employs to explain the misrepresentation and exploitation of the Orient can be loosely applied to colonialism in sub-Saharan Africa. Marianna Torgovnick claims in *Gone Primitive* that literary depictions of encounters with the "primitive Other" can be traced back to

Homer's *The Odyssey*, when Odysseus meets Polyphemus (Torgovnick 23–4). On his travels home, Odysseus visits a variety of islands: “primitive societies, and hypercivilized ones” (Torgovnick 24). One specific encounter is with Polyphemus, one of the Cyclopes found in *The Odyssey*, a disgusting “savage” who eats Odysseus’ men and is “monstrous” in appearance (Homer 149). Torgovnick claims that thousand years later, in *How I Found Livingstone*, “Henry M. Stanley sees in primitive societies the same things that Odysseys saw” (Torgovnick 26). Stanley brings to his narration a number of “literary topoi”: he is an explorer and a hero, like Odysseus; his goals are well-established and “immutable”, but hindered by unpredictable adventures and encounters with the Other (Torgovnick 26–27). Torgovnick posits that depictions of Africa and Africans in Stanley’s works helped form Euro-American attitudes towards the continent and its inhabitants. Many of Stanley’s works, such as *In Darkest Africa*, were bestsellers, with “lines of influence” from Stanley to modern discourse about the primitive being “long and multiple” (Torgovnick 26). Saïd also offers a brief, succinct, and useful account of “Africanism” in *Culture and Imperialism*:

a larger formation of European attitudes and practices toward the continent, out of which emerged what late-twentieth-century critics have called Africanism, or Africanist discourse, a systematic language for dealing with and studying Africa for the West. Conceptions of primitivism are associated with it, as well as concepts deriving a special epistemological privilege from the African provenance, such as tribalism, vitalism, originality (193)

Saïd’s Africanism offers equivalent ideas on the Other to *Orientalism*, but is more specific to Africa. Overall, the general principles of “othering”, essentialism, economic exploitation, and ‘speaking for’ found in Saïd’s and Torgovnick’s works can be applied

to European imperialism in Africa. This chapter uses these theoretical frameworks to examine the representation of the Congo in European media – specifically, the BD medium – and demonstrates how the Congolese people and their culture are essentialised for Western consumption.

Central to postcolonial critical theory is the relationship between power and knowledge, which forms the basis of Foucauldian epistemology. Foucault proposes the concept of *le savoir-pouvoir* in his 1976 volume *La volonté de savoir*, part of his four-volume study *L'Histoire de la sexualité*. *Le savoir-pouvoir* refers to Foucault's view that knowledge and power are inextricably linked – knowledge is always an exercise of power and power is a function of knowledge. Foucault challenges the traditional idea of power being wielded by people or groups by acts of domination or coercion, instead claiming that power is pervasive and is in a constant state of negotiation. He uses the term 'power-knowledge' to explain how power is determined by accepted knowledge and truths. Foucault writes in *Power/Knowledge* that truth "is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its own régime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the type of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true" (131). General politics and regimes of truth are enforced and maintained through education systems and the media. Foucault posits that as a result of this régime, there is no absolute truth but instead only truth according to the social, political, and economic roles it plays (144). In this way, specific effects of power are attached to the truth.

Saïd's work expands on this idea. Saïd believes that Foucauldian metaphysics are Eurocentric in nature, and so he extends the concept of *le savoir-pouvoir* to analyse how European colonisers were able to impose domination over colonised, docile bodies.

He investigates how this dichotomy is managed through the Western literary and cultural canon, specifically the production certain generalisations about the “Orient and Occident through totality and stereotypes” (Varol 318). As a result of the perceived primitiveness of non-Western societies and cultures – specifically, their political and cultural structures – authority and domination by a “superior power” was needed to help the non-Western society meet “Western standards such as freedom, rationality, and human progress” (Varol 318).

Orientalism is closely related to the concept of the Self and the Other. With reference to the work of Elleke Boehme, Sayeed Rahim Moosavinia notes that “Postcolonial theories swivel the conventional axis of interaction between the colonizer and the colonized or the self and the Other” (105, quoting Boehmer 1). On a similar note, Ashcroft emphasises that Orientalism is a Western invention, which constructs the East as the Other: therefore, it becomes a way of “locating” Europe’s others (Ashcroft 50). By this definition, the Orient represents everything that the West is not. The Other is everything that exists outside the Self, and is thus the Other is constructed as the strange and unfamiliar (Saïd, *Orientalism* 144).

In his later publication, *Culture and Imperialism*, Saïd presents a postcolonial analysis of influential works of fiction in the modern Western literary canon, critiquing authors such as Jane Austen and Joseph Conrad for their acceptance of colonial regimes in their narrative discourses. Through such critiques, Saïd provides a theoretical framework for analysing the relationship between imperialism and fictive narratives. Representations of the ‘Other’ in colonised societies drive imperial discourses that reflect themes of superior European power and knowledge. Saïd notes in *Culture and Imperialism* that Conrad had an inability to “conclude that imperialism had to end” (34),

drawing attention to his perspective that fictive narratives possess authority and power over the reader:

For if we cannot truly understand someone else's experience and if we must therefore depend upon the assertive authority of the sort of power that Kurtz wields as a white man in the jungle or that Marlow, another white man, wields as narrator, there is no use looking for other, non-imperialist alternatives; the system has simply eliminated them and made them unthinkable. (26)

This reflects Saïd's perspective on the duality of writers and their fictive characters, both possessing authority over the reader. In this way, imperialism monopolises the entire system of representation within the Western literary canon. On Giuseppe Verdi's nineteenth-century opera *Aida*, Saïd posits that the Orient is depicted as an "exotic, distant and antique place in which Europeans can mount certain shows of force." (Saïd, *Culture and Imperialism* 134). This representation of the Orient (the Other), where "subaltern cultures [are] exhibited before Westerners as microcosms of the larger imperial domain", operates within the same framework as depictions of Africa in European literature (Saïd, *Culture and Imperialism* 134).

Applying Saïd's criticism, this chapter will explore how representations of the Other in *Tintin au Congo* are ethnocentric in nature. American social theorist William Sumner describes ethnocentrism as the "view of things in which one's own group is the centre of everything and all others are scalded and rated with reference to it..." also noting that "Each group [...] looks with contempt on outsiders" (qtd. in Rosenblatt 131). According to Sanghamitra Ganguly, creating prototypes of colonised people was essential for making the notion of colonisation acceptable for Europeans the aftermath of

King Léopold's *État indépendant du Congo* (104). These prototypes, "steeped in prejudices," were constructed from a European ethnocentric perspective (Ganguly 104).

The concept of 'hierarchical binary opposition' is relevant to the relationship between the Self and the Other. Fundamental binary oppositions, such as light/dark or white/black, are extended in postcolonial criticism to discuss the colonised/coloniser and the Self/Other. As purely geographical directions, east and west are just two terms in binary opposition: however, once these terms are given geo-political connotations, they transform into a hierarchical binary opposition.. How The Self – which is generally European, white, and masculine in colonial discourses – is represented in a positive way, whereas its binary opposition – non-European, feminine, black – is a negative reflection on the Self. Indian literary scholar Ania Loomba posits that on this basis, the Self is the coloniser and the Other is the colonised (144). This is summarised by Moosavinia et al. as: "the Self is the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the Other is strange (the Orient, the east, 'them')" (105). By establishing non-Europeans as the Other through a binary opposition, the Western literary canon frequently dehumanises the colonised bodies it represents.

The body has always been a target of power. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, policies of coercion acting on the body were formed: the way in which the body became a site of power changed in Europe during this time. Foucault begins his notion of the 'docile body' with the ideal of a seventeenth-century soldier, continuing with the economisation of the body in the eighteenth century during Europe's Industrial Revolution. In both cases, the "body is subjected, used, transformed, and improved" to fulfil a socio-economic or political purpose, imposing a relationship of docility-utility (Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* 136). The term 'docile bodies' comes from Foucault's

*Surveiller et punir*, where he claims that individuals are under constant surveillance and regulation in ways that subtle and thus seemingly invisible, leading to the normalisation of these systems. The purpose of power relations that act on the body is to turn them into docile bodies “that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* 136). Foucault claims that the shift from torture in the eighteenth century to the modern prison system marked a “displacement in the very object of the punitive operation” from the body to the soul (Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* 16).

Contrary to these developments in Europe, the manipulation of the Congolese by the Belgian colonisers – both throughout the E.I.C. and Belgian Congo periods – is comparable to a shepherd directing a herd of animals. The brutalities of the colonial period consisted of torture, enslavement, and murder. Despite Europe’s progressing away from torture towards more humane methods, such as imprisonment, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, methods for creating docile bodies in the Congo were an unmitigated horror: during the E.I.C. period, as many as ten million people died as a result of Léopold’s rule. At the same time that the modern prison system was being used in Europe to produce docile bodies, archaic forms of punishment and discipline were used in Belgian Congo: mutilation and dismemberment were a common form of punishment (Renton et al. 31). The Belgian imposition of the types of discipline resulting in these deaths aligns with what Foucault calls the “military machine” (Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* 50). However, in this case the term ‘military’ does not refer to “fighting a war against an identifiable enemy, with its individual episodes of heroism, self-sacrifice, victory, and defeat” (Roberts 52). Rather, it refers to “occupying and controlling [...] an area populated with usable [docile] bodies” (Roberts 52).

According to Benjamin Sparks, the malleability of a docile body means it has “minimal risks of revolt but still produces maximum productivity” (19). In the context of Léopold’s E.I.C., these docile bodies were utilised to maximise productivity, which, for the colonisers, meant reaping maximum economic potential for the colony’s natural and human resources. However, colonialism in general relies on this notion of docile bodies: the power relationship – the dichotomy – between coloniser and colonised creates the colonised body, which Sparks argues is synonymous with the docile body. This chapter is concerned with how Hergé’s portrayal of Africans in *Tintin au Congo* represents how colonised bodies are synonymous with docile bodies. Relying on establishing a binarism between the Europeans and Africans in the BD, Hergé dehumanises the Congolese people, representing them as naïve, primitive, and reliant on Belgium’s civilising mission to ‘humanise’ them. *Tintin au Congo* speaks for the Congolese people, rather than them speaking for themselves. The representation and reinforcement of docility, as demonstrated in Hergé’s BD, prevents any Congolese voices from contributing towards the literary canon at this stage in its history.

## **2.2. Comics, *bandes dessinées*, and *Les Aventures de Tintin***

American cartoonist Will Eisner defines comics as “the arrangement of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea” (5). Comic books emphasise the pictorial representation of narratives where illustrations do not merely supplement the story but are instead integral in its telling. As a result, literary analysis of comic books must consider both the illustrations and words. Though the entertainment value of comics must also be considered in such analyses, the role of comic books as political texts – aiding in the dissemination of ideas – cannot be understated.

For most of the twentieth-century in the English-speaking world, comic books were considered low-brow literature that were primarily read by children. William Moulton



Marston, creator of the ‘Wonder Woman’ series, writes in a 1940 *The Family Circle* article entitled “Don’t Laugh at the Comics” that comics have “enormous potential” for children (Olive). However, four years later Marston refines his stance, speculating in his article “Why 100,000,000 Americans read comics” that adult readers make up half of this number (Marston). Marston suggests that comics’ combination of prose, dialogue, and illustrations trigger a rudimentary sensation that satisfies the mind in an emotional manner, transcending the arbitrary notions of high and low brow. Positioned between high and low art, nowadays comics occupy a position that historian Peter Swirski terms “nobrow” – they appeal to both and neither of the familiar aesthetic levels of “high” and “low” (89). However, France and Belgium have a comic book tradition that differs considerably from that in the Anglosphere.

Unlike comics in the Anglosphere, where the term ‘comic’ (or the synonymous: ‘funnies’) indicates the medium’s humorous subject matter, BDs have historically had the potential to present serious material. This is not to say that English-medium comics are not political in nature: pictorial satires and wartime propaganda comics do have a rich history in the Anglosphere. However, the term *bandes dessinées* – which translates to ‘drawn strips’ – carries no indication of subject matter, and is embraced in French and Belgian society as a genuine form of visual art. Unlike the common perspective of comic books as being ‘lowbrow’ in the (western) Anglophone world, in France and Belgium BDs are celebrated as *neuvième art* (ninth art), a term coined by Maurice de Bévère and Pierre Vankeer in 1965 to legitimise this artform. The term *neuvième art* places BDs alongside film and literature in terms of artistic value, and has helped cement the significance of this artform in French and Belgian national identities.

Ganguly notes BDs tend to use their medium realistically, with the notable exception of the Other who is frequently stereotyped in the portrayal of colonial subjects:

“[BDs] dealing with the portrayal of Africans as simian-like savages abound” (103). In the BDs of the 1930s and 1940s, non-European (non-white) characters frequently function as binary oppositions and comic foils to the European main characters. The Other is frequently portrayed as an ignorant native: Ganguly posits that this reinforces a “natural order”, where the Other is “debased and degraded” (103–4). Michelle Bumatay, a specialist on African Francophone literature, believes that originally BDs represented the Congo with “real facts such as geographical names and visual cues” (8). However, over time these factual and realistic representations were “ironed out” (Bumatay 8) in favour of a generic representation of Africa that would resonate with a wide audience in France and Belgium. French critic Phillipe Delisle refers to the subsequent portrayal of colonised Africa as “*une brousse indéterminée* [an indeterminate bush]” (Delisle 20). This generic portrayal of colonial Africa is certainly apparent in *Tintin au Congo*, where the only indication of the specific location within sub-Saharan Africa is found in the BD’s title.

The character of Tintin was created in Brussels, Belgium in 1929. He was brainchild of Georges Rémi, better known by his penname Hergé. Like Tintin, Hergé was born in Brussels. Hergé’s first BD series appeared in *Le Boy-scout belge* in 1926. A year earlier, Hergé was working for the Belgian Catholic nationalist journal, *Le Vingtième Siècle: Journal catholique et national de doctrine et d’information*, when director of the journal, Father Norbert Wallez, created a weekly serial for children, *Le Petit Vingtième*. Hergé was put in charge of *Le Petit Vingtième*, and within several months he had created the Tintin series (Doyez). *Le Vingtième Siècle* had a strong far-right, fascist viewpoint, which was a fairly common political stance in Belgium at the time (Thompson 24). The resulting series, known by the French title *Les Aventures de Tintin*, is considered to be the archetype of the modern BD. *Les Aventures de Tintin*

became one of the most successful BDs of the twentieth century, eventually being translated into some one hundred languages as well as having a Hollywood film adaptation, *The Adventures of Tintin* (2011). According to Tintin ‘biographer’ Harry Thompson, *Les Aventures de Tintin* promoted political ideas on “patriotism, Catholicism, strict morality, discipline, and naivety” (24). It is evident that *Les Aventures de Tintin* was heavily politicised: masquerading behind humorous and light-hearted cartoons, Hergé’s BDs wielded political power to (mis)represent the Congo and disseminate the Belgian colonial discourse.

In the 1929 debut volume of the series, *Tintin au pays de Soviets*, Hergé bases his view of the Soviet Union on compelling accounts of the “vices and depravities of the [Soviet] regime” (Farr 12). Through the publication of Tintin’s debut volume, *Le Vingtième Siècle* participated in anti-communist propaganda, revealing how mainstream journalism at this time was frequently politicised. Following the success of this debut volume, Wallez encouraged Hergé to create a volume that promoted the civilising mission of Belgium in the Congo. Wallez believed that the Belgian colonial administration needed promotion, and since King Albert and Queen Elisabeth had visited the Congo a few years prior in 1928, the Congo was particularly relevant to Belgians at this time. Hunt suggests that for Wallez, a colonial mission narrative also served as a marketing strategy (92). The resulting volume, *Tintin au Congo*, like *Tintin au pays de Soviets*, served both political and entertainment roles.

Later in life, Hergé expressed regret towards the early Tintin volumes as well as his personal attachment to Wallez (Waterfield). In his 1975 interview with Numa Sadoul, Hergé admitted to representing Congolese people in accordance with the prejudices of his contemporary Belgian society, describing them as “*de grands enfants* [big children]” (Venaille). In this interview, Hergé attempted to distance himself from the criticism the

earlier Tintin volumes were receiving, explaining: “*J’étais nourri des préjugés du milieu bourgeois dans lequel je vivais [...] En fait, les Soviets et le Congo ont été des péchés de jeunesse* [I was nourished by the prejudices of the bourgeois milieu in which I lived [...] In fact, the Soviets and the Congo were the sins of youth]” (Venaille). With this in mind, it is important to approach *Tintin au Congo* as a political text rather than a mere comic for schoolboys: the ideas it espouses are not just for the purpose of entertainment, but also to disseminate a patriotic, colonial discourse to the people of Belgian – and even wider European – audiences.

*Tintin au Congo* is notorious for its caricatured representation of the “black body” (Hunt 91). The racialised ‘humour’ of this *Tintin* volume chiefly arises from episodes of misrecognition. For example, Tintin’s dog Milou<sup>4</sup> mistakes a “*négré*” carpenter, entering the infirmary holding saws, for his doctor and is terrified as a result: “*Ça, jamais ! ... Plutôt mourir ! ...* [That, never! Rather die!]” (Hergé 3). The colourised version of the BD was a revised publication of Hergé’s original comic, the black-and-white *Les aventures de Tintin: Reporter du Petit “Vingtième” au Congo*. The revised and abridged publication of *Tintin au Congo* was first printed in 1947, at a time when post-war audiences were demanding engaging, colourised comic-books (Hunt 92). As well as being colourised, the revised publication omitted some of the most infamous instances of problematic imperialism found in the original. For example, Tintin’s geography lesson in a mission classroom on “*votre patrie, la Belgique* [your fatherland, Belgium]” was omitted and replaced by a mathematics lesson. Despite the decision to omit potentially offensive imperialist dialogue, the new publication did not drastically modify the caricatured and cannibalistic pictorial representation of Congolese bodies. Such

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<sup>4</sup> Note: Milou is known as Snowy in the English translations of *Tintin*.

portrayals are still found in publications of the book in the twenty-first century, which will be explored in the following chapter.

In *L'Écriture et la différence*, Jacques Derrida investigates the role of the *bricoleur*. Appropriating the term from Claude Lévi-Strauss, Derrida suggests that the *bricoleur* borrows concepts from a heritage that is less coherent or ruined to create a discourse, adapting these concepts for the purpose of the discourse (Derrida 418). The author of a BD brings together elements of text, image, colour, and format, and in this way they are a *bricoleur*. Subsequently, the reader's interpretation of the BD is dependent on how they amalgamate these "various pieces" (Grove 219). Grove claims that viewing these caricatures enables the reader to view a "snapshot" of certain clichés in historical "locations and circumstances," and in this way generates cultural reactions that are unique to today's socio-political environment (Grove 219).

### 2.3. The 'Other' in *Tintin au Congo*

According to Laurence Grove, a modern reading of *Tintin au Congo* shows how European colonial literature represents the Other. Grove refers to this presentation of the Other as "deferred" insofar that the cultural and ethnic differences of the Other are "through the eyes of a time that is no longer our own" (219). Depicting an Africanised version of the Orientalism described by Saïd, *Tintin au Congo* reflects how exotic cultures are conveyed to the reader: not through the customs and lifestyles of the Other, but rather through the "mythological portrayals" of such lifestyles (Grove 219). This representation of Africa as an exotic and mythical setting also manifests itself greatly in Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan of the Apes*, which has the premise of Viscount Greystoke and his pregnant wife, Lady Alice, being marooned and having to confront the "primeval" sub-Saharan African jungle (Burroughs 16). Writing for an American

audience, Burroughs exoticizes Africa to provide a sense of escapism for readers. The setting reinforces the romanticism of a primitive lifestyle away from the restrictions of urban civilisation (American cities), thus “endowing the reader with a Promethean sense of power” (Hart 219). In this sense, both Hergé and Burroughs project an exotic fantasy onto Africa in order to entertain their readers, which is achieved through presenting it as oppositional to Western society. The remainder of this chapter will focus on how this binary opposition in *Tintin au Congo* reflects Foucauldian notions of power and docility, and functions as evidence of the BD’s political agenda.

Louis Althusser et al. claim in *Reading Capital* that there is “no such thing as an innocent reading” (13). This claim reflects the idea that all texts, regardless of whether they are geared towards children or adults, are a coded medium. The political agenda of literature was a recurring theme throughout the twentieth century: the Nazis burning novels that contradicted their political ideologies serves as an obvious example of this. Derek Royal notes in “Colouring America” that:

Authors may expose, either overtly or through tacit implication, certain recognized or even unconscious prejudices held by them and/or their readers. In comics [...] there is always the all-too-real danger of negative stereotypes and caricature, which strips others of any unique identity and dehumanizes by means of reductive iconography – [...] generally deformed that have historically composed our visual discourse on the Other. (8)

The Tintin series highlights how BDs – as well as comics outside of European Francophone societies – are political texts. Compared to static caricatures, the “sustained and damaging fiction” of BDs complicates the impact of problematic iconographies (Mountfort 35). Reductive caricatures being sustained over an entire book, or even a

series in the case of Tintin, cements the dehumanisation of the Other, transforming such representations of the Other into ethnocentric cultural myths and prejudices. Furthermore, BDs that revolve around an idealised European hero promote the features and values of their ethnic group, while reducing the culturally differentiated foil into the inferior Other. Paul Mountfort describes this process as the “marking [of] Other/s” (35). Through the simian-like caricatures of the Congolese in *Tintin au Congo*, Hergé is able to disseminate imperialist and racist attitudes towards African people, thus promoting a damaging form of ethnocentricity. Tintin’s legacy is shown on the last page of the BD, where he is revered as a hero amongst the Congolese people: a mother tells her crying child that “*Si toi pas sage, toi y en seras jamais comme Tintin!...* [If you are not wise, you will never be like Tintin!...]” (Hergé 62). This reinforces Tintin’s binary placement with the Congolese people he visits, where he occupies a ‘white saviour’ role within the primitive society that Hergé portrays.

*Tintin au Congo* channels Hergé’s reactionary tendencies. The Congolese are represented as the grossly caricatured “juju-lipped Negro” variety (Mountfort 36). Mountfort claims that such visual codes present colonial prejudices: “Africans as, variously; credulous, untrustworthy, bloodthirsty, servile, lazy and childlike” (36). Such prejudices reproduce the dehumanising views of Africans that had been used to justify Léopold’s regime in the Congo several decades prior, perpetuating the European systems of knowledge and power that supposedly permitted the master/slave relationship between the colonist and colonised. These depictions of Congolese people represents the ‘white man’s burden’ motif – also seen in *Heart of Darkness*’ Kurtz – where Tintin’s role as a problem-solving European colonist conveys him as the antithesis of the ‘primitive’ natives.

The ‘white saviour’ role is even seen in Tintin’s dog, where Milou is portrayed as a ‘colonist animal,’ oppositional to the exotic and dangerous ‘colonial animals’ they encounter, such as leopards, rhinos, and buffalos. Milou is provided with a voice in the BD as represented by dialogue between him and Tintin; meanwhile, the colonial animals express themselves through exclamation points and question marks. On the few occasions in *Tintin au Congo* where the colonial animals do have a voice, their speech mirrors that of the Congolese people:

In one panel (below), Tintin is described by Milou as “*petit Salomon* [little Solomon]” when he breaks up a fight between two Congolese men fighting over a hat by cutting it in two (Hergé 27). The Congolese men respond: “*Li Blanc li très juste ! ... Li donné à chacun la moitié du chapeau ! Ça y en a très bon blanc* [White master very fair! Him give half-hat top each one! It’s a very good white]” (Hergé 27).



Hergé (1931)

Hergé (2006)

Elements of Eurocentrism are apparent in these panels, with Tintin being described by Milou as a wise, Solomon-like figure by the crudely illustrated Congolese characters. Solomon (French: *Salomon*) was the wealthy and wise son of King David. In the Tanakh and the Old Testament, he is portrayed as incredibly wise, wealthy, and powerful, and was the builder of the First Temple (בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ: *Beit Ha-Miqdash*) in Jerusalem. Solomon also plays a central role in H. Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* and Dante’s *Divina*



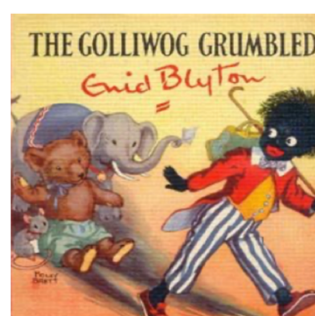
*Commedia*: in both texts he is associated with wisdom and wealth. Therefore, Milou referring to Tintin as *petit Salomon* in *Tintin au Congo* expresses that Tintin is a ‘white saviour,’ bringing wisdom and wealth to the Congo. Hergé is also referring to the famous “judgement of Solomon” two women argue over parentage of a baby, and Solomon suggests cutting the child in two. The false mother approves of the proposal, while the true mother begs to give up her claim to protect the child. As a result, the truth is revealed and Solomon can restore the child to its true mother. The Congolese characters in *Tintin au Congo* are thus portrayed as being so foolish that they are both happy with the hat cut into halves. This reinforces the socio-political purpose of *Tintin au Congo*, which was to encourage the Belgian missionary effort in their colony. The idea of the ‘white saviour’ in literary representations of the Congo will be further explored in the later chapter on Kingsolver’s *The Poisonwood Bible*.

The omission of “*Ça y en a très bon blanc* [There is a very good white]” in the 1949 colourised edition removes some emphasis of Tintin’s superiority due to his “*blanc* [white]” race. However, even in the colourised edition there is a clear binary opposition, established based on ethnicity and culture. Also of significance is the revision of the African caricatures: the simian-like faces of the Congolese people are toned down, being replaced by human-like features. And yet, the colourised version still emphasises the darkness of their complexion, rendering them completely black, and also exaggerates the size of their lips. The Congolese man on the right is shirtless, which also reinforces the notion of primitiveness: clothing is used to symbolise civilisation and progress, and the sort of clothing worn by the Congolese caricatures in *Tintin au Congo* is much less sophisticated than that worn by the European characters.

Despite Hergé's apparent remorse, caricatures of Africans continue to appear in later Tintin volumes. For example, the "visual codes" found in *Les Cigares du pharaon* are similar to those found in *Tintin au Congo* (Mountfort 27). In *Les Cigares du pharaon*, Africans are portrayed essentially as slaves to European characters and also bear the same exaggerated lips of the Congolese characters in *Tintin au Congo*. Furthermore, in *L'Oreille cassée* the 'serving-boy' (who is actually Tintin in blackface) is portrayed in an artistic style reminiscent of the controversial golliwogs in Enid Blyton's works:



Hergé (1998)



Blyton (1977)

Such caricatures erase the individuality and humanity of Africans. The waiter in the Hergé frame on the left looks more like a monkey or a doll than a human being, when compared with the white faces next to him. Chenua Achebe makes the claim that stereotypical representations of Africans in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* are dehumanising: the same critique is valid for the African caricatures in the Tintin series.

Through contrasting African characters with Tintin and other European characters, the dehumanisation of Africans promotes and celebrates European culture and imperialism. The celebration of European imperialism is a common trope in colonial-era portrayals of Belgian Congo, with examples of this being found in Conrad's novella. Ganguly relates these tropes back to missionary efforts throughout the "Christianization of Africa" wherein Africans are portrayed as sub-human, and their culture and intelligence represented as inferior to that of Europeans (105).

Michel Foucault's insight that knowledge is not innocent, but rather connected to power hierarchies, is relevant to the role that Tintin plays in *Tintin au Congo*. As a European investigative journalist, Tintin's professional role is to manage facts and knowledge. In a colonial society, it is the 'master' who possesses power through surveillance and language. Firstly, consider the Foucauldian panopticon: the master creates the illusion that the docile (Congolese) bodies under his control are constantly being watched, therefore enforcing 'good' behaviour. Furthermore, language was used as a tool of imperialism: the implementation of French-language in E.I.C. and Belgian Congo reflects this.

Tintin's observations and representations of the Congolese people he encounters constructs an image of the Other, thus "giving it currency." (Roy 30) Debbottama Roy posits that Tintin's role in his adventures to colonial societies is similar to an Orientalist scholar: "he visits foreign lands to make the 'truth' known to the world – the truth that would help Europe to establish its superiority in relation to the East and also create [...] a manageable Other which could be conveniently controlled and subjugated." (ibid) In Saïd's *Orientalism*, a parallel is established between the Other and the Orient, both of which are a political manipulation of reality to construct a binary opposition between Europe and the non-Western world. This is summarised by literary scholar Ania Loomba as showing that:

opposition is crucial to European self-conception: if colonized people are irrational, Europeans are rational; if the former are barbaric, sensual and lazy, Europe is civilization itself, with its sexual appetites under control, and its dominant ethic that of hard work; if the Orient is static, Europe can be seen as

developing and marching ahead; the Orient has to be feminine so that Europe can be masculine. (47)

Loomba expresses how Orientalism relies on binary oppositions. In order to construct the power hierarchies central to Foucauldian criticism, Hergé portrays distinct contrasts between Tintin (as well as other European characters) and the Congolese characters in *Tintin au Congo*.

According to Scott McCloud, comics are composed of ‘cartoons’ used to represent a person, place, or thing. A key characteristic of cartoons is “amplification through simplification” (30): it abstracts an image through simplifying its form, while also amplifying its visual meaning. These abstractions, coupled with Hergé celebrated *ligne claire* illustration style, allow for reader identification with Tintin. This *ligne claire* style combines realism and abstractions, permitting the reader to ‘travel’ the globe through their identification with Tintin. Through the use of binary opposition creating the power hierarchy seen between Tintin as the ‘colonial master’ and the Congolese as docile bodies, it seems clear that *Tintin au Congo* functions to encourage the Othering of Africans to European readers.

An image on the last page of *Tintin au Congo* shows an entire village praising Tintin (62). Two Congolese men are seated at a table, one remarking “*Dire qu’en Europe, tous les petits Blancs y en a être comme Tintin*” (Hergé 62):



Hergé (2006)

Such scenes reassure the role of white supremacy in *Tintin au Congo*, suggesting that the colonised body is bettered through European ‘guidance.’ In this way, Tintin is spearheading the Belgian civilising mission in Belgian Congo. Perhaps most notable about this panel are the statures/totems erected in honour of Tintin and Milou. Likely referential to the Nkondi idols of the Kongo people in the region, such statues have historically functioned as spiritual idols tasked with hunting down wrong-doers and witches. The depiction of Congolese caricatures bowing in front of these statues further suggests the mystical role that Tintin occupies in the mind of the villagers following his mission. This links back to Kurtz’s idea in *Heart of Darkness* that the native will always tend to regard the European Imperialist as a deity. This is an old European fantasy: it goes back to the accounts of the death of Captain Cook, which were said to result from the Hawai’ian’s perception of him as the god Lono; Cortez’ conquest of the Aztec, who allegedly regarded him as the god Quetzalcoatl; and Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (Obeyesekere 8–10).

The reality of the ‘civilising’ mission is far removed from Hergé’s BD. Rather, European colonists in *État indépendant du Congo* and Belgian Congo, such as Henry Morton Stanley, tortured and murdered the colonised Congolese people he encountered. An account from *King Leopold’s Ghost* (1998) states that: “Soldiers made young men kill or rape their mothers and sisters” (Hochschild 166). *Heart of Darkness* portrays the reality of the civilising mission: “I could see every rib, the joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope; each had an iron collar on his neck, and all were connected together with a chain” (19). Hochschild discusses how in postcolonial Belgium, there is little collective memory of the atrocities carried out in Belgian Congo: an absence of this history in “museums, novels, textbooks, and any other public outlet throughout Belgium.” (Ganguly 108) The attempted removal of such historical atrocities from historical records reinforces the significance of postcolonial literary studies. While works such as *Heart of Darkness* communicate to contemporary readers the horrific realities of imperialism, determining the relevance of more light-hearted literature like *Tintin au Congo* is more complex.

In concluding this chapter, it should be noted that a reading of *Tintin au Congo* may evoke a sense of unease in the reader. This is likely a result of the transposition of the colonial stereotypes that are deemed offensive by modern standards. However, these stereotypes were acceptable – even endorsed – in the historical context of Hergé’s own Belgian society, especially in a right-wing publication. Hergé portrays Africa as an exotic paradise, with imagery suggestive of pre-civilisation. Specifically, Belgian Congo is shown as an adventure playground for Europeans, with naïve and uneducated natives begging for European civilising missions to educate them on the ways of Western culture.

Eurocentrism underpins Hergé's misrepresented and generic portrayal of Africa. Saïd's theoretical frameworks found in *Orientalism* – that the Other is sub-human, morally and intellectually inferior to their European counterparts – can be used to explain this Eurocentrism. On this basis, contemporary critics have condemned *Tintin au Congo* for its racist themes. Recent public outcry over the BD's controversial, dated themes has raised the question of whether its re-publication in the twenty-first century is appropriate. This chapter has explained that while Hergé's racialised BD album does 'Other' and dehumanise African bodies and cultures, it serves an important role in the contemporary understanding of colonial discourses.

Although the representation of the Belgian mission in *Tintin au Congo* is misleading – bordering on propaganda – it does illustrate how the Belgian government attempted to conceal the brutality of their colonisation of Belgian Congo. *Tintin au Congo* demonstrates how Belgian authors and artists used popular media to manipulate public perceptions of reality – masking the truth – while also expressing an agenda aligned with Belgian colonist discourses.

### Chapter Three: *A Burnt-Out Case*

Graham Greene's novel *A Burnt-Out Case* was first published in Sweden in 1960, and then in the United States and United Kingdom the following year (Thomas 64). Greene, who had visited Liberia in 1935 and British West Africa during World War II, travelled to Belgian Congo in 1959 to research *léproseries* for his upcoming novel. He kept a diary during his time in Belgian Congo, which was published as *In Search of a Character* in 1961:

I went to the Belgian Congo in January 1959 with a novel already beginning to form in my head by way of situation – a stranger who turns up in a remote leper-colony. I am not as a rule a note-taker, except in the case of travel books, but on this occasion I was bound to take notes so as to establish an authentic medical background. (Greene, *In Search of a Character: Two African Journals* 7)

Arriving in Belgian Congo, Greene met with Doctor Lechat, the medical director of the Yonda *léproserie*. During his tour of the *léproserie*, Greene learnt about the social stigma attached to leprosy patients and progress in the treatment of this disease. Lepers whose disease was cured after it had claimed their extremities were referred to by medical personnel as “burnt-out cases” (Greene, *In Search of a Character* 47). On such cases, Greene notes: “This is the parallel I have been seeking out between my character X and the lepers. Psychologically and morally he has been burnt out” (Greene, *In Search of a Character* 37). However, the thematic focus of *A Burnt-Out Case* is not leprosy: rather, the disease is used as a vessel for Greene's exploration of cultural hegemony and Eurocentrism in a colonial space. Marie-Francoise Allain quotes Greene as saying on *A Burnt-Out Case* that “the leprosy [...] is not, after all, what the novel's about so much as about what goes on in the minds of the characters” (Allain 64).



In the dedication of *A Burnt-Out Case*, Greene states that “This Congo is a region of the mind, and the reader will find no place called Luc on any map” (Greene, *A Burnt-Out Case* xiv). This would seem to suggest that the novel falls into the trap of ironing out realistic representations of the Congo and instead presenting a generic, exoticized setting that reinforces the othering of Africa and Africans. Furthermore, the novel’s narrative structure is fundamentally similar to that of other early-twentieth century colonial novels: the protagonist Querry goes on a physical journey to the interior of Africa which also serves as a journey of self-discovery. When considered in this way, Greene’s novel seems to merely be a retelling of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. And so, it seems rational to suggest that *A Burnt-Out Case* perpetuates the Eurocentric discourses of other works in the Western literary canon. Supporting this, Peter Mudford claims that “though [Greene’s] novels were set in many different countries, his attitudes and beliefs were, like his contemporaries, Eurocentric” (12).

However, before dismissing Greene as another modernist writer unable to see other cultures through anything but Western eyes, it is necessary to contextualise what Greene means when he states that the “Congo is a region of the mind” (Greene, *A Burnt-Out Case* xiv). This chapter will analyse the structure of the societies Greene portrays in his novel – the Westerners and the Congolese – to determine if Greene is critically reflecting on the effects of colonisation in Africa in *A Burnt-Out Case*.

This analysis will be guided by the theoretical frameworks of Yuri Lotman and Søren Kierkegaard. Yuri Lotman’s notion of semiospheres is a useful framework for investigating how Greene presents postcolonialism in *A Burnt-Out Case*. It considers cross-cultural relations through ‘permeable borders’ within a given society and information-exchange between coexisting cultures. When approaching the European characters in *A Burnt-Out Case* from a cultural semiotic framework, it becomes apparent

that Greene gives the characters on the border of the semiosphere his top honours. Such characters embrace elements of Congolese culture alongside their own imported culture and values forming a hybrid culture and set of values. In this sense, *A Burnt-Out Case* breaks away from Eurocentric colonial discourse present in *Heart of Darkness* and *Tintin au Congo*. This also refutes Mudford's claims that Greene's writing is Eurocentric.<sup>5</sup>

To analyse the role of semiospheres in *A Burnt-Out Case*, this chapter will focus on how Greene is able to develop a range of characters within the novel's European semiosphere that function as a critique of colonialism in Africa, specifically Greene's fictionalised version of Belgian Congo. Characters situated at the 'core' of the European semiosphere are shown to embrace traditional values of Eurocentrism, imperialism, and cultural hegemony. However, these characters have their foils in the more favourable 'border' characters of Greene's novel, who are shown to engage in the cultural exchange of ideas and values with the African semiosphere.

### 3.1. Theoretical Frameworks: Lotman and Kierkegaard

In Conrad's and Hergé's portrayals of the Congo, relationships between colonisers and colonised subjects are founded on the hegemonic dominance of the former over the latter. The concept of cultural hegemony is attributed to Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, and is used to explain how influential economic or social groups – specifically,

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<sup>5</sup> It is worthwhile noting the similarities between Lotman's idea of 'semiospheres' and Mary Louise Pratt's concept of "the contact zone" (Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* 6). Pratt describes this concept as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination — like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (ibid). Elsewhere, she talks about "transculturation", which she calls "a phenomenon of the contact zone" (ibid).

the capitalist class: the *bourgeoisie* – come to dominate society without (explicitly) using coercion. The manipulation of social and cultural institutes provides the dominant group with the ability to control the preferences of the subordinate group in favour of the existing order (Mastroianni). In a colonial context, this dominance is compounded by an apparent disinterest or disdain from the Western semiosphere towards the native one, where it is perceived as a “non-structure” (Valverde Jiménez, “Civilizing Africa” 155). I propose that Greene’s reflection on the effects of colonialism in Africa focuses on Colin and Query’s criticism of the hegemonic European attitudes towards native Africans, coupled with their comments on the absurdity of these attitudes.

Valverde Jiménez draws on the works of Søren Kierkegaard in her proposal that Greene employs the narrative strategies of “indirect communication” and “attack and defence” for his representation of hegemony and colonialism in *A Burnt-Out Case* (“The Ethics of Facing Western Nations” 111). In *Training in Christianity*, Kierkegaard states that “[i]ndirect communication can be produced by the art of reduplicating the communication” (132). This means the writer is engaged in “mediation between estranged or conflicting positions,” where contradictory messages or ideas are inserted into a text, and the reader must play an active role in determining their personal understanding of these contradictions (Kierkegaard 132). Thus, the reader must reconsider their preconceptions and perspectives, so that they self-reflect and revise them. Greene uses this same attack and defence strategy to insert contradictory messages into the text. In *A Burnt-Out Case*, indirect communication and attack and defence appear in the form of characters’ espousing of pro- and anti-imperialistic ideas. As will be later discussed, Greene is able to insert these contradictory attitudes towards imperialism within the third-person narrative using free indirect discourse, giving readers the illusion of unmediated apprehension of characters’ thoughts.

In *Graham Green, Soren Kierkegaard, and the Discourse of Belief*, Anne T. Salvatore claims that Greene was influenced by Kierkegaard, and employs these strategies of indirect communication and attack and defence in *A Burnt-Out Case* (42). As a writer, Greene rejects his role as a teacher of morals, and instead uses his novels as “incitements to an awareness of the moral capability” (Salvatore, *Graham Greene, Soren Kierkegaard, and the Discourse of Belief* 42). Instead of directly presenting the moral teachings he wishes to impart upon the reader, he presents contradictory perspectives on imperialism for the reader to personally critique. Kierkegaard’s framework proposes that the reader’s “conventional assumptions become defamiliarized [...] so that they can criticize and revise them” (Valverde Jiménez, “The Ethics of Facing Western Nations” 112). This framework suggests that *A Burnt-Out Case* should not be considered a closed structure but rather one that is open – gaps of meaning exist in the novel for the reader to fill. The paradoxes created by the spectrum of characters in Greene’s discourse allow these gaps to occur. These gaps constitute the contradictions between characters existing at the core of the European ‘semiosphere’ and those situated at its borders.

Greene’s representation of cultures and societies in *A Burnt-Out Case* can be divided into two semiospheres: the Western and the native (alternatively, the European and the Congolese). The two semiospheres are fundamentally equivalent to the binary oppositions discussed in the chapters on *Heart of Darkness* and *Tintin au Congo*: however, within this framework the dichotomy between Self and Other can be thought of as a complex spectrum rather than a simple, binary model. The term semiosphere is derived from the field of cultural semiotics, and was coined by Soviet scholar Yuri Lotman:

Humanity, immersed in its cultural space, always creates itself around an organized spatial sphere. This sphere includes both ideas and semiotic models

and people's recreative activity, since the world which people artificially create (agricultural, architectural and technological) correlates to their semiotic models. (Lotman 203)

Central to this concept is the idea of a boundary surrounding each semiosphere. This boundary is a permeable 'border' that separates it from other cultures. Lotman claims that this frontier is "represented by [...] bilingual translatable filters, passing through which the text is translated into another language [...] situated outside of the semiosphere" (208). The border of a semiosphere is the boundary of cross-cultural communication and is "fundamental when defining the semiosphere itself as a differentiated entity" (Valverde Jiménez, "Civilizing Africa" 152).

Internal homogeneity is characteristic of a semiosphere and is foundational in the idea formation of what is 'foreign' or 'alien' (Lotman 214). Each semiosphere contains a differing perspective of the surrounding world, which is heavily entwined with its cultural and social identities. One culture requires the comparison of surrounding cultures in order to define its own essence and limits: thus, the border of a semiosphere is of great significance when considering cross-cultural relations, such as the relationship between the European and Congolese characters in Greene's novel. The border functions as an abstract, permeable divider, allowing the exchange of 'texts' (information) between cultures and societies:

The border of semiotic space is the most important functional and structural position [...] The border is a bilingual mechanism, translating external communications into the internal language of the semiosphere and vice versa. Thus, only with the help of the boundary is the semiosphere able to establish contact with non-semiotic and extra-semiotic spaces. (Lotman 210)

Therefore, the border separates a given semiosphere from surrounding semiospheres, while also having the potential to unite the two semiospheres. According to philosopher Mircea Eliade, the concept of semiospheres and their borders is derived from fundamental oppositions in human culture: the division of the world into ‘our world’ and the ‘alien world’ (Eliade 29). Eliade’s idea aligns with Saïd’s notion of Orientalism, where the Orient and Occident exist as a binary opposition, where the Occidental understanding of Self is informed by what it does not have in common with the Orient (the Other). And so if the space within one semiosphere is perceived as ordered, safe, and rational, then the outside space is perceived as disorganised, unsafe, and absurd – potentially even being perceived as a ‘non-culture.’

Lotman’s model departs from the theoretical frameworks used in earlier chapters in that it also considers the differences between the core of a semiosphere and its border: those who are fully immersed in the homogeneity of the semiosphere exist within its core, while those engaged in the cross-cultural exchange of information are situated at the border. Brazilian linguistics academic Ekaterina Vólkova Américo claims there is a “meaningful difference” between the core and the periphery of a semiosphere: “the centre [...] of the semiosphere is inactive, unable to evolve; the periphery, on the other hand, is extremely dynamic due to its ongoing exchange of information with the extrasemiotic space” (11). Periphery texts within the semiosphere – through being in contact with extrasemiotic spaces – represent the “catalyst of culture,” and due to their dynamism will, over time, make their way to the core of the semiosphere through a process that Vólkova Américo refers to as the “center-periphery opposition” (12). Relevant to this, Lotman proposes that in each semiosphere there are individuals who, due to their talents or employment, come into contact with other semiospheres. These ‘border characters’ are situated at the frontier of their semiosphere, and form a “zone of cultural bilingualism,

ensuring semiotic contacts between two worlds” (Lotman 211). This model, especially the notion of border characters, forms a useful framework to analyse the relationship between the European and Congolese characters in *A Burnt-Out Case*. Specifically, this model provides the framework behind how characters situated at the frontier regions of the European semiosphere in *A Burnt-Out Case* – chiefly Colin and the priests – participate in the cultural exchange with the bordering Congolese semiosphere. The overlap of these semiospheres relates back to Pratt’s “contact zone” concept. Physically, these spaces are “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths” (Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* 33). In Greene’s novel, this physical space is the *léproserie* and the nearby town of Luc.

This theoretical framework on semiospheres is complemented by Kierkegaard’s ideas of indirect communication and attack/defence. Greene’s mode of attack is most evident in the characters who alienate themselves from African culture, such as Rycker and Father Thomas: these characters seem to make no effort to understand African culture and society. This criticism extends so far as to alter Greene’s narrative when a character such as Rycker is the reflector of the discourse:

In a village by the road stood a great wooden cage on stilts where once a year at a festival a man danced above the flames lit below; in the bus thirty kilometres before they pass something sitting in a chair constructed out of a palm-nut and women fibres into the rough and monstrous appearance of a human being. (61)

This is an example of free indirect discourse, a narrative technique that embeds the thoughts of a character in the third-person narrative itself. Third-person denotations of Rycker’s thoughts or speech, such as ‘Rycker thought’ or ‘Rycker said to himself,’ are not present in the above extract, and instead Rycker’s perception of the world is given

directly by the narrator. Free indirect discourse combines elements of first-person and third-person narration, where the reader is given an objective perspective of the events in the novel while also fostering the subjectivities of specific characters. In this case, the reader is given a more immediate encounter with Rycker's consciousness. Rycker exhibits no interest in understanding Congolese imagery and symbolism, and instead he simply regards such symbols as "things". The above passage focalises Rycker's perspective through free narrative discourse. This is an effective use of Kierkegaard's strategy of indirect communication, as it presents a contradictory perspective to those expressed by Querry and Colin through free indirect discourse. The characters existing at the border of the European semiosphere express disdain for colonialism through free indirect discourse: meanwhile, Rycker's perspective channels cultural hegemony, as he reduces culturally significant artefacts to being mere 'things,' describing them as "monstrous" (Greene, *A Burnt-Out Case* 61).

In the novel, cultural hegemony is portrayed through the control by a small group of men of the politics and economics of the region. Characters like Rycker and Father Thomas occupy a space at the core of the semiosphere, where they are sheltered from cultural exchanges. They are presented as Europeans who are physically in Africa, but whose minds remain in Europe. At the very core of the novel itself is the idea that the Congo is a region of the mind: however, this outlook is not demonstrated through these characters, but rather through the characters situated at the frontier of the semiosphere. While the novel's main characters exist in the same semiosphere, the varying degrees of connection with African culture divides them into two groups: characters who defend the idea of colonialism in Africa, and characters who attack it. As a result, the European characters in *A Burnt-Out Case* cannot be reduced to a homogenous community but rather a spectrum of characters situated within the European semiosphere.



As a result of failing to adapt to their semiosphere in Africa, Rycker, Father Thomas, and Parkinson experience alienation from the surrounding African culture. However, on the other hand several European characters in Greene's novel – the priests, Doctor Colin, and Query – demonstrate an understanding of both European and African cultures, forming a hybrid system of thinking that helps bridge gaps between the two cultures. According to Dobozy, these characters “take Africa as given, striking an attitude of acceptance, charity, and even resignation, even placing service over gain in an attempt to undo or mitigate the harm done in the name of country” (435). Such characters are situated at the border of the European semiosphere in the novel, where they are able to translate information between the European and Congolese semiospheres. As a result, these characters engage in a cultural exchange through existing in the “contact zone”.

Comparing these groups of European characters in *A Burnt-Out Case* reveals two, distinct groups within the European semiosphere. These differing attitudes creates an unsurmountable rift that culminates in Query's death near the end of the novel. To contextualise this, the rift can be compared to the various disagreements between Roger Casement and the *Force Publique* during the former's investigation into the human rights abuses in the E.I.C. The Casement Report of 1904, through its detailing of the atrocities carried out in the state, was instrumental in Léopold's relinquishing of his private holdings over E.I.C. in 1908.<sup>6</sup> Greene's critical attitude towards European colonialization focuses on European characters who support cultural hegemony and imperialism. Greene does not focus directly on the centre of the Congolese semiosphere directly, but rather

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<sup>6</sup> Mario Vargas Llosa focuses on this historical context in his 2010 historical novel *El sueño del celta*, where the colonial subjugation and enslavement of the native inhabitants of the Congo basin during Léopold's reign are presented as a journalistic chronicle.

on the European characters situated at the border of their semiosphere. As a result, any presence of the native or African semiosphere in the novel is managed through European perspectives.

The African semiosphere plays a significant role in the narrative when Doctor Colin describes the religious views of the lepers as “a strange Christianity” (58). The Congolese worship both Jesus and Nzambe, merging the imported European Catholicism with their pre-colonial indigenous spirituality. The majority of the priests show an acceptance of this hybrid faith system, which Valverde Jiménez refers to as “ecumenical” (“Civilizing Africa” 157). The ecumenical nature of this Catholicism demonstrates how the European priests and Doctor Colin are at the periphery of the European semiosphere, and the Congolese they interact with are at the periphery of their own semiosphere. The priests translate the cultural ‘texts’ of the other semiosphere, thus “transforming the core of each semiosphere” through disseminating these ideas inwards, towards those less exposed to other cultures (Valverde Jiménez, “Civilizing Africa” 157). Through being exposed to disseminated information from the periphery of the European semiosphere, Querry is able to migrate towards the border himself: this transition is foundation in his character development, where he goes from being Eurocentric (at the core of the semiosphere) to be more immersed with Congolese culture (at the border, and thus engaging in the cultural exchange himself).

Querry’s assigned servant, Deo Gratias, wishes to locate ‘*Pendéle*’ – a place of spiritual enlightenment in Greene’s portrayal of pre-colonial Congolese spirituality. Analogous to the Garden of Eden, *Pendéle* is hidden away in the interior of the jungle. This representation of Africa’s exoticism is an example of primitivism being positively portrayed. Of course, the ancient tradition of positive primitivism (which goes back at least as far as Classical portrayals of the Golden Age) has been connected with Africa by

writers before Greene. As far back as the works of H. Rider Haggard in the late nineteenth century, some novelists used a positive, romanticising primitivism to portray Africa in a positive light, where the continent possesses an unspoiled secret that rational Western civilisation has lost its misguided sense of progress (Abrams 244–45). In Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* and *She*, the allure of primitivism is represented by the Garden of Eden setting: an untouched paradise; a place of unspoiled beauty. Literary scholar James David Hart claims that *Tarzan of the Apes* also portrays primitivism in a positive way: “Tarzan was a joyous symbol of primitivism, an affirmation of life” (219). When used this way, exoticism and primitivism offer the reader a sense of escapism, where Africa is constructed as an escape from the sense of ennui readers felt in Western society. Greene taps into this positive depiction of primitivism with the description of *Pendéle*, which contradicts other instances in the novel where the tradition of negative primitivism (as extensively deployed by Conrad) is apparent. This negative primitivism emphasises savagery, whereby sub-Saharan Africa is portrayed as a dark, dangerous, and hellish landscape. The theme of suffering established at the beginning of *Pendéle*, with the dark, African setting functioning as a pathetic fallacy, mirrors Query’s initial characterisation as a ‘burnt-out case.’ However, as Query migrates towards the periphery of the European semiosphere, where he begins to engage in a cultural exchange with the Congolese – Deo Gratias, for example – Greene’s depiction of the African landscape becomes less bleak and more romanticised.

Deo almost dies in his attempt to locate *Pendéle*, but tells Query that this risk was worthwhile because in this place “*nous étions heureux* [we were happy]” (Greene, *A Burnt-Out Case* 78). *Pendéle* functions as Query’s inward retreat: Baldridge notes that Greene “leaves it ambiguous [...] as to whether [*Pendéle*] is a real place or merely a product of Deo Gratias’s fancy” (Greene, *A Burnt-Out Case* 124). Query is initially

characterised as having an antisocial mentality: “humans are not [his] country” (Greene, *A Burnt-Out Case* 51); however, he later adopts a similar mentality to Deo Gratias in viewing *Pendéle* as a mental and physical place that he is trying to locate: “If there is a place called Pendéle [...] I would never bother to find my way back” (172). This is how Greene uses Query to attack the idea of colonialism and its consequences for the Congolese semiosphere – the character’s experience in the Congo is a pivotal period in his life: he evolves from being a “passenger without any actually roots to a man who has to fight for the new life he has been able to build” (Valverde Jiménez, “Civilizing Africa” 159). Query’s character development is only possible through his encounter with the native semiosphere. Like Colin and the priests, Query is able to function at the periphery of the European semiosphere, engaging in a cultural exchange with the Congolese semiospheres. As a result, he is a “border character” within the Lotman model (Valverde Jiménez, “Civilizing Africa” 160).

### 3.2. Greene’s Attack on Colonialism

Greene uses the border character roles of Doctor Colin and Query to attack colonialism and portray its negative consequences. It is worth noting that Query is open about his religious indifference and Colin about his atheism. Meanwhile, the unsympathetic character of Rycker is presented as a dutiful Catholic man. Father Thomas, perhaps the strictest religious character in the novel, is presented as depassionately orthodox in his practices. D.J. Dooley claims that the “farther the religious people in [*A Burnt-Out Case*] are from Rome, the more favourably Greene seems to present them” (Dooley 348). The figurative distance between the favourable characters and Catholicism allows them to exist on the borders of the European semiosphere. These characters are not blinded by

religious zeal and paternalistic European attitudes and are instead open to engaging in cross-cultural communication with the Congolese semiosphere.

Instances of Colin's anti-colonial perspectives are expressed through free indirect discourse, such as the reference to atrocities carried out by Europeans colonists in various African colonies: "Hola Camp, Sharpeville, and Algiers had justified all possible belief in European cruelty" (43). The idea of colonialism being an act of "European cruelty" is communicated to the reader through third-person narration. It remains clear the narrative is an internal focalisation of Colin's perspective due to the emphasis on "patients" and "curing" in the surrounding text. However, Colin also directly attacks colonialism through direct speech, such as when he accuses European colonialism of inflicting harm upon the Congolese: "These people here are all dying – oh, I don't mean of leprosy, I mean of us" (174). Through the use of both free indirect discourse and direct speech, Colin is characterised as having an anti-colonialist stance. His reasoning for this is due to the negative consequences colonialism has on African colonised subjects, which violates his loving and compassionate philosophy.

Colin is characterised as being admirably invested in treating his patients at the *léproserie*. He does not view his patients as being mere 'lepers' in the metaphorical sense – that is, social pariahs – but rather humans who are suffering as a result of unfortunate circumstances. This perspective extends to the racism that is intrinsically linked with colonialism, where differences between the Europeans and Congolese (of which skin colour is the physical manifestation) form the basis of 'othering.' The alienation of lepers has Biblical roots: in the Torah and the Old Testament's Book of Leviticus, leprosy is associated with sinning and impurity. For example, in Leviticus 13.43-6:

The priest is to examine him, and if the swollen sore on his head or forehead is reddish-white like a defiling skin disease, the man is diseased and unclean. The priest shall pronounce him unclean because of the sore on his head.

Anyone with such a defiling disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, 'Unclean! Unclean!' As long as they have the disease they remain unclean. They must live alone: they must live outside the camp. (*King James Version of the Bible*, Lev 13.43-46)

However, in the New Testament there are several instances of Jesus cleansing and healing people with leprosy, such as in Luke 17.11-19 where Jesus cleansed the feet of ten lepers. Colin's compassion towards his patients parallels the sympathetic and compassionate approach Jesus has towards lepers in the New Testament, where the idea of lepers being social pariahs is challenged. In *A Burnt-Out Case*, leprosy provides a metonym for the social significance and stigmatisation of skin. Skin tone also functions as a marker of racial identity, and so as a socially stigmatised disease, the role of leprosy in Greene's novel offers an indirect attack on the role skin and racial identity play vis-à-vis colonialism. In rejecting the tendency to ostracise lepers, Colin in the novel also rejects the racist structures of colonialism.

Query's development throughout the novel also functions as an attack on colonialism. Greene portrays the Congo as an empty landscape. The "emptiness" of the landscape forms a parallel with Conrad's depiction of the Congo, which is described in *Heart of Darkness* on several occasions as being empty and void (119). Greene's depiction of the Congo as empty is as a pathetic fallacy, corresponding to Query's own emotional and spiritual emptiness. Despite Query's initial inability to realise it, this is why Africa has such a pull on him. He tells Colin that the goal of his journey is "to be in an empty place," but is unable to expand on his rationale when questioned by the captain

earlier in the novel (Greene, *A Burnt-Out Case* 46). Anywhere in the ‘Oriental world’ – which is geographically further away from Europe than sub-Saharan Africa – would have offered the same sort of escape. However, to Query the Congo seems “a lot further off” (Greene, *A Burnt-Out Case* 146). As a result of abundant (albeit, erroneous) representations in European discourse, the Oriental world seems familiar to Query: “There was one [plane] going to Tokyo [...] but somehow [the Congo] seemed a lot further off. And I was not interested in geishas or cherry-blossom” (Greene, *A Burnt-Out Case* 146). Meanwhile, Africa is a “denuded space, less known within Western discourse” (Purssell 12). When he first arrives in the Congo, Query is characterised as an empty shell of a man, searching for meaning and pleasure in life. Cedric Watts notes that Query’s name “brings to mind the Latin verb *quaere*: question, search for, or seek in vain,” reflecting the very search for selfhood that the protagonist embarks on (Watts, *A Preface to Greene* 157). Query’s emptiness is part of what allows him to connect with the Congolese semiosphere as a border character: deemed a ‘burnt-out case’ by Colin on account of his lack of spirit, his mental affliction parallels the physical ailments of the Congolese lepers. He is able to view their situation sympathetically. Because it frees him from being blinded by religious zeal like Rycker and Father Thomas, it is Query’s ‘burnt-out’ condition that allows him to see the flaws in colonialism.

While he is visiting the provincial city of Luc, free indirect discourse focalises Query’s perspective, hinting at the impracticality of European architecture in Belgian Congo: “a block of blue and pink modern flats by a little public garden where no one sat on the hot cement benches” (32). Furthermore, a contrast between European and African civilisations is later presented as free indirect discourse when Query walks through the cathedral: “the European saints, pale like albinos in the dark continent” (172). Referring back to the idea of binary oppositions, the light/dark opposition refers to the difference

in skin tones between Europeans and Africans, as well as the connotations of lightness and darkness. Lightness represents development and progress, whereas darkness represents savagery and backwardness. However, the use of this binary opposition here is cynical, since the paleness of the priests is compared to albinism through a simile. Vision impairment – often blindness – is a key feature of albinism, and so the reference here indicates the blindness of religious missions in the Congo. Following this free indirect discourse, Querry's longing for *Pendéle* is expressed through indirect discourse: "If there were a place called *Pendéle*, he thought, I would never bother to find my way back" (172). As discussed earlier, *Pendéle* represents an Edenic location in the Congolese spirituality of Greene's novel, symbolic of the spiritual enlightenment achieved prior to European colonisation. Querry's longing for *Pendéle* shows how he is operating as a border character, as he is seemingly rejecting the role of imported Christianity in the Congo and instead embracing the spirituality of the native semiosphere. Interestingly, *Pendéle* in Greene's novel is similar to the French term '*pendée*,' which means 'hanging' and 'suspended': this is perhaps a nod to the location being in a limbo outside and between other places.

Greene's attack on colonialism also draws attention to the exploitation involved with the European missions in Africa. For example, the episode where the fake member of the Salvation Army takes advantage of the Congolese:

[...] he had given certificates insuring them against the danger of being kidnapped by the Catholic and Protestant missionaries who, he said, were exporting bodies with the help of witchcraft whole-sale to Europe in sealed railway trucks where they were turned into canned food labelled Best African Tunny. (120)

The fake member of the Salvation Army deceives the villagers in order to get their blankets and money. This conveys how European colonists prey on the innocence of the



Congolese in order to capitalise on resources and labour, especially within the historical context of Stanley and Léopold. The short episode here summarises the imperial greed of Europeans in the Congo, especially concerning the role of the so-called religious civilising missions.

Interestingly, it is through the novel's dutiful Catholic characters that Greene directs another attack on colonialism. Rycker and Father Thomas are portrayed as being so absorbed by religious hubris that they are unable to leave the homogenous core of the European semiosphere. Rycker is shown to be uninterested in connecting with Congolese society, seemingly rejecting anything other than Western culture through his self-imposed alienation. Rycker embodies Western traditionalist values, notably his chauvinistic attitude towards his wife, Marie: "I've trained her to know what a man needs" (36). His limited contact with Congolese people imposes Western dominance and imperialistic attitudes: "You know you have to shout at them a little. They understand nothing else" (34). Valverde Jiménez suggests that Rycker's role illustrates to the reader how cultural hegemony dehumanises Africans through the creation of a binary opposition within the narrative discourse: civilisation (European) versus "barbarism" (African) (116). Rycker is characterised as the archetypal European colonist, as he has no interest in the culture and welfare of the colonised people, and instead his interests are rooted in utilising their resources for personal economic gains.

Father Thomas is also used in Greene's attack on colonialism. Still longing for European civilisation after living in Belgian Congo for two years, Thomas' opposition to integrating with Congolese society reflects cultural hegemony in the same way as Rycker's characterisation. Thomas is shown to have a fear of darkness, which affects his ability to sleep. His fear of darkness is symbolic of his fear of African culture: as mentioned earlier, the term 'darkness' channels negative representations of the Congo in

the Conradian tradition, existing within the binary opposition of European enlightenment versus African darkness/backwardness. Furthermore, Thomas' embodiment of European hegemony affects his ability to communicate with the Congolese:

“I asked Deo Gratias. He said yes. I asked him what prayers – the *Ave Maria*, I asked him? He said yes.”

“Father Thomas, when you have been in Africa a little longer, you will learn not to ask an African a question which may be answered by yes. It is their form of courtesy to agree. It means nothing at all.”

“I think after two years I can tell when an African is lying.” (87)

Having just arrived in the Congo, Query's ability to easily communicate with the Congolese contrasts Thomas' inability to communicate outside of his semiosphere. Earlier in the novel, Query seems to understand how the natives communicate with Europeans in the region: “[Deo Gratias] said yes, but Query guessed it was what Africans always replied to a question couched like that” (31). Communication between the Congolese and Query reflects how open-minded the latter is to a new way of living: becoming culturally immersed in the African lifestyle. This reflects Query's position at the border of the semiosphere, where he is open to cultural exchange with the Congolese semisphere. Meanwhile, Thomas is trapped in the homogenous core, in much the same way as Rycker.

Thomas represents the “conservative vision of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church before the Second Vatican Council,” contrasting with the other priests in the novel, who appear to make an effort to get “closer to the modern world” and are thus portrayed as more sympathetic characters (118). The other priests are shown to be open-minded and willing to culturally integrate, reflecting the progressive attitudes of some Catholics in

the mid-twentieth century, in the years leading up to the Second Vatican Council. Within the semiosphere model, these priests are also located at the border of the European semiosphere, where they are involved in the cultural exchange with the Congolese semiosphere. For example, Thomas argues with Father Superior over the appropriateness of Marie Akimbu teaching at the school given that she has mothered children to different fathers: “What kind of example is that?” asks Thomas, to which Superior responds “*autres pays autres mœurs* [other countries, other morals]” (86). Father Superior and the other priests seem to practice a more open-minded form of Catholicism than Thomas, where they adapt their values to incorporate the cultural dynamics of Africa.

Parkinson is also presented as a character who willingly alienates himself from the Congolese semiosphere. He bases his expectations of twentieth-century Africa on romanticised Victorian fictional narratives, particularly the likes of Sir H. Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* and *She*. These novels belong to the ‘lost world’ subgenre of fantasy fiction, which has its roots in late-Victorian romance adventure novels. In Haggard’s novels, African natives are frequently portrayed as violent barbarians, while the uncharted African interior is idealised as a paradise: in other words, Rider Haggard uses both positive and negative primitivisms. Integral to the setting of lost world novels is the idea of Africa as an unexplored territory: untouched by European civilisation, shrouded with mystery and otherworldly magic. By the mid-twentieth century when Greene was writing *A Burnt-Out Case*, the exploration of Africa had caused the evolution of the lost world romance novel into planetary romance subgenre. Parkinson experiences a different Africa from the one portrayed in Victorian adventure-romance novels. He has the opportunity as a journalist to educate his Western readers, correcting the erroneous and problematic European perception of Africa and providing an accurate report of the state of affairs in his contemporary Africa. However, he chooses

not to provide an accurate representation of the Africa he experiences, as he is solely driven by ambition. He ends up writing: “The eternal forest broods along the banks unchanged since Stanley and his little band” (97).

Rycker and Thomas are shown to simply ignore African society and culture. However, Parkinson dangerously manipulates reality and in doing so perpetuates the stereotype of pre-civilisation Africa. As detailed in the previous chapter on *Tintin au Congo*, misrepresenting Africa is a major issue within the colonial Western literary canon, perpetuating imperial and hegemonic stereotypes that divide European and African people and culture. As Hergé demonstrates, instead of accurately portraying sub-Saharan Africa some European writers took the liberty of ironing out these cultures and geographies to create a generic, exoticised image. This is something Parkinson does in the novel. He functions as a cipher for what Edward Saïd calls the “the destructive dominance of a Eurocentric and totalizing view” (Saïd, ‘Intellectuals in the Post-Colonial World’ 52). Query notes that Parkinson’s “geography is wrong,” thus conjuring to mind misrepresentations of Africa in and by Europe throughout the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries (98).

Greene uses the characters of Rycker, Father Thomas, and Parkinson for his attack on European imperialism. However, he also introduces characters who defend the positive influence of Europeans in Africa. Such characters in Greene’s novel “[place] service over gain in an attempt to undo or mitigate the harm done in the name of the country” (Dobozy 435). For example, the *léproserie* priests embody the values of progressive Catholicism, with their role extending beyond mere theological services. This contrasts with Thomas’ values: “Souls could wait. Souls had eternity” (Greene, *A Burnt-Out Case* 83). The priests adapt the teachings of Catholicism in order to be inclusive of the cultural differences between Europe and Africa, assigning significance

to the role of the family: for example, baptising children born out of wedlock. Rather than blindly foisting Catholic teachings upon the Congolese, these priests are portrayed as working towards a common good.

Despite Colin being an atheist, the priests of the *léproserie* seem content working alongside him for the perceived common good. Colin states: “there are many priests who wouldn’t be happy to work with an atheist for a colleague” (82). The quest for visible unity in Christianity within the “whole inhabited Earth” also includes people from non-denominational and non-sectarian backgrounds, with the term ‘ecumenism’ being derived from the Greek *οἰκουμένη* (*oikouménē*), which translates literally to ‘inhabited’ (Matt 24.14). Colin notes that “It’s a strange Christianity we have here,” referring to the interpretation of Catholicism in a colonial context, where Africans pray to both God and *Nzambi* (58). *Nzambi a Mpungu* is the KiKongo name for a high creator god. Near the beginning of the novel, Query notices a Johnny Walker bottle containing a brown liquid and withered plants, and is told “Medicine. Magic. An appeal to his God Nzambi” (5). The ecumenical nature of Catholicism in Africa is questioned by Query here, to which the doctor responds “[The leper] half believes in Christ and half believes in Nzambi. There’s not much difference between us as far as Catholicism is concerned” (5). Throughout the novel, there seems to be an understanding amongst those situated at the border of the European semiosphere that Catholicism, as it is practised in Europe, is not entirely compatible with African society. In this way, these characters deconstruct and reconstruct what it actually means to be a Christian.

The sermon given by Superior also reflects how Catholicism is adapted for a postcolonial African context:

Now I tell you that when a man loves, he must be Klistian. When a man is merciful he must be Klistian. In this village do you think you are the only

Klistians – you who come to church? There is a doctor who lives near the well beyond Marie Akimbu’s house and he prays to Nzambe and he makes bad medicine. He worships a false God, but once when a piccin was ill and his father and other were in the hospital he took no money; he gave bad medicine but took no money [...] Everybody in the world has something that Yezu made. Everybody in the world is that much a Klistian. (80-1)

The notion of the ‘Anonymous Christian’ by Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner is relevant to this sermon. While Rahner accepted that without Jesus it was impossible to achieve salvation, he refuted that those who had never heard of Jesus would be condemned (Clinton). Father Superior and the other priests in *A Burnt-Out Case* parallel this stance, channelling the realities of Roman Catholic missions in colonial Africa. As emphasised by the phonetical discourse, Father Superior speaks in a way that mimics the speech of the locals, as well as borrowing terms from the KiKongo language. The inclusiveness and open-mindedness of the priests, including Father Superior, functions to defend the role of Catholic missions in colonial Africa.

Doctor Colin is also characterised in a way that defends the role of European colonialism in Africa. Like Father Superior and the other priests, Colin is open-minded and is willing to incorporate African values in his role at the *léproserie*. For example, he chooses to accept that some Africans can foresee their own deaths, which totally contradicts his self-proclaimed atheism. Colin is motivated by the prospect of improving the leprosy situation in Africa: as William Thomas Hill writes, “For Dr. Colin, the best man can hope to do is improve his little corner of the world or try to provide instruments that will do it for us” (77). Colin’s displays of compassion towards the maimed Congolese boys in the *léproserie* illustrates the selfless and unconditional love he offers his patients. Colin acts as an agent of change for Querry, who is impressed by the

doctor's practical and compassionate philosophy. Colin states: "I want to be on the side of change [...] Suppose love were to evolve as rapidly in our brains as technical skill has done. In isolated cases it may have done, in the saints ... in Christ, if the man really existed" (Greene, *A Burnt-Out Case* 124) We learn that Colin's wife passed away some time prior to the novel's events and is buried nearby Colin has clearly experienced his share of suffering, and yet he professes "his belief in the power of love" (Melfi 191). Colin is able to help in 'curing' Querry of his burnt-out condition – his emptiness, his ennui – through providing himself as a template for growth: Querry sees that enlightenment does not need to come from Catholic doctrine, but can instead be achieved through love and compassion triumphing over suffering.

Querry's growth can also be attributed to cross-cultural encounters between semiospheres. Querry arrives at the leper-colony as a mere "passenger" – a 'burnt-out case' – who personifies the emptiness of the dark landscape now surrounding him (9). However, by the novel's conclusion Querry is protective of his life in the Congo and his anonymity – he does not want to be connected to his former life in Europe (125). Arriving in Africa is a pivotal point in Querry's life, and his transition is in part achieved through his contact with the Other – the African characters, particularly Deo Gratias and the concept of *Pendèle* he introduces. Through abandoning paternalistic European attitudes, Querry glimpses a new beginning. Literature academic John Nordlof writes that Querry's struggle "involves an attempt to reject the Victorian encounter with Africa in its political, religious, and literary forms" (Nordlof 473). These Victorian encounters are rewritten by Greene in *A Burnt-Out Case*, where the civilising mission/white saviour trope – found in previous works of the literary canon, such as *Heart of Darkness* and *Tintin au Congo* – is embodied by Doctor Colin, Father Superior, and the priests. These

characters serve as “cultural translators,” bridging the gap between European society and the ‘Other’ (Valverde Jiménez, ‘Ethics of Facing Western Nations’ 121).

The relationship the European characters in *A Burnt-Out Case* build with the surrounding Congolese culture is relevant in determining whether Greene’s novel is Eurocentric. Reading the novel through Lotman’s semiosphere framework, as well as employing Valverde Jiménez’s interpretation of Kierkegaard’s indirect communication and attack/defence narrative strategies, makes it apparent that Greene uses character development in his novel to denounce the negative consequences of colonialism and hegemony in Africa, while also authentically emphasising the importance and value of Congolese culture itself.

The native semiosphere in *A Burnt-Out Case*, while lacking its own development per se, is fundamental in Querry’s characterisation. Through the contact of some European characters with the native semiosphere, the reader is able to form their own perspective on the consequences of colonialism. This is also a result of Greene’s indirect communication in the novel’s narrative discourse. The spectrum of characters existing within the European semiosphere in the novel can be simplified into two groups: one that attacks (critiques) the lasting effects of colonialism in Africa, and one that defends its role in enforcing hegemony. However, Querry’s positioning at the border of the European semiosphere ultimately suggests that the novel tries to distance itself from past fictional narratives within this canon which romanticise and promote colonialism and hegemony, and instead refocuses the narrative more on the side of the Congolese semiosphere. As previously mentioned, the characters situated at the border of the European semiosphere get Greene’s top honours in *A Burnt-Out Case*. Greene shows through these characters that he values the customs and cultures of the Congolese society



portrayed in his novel, through both their assimilation into the native society's beliefs and their critiques of colonialism.

This is not to say that Greene himself entirely abandons the paternalistic attitudes of Conrad and Hergé. Some evidence of imperialism exists in *A Burnt-Out Case*: the novel suggests that European society still has the ability to improve African society through the overlap of the two semiospheres. While *A Burnt-Out Case* does indeed distance itself from previous novels in the canon in its representation of African culture and society, the lack of Congolese voices and explicit condemnation of European conquest puts it somewhere on the border of colonialism and postcolonialism. The novel explored in the following chapter will demonstrate how novels in this canon managed interculturality in postcolonial Congolese society much less paternalistically.

## Chapter Four: *The Poisonwood Bible*

Barbara Kingsolver's 1998 novel *The Poisonwood Bible* is set between 1959 and 1986 in what is nowadays the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The novel follows an evangelical Christian preacher and his family as they adjust to life in mid-twentieth-century Congo, chiefly focusing on the family's struggle to interact with and integrate into Congolese culture and society. Through the polyphonic, first-person narratives of the Price women, Kingsolver investigates the complex relationship between Congolese and Westerners. The story is set amid the Congo's historical battle for independence – *Mouvement National Congolais* (Congolese National Movement) – involving the nation's escape from Belgian colonialism, American imperialism, and the subsequent totalitarian dictatorship of Mobutu Sese Seko.

*The Poisonwood Bible* entwines both feminist and postcolonial themes in its portrayal of the voiceless condition of Kingsolver's contemporary American women and the subjugation of an emerging Congolese national identity. Drawing from postcolonial, feminist, and narratological theoretical frameworks, such as Homi Bhabha's cultural "hybridization" theory, this chapter will examine Kingsolver's representation of, and response to, multifaceted marginalisation and social dominance. In her novel, Kingsolver merges the oppression experienced by the matriarch of the Price family, Orleanna, with the historical story of Belgium's colonisation of Congo and the imperialistic involvement of the United States of America. Orleanna's focalisation is entwined with the Congolese people's own narrative. She frequently compares herself to the Congo and its people within this historical context: "stripped of valuables" (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 198) and "changing hands, bearing scars" (89). Through assigning voices to subaltern

identities, Kingsolver critiques the sustained subjugation in patriarchal, imperialist societies.

This chapter will draw on Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in analysing the struggles of voiceless people being repressed through "deviation from an ideal," both within Kingsolver's novel and the wider historical context of the Congo's decolonisation (Spivak 323). Spivak's highly influential essay develops Gramsci's work on cultural hegemony, and tackles the issues of the "subaltern as female" alongside the "subaltern of imperialism" (323). Orleanna is initially characterised as a repressed twentieth-century American woman, in such a way that her first-person narrative personifies a colonised African nation suffering under the remnants of imperialism. Towards the end of the novel, as Orleanna gains her voice, Spivak's metaphor "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is allegorically addressed: Orleanna's narrative functions as her revolt against domination, revealing the suffering she experienced under Nathan. In this way, Kingsolver allows the subaltern to speak. However, an equation exists between the subjective struggles of a white American woman displaced in Africa, "colonised" by her husband, and those of a colonised African nation, raising clear questions about white people's (and white writers') "use" of Africa. Kingsolver gives Orleanna a voice towards the end of colonial rule. Kingsolver makes her speak: "I'll discuss it" (495) Orleanna says, trying to "invent her side of the story (492). Orleanna-as-subaltern gaining a voice towards the end of the novel comes at the expense of a re-silencing of Congolese-as-subaltern.

In a similar way to nineteenth-century feminist discourses, Kingsolver's novel is occupied by voiceless and powerless women. Perceived by patriarchal figures as characterless, they are only "visible in their own eyes" (Shureteh and Al-Khalili 42).

Orleanna is initially characterised as a woman who “has no life of her own,” and is one of five female narrators in the novel, the other four being her daughters Rachel, Leah, Adah, and Ruth-May (Kingsolver 8). All of the Price women experience varying degrees of suffering under the emotional and spiritual domination of the family’s patriarch, Nathan, who neglects Orleanna and his daughters as he becomes absorbed in a zealous mission to convert the Congolese to Christianity. Nathan’s failings as a missionary function as a multifaceted critique, speaking to the Western imperialism that operates in postcolonial societies, as well as dominating paternalistic attitudes that repressed the voices of twentieth-century American women.

Following the death of Ruth-May, Orleanna develops a distinctive voice. Through her narrative, she details her innocence and how she was originally walking “across Africa” (9) shackled as a woman who “stayed alive by instinct rather than will” (182). Shurech and Al-Khalili claim that Orleanna's characterisation is “representative of other marginalised captives downtrodden at the hands of colonialists at multiple intertwined levels,” functioning as a foil to Nathan’s role as an agent of imperialism (40). As a result of this, Orleanna is shown to have solidarity with the colonised Congolese people.

Despite having lived in Belgian Congo as a child, Barbara Kingsolver’s identity as an Anglo-American creates distance between herself and the postcolonial people directly experiencing colonial oppression. However, with *The Poisonwood Bible* functioning as a political allegory, Kingsolver establishes conspicuous parallels between the novel’s repressed female protagonists and the colonised Congolese subjects. Indian-American critic Feroza Jussawalla notes the “empathetic and sympathetic connection to the land and its people” in Kingsolver’s novel, which she believes is conducive to a

postcolonial reading of the novel (9). Departing from the ironed-out representation of the Congo seen in the works of Conrad, Hergé, and (to a lesser extent) Greene, Kingsolver's portrayal of Africa is much more realistic and sympathetic. Rather than exoticising the Congo, Kingsolver familiarises it. Kingsolver identifies with the postcolonial subjects and, through the roles of the Price women, actively engages in the negotiation of subaltern identities in her novel. The five Price women are developed as narrators who can identify with the Congolese people on account of their shared experiences of being subjugated to dominating authorities. Consequently, Kingsolver empathetically expresses a sense of solidarity in the novel between her protagonists and the colonised people of Congo.

This chapter will also consider whether an Anglo-American can be a postcolonial writer. To the extent that Kingsolver is able to portray an analogous representation of Spivak's 'subaltern' within her female American protagonists, *The Poisonwood Bible* can be considered 'postcolonialism with intent.' The narrators of Kingsolver's novel, despite being American women, are characterised as being liberated from the same forms of oppression – imperial, neocolonial, religious, political – as the Congolese people surrounding them.

#### **4.1. The Misspoken Missionary**

In *The Poisonwood Bible*, Kingsolver demonstrates how politics and religion are interwoven entities. Within the context of historical colonialism, these entities were used as a force to "convert the savages" and convince wider society that the imperialist missions being carried out in the name of democracy and Christian principles were done for the "greater good" (Ognibene 20). Drawing on the scholarship of Adam Hochschild, Elaine R. Ognibene claims that in the early days of the Congo's colonial occupation

(specifically, the *État indépendant du Congo* period), King Léopold II of Belgium “used democratic, religious rhetoric to control the rape and pillage of the Congo” (20). Raising money through the Vatican and using Christian missionaries to establish children’s colonies – supposedly to offer religious and vocational instruction – Léopold’s true motivation was to build his own colony: “He deployed priests, almost as if they were soldiers [...] to areas he wanted to strengthen his influence” (Hochschild 133). Written a century after the atrocities carried out in the E.I.C., Kingsolver’s novel engages with the continued humanitarian peril of political and religious rhetoric being weaponised to sustain colonialism.

Literary critic Pamela Demory suggests that the goal of Kingsolver’s novel is to “reveal to the wider public the devastating consequences, for the Congolese people, of exploitative foreign and local government policies” (189). Demory’s reading of the novel focuses on the “different truths” revealed through a white, female American’s experience in the Congo, compared to the patriarchal perspective expressed in the Conradian tradition (183). Similarly, the religious allegory in the novel speaks through the Price women’s narratives. Nathan Kilpatrick acknowledges the validity of Ognibene’s claims that Nathan’s control over his family is analogous to the way in which religious rhetoric is commonly employed in colonial contexts to sacrifice the good of the many to benefit those in power. However, Kilpatrick argues that solely focusing on Nathan’s rhetoric in this way is failing to acknowledge how the Price women’s narratives convey their personal transformations. These personal transformations “problematize Nathan’s colonizing religious rhetoric,” replacing it with a “plurality of religious language” that speaks “the truth of their experience in the Congo” (85). Despite this narrative technique still placing an emphasis on personal narratives, Kingsolver’s use of multiple narrators creates a more multi-faceted representation of events, with the reader becoming

acquainted with several different – perhaps even contradicting – focalisations of the ‘truth.’

Theologian Robert Schreiter proposes a “two-step procedure” for the translation of religious rhetoric within a missionary context. Firstly, “one frees the Christian message [...] from its previous cultural accretions,” allowing the “data of revelation to stand freely” of socio-political milieu; secondly, the material is translated “into a new situation” (7). Kilpatrick offers a metaphor for Schreiter’s procedure: “Christianity exists as a kernel of a grain from which the husk of culture must be stripped before it can be ingested by the recipient” (85). With Christianity itself having been historically contextualised for the Hebrew people, a certain amount of abstraction is required prior to this translation process. Thus, the process of translating religious rhetoric is a translation of meaning, not merely words and grammar (Bevans 38). Fundamentally, this view signifies that a successful missionary is able to contextualise Christianity for different societies and cultures: when done properly, missionary work grants “authority and linguistic ability to the colonized subject” (Kilpatrick 86). To this end, Nathan represents how an unskilled abstraction and translation of language can result in reductive religion.

The failings of Nathan’s religious rhetoric are hinted at by Leah early in the novel: “My father, of course, was bringing the Word of God—which fortunately weighs nothing at all” (19). While Nathan (and Leah to a lesser extent) believes that the Word of God “weighs nothing at all,” Kilpatrick notes that an obligation exists to remove any cultural residue within this rhetoric, translating Christianity into a language that is accessible for the receiving culture. This theme is explored in Greene’s *A Burnt-Out Case*, where some of the sermons delivered to the African lepers carries little weight of European culture and imperialism. Richard V. Pierard, an American historian, provides historical context

to the issues in “Americanised” missions to colonies during the period in which *The Poisonwood Bible* is set (83). In his book section “Baptists in Africa” Pierard ascribes, amongst other factors, the rise of non-denominational faith missions and a lack of training to the problematic teachings of missionaries like Nathan:

A concomitant feature of this development was the rapid growth of faith missions, which, in contrast to the denominational mission boards, required their personnel to raise their own financial support. This resulted in a new kind of missionary, one who was skilled in fund-raising at home and could make impassioned appeals for money. On the field, such people tended to be more simplistic than the traditional missionaries in their approach to proclaiming the Gospel. Many of them were less educated and informed about the culture of the peoples among whom they worked, and accordingly were condescending towards the indigenous Christians, thus perpetuating a practice that has haunted Western missions from the very beginning.

(83)

Nathan exemplifies this “new kind of missionary,” insofar as he lacks an understanding of African cultural nuances, with his rhetoric being geared towards selling Christianity as a commodity. Kingsolver herself states that Nathan is a “symbolic figure,” with his obvious character flaws “suggesting many things about the way the U.S. and Europe have approached Africa with a history of cultural arrogance and misunderstanding at every turn” (Kingsolver, ‘FAQ: Some Previous Books’). Nathan’s role as a missionary epitomises Western attitudes towards Africa, with his actions calling to mind a famous line in Karl Marx’s *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte*: “History repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce” (Marx 115). Nathan employs the same tactics as colonial missionaries had several decades earlier: however, because of Kingsolver’s



anticolonial point of view, these tactics are portrayed unfavourably. At the verge of independence in the Congo, Nathan's imperial missionary methods no longer hold sway.

Nathan's shortcomings are not necessarily limited to his ability as a missionary. Upon arriving in the Congo, Nathan attempts to establish a garden: he plants the seeds in parallel lines, as he would have done back home in Georgia. He does this despite being warned by Mama Tataba that such an arrangement is unsuitable for the Congolese climate. As a result, Nathan's garden is damaged by a storm. Afterwards, claiming that he is then "influenced by Africa," Nathan arranges the garden "into rectangular, flood-proof embankments" (63). Describing this in her narrative, Adah is quick to note that Nathan "might never admit in this lifetime that it was not his own idea in the first place" (63). Ultimately, the garden ends up failing on account of Nathan cultivating beans from Georgia, as there is a lack of honeybees in the Congo to pollinate these crops. In a rare moment of wisdom, Nathan tells Leah "You can't bring the bees. You might as well bring the whole world over here with you, and there's no room for it" (80). The crops function as a metaphor for Nathan's lack of cultural understanding, which affects his success as a preacher of God's word. While he understands that certain practices have to be adapted for the Congolese climate, he does not understand that some crops are unsuitable for cultivation in the Congo.

In a more obvious demonstration of Nathan's cultural arrogance, his sermons are poorly translated. This drastically hampers the success of his missionary work. Rather than spending time engaging with the Congolese of Kilanga or utilising Anatole's expertise in translation, Nathan's hubris has him believing he possesses a mastery of language. Here, Adah offers some insight: "It is a special kind of person who will draw together a congregation, stand before them with a proud, clear voice, and say the wrong words, week after week" (213). Nathan's hubris and zeal actually achieve the opposite

result of conversion, eventually turning the people of Kilangi against Christianity. His mispronunciation of the Kikongo word for ‘precious’ as *Bāngala* (as opposed to *Bangala*) frightens the Congolese people – Nathan is inadvertently telling them Jesus is poisonwood, a rash-inducing tree. Furthermore, Nathan insists on carrying out baptisms in a nearby river, where several children of the village had previously been killed by crocodiles. This episode demonstrates Nathan’s insensitivity, revealing his inability to empathise with the parents of Kilangi through the shared experience of parenthood.

When Ruth-May is killed by a snake attack, Nathan’s responds that “she wasn’t baptised yet,” highlighting that his emotions are inextricably pervaded and shaped by his religious outlook (368). Ruth-May’s death has the potential for a pivotal point in Nathan’s personal journey: an opportunity to grieve and accept the solidarity of his fellow parents in Kilangi. However, Nathan squanders the opportunity for redemption on account of his hubris, which now borders on delusion. Leah concludes at this point that her father is a “simple, ugly man” (368). Previously, Leah had isolated her father: however, following his aloof response to Ruth-May’s death, she can no longer stand to look at him. Not only does Nathan’s inability to understand the Congolese culture lead to his failure as a Christian missionary, but it also irreparably undermines his patriarchal role within the Price family unit. Nathan Price becomes Shakespeare’s King Lear: “a mad father abandoned by his daughters, wandering in the wilderness and speaking in words few can understand” (Ognibene 26). However, while Lear gains experience from suffering, allowing some redemption of his character, Nathan remains “deaf to the truth” in the same way he remains deaf to Congolese cultural nuances (Ognibene 26).

Nathan’s insensitive and arrogant approach to the Congolese echoes the sentiments of the novel’s Book One epigraph, which cites the Book of Genesis:

And God said unto them,  
 Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth,  
 And subdue it: and have dominion  
 over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air,  
 and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth (Gen 1.28).

Nathan corrupts this biblical verse through interpreting and implementing it alongside his imperialist perspectives in the Congo: he imposes unwelcome sovereignty upon fellow human beings, believing he is entitled to have dominion over the Congolese people. Nathan focuses solely – almost obsessively – on imposing his version of Christianity on the Congolese, who already have established spiritual beliefs.

Given the flaws in Nathan’s religious rhetoric, it is the Price women who create space for more positive representations of religious themes in *The Poisonwood Bible*. Demory notes that through the polyphonic narrative voices of the Price women, the novel is able to convey the “subjectivity of narrative, the impossibility of a story unmediated by someone’s personal experiences, and the possibility of multiple truths” (187). This effectively undercuts any power wielded in Nathan’s own experiences. The two sections of the novel that frame its story – “The Things We Carried” and “What We Carried Out” – focus on the material objects brought into and taken from their time in the Congo: Betty Crocker cake mixes, for example, are taken to the Congo; basic food for subsistence is taken from the Congo. The three middle sections – “The Things We Learned,” “The Things We Didn’t Know,” and “What We Lost” – chronicle how the women adjust to Congolese culture and society, demonstrating their individual and collective character development as they learn how to identify with the Congolese. Kristin J. Jacobson proposes that the framework of Kingsolver’s novel also demonstrates how the Price

women “unpack white privilege” (113). Despite not being able to eliminate this privilege, the women – unlike Nathan – are able to “change how they carry it” (113).

Through this narrative framework, Kingsolver expresses how each of the Price women compensate for Nathan’s various failings as a Christian missionary and conveyor of religious and political rhetoric. In an interview, Kingsolver explains that “The four sisters and Orleanna represent five separate philosophical positions, not just in their family but also in my political examination of the world” (Leder 82). Concretely, through language each of the Price women comes to identify with a different aspect of the suffering experience by the Congolese people. Most notably, Orleanna employs language as a form of resistance to Nathan’s repressive rhetoric and as shared suffering with the Congolese people.

It is Orleanna’s voice that opens each of the first five chapters of Kingsolver’s novel. She retrospectively views herself as a “captive witness” during her year and a half in the Congo, highlighting the complicity she feels over her voiceless condition. According to Fanon, nationalism is essential to unite people in their fight for independence: however, this nationalism must undergo changes following independence in order to promote autonomy in the socio-political consciousness of the liberated people (Fanon 35). The reality in many post-independent nations, such as Mobuto’s Zaïre, is that empowered politicians – the bourgeoisie – hold their people captive throughout this post-independence nation-building process. In this sense, Orleanna’s role as a ‘captive witness’ parallels the *Zaïrois* political captivity, where foreign states, such as the United States and the Soviet Union, set “traps” to manipulate this pseudo-nationalism for their own benefits (Chang 19–20).

In “The Revelation,” Orleanna reflects on her political and cultural mistakes when she first arrived in the Congo, recognising the parallels between her husband and other

national imperialist American leaders like Eisenhower. It dawns on Orleanna that her husband is a tyrant: abusive and projecting his own sense of ‘sin’ onto those around him, particularly his family. Orleanna was occupied by Nathan’s mission, “as if by a foreign power” and as a result he gains “full possession of the country once known as Orleanna Wharton” (199). Seducing her with images of “green pastures,” Orleanna begins to see Nathan as a husband and father for whom ownership is normalised and abuse a weapon for maintaining control (197). Eventually, Orleanna views the condition of herself and her daughters as analogous with that of the colonised Congolese people: “cast with the Congo [...] barefoot bride of men who took jewels and promised the Kingdom” (198-99). This means that the colonised Congo provides a means for Orleanna to understand herself: however, the colonised Congolese do not get to actually speak for themselves.

Given Nathan’s failed religious rhetoric and incompetence as a “cultural translator,” the voices of the Price women must instead convey the novel’s “postcolonial heterogeneity to its politics” (Kilpatrick 89). On this, Ognibene notes that “The heart of the novel emerges only by stacking multiple renditions and discerning the similarities and differences that together shape the broader view” (21). The typically unreliable discourse of a single first-person narrator is mitigated through Kingsolver’s use of multiple narrators – polyphonic voices – to necessitate the novel’s religious and political message.

## 4.2. Transculturation

Critic Kathy Weese claims that when considering the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised, cultural influence is frequently perceived as being a “one-way street” (Weese 5). She disagrees with this, arguing it is an oversimplification of the complex interactions between the two parties. Françoise Lionnet posits that viewing the

relationship between the coloniser and colonised as “unidirectional” is a reductive approach (Lionnet 10). Drawing from the work of Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, Lionnet defines transculturation as “a process of cultural intercourse and exchange, a circulation of practices which creates a constant interweaving of symbolic forms and empirical activities among the different interacting cultures” (11). Ortiz coined the term *transculturación* in his 1940 essay *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* [*Cuban Counterpoint of the Tobacco and the Sugar*]. The term is a revision of ‘acculturation,’ which had been introduced by Jewish Polish ethnographer Bronisław J. Malinowski in the 1920s. Unlike acculturation, which Malinowski used to describe immigrants assimilating into American society, transculturation addresses the highly complex exchange between cultures. This exchange exists on linguistic, economic, racial, gendered, and cultural bases.

In postcolonial critical theory, the transculturation process explains why the exchange between the coloniser and colonised – the metropole and the periphery – must be considered to be reciprocal. Mary Louise Pratt’s adoption of the term “transculturation” is also worth noting. Pratt refers to Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala’s *New Chronicle* as an example of transculturation – a term that ethnographers have used to “describe the process whereby members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent new materials transmitted by a dominant metropolitan culture” (Pratt, ‘Arts of the Contact Zone’ 36). When Orleanna reflects on the death of Ruth-May, she writes “Africa rose up to seize me [...] You’ve played some trick on the dividing of my cells so my body can never be free from the small parts of Africa it consumed. It seems I only know myself, anymore, by your attendance in my soul” (87). This dynamic, which sees the Congo and its people leaving a major impression on Orleanna and her three surviving daughters, demonstrates the process of transculturation. Referring specifically to the

impact Spanish colonisation had on the indigenous inhabitants of Cuba, Ortiz writes that “when cultures encounter each other, each of the parties invariably exerts a strong influence on the other” (Hermann 257). Transculturation is a useful theoretical framework to analyse how Africa changes the Price women, chiefly through their ability to self-identify with the subaltern experience of the colonised Congolese people.

Despite Orleanna realising that “Africa shifts under her hands,” Nathan believes that he can remake Africa in his own image (10). The way these characterisations differ aligns with Sidonie Smith’s description of the way a female travel writer grounds “herself in another’s identity [...] imagines herself un-becoming Western. Shedding unconventional identities and behaviors, [...] she becomes other to her ordinary, unheroic, ‘feminized’ self” (Smith 32). Smith’s argument provides some explanation of Orleanna’s developing disillusionment with her marriage to Nathan, who instead “imposes himself upon foreign lands to remake them in his image” (Weese 7). Throughout the novel, Kingsolver makes a clear link between the colonised Congolese people and women oppressed by normative patriarchal structures. The parallels between the two groups – both ‘subaltern’ in these dynamics of social power – allows the Price women to align with the transculturation process. Critic Patrick Hogan posits that “indigenous cultures were seen as feminine and effeminate and the metropole culture as masculine” (17). Hogan’s claim is exemplified by the narratives of both Orleanna and Adah personifying the Congo in a feminine way: Orleanna laments the Congo being robbed of her jewels (201), and Adah later refers to the Congo as “a woman in shadows, dark-hearted, moving to a drum beat” (495).

The Price women have been colonised by Nathan in a way that parallels the Congo being colonised by Léopold II and later Belgium. This is perfectly captured in Orleanna’s claim that she and her daughters were “swallowed by Nathan’s mission, body and soul”

(198). Nathan constantly denigrates Orleanna by ignoring the difficulties she experiences with life in the Congo and belittling her abilities. He speaks to her “in that same voice, for dogs and for morons” (133). Postcolonialism and feminism share a common goal of giving voices to those who were voiceless in the traditional dominant social order. *The Poisonwood Bible* best exemplifies this intersection through Orleanna. She is occupied by Nathan because of her supposed inferiority: “I was an inferior force” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 192). Nathan believes she is “his instrument, his animal, nothing more” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 192). Spivak states that “If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in the shadow” (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak 325). It is worth noting the wording here: “the subaltern as female” and not “the female as subaltern”. For Spivak, being subaltern means belonging at the bottom of an imposed racial, colonial class, and economic order: being a female added to that makes a person even more silenced, more shadowed. However, Nathan’s use of religious dominance to insistently ignore, belittle, and silence his wife and daughters creates a condition comparable to colonial subalternity – a condition sufficiently similar that it enables the Price women to recognise and empathise with the actual subalternity of the Congolese. This is what creates their receptivity to transculturation.

Early twentieth-century representations of Congolese parallel how Nathan views the Price women in *The Poisonwood Bible*: “invisible powerless women,” characterless creatures who are “only visible in their own eyes” (Shureteh and Al-Khalili 42). He disparages his daughters through repeatedly commenting on their inferiority, mainly on account of their gender: “‘Sending a girl to college is like pouring water in your shoes,’ he still loves to say, as often as possible” (56). Through the voicelessness and subjugation they experience on account of Nathan, the Price women find themselves naturally



empathetic towards the colonised people of the Congo. They are thus receptive to the process of transculturation. Nathan's pattern of behaviour in the family sphere is analogous to the imperialist tactics of the imperialist powers following the Congo's independence – chiefly, the United States and Belgium – who conspired with one another, as well as with their puppet-rulers in Africa, to retain control over the Congo and its people.

Leah's involvement with the transculturation process is perhaps the most apparent. Initially supportive of her father, believing he can do no wrong, she quickly becomes disillusioned with Nathan. Leah is shown to be acutely aware of the complexities of language: "everything you thought you knew means something different in Africa" (505). This contrasts her father's own challenges with language. Leah's involvement with Congolese culture and politics results in her marrying Anatole and choosing to stay and raise her children in Africa. She refers to herself as the "un-missionary," beginning each day on her knees "asking to be converted" (525). Leah's relationship with Anatole epitomises her transculturation, illustrating how the blind faith she had in her father at the beginning of the novel has been replaced by the "political commitment that Anatole symbolizes" (Koza 287). Mary Louise Pratt refers to the biracial colonial trope:

colonial love stories, in whose denouements the 'cultural harmony through romance' always breaks down. Whether love turns out to be requited or not, whether the colonized lover is female or male, outcomes seem to be roughly the same: the lovers are separated, the European is reabsorbed by Europe, and the non-European dies an early death. (Pratt 97)

The Leah-Anatole relationship is a disruption of this trope, which is commonly found in film: for example, Gréville's *Princesse Tam Tam* and Preminger's *The Human Factor*. Leah and Anatole's relationship represents the transculturation process, contrasting the

biracial colonial romance trope insofar that the two remain in Africa rather than Leah being “reabsorbed by Europe.”

Like her younger sister, Rachel also remains in Africa. Unlike Leah, Rachel seems to maintain the same sense of self-importance and materialism she had upon arriving in the Congo. Even in the novel’s final pages, she is shown to cling onto capitalistic ideals. As the narrative progresses, Rachel’s transculturation process does not advance in the same way her sisters’ do. On a surface level, Rachel seems unchanged by her time in Africa. However, Rachel does subtly undergo transculturation, specifically through her role as an “oppressor altering due to the native culture” (Pagan 26). Later in the novel, she offers a rare moment of insight on her father’s resistance to acclimatise to life in the Congo: “You can’t just sashay into the jungle aiming to change it all over to the Christian style, without expecting the jungle to change you right back” (515). While recognising she has changed into “someone different” (367), she maintains resistance to letting Africa “influence [her] mind” (516). As a businesswoman managing an African resort, Rachel clings to the very American capitalism that defined her when she arrived in the Congo. Rachel seems to embody Smith’s idea of a male travel writer, “For these travelers, the land was ‘underdeveloped’ and its inhabitants backwards, dirty, and lazy, in need of a secularized version of the civilizing mission” (S. Smith 6). The way Rachel is characterised as materialistic at the novel’s conclusion contrasts the more complete transformations of her sisters: Leah’s decision to live in relative poverty; Adah’s connection with spirituality; and Ruth-May’s posthumous narrative, which portrays her as the embodiment of African spirituality. Despite this, near the end of the novel, Rachel acknowledges that she has been changed by Africa. She relates to the plight of the oppressed through having Africa foisted upon her: she was powerless in Nathan’s decision to relocate his family to the Congo. A victim of her past, it is in this way that

Rachel achieves a degree of transculturation. Even though she is seemingly unaware of her connection to the Congolese, by the conclusion of the novel Rachel has created a new identity in Africa. In this sense, Rachel experiences a “shift into hybridity” (Pagan 26). She does not simply acquire African cultures (acculturation), but instead embodies a subtle version of neoculturation, where her American cultural identity has blended with the influences of cultural phenomena she encounters throughout the novel.

From her first narration, Rachel stands out from the rest of the Price women on account of her sense of entitlement and self-importance: “We are supposed to be calling the shots here, but it doesn’t look to me like we’re in charge of a thing, not even ourselves” (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 22). Rachel arrives in the Congo with a sense of Western superiority, believing that all Congolese are ignorant and beneath her. Almost every description of the Congolese in Rachel’s narrative is marked with some form of disdain. This is hardly a surprising perspective from an American teenager. As Marie Austenfeld notes, “Rachel sees the world through the eyes of a literal-minded, materialistic teenager” (Austenfeld 295). However, throughout the novel Rachel experiences transculturation, even if it is not as apparent as the process her sisters undergo. This can be approached through Bhabha’s theory of ‘hybridization,’ a framework that overlaps transculturation. According to Bhabha, hybridisation occurs when the oppressive culture encounters the oppressed culture, creating a discourse referred to as the “third space” (Ilyas 1925). In this space, identity construction occurs. The construction of Rachel’s hybrid identity occurs gradually throughout the novel. For example, after being in the Congo for a year, Rachel shares the following perspective on Congolese women:

The women moved slowly and gracefully, putting one foot ahead of the other, and with their thin bodies all draped in colorful *pagnes* and their heads so straight

and high – honestly, though it is strange to say, they looked like fashion models. Maybe it has just been too long since I’ve seen a fashion magazine. But some of them are pretty in their way. (291)

Here, Rachel shows an appreciation of Congolese women – for the first time in the novel, she values something outside of her American ideals. She relates the beauty of these Congolese women to her own standards of beauty. However, she is unable to value their beauty on its own account. Pagan notes that while Rachel is unable to relinquish her American values to fully undergo the transculturation the other Price women experience, she nevertheless shows progress in her acceptance of Congolese culture. She is the only Price woman to not return to America, despite her insistence that American values and culture are superior to those of Africa. In her final narrative, Rachel reflects on why she cannot return to the United States: “I had my bags packed more than once. But...I was always afraid...scared I wouldn’t be able to fit back in” (513). Ruth-May’s death seems pivotal in Rachel’s hybridisation, “cancelling [...] belief that she can return to a carefree, fortunate destiny in America. It demolishes her illusions that Americans are a different ‘kind of person’ from Africans” (Strehle). While she is still full of the same disdain towards Africans she had at the beginning of the novel, Rachel remains in Africa, seemingly unaware of her own transformation.

The narratives of Adah and Ruth-May most explicitly challenge Nathan’s dominant unidirectional ideas on the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. Central to the notion of transculturation is the way in which the convergence of cultures results in the formation of new cultural phenomena: neoculturation. This is a process Adah observes among the Price women, characterised by their shifting identities. A hemiplegic, Adah is unable to speak, but through extensive reading she possesses a strong command of language: “When I finish reading a book from front to back, I read it

back to front. It is a different book, back to front, and you can learn new things from it” (57). Adah observes that the transculturation process is fundamentally changing her sisters and mother: “Ruth May is not the same [...] Yam Htur. None of us is the same: Lehcarr, Hael, Hada, Annaelro. Only Nathan remains essentially himself, the same man however you look at him” (276). Writing their names backwards reflects the changes she sees in her family. The obvious exception is Nathan, who does not change. Just as Adah reads books backwards to derive new meanings, she observes new meanings in the Price women. Furthermore, writing these names backwards is indicative of the reciprocal relationship between the American women and the Congolese people. Only Nathan, with his unidirectional approach to African culture, is not represented in this way. His name remains unidirectional.

Another important aspect of transculturation is the shifting identification of the self. The Congolese concept of Self differs from the American Self, particularly regarding the African spiritual belief of ‘*mntu*.’ Adah explains: “Here in the Congo [...] there is no special difference between living people, dead people, children not yet born and gods—these are all *mntu*” (209). Later, elaborating further:

“People are *bantu*; the singular is *mntu*. [...] The *Bantu* speak of ‘self’ as a vision reading inside, peering out through the eyeholes of the body, waiting for whatever happens next. Using the body as a mask, *mntu* watches and waits without fear, because *mntu* itself cannot die. The transition from spirit to body and back to spirit again is merely a venture. [...] In that other long ago place, America, I was a failed combination of too-weak body and overstrong [sic] will. But in Congo I am those things perfectly united: *Adah*. (343)

Upon returning to the United States, Adah’s gait – self-described as a “slant” – is treated. Following this, Adah experiences dejection over the loss of her ability to see the “truth”:

“I lost my ability to read in the old way” (492). This new sense of Self leads Adah to believe that her aforementioned ‘unity’ – “one-half *benduka* the crooked walker, one-half *benduka*, the sleek bird [...] with a crazy ungrace that took your breath away” – was a gift, a blessing, and thus laments its unceremonious death (Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* 47).

Adah’s favourite poem is Dickinson’s “Tell all the Truth but tell it slant”. Anthony Hecht claims that Dickinson’s poem refers to religious ‘Truth,’ specifically the blindness humans experience when looking upon the ‘Godhead’ (Hecht 18). Jesus’ words “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” demonstrate that humankind is not supposed to directly understand the Truth of God – with the exception of Moses, humans are simply not worthy (John 14.6). This stance on religious truths allows Christian scriptures to be interpreted as parables. Christianity is full of references to being ‘blinded’ by the truth: for example, in Acts of the Apostles Chapter 9, Jesus appears as a bright light that causes Paul to go blind for three days until “scales” fall from his eyes and he can see, and is a believer. The first stanza of Dickinson’s poem associates the notion of truth with light:

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant –  
 Success in Circuit lies  
 Too bright for our infirm Delight  
 The Truth’s superb surprise (Crowder 237)

This suggest the truth offers enlightenment, particularly in the religious sense. Furthermore, the repetition of the stressed /ɪ/ phoneme in the final syllable of each line – ‘lies,’ ‘delight,’ and ‘surprise’ – calls to mind the word ‘eyes,’ and the role that seeing – the visual – has in Dickinson’s notion of the truth. Helen Vendler proposes that Dickinson’s use of the word ‘slant’ involves indirection: this also points to understanding religious truths through parables, rather than relying on literal interpretations of the

Christian scriptures to find truth. As Vendler summarises, “some truths must be told allegorically” (431). Literary critic Oliver Tearle claims that the core meaning of Dickinson’s poem is “to make the [concept of] truth more palatable to those who run the risk of being ‘blinded’ by it, as by the sun’s glare” (Tearle). Through incorporating Dickinson’s poem into her novel, Kingsolver hints at why the theme of truth is relevant to Adah’s character development. Adah’s ‘slanted’ truths – allegorical truths – contrasts Nathan’s single-minded concept of the truth, which he imposes on the Congolese people.

In lamenting the loss of her slanted gait Adah is not only thinking of losing her spiritual unity but also her ability to see the truth in Dickinson’s sense. Adah notes that she “will always be Ada inside, a crooked little person trying to tell the truth” (496). Interestingly, Adah deliberately misspells her name here, likely to make it a palindrome. This is a nod to her ability to read things ‘front to back, back to front,’ or from multiple perspectives, despite becoming Americanised near the conclusion of her narrative.

On account of her young age, Ruth-May’s relationship with language is less sophisticated than Adah’s. However, Leah reports that at age five Ruth-May is able to “establish communication with the Congolese” (106). Ruth-May’s connection with American culture and society is less developed than the rest of her family’s, and so she is able to easily form relationships with African characters. Through her friend Nelson, Ruth-May quickly becomes involved in African spiritual beliefs and wider perspectives of the world. Her connection with African spirituality takes on particular significance following her death, with every subsequent chapter she narrates foreshadowing her reappearance at the end of the novel as a snake/spirit. Weese suggests that Ruth-May’s transformation is an instance of magical realism (14), insofar as she embodies “a mode of discourse that suggests the spirits into ordinary reality” (Faris 154). Magical realism challenges dominant forms of representation – it challenges authoritarian versions of

history, as history is frequently told from the conqueror's perspective. For Ruth-May, realism works as agent of transculturation. Critic Wendy Faris notes that representation of magical realism in postcolonial societies serves as "an efficacious form of counterdiscourse [...] that transforms not only the discourse of the colonized but that of the colonizer as well" (155). Specifically, this is a counter-discourse to Nathan's own discourse: a discourse that fundamentally determines the novel's condemnation of language being misused. Natalie Wallace claims that Kingsolver uses the Kikongo language to subvert Western authority, as the "incorporation of this Congolese language directs attention towards the culture to which Kingsolver seeks to do justice" (Wallace 50). Nathan's *bangala/bängala* mispronunciation referred to earlier in this section illustrates this point: on this, Kilpatrick writes, "In the recharting of her identity, Leah allows a formerly colonized language, Kikongo, to become the tongue by which she defines herself. This [...] reinscribes meaning because it occupies a formerly colonized tongue and person with a new refusal to be subjugated" (104).

Ruth-May's malaria infection reveals the hybridised nature of her perspective, which is central to her narrative. In this sense, malaria functions as a critical lens. Approaching Ruth-May's position in Africa as an American, she considers the different influences of the cultures surrounding her. She ponders: "I know the meek shall inherit and the last shall be first, but the Tribes of Ham were last. Now will they be first?" (Kingsolver 238). Rather than approaching American and African cultures as dichotomic – "relying on her 'whiteness' in a 'black' culture" – she now merges both cultures together in the same way Querry does through his role as a border character in *A Burnt-Out Case* (Pagan 70). Through her suffering from malaria, Ruth-May forms her own hybrid identity. Postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha posits that a key attribute of colonial relations is the "process of identification," where one departs from the Self, or the known,



and begins relating to the “Other,” which he refers to as “splitting” (Bhabha 64). In terms of the colonised person, this process constitutes the rejection of indigenous/native culture and the mimicking of the colonising culture. However, for the colonising person, mimicking the indigenous culture of the colonised subjects requires an in-depth understanding of this culture. For the coloniser, this splitting is counter-productive as it undermines the very suppression of native culture fundamental to colonisation, and instead demands the fostering of newfound cultural awareness (Pagan 20). Ruth-May’s youth means she has not yet been as fully or thoroughly conditioned by Western culture as the rest of her family, which allows her to acquire an understanding of Congolese spiritual belief systems. She is able to translate the ideas and principles from her life in the U.S. and apply them to Congolese culture. Pagan summarises this as an ability to apply “the biblical lessons her father teaches her are applied to everyone, not just white Americans (71).

While she is ill with malaria, Nelson approaches Ruth-May and offers advice on fighting the disease, as per Congolese spiritual beliefs:

He said this way I won’t die, I will just disappear for a second and then I’ll turn up someplace else, where it’s safe. Instead of dead I’ll be safe. But first I have to think of that place every day, so my spirit will know where to run away to, when it’s time. You have to think of your safe place every day. (239)

By following Nelson’s instructions, Ruth-May shows her complete faith in Congolese spirituality, seemingly abandoning her father’s biblical teachings. Ruth-May’s rejection of the Christianity espoused by Nathan also suggests her opposition to his tyrannical temperament. Ognibene makes the claim that by putting her faith in Congolese spirituality, Ruth-May is rejecting Western civilisation entirely (30). Nathan’s shortcomings are all apparent to Ruth-May: his physical abuse of her sisters, mother, and

herself; his rhetoric that instructs love towards Jesus while installing fear of himself; and the broader political ideologies Nathan espouses that bring destruction to Kilanga. When the doctor who sets Ruth-May's arm in a cast says that "his work is a hell of a bargain for Belgium [...] but a hell of a way to deliver social services," and then lists the atrocities carried out by Westerners in the Congo under the guise of 'progress,' Nathan responds that "Belgian and American business brought civilization to the Congo!" (Kingsolver 121). Ognibene claims that such instances illustrate how Nathan associates the notion of civilisation solely with his faith, language, and culture (30). As a result of her father's preaching, Ruth-May is "scared of Jesus" (Kingsolver 158), and subsequently, when she becomes ill with malaria, she believes that her illness is punishment "because of doing bad things" (273).

In her final narration before dying, Ruth-May mentions her perception of death: "If I die I will disappear and I know where I'll come back. [...] in the tree, same color, same everything. I will look down on you. But you won't see me" (273). Not only does this foreshadow her rebirth as a snake, but it also shows Ruth-May's understanding of Congolese spirituality and disregard of her father's teachings: "she has split from relying solely on Nathan's claims and creates an understanding of her own, mixed with a foreign ideology" (Pagan 71). This is magical realism at play, challenging Nathan's Christian teachings: it "radically modifies and replenishes the dominant mode of realism in the West" (Faris 1). Ruth-May's rebirth as a snake later near the end of the novel illustrates that not only does she understand Congolese spirituality, but her transformed self is a physical manifestation of her newfound beliefs. Her transculturation is the best example of magical realism in *The Poisonwood Bible*, which functions as a "decolonizing agent" through its "destabilization of a dominant form" of Western knowledge and power – Christianity (Faris 1). For example, following her death Ruth-May remarks: "Being dead

is not worse than being alive. It is different, though. You could say the view is larger” (538). Death has transitioned her view: she has gone from essentialising her own culture as being the ‘only’ culture – “they don’t even have regular dollars here” (41) – to seeing the larger picture. This whole picture is that cultures should not separate people the way that they do. In this sense, Ruth-May’s rebirth allows her to transcend cultural boundaries – her ‘semiosphere’ – and fully achieve transculturation.

### 4.3. Truths

In “The Allegory of the Cave” in *The Republic*, Plato constructs a positive image of what he considers to be the objective, absolute truth. Unobtainable to ordinary humans, this perception of truth is accessible only to a selected few – the “philosopher-kings.” (Plato). Anne T. Salvatore claims that in *The Poisonwood Bible*, Kingsolver challenges a similar notion of the absolute truth by privileging the subjective truths of the Price women. Kingsolver challenges the supposed wisdom of the philosopher-king concept through two “intertwining spheres” (Salvatore 157). Firstly, her novel negatively portrays the imperialist attitudes of Belgium and the U.S.A. during the Congo’s independence movement; secondly, through Nathan’s role as a “offending patriarchal character” (Salvatore 157).

“The Allegory of the Cave” was written as a dialogue between Plato’s brother Glaucon and his mentor Socrates, and is told from the perspective of the latter. The allegory presents a cave where people have been imprisoned since childhood, chained so that they are unable to move their necks and legs, thus forcing them to constantly gaze at the wall in front of them. The prisoners are unable to look around the cave or at one another. Situated behind the prisoners is a fire. In between the fire and the prisoners is a raised walkway where people walk carrying objects. The shadows cast upon the cave

wall do not show the silhouettes of the people on the walkway, only the objects they carry. Sounds from the people on the walkway talking are echoed off the cave walls: the prisoners believe these sounds come from the objects they perceive on the wall. Socrates claims that for these prisoners, the shadows they see on the cave wall are their reality. They lack the knowledge and experience to realise the shadows are merely puppets in front of a fire. Furthermore, Plato suggests that the fire – the light source causing the shadows – is political doctrine taught in a nation-state. If a prisoner is freed from the cave, they would be highly sensitive to the light (fire) and it would be difficult to see the objects casting the shadows. The freed prisoner would also find it difficult to believe the subjective reality presented before them. However, if the prisoner was to overcome these initial difficulties, and was to escape the cave and go outside, they would “gaze upon the light of the moon and the stars and the spangled heaven” (Plato 255). Eventually, the prisoner would be able to gaze upon the sun, which Plato constructs as the ultimate symbol of knowledge, wisdom, and authority. As a result, should this freed prisoner return to the cave, they would have authority over their fellow humans. These humans, ignorant and still believing their misperceptions within the cave, are depicted as inferior to the freed prisoner, and so the freed prisoner’s authority over them is justified and absolute.

In *The Poisonwood Bible*, Kingsolver challenges this allegory. The “The Allegory of the Cave” can be used as a mode of thinking applied to Africa, where the darkness of the cave is analogous to the idea of the ‘dark continent’ – backward, mysterious, and ignorant – in *Heart of Darkness*. However, while Plato devalues the subjective perceptions (‘truths’) of the prisoners within the cave, arguing that their subjective understanding of reality makes them inferior to the freed prisoner, Kingsolver channels the beauty and wonder of human subjectivity. The polyphonic voices of the

Price women are in fact shown to be superior to an absolute, patriarchal voice: that of Nathan. These subjectivities allow both the Price women and the reader to find truths appropriate to themselves, rather than that of the master narrative. In a sense, this is similar to Kierkegaard's strategy of indirect communication in *A Burnt-Out Case*, where Kingsolver is avoiding the role of an omniscient, moral teacher, and instead presenting multiple truths to the reader to ponder over. Kingsolver's disruption of Plato's absolute truth/philosopher-king notion is central to how her novel has both postcolonial and feminist functions: the patriarchal, European voice is shown to be problematic and inferior to the frequently silenced subaltern voice.

The U.S.A. maintained control of Congo through a puppet-government, having influenced the installation of Joseph Mobuto as its head following the assassination of the Soviet-affiliated Patrice Lumumba – an assassination facilitated by the U.S.A. and Belgium. Diane Kunz notes that Mobuto's regime erased "what democracy remained in the Congo," claiming "absolute power over the country" (Kunz 291-2). Edward Saïd refers to the unequal power relations between Western powers and postcolonial states as "the imperial dynamic," characterised through "separating, essentializing, dominating" tendencies (Saïd 37). Like the concept of philosopher-kings, these colonial powers and their puppet-rulers assumed supremacy: however, the narrative voices of Kingsolver's novel portray such powers disapprovingly. For example, Leah notes that Mobuto "[changes] all European-sounding place names to indigenous ones to rid us of the sound of foreign domination," despite negotiating ongoing "deals with Americans who still control our cobalt and diamond mines" (448). Furthermore, Orleanna addresses the abhorrent treatment of Africans by Belgium: "Using these people like slaves in your rubber plantations and your mines [...] There's men right here in this village with tales

to make your hair stand on end. One old fellow got his hand whacked off up at Coquilhatville [...] Is that how a father rules?" (165).

Nathan's unsympathetic characterisation also challenges Plato's philosopher-king concept. He arrives in Africa with a misguided confidence in his belief system, having anointed himself with god-like authority to foist this Christianity upon the Congolese, which he immediately attempts to establish through references to the "darkness of [the Congolese's] souls" (27). However, while Plato portrays Socrates favourably as a philosopher-king, Kingsolver undercuts Nathan's patriarchal, zealous character. In Books VII-X of *The Republic*, Plato criticises different forms of government: specifically, timocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny (545–50). In this sense, Nathan represents corrupt politics. For example, when prompted by Tata Ndu the Congolese take a "democratic" vote in order to determine whether they will establish Jesus Christ "in the office of personal God, Kilanga village" (330). Nathan opposes this election, claiming that Jesus should be "exempt from popular elections," yet the people continue to vote, in the end voting against Jesus eleven to fifty-six (331). This act demonstrates how the people of Kilanga reject Nathan's efforts to enforce his spiritual beliefs on the Congolese.

Salvatore employs Julia Kristeva's analytical interpretation, a psychoanalytical theoretical framework, to unpack the "assumed, Ideal Truth," which "arises from [...] the more tentative *analytical* discourse" created by the voices of the Price women. This analytical interpretation is defined by Patricia Elliot as "one whose own truth is always in question" (199). Kristeva emphasises incomplete nature of meaning and the limitations of the analyst, who is "not fixed in the position of the classical interpreter, who interprets by virtue of stable meanings derived from a solid system or morality" (310). In contrast to philosopher-king, single-minded discourse of truth as per the Western powers and

Nathan Price in *The Poisonwood Bible*, the polyphonic voices of the Price women suggest a “postmodern plurality of truths through their individual versions of events” (Salvatore 162). Despite each woman’s narrative being shaped by their unique characteristics and interpretation of events, the voices do not contradict one another or doubt the credibility – the truth – of another narrative. Salvatore considers a question relevant to any critical analysis of narratives, fictional or otherwise, “Whose version of the story constitutes the Truth?” (162) Some critics claim it is Leah’s voice which functions as the ‘absolute’ truth in the novel. For example, Amanda Cockrell posits that Leah’s narrative is the “surrogate voice of the author” (qtd. in Salvatore 162). Initially having similar colonialist perspectives to her father, Leah becomes disillusioned with Nathan and his religion, spending the rest of her life rejecting his imperialist approach to Africa and his family. It is this awakened voice of Leah that Cockrell may be identifying as the surrogate voice of Kingsolver. Even if this is the case, this surrogate authorial voice does not claim absolute authority. Unlike Nathan and Socrates who suggest that their truths are the only truths – and as a result attempt to enforce these truths onto others – Leah makes no such attempt. Anatole nicknames Leah *bénee-bénee*, which means “as true as the truth can be” (286–87). Salvatore suggests that truth is “entirely subjective, based on changing [...] human perception” (163). Kingsolver’s narrative structure supports this claim insofar that the five first-person narratives present the characters’ efforts to find their own truths rather than an objective, absolute truth. Ultimately, any attempts to answer the question of which Price woman represents a single, absolute truth in *The Poisonwood Bible* will result in failure. Salvatore compares Kingsolver to the likes of theorists Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, who entirely reject the idea of an absolute, “Ideal Truth” (Salvatore, ‘Against Platonic Authority’ 163). Instead,

Kingsolver's novel relates truth to the subjectivities of human perspective. In this sense, Kingsolver's approach to truth directly opposes "The Allegory of the Cave."

In a reversal of the patriarchal silencing of women, Kingsolver silences Nathan's patriarchal voice through not providing any narrative space for his interpretation of events. Not only does this reflect a general lack of interpretation on Nathan's part – he seems to act and react without considering potential consequences, rather than interpret and reflect like his wife and daughters – but it also conveys Kingsolver's rejection of the "Master narrative" Salvatore refers to (168). As with most first-person narratives, the reader is inclined to view elements of fallibility in the voices of the Price women. However, through maintained exposure to their own truths, the reader comes to sympathise with their perspectives on life in the Congo. The reader also comes to understand the plurality of truths in the novel. While the "whole [absolute] truth" is never presented, the complexity and variety provided through the sympathetic polyphonic voices is appreciated by the reader as they form an overview of the events and characters of the novel (Salvatore 169). These voices challenge the patriarchal, imperialist, and absolutist authorities in the novel – Nathan, the Western powers, and the puppet-rulers – which are in clear opposition of the subjectivities the Price women espouse.

The Price family arrive in the Congo as products of Western society. Despite all having different expectations of their new life in Africa, the five Price women who narrate *The Poisonwood Bible* are unified through the transculturation process they undergo. While there is little doubt that Kingsolver's novel challenges a literary canon that has historically been shaped by patriarchal Eurocentric perspectives, it is difficult determining to what extent it can be called a 'postcolonial novel' in the traditional sense, given the author's background. Critics may point to Kingsolver not being from the Congo, nor does her background align with Bhabha's theory on cultural hybridity.



The shared experience of subjugation to a totalising authority creates solidarity between the Price women and the postcolonial people of the Congo. While their experiences differ, a sense of kinship emerges through the experience of being oppressed. Kingsolver entwines postcolonialism with feminism in order to challenge the way the Congo is portrayed within the Western colonial literary canon. Despite not being literally colonised subjects, there is a strong case for the Price women being figuratively colonised by Nathan and even the wider patriarchal systems of oppression in twentieth-century American society. They lack voices and agency through systems that parallel that asserted power over colonised Africans. The way the entire narrative discourse of *The Poisonwood Bible* consists of female voices serves to contextualise the socio-political sphere of the Congo the Price family lives in. Doing so provides a contemporary perspective not found in earlier books on Africa written by American and European male authors.

Throughout her narrative, Orleanna Price compares the systems of oppression affecting her to the Congo itself: colonised and stripped of valuables. The oppressor in both instances is her husband: Nathan Price represents the colonisation of both the Congo and Orleanna. Through finding common ground between the Price women and the Congo, Kingsolver can provide the latter with a voice through the former. Driving the postcolonial treatise of the novel is the idea that individuals struggle to see connections between themselves and larger political systems. The Price women are all ordinary, American women – not unlike the readers Kingsolver had in mind when writing her novel – and yet through their observations of the world surrounding them, they are able to question the intersectional ramifications of oppression political systems.

Unlike Marlow in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the Price women lack the opportunity to provide their stories within the world of the novel. They are presented to the reader as voiceless. They find their voices through providing the novel's narratives, allowing the reader to access the Congo through their own experiences and perspectives. On this basis, there is a clear connection between the subaltern that Spivak refers to in her essay and the condition of the Price woman. Giving the Price women voices allows Kingsolver to comment on the social and political constraints that oppress women.

There are many parallels between these Kingsolver's and Conrad's stories: they both employ complex narrative points of view that develop the theme of subjective truths and how language has the potential to shape reality. Both texts also demonstrate how white agents of the metropole are often corrupt and misguided. Africa is also portrayed by both authors as being seductive yet dangerous, proving fatal for those who fail to adapt. However, through the Price women Kingsolver can do more than simply retell Conrad's story: she critiques it. The voices of the Price women usurp Marlow's role in *Heart of Darkness*.

The Price women are removed from their lives in mid-twentieth century United States, being forced to abandon their innocence in the context of unfamiliar and confronting political and social flux. As a result, they experience transculturation: a refashioning of their identities and the way they relate and react to the world around them. Rather than the binary opposition of the self and the other, or the coloniser and the colonised, this transculturation shows the convergence of two distinct cultures. Kingsolver can develop this transculturation only through the subversion of the male voice. Nathan's authority is subverted through his ignorance and hubris, through his false religious rhetoric, and perhaps most importantly through not being provided with a voice. While Nathan is initially placed on a pedestal by the Price women – he is respected even

if he is not liked – he is eventually stripped of any respectability and his authority is undermined by Kingsolver through depictions of his incompetence and misguided sense of values.

The plurality of their voices strengthens Kingsolver's message: each Price woman represents a different philosophical position in the reader's understanding of this Congo. The polyphonic narrative structure celebrates subjectivities and multiple truths. In *The Poisonwood Bible* the truth does not speak with a single voice, but with many.

## Conclusion

Fanon remarks in *Les damnés de la Terre* that Africa is shaped like a revolver and the Congo is its trigger. For a moment in history, the independent spirit of the Congolese people became a hopeful icon for all African colonised subjects: a glimmer of hope for African nationalism; optimism for liberation from imperial oppression. Sadly, this quest for independence was realised as a bloody nightmare, with the consequences still being felt today in the form of civil unrest and extreme poverty. The Democratic Republic of the Congo – in its various names and forms – exemplifies the tragedy of imperialism and colonialism. For this reason, too, it functions as a powerful *topos* in postcolonial literary criticism. Analysing portrayals of the Congo in the Western literary canon forces scholars to rethink the paradigms that underpin historical and contemporary relations between the West and Africa. Unsettling the fictional narratives that have informed the Western understanding of the Congo allows the postcolonial critic to analyse shifting attitudes towards both colonising and colonised ‘subjects’ and the way novelists choose to portray them.

Through postcolonial critical analyses of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, Hergé’s *Tintin au Congo*, Greene’s *A Burnt-Out Case*, and Kingsolver’s *The Poisonwood Bible*, this study has examined how the portrayal of the Congo and its indigenous people in the Western literary canon has developed throughout the twentieth century. The formation of this identity in the Western novel is best represented through *The Poisonwood Bible*. The hierarchical binary opposition – the Western Self versus the Congolese Other – is challenged through the later texts analysed in this study: however, the question of whether Congolese-as-subaltern *actually* get to speak in these Western representations of the Congo has not been completely unanswered. To reiterate Spivak’s point, Western writers cannot and should not attempt to speak for the subaltern. For this reason, analyses

of how the Congo is represented in fictional texts by Congolese writers is necessary to examine this question.

Originally, this study was going to analyse *La vie et demie* by Congolese novelist Sony Lab'ou Tansi: including Tansi's novel would have granted access to a Congolese voice on its own terms. However, it was decided after drafting a chapter on *La vie et demie* that this thesis was not able to encompass the Congolese voice. From my position, as a Pākehā New Zealander reading a Congolese writer in translation from the original French, there are too many layers of cultural knowledge and translation for me to write with any scholarly authority about Tansi's voice. Doing this would have been overwriting or speaking over it. Thus, the decision was to limit the focus of this study to showing how Western writers re-colonise the Congo, or decolonise themselves or the colonial/imperial subject – rather than claiming that they actually succeed in decolonising an African subjectivity that is not their own. Tansi's novel uses violence, rape, and the “grotesque” as a metaphor for social and political disorder in the decolonised African state: an abstracted image of human disorder and ugliness in the aftermath of colonial occupation. Tansi merges the private, personal, and political spheres to express attitudes towards power. In this sense, it can be suggested that Tansi provides the Congolese-as-subaltern with a voice, in a way that Western writers cannot (and should not).

In 1975 Nigeria critic and author Chinua Achebe declared Joseph Conrad to be a “bloody racist”. However, since Achebe's publication of *An Image of Africa*, many critics have defended Conrad's novella, claiming it is in fact anti-colonialist in nature. On these grounds, one can argue that *Heart of Darkness* is one of the first ‘postcolonial’ fictional works in the Western literary canon. The novella contains some criticism of European expansionism, colonialism, and imperialism. However, from a contemporary perspective

the novella is deeply problematic: Conrad sets up Africa as a foil to Europe, projecting an image of the 'dark continent' as the 'Other world.'

For Marlow – and the reader by extension – the Congo represents Hell, with its inhabitants being constructed as primitive savages. And yet, a form of kinship between Marlow and the Congolese people is expressed. Marlow recognises no moral distinction between the Self and the Other. Some degree of transculturation is present. The controversial nature of *Heart of Darkness* as well as its prominent role in the Western literary canon made it an obvious place to start for my own critical analysis of how the Congo is portrayed in Western fiction.

Was Conrad a racist, as Achebe claims? By today's standards, absolutely. However, the need to recontextualise racism is essential within the scope of this study, since the term itself was coined several decades after Conrad's novel was published. *Heart of Darkness* causes the modern reader to see weaknesses in colonialist discourses through Conrad's exposure of the epistemological 'violence' that imperialism and colonialism promulgates. Long before the emergence of postcolonial critical theory, Conrad undermined colonial discourse from within. For this reason, his novella has served two key purposes in this study. Firstly, to introduce how the notion of empire can be unsettled in fictional narratives; secondly, as a point of reference for the progress of more recent portrayals of the Congo in the Western literary canon. Conrad's representation of the Congo and its indigenous inhabitants is problematic through the way it perpetuates colonial binary oppositions and discourses. When considering the development of postcolonialism in the Western literary canon, *Heart of Darkness* is a undoubtedly a worthy starting point.

*Tintin au Congo* is a step forward from *Heart of Darkness* chronologically, having been published during the era of Belgian colonialism in the Congo – over three

decades after Conrad's novel, and five decades after Léopold II initially took control of the region. Yet as far as postcolonial discourse is concerned, Hergé's *bande dessinée* is regressive in its portrayal of the Congolese people and how Europe relates to them as 'colonised subjects.' Research suggests that some of this is explained by medium: the intended audience and visual nature of the 1930s *bande dessinée* is conducive to the maintenance of colonialist discourse. The Congolese caricatures in *Tintin au Congo* are products of the 'amplification through simplification' that McCloud refers to, which constructs these characters in opposition to Tintin. While Tintin is a sympathetic and complex character – and one that would be serialised across the *Les Aventures de Tintin* series – portrayals of the Congolese people he encounters are crudely-drawn, exaggerated stereotypes. These cartoon depictions align with how colonialist discourse typically portrays docile 'black bodies.' The binarism present here is a product of the Hegelian master/slave dichotomy that forms the frameworks of imperialist and colonialist ideologies. Hergé's representation of the Congolese people in *Tintin au Congo* perpetuates colonialist discourse through using them as foils to its more significant European characters.

The literary themes present in *Tintin au Congo* also make it apparent that the *bande dessinée* functions in harmony with colonialist discourse. Léopold II's crimes had surfaced in the decades prior to the publication of *Tintin au Congo*: the population of *État indépendant du Congo* was halved, from twenty million to ten million people, between 1885 and 1908. Given this, the racist and dehumanising stereotypes in the album are all the more problematic. The portrayal of the Congolese peoples as simian-like and lazy, with large 'juju' lips and completely black skin, reveals how even in the 1930s it was possible, within mainstream Western narratives, to continue represent African characters in terms of the stereotypical alterity: the Other. The 'white man's burden'

motif, which is also apparent to a lesser degree in *Heart of Darkness*, is present in Hergé's *bande dessinée*, and see Tintin attributed to having the 'wisdom of Solomon.' Tintin's interactions with the Congolese peoples constructs the titular character as a 'white saviour' – a soteriological hero – and the colonised subjects as inferiors.

Analysing *Tintin au Congo* within this research is incredibly useful for understanding the extent to which indigenous African peoples were Othered in twentieth-century Western narratives. Conrad's attempted anti-colonialist discourse in *Heart of Darkness* represents a starting point for the development of postcolonialism in this canon, and by contrast Hergé's caricatures reveals the attitudes that still existed over three decades later during Belgium's colonisation of the Congo. The theoretical frameworks Saïd and later Achebe employ to explain how Africa operates as Europe's foil in fictional literature are prevalent in this *bande dessinée*. *Tintin au Congo* illustrates how the Congo was represented well into the twentieth century, and its commercial success speaks to the public's acceptance of such representations. Despite later revisions that distanced it from colonialist discourse – removing overt instances of Western superiority and imperialism – the pro-colonialist stance is still apparent in twenty-first century publications of *Tintin au Congo*.

In *A Burnt-Out Case*, Graham Greene's portrayal of the encounter between the Self and the Other is considerably more neoteric than Conrad's or Hergé's. The novel contains a few fleeting moments of explicit postcolonial criticism, such as Query's commenting on the atrocities carried out by European colonists in the Congo. However, overt references to postcolonialism are few and far between, and instead the indictment of colonialism and imperialism is much more latent in nature. Leprosy functions both as a disease and a metaphor, whereby the social stigma attached to skin offers a commentary on the racial alterity that informed imperialistic attitudes and Eurocentrism in African



colonialism. Furthermore, Parkinson's misrepresentation of Africa alludes to Eurocentrism, and his benighted nature demonstrates the totalising impact of how Europeans willingly misrepresented and misunderstood Africa to justify conquering the continent and its people. Parkinson's travesty is reinforced by the novel's preface, where Greene states that the "Congo is a region of the mind" (Greene xiv). The realities of Africa are insignificant for Parkinson, who instead chooses to perpetuate the European image of Africa from bygone generations. These latent criticisms of colonialism provide some substance for the argument that *A Burnt-Out Case* is a postcolonial novel.

Query travels the same route that Marlow had in *Heart of Darkness* some sixty years prior. The Congo had changed considerably throughout these several decades: it was no longer a personal concession of a European monarch. By 1960, the trajectory towards decolonisation was becoming apparent from an emerging nationalist movement, the *Mouvement national Congolais*. Given this, the persistence of similarities between these two narratives is striking. While offering some criticism of colonialism, Greene's novel utilises Africa as a mere backdrop for Query's characterisation. Portrayed as empty and desolate, the physical geography of Greene's Congo functions as a pathetic fallacy for Query's inner anguish. The problematic portrayal of Africa being the dark continent – a foil to Europe's own enlightened state – is maintained.

However, the intertextuality of *A Burnt-Out Case* – specifically in its allusions to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* – positions the novel at a pivotal point in the Western literary canon's progression towards postcolonialism. Drawing from the old models of Africa, Greene initially offers a retelling of Marlow's own journey into the dark heart of Africa. But at the end of the novel, shortly before Query's death, a sense of optimism associated with a new beginning is present: Query plans buildings for the village. If Query is the last colonist, he is also the first aid worker. Rather than 'saving' the Africans in the

traditional sense, the conclusion suggests Query working alongside Africans to improve their living conditions. He does not occupy the position of a colonial master, but instead offers a glimpse of Bhabha's notion of 'hybrid identity' that Kingsolver develops in *The Poisonwood Bible*.

The barrier between Self and Other is less rigid in Greene's novel than in *Heart of Darkness* and *Tintin au Congo*. Through Lotman's semiosphere model and Kierkegaard's theoretical framework of attack and defence in fictional narratives, I have argued that Greene uses certain characters to critique colonialism and others to defend the role of hybrid identities. Rycker, Parkinson, and Father Thomas all possess Eurocentric attitudes in the novel, making no effort to leave the core of their European semiosphere. Meanwhile, the priests, Doctor Colin, and Query are all situated at the border (frontier) of the semiosphere, where they are involved in a cultural exchange with local cultures. At the border, a sense of cultural hybridity emerges, which is conducive to the development of an inter-cultural faith system combining Jesus and Nzambe. In this sense, *A Burnt-Out Case* distances itself from the paternalistic and hegemonic portrayals of Africa and Africans that was common in the literary canon during the first half of the twentieth century.

Cultural hybridity between Westerners and the indigenous Congolese is of great significance in Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible*. The five Price women who narrate the novel all undergo transculturation to differing degrees, with the patriarch of the Price family, Nathan, serving as their foil. Kingsolver deliberately avoids giving Nathan any sort of narrative agency in her novel, instead wholly providing the female protagonists with this. Nathan is the Kurtz of *The Poisonwood Bible*: a relic of European imperialism. Addressed by his daughters as 'Our Father,' Nathan's hubris creates a perceived omnipotence, where he approaches both the Congolese people and his own family as a

God-like figure. Unlike Conrad's 'Mistah Kurtz,' Nathan has no redeeming qualities nor is his presence valued by the Congolese, who eventually burn him to death. Kingsolver makes her condemnation of European colonialism and imperialism quite apparent through Nathan's character development.

Despite coming to the Congo with Westernised mindsets and facing their own adversities, the Price women all undergo transculturation. Kingsolver uses the characterisations of the five narrators, Orleanna, Rachel, Leah, Adah, and Ruth-May, to show the permeability of cultural identities. I have used Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity to demonstrate how the coloniser/colonised binarism to be unpacked, showing that both cultures are affected by the presence of each another. In this sense, Kingsolver challenges the reductive colonialist notion of the Self versus the Other. Unification formed within hybrid cultures is stronger than the forces of imperialism and colonialism used to create alterity.

These ideological shifts are made particularly apparent to the reader using first-person narrations. The different focalisations of the same historical events allow the reader to see intimate transformations relating to hybrid identities within the five Price women. Postcolonial tendencies can be traced as they emerge throughout the narrative discourse. There is a clear parallel between the Subaltern in postcolonial literary criticism and the Price women. Not only do these voices allow the women to be liberated from Nathan, but they also channel voices of the historically voiceless Congolese people. Orleanna compares herself to the Congo: colonised, stripped of valuables, 'changing hands, bearing scars.' When Orleanna explains why she left the Congo with her children, leaving behind her husband, she links African and American women: ordinary people who may fail to see connections between themselves and larger political systems operating in the world. Her role as a repressed wife functions allegorically to present the

subjugation of the Congo under Western colonialism. Through the emergence of a hybrid identity, Orleanna comes to identify with the Congolese, drawing a clear parallel between her occupation as Nathan's wife and the occupation of the Congo by colonisers.

Nathan's persistent zeal to change the Congolese – to convert them to Christianity – resembles the misguided intentions by colonists. On the other hand, amidst Belgian Congo's struggle for independence and the country's subsequent authoritarian political regime, the Price women's condemnation of Nathan is symbolic of decolonisation and postcolonialism. Ruth-May's spiritual divorce from her father and embodiment of Congolese spirituality perhaps best illustrates this idea. The naivety that originally characterises Ruth-May is alleviated through the transculturation process, and her complete faith in Congolese spirituality rather than her father's biblical teachings shows how she abandons Western civilisation completely. Similarly, Adah's transculturation is apparent to the reader, with her shifting identity being explicitly conveyed as she embraces her 'slant' and grows to appreciate the Congolese notion of 'muntu,' the Congolese sense of self.

Over the course of the twentieth century, the Self vs. Other opposition in Western narratives portraying the Congo has become less prevalent. Comparing *Heart of Darkness* and *Tintin au Congo* to *A Burnt-Out Case* and *The Poisonwood Bible* shows a transition away from cultural hegemony and Eurocentrism: the traditional systems of power are subverted in these more recent Western narratives. Conrad provides a subtle critique of imperialism in *Heart of Darkness*: however, Greene and Kingsolver are much more explicit in their critiques of imperialism and colonialism. One of Kingsolver's political aims in *The Poisonwood Bible* is to show the value of Congolese culture, which is achieved through the American protagonists embracing native culture.. By entwining a feminist narrative with a critique of colonialism, Kingsolver departs from this trope,

and instead presents a connection between the oppression experienced by women within the Western family unit and the (post)colonised Congolese.

The texts examined in this study show a shift in how Congolese characters are represented in Western narratives. Conrad presents Congolese characters as primitiveness personified: people in a land that time forgot. His protagonist, Marlow, views them as savages and incomprehensible, yet expresses a sort of kinship with them. Greene and Kingsolver represent Congolese characters in a way that shows greater depth: these characters, such as Deo Gratias and Anatole, are not mere follies to their European protagonists. Kingsolver's protagonists identify with the novel's Congolese characters, which undermines the Self versus Other binarism seen in earlier texts. In this way, the division between the Western and Congolese characters is blurred, and Bhabha's notion of hybridity emerges. This same hybridity is seen to a degree in Greene's novel as well, where the exchange of culture between semiospheres occurs.

It is necessary to note that the emergence of postcolonial narratives in *The Poisonwood Bible* lags behind real-world socio-political developments. For example, Spivak's seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" was published ten years before the publication of Kingsolver's novel – not to mention the works of Bhabha, Fanon, Saïd, and many other postcolonial academics throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. And yet, there are few significant novels on the Congo published between *A Burnt-Out Case* and *The Poisonwood Bible*. Between the Congo Crisis in the early 1960s and the demise of Zaïre in 1997, there seems to have been little Western interest in the Congo. However, with the Rwandan Civil War and genocide in the early 1990s, and the First Congo War in the mid-'90s, Western interest in central Africa seems to have been reignited, and with this came the opportunity for new takes on a century-old literary canon.

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