



Africa and Africans in Conrad's Heart of Darkness

A Lawrence University Freshman Studies Lecture

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I am going to begin my discussion of *Heart of Darkness* with *Curious George*. As you all know, Curious George was a little monkey who was found in the jungle by the man with the yellow hat, and brought to America where he had many adventures. Curious George, we are told, is "a good little monkey." He is a good little monkey with no tail who walks upright and rides bicycles. Those of you who have taken paleoanthropology, however, already know that Curious George is no monkey. He does not have a tail. Maybe he is a chimp -- except chimps walk on their knuckles and generally don't deliver papers, paint walls, and make phone calls.

As we all know, George has a problem. He is a good little monkey, but he is "too curious." He is so curious that he causes problems for the man in the yellow hat. The man in the yellow hat dresses like a colonial officer, wearing a bright yellow safari suit.

In *Curious George Takes a Job*, George is in the zoo. He steals the keys to the cages from the zookeeper, and frees all the African animals. George, now newly liberated himself, takes a series of menial jobs. At one point, George breaks into an apartment and paints African animals all over the walls. At the end of the story he stars in a Hollywood movie.

Curious George is a two layered story. On one level it's a dumb but beloved children's story. On another, it is a postcolonial parable in which George stands for Africa, and the zookeeper and man with the yellow hat for benevolent colonizers. George stealing the keys and liberating the animals is a parable for the decolonization of Africa. From the middle of this century onward, the African took the keys from the white man and let himself out of the cage.

One day I read some of *Curious George Takes a Job* to my students. One student, an African woman raised biculturally, was shocked. "My parents read me this story," she said. "This is horrible! Did the author know what he was doing? Was he a racist? Or did he write this postcolonial plot into the book with full consciousness?" Unfortunately there is little written about the author, so I cannot tell you whether he was an enlightened man who hid the symbolism in there on purpose, or if he did it unconsciously.

Heart of Darkness is also a multilayered postcolonial parable. And it is also a story in which racism presents itself so blatantly that, for many, the dilemma of race must be tackled before anything else in the book may be dealt with. Conrad's liberal use of derogatory, outdated and offensive terminology, and the flagrant devaluation of people of color as savages, niggers and cannibals -- this use of language by Conrad darkens and disturbs many a contemporary, 1996 mind.

One of the first questions my students often ask is "Was Conrad a racist?" And I have had African-American students tell me, in no uncertain terms, that he was, that this book is not read in traditionally black colleges in the US, and that there is little value in it being read here. And then there is the argument, stated eloquently by one of my own students on Monday, that language was used differently in the 1890's. What we interpret now as a racist term was then, the argument goes, a relatively neutral word without racist overtones.

In 1996, these are highly relevant questions. We live in interesting times -- times when books are banned because they contain offensive terminology. Two of Conrad's books -- *Heart of Darkness* and *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* -- have been on some banned book lists, but not nearly as often as Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer*.

These books have been banned in schools and libraries in such places as Brooklyn because they contain the word "nigger."

See, I said the word. Last year, during the [O.J.] Simpson trial, those CNN reporters invented the term "n word" to describe some of the content of the Fuhrmann tapes. Does this newfound "n word"-consciousness affect how 300 odd freshman might view *Heart of Darkness*?

In the meantime, we find the word "nigger" sprinkled liberally throughout contemporary song, in the lyrics of the Grateful Dead, Patti Smith, Public Enemy, John Lennon, and Snoop Doggy Dog, as well as on such popular shows as Def Comedy Jam. Our comfort level with the "n word" is context-dependent.

In 1890, however, when Conrad did his trip up the Congo River, things were different, were they not? This is actually an empirical question, and one we can tackle with evidence. We can ask, for example, how the word "nigger" was perceived in 1890.

The word "nigger," like Negro, Niger, and the archaic slang word "neger," come from the Latin root for black. The following quotation is from Stuart Flexner's 1976 book, *I Hear America Talking*(i):

". . . At any rate, "nigger" was a common word in both England and America by the 17th century; it was just considered a pronunciation of "Negro" until around 1825, when both abolitionists and Blacks began to object to it as disparaging. Then after the Civil War "nigger" became the most common contemptuous word for a Black."

This was in the US. What about England, where Conrad lived? According to Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow in *The Africa That Never Was* (1970) the word "nigger" had fallen into disrepute by the 1880's. They give an example of a travel writer named Grogan who "saw the Africans only as 'niggers' -- he used no other term." Hammond and Jablow write (p. 100):

"No issue was taken with the word or its use at this time, though some in positions of administrative responsibility, clearly aware of its pejorative content, eschewed its use. In this connection it is noteworthy that [Sir Harry] Johnston [writing in the 1880's] occasionally lapses into using the word, but discreetly, hemmed in by quotation marks. Later, when he became Proconsul of British Empire in Africa, he did not use the term at all."

There is little doubt, then, that Conrad would have been aware in 1898 that the word "nigger" was derogatory. Although not a native speaker of English, Conrad reportedly had a flawless ear for the tongue. Our reference librarian, Mr. Gilbert, also did some research on the topic, and found references in both the US and Britain indicating that the word "nigger" was already considered offensive in the 18th century in both places. Thus, Conrad must have known.

But does this mean that Conrad was a racist? Not necessarily. Conrad is not Marlow. Perhaps Conrad constructed Marlow as a racist, at least in part, by having him use such words as "nigger" or savage in a few select places in the book. If you go onto the Freshman Studies World Wide Web page, however, you will find a searchable index of *Heart of Darkness*. Type in the word "nigger" (do this both for the singular and the plural) to see every case in which the term is used. Surprise. Most of the times that Marlow uses the word nigger, it is when an African has been physically abused by somebody else, when the African has already been completely and totally dehumanized. Otherwise Marlow uses Negro, or Black.

I want to take this idea of racism with Marlow and Conrad just a bit further. When we look at the racist language in the book, it is as though we are looking at the very surface of the story. But, as professor Yatzeck pointed out in his lecture last year, *Heart of Darkness* is full of irony and deception. I thought he made a really interesting point, and one that some of you might want to pursue in your papers. He suggested that light is used to indicate deceit in *Heart of Darkness*. For example, when something glitters, it does not glitter because it is beautiful or good, but because there is something hidden under the surface, and sometimes something dangerous. The river glitters, eyes glitter. The haze is translucent, still, eerie, as though the sky was covered with white gauze. This light is much like the parable that Conrad tells at the beginning of the novella:

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 be excepted), 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 . . .

It is as though the light does not illuminate the darkness, but rather that, in a sense, the light is the darkness. Nothing is what it seems, as is the case with a parable. A parable is a thing that, as Jesus pointed out, you can hear if you have ears.

When we look beyond the language in the book that makes us nervous in 1996, we can see *Heart of Darkness* as a scathing critique of colonialism. *Heart of Darkness* takes place at a time when there were mere hints that colonialism was not working as it should. It was a time that appeared on the surface perhaps to be the height of Empire, a time to be bullish about colonialism in Africa. But Conrad was lurking about whispering "sell, sell," a lone bear on the floor of Pax Britannica.

Imperialism is a central, underlying theme in this book, although it is not only about imperialism. Conrad stated so himself in various documents. In an 1899 letter, for example, Conrad wrote that the idea behind *Heart of Darkness* is "the criminality of efficiency and pure selfishness when tackling the civilizing work in Africa." In 1902 he lavished praise on a reviewer who wrote that *Heart of Darkness* is:

"a 'psychological masterpiece' relating 'the sub-conscious life within us. . . to our conscious actions, feelings and outlook,'" offering, "an 'analysis of the deterioration of the white man's morale, when he is let loose from European restraint, and planted down in the tropics as an emissary of light armed to the teeth, to make trade profits out of the subject races.'" (Murfin, pg. 97)

But in one of these letters, Conrad adds:

"The idea is so wrapped up in secondary notions that You -- even You! may miss it."

Now let us turn to the colonial backdrop of the *Heart of Darkness*.

The Setting: The Thames and the Congo

Heart of Darkness is set in the Congo. No, let me backtrack. It is not really set in the Congo. Rather, it is a story that we infer takes place in the Congo, narrated by Marlow from a barge on the Thames. The reality of *Heart of Darkness* is that the entire time, we never leave the Thames. During the time when Conrad wrote *Heart of Darkness*, and even before that, during the imaginary time when Marlow went to the Congo, the British colonial empire was at its height. Britain was the preeminent world power during the second half of the nineteenth century. She had colonies around the world, including India, Malaya, Hong Kong, and much of Africa. Britain controlled the Suez Canal, the east coast of Africa, and the route to the source of the Nile.

The images from the Thames in *Heart of Darkness* lend support to the argument that this is, at a basic level, a novel about imperialism. At the beginning of the novel, Conrad connects the Thames to the Congo. The Thames is "a waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth." It is connected to the Congo like "an interminable waterway." It is connected both symbolically and actually. It is connected physically as all rivers are connected to each other. It is also connected by shared humanity, and it is connected economically. One piece of the economic connection is the ivory coming out of the Congo, on its way to Europe. This economic connection is alluded to by the presence of London in the distance -- the "monstrous town" -- and by the gloom we now see as we sit on the Thames with Marlow -- a lightness growing gradually darker, a sense of foreboding that intensifies. Some readers of this book argue that the coming darkness is about the future (Sarvan in Kimbrough 283,284).

From the barge on the Thames, Marlow tells us, "And this also has been one of the dark places of the earth." This also -- in relation to what? Well, for one, in relation to Africa, and Marlow will soon tell us about that. Second, in relation to Britain's own past -- a "primitive" past which was a dark time, also, like the dark time Marlow found in the Congo.

Now let me tell you a little about the history of the Congo. The Congo was the place that brought about the "partition of Africa." The partition of Africa was a momentous event. It took place between 1880 and 1890, and marked the beginning of the colonial era in Africa. Before the partition of Africa, many European countries had nothing but "toeholds" in Africa. These toeholds were economic and political claims to the coastal regions of Africa. Before the partition of Africa, the map of Africa was, for Europeans, a map with a big blank space in the center. Conrad later admits to a fascination with the big blank space. He writes:

It was in 1868, when I was nine years old or thereabouts, that while looking at a map of Africa of the time and putting my finger on that blank space then representing the unsolved mystery of the continent, I said to myself with absolute assurance and an amazing audacity which are no longer in my character now:

"When I grow up I shall go there."

Before the partition of Africa, the Europeans did not know much about what was at the center. There had been only isolated journeys into the interior by explorers, traders, missionaries and the like. Some mapmakers used to fill the blank spaces with drawings of wild animals. If you've seen "Out of Africa," perhaps you can remember the dinner scene with Karen von Blixen and Berkeley Cole. In a mysterious, hushed voice, Berkeley tells Karen, "Be careful." She looks confused. He goes on. He reminds her of the mapmakers in earlier times who drew maps of the world, and when they got to the edge of the known world they drew dragons, and they wrote, "Beyond this point there be dragons." Karen is horrified by this metaphor. She says, "Is that where we are?" Of course, Karen and Berkeley were in Kenya, and it was 20 years after Conrad's journey to the Congo. But this is how the unknown regions of Africa were symbolized at the time. "Beyond this point there be dragons."

To the Africans, of course, the center was filled in. Peoples all over Africa lived in bands or tribes or kingdoms or empires, and they had territories with boundaries that they defended. There were walled cities with armies, and complex trade relationships. There were long distance trade routes, and alliances and enemies. Indeed, in some places there was even a 2000 year history of contact with the outside world -- Egypt. Islam had penetrated north and west Africa by the 12th century, and people were keeping written histories in Arabic. There was no blank center, and there were no metaphors about dragons. As far as the Africans were concerned, the land was not up for grabs.

Though they did not have a written history, the people of the Congo were not primitives, cannibals or savages. Four of the societies in the Congo were kingdoms. These kingdoms traded with the Portuguese since the fifteenth century. They were also involved in the slave trade. A group of forest hunters also lived there. They called themselves such names as Mbuti or Efe, but you probably know them as the "Pygmies." These are the people from whom the group "Deep Forest" borrows sounds for their haunting, synthesized music. The Pygmies have occupied this region for 40,000 years. There is clear evidence that these people had contact with the Egyptians, and that their music was all the rage in the Pharaoh's court. Later, during the 17th century, two forest people, young men, were taken to Italy where they learned to speak Italian and play the piano.

How was the Congo implicated in the partition of Africa? During the 1870's, this region of Central Africa that we now call Zaire was the domain of Belgium. King Leopold II of the Belgians had created a personal empire for himself in this area of Africa. This was an area rich in ivory and other minerals, including diamonds. The British, French and Germans were jealous that King Leopold owned such a vast rich area of Africa. To resolve the controversy they set up an international conference in Berlin in 1884. The conferencees, not an African among them, decided that all the nations of Europe should have free access to the interior of Africa -- to the white spaces. They also decided that a country could not claim a region of Africa for its own unless there was clear evidence of occupation.

The 1884 conference led to a scramble for colonies. King Leopold already had a head start. In 1878, he had hired an explorer named Henry Stanley to establish trading stations along the Congo River. Stanley had gone there before, and had essentially "opened up" the interior of Africa. In 1885, a year after the Berlin conference, King Leopold established the Congo Free State. The Congo Free State was not a Belgian colony, but a personal possession of King Leopold.

It was during this time that Conrad went to the Congo.

Postcolonial Critique

Earlier I argued that *Heart of Darkness* was a postcolonial parable. I have just spent several minutes explaining how, during the time Conrad visited the Congo, the British Empire was at its height and the era of colonialism in Africa was just beginning. What is the difference between a colonial perspective and a postcolonial one? Edward Said wrote in his book *Culture and Imperialism* that colonialism is mainly about political and economic relationships, some of which may or may not continue after a state gains independence. The postcolonial era, on the other hand, is about the

intrusion and colonization of minds with ideas. This is what the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o meant when he talked about "decolonizing the mind" -- that the colonizer and the colonized both carry colonialism in their minds long after the state has gained independence. Although Marlow is surrounded -- and horrified by -- by the accouterments (and inefficiencies) of colonialism as he travels up the river, his struggle is also (or perhaps more so) with the idea of colonialism. For this reason -- and because Conrad appears to be critical of colonialism in *Heart of Darkness* -- this book has much about it that is postcolonial. This may explain the fascination with *Heart of Darkness* and other novels by Conrad among so many postcolonial and postmodern thinkers. These include Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Frederic Jameson and a number of my colleagues in anthropology. *Heart of Darkness* has nearly become fetishized in the postmodern intellectual community.

Some critics argue, for example, that Conrad has constructed Marlow as a well-intentioned liberal. Listen to what Marlow says when comparing the deaths of Kurtz to the helmsman:

No I can't forget him [and here Marlow means Kurtz], though I am not prepared to affirm the fellow was exactly worth the life we lost in getting to him. I missed my late helmsman awfully -- I missed him while his body was still lying in the pilot-house. Perhaps you will think it passing strange this regret for a savage who was no more account than a grain of sand in a black Sahara. Well, don't you see, he had done something, he had steered; for months I had him at my back -- a help -- an instrument. It was a kind of partnership. He steered for me -- I had to look after him, I worried about his deficiencies, and thus a subtle bond had been created, of which I only became aware when it was suddenly broken. And the intimate profundity of that look he gave me when he received his hurt remains to this day in my memory -- like a claim of distant kinship affirmed in a supreme moment.

There are many things to see in this passage. Among them, we observe how Marlow is able to identify personally with "a savage who is no more account than a grain of sand in a black Sahara." On the other hand, we observe in retrospect Marlow's graciousness toward this mere savage -- (as if to say) -- "ah, yes, this is a mere savage, and I -- such a wonder -- could actually see humanity in him -- amazing -- he is human." Marlow is simultaneously a good liberal and a racist, and a man struggling quite consciously with both perspectives.

Achebe's critique and Images of Illness in Africa

Those of you who have read the introduction in your edition of *Heart of Darkness* are aware of Chinua Achebe's critique of the novel. I would like to go back for a moment to Achebe's critique.

Everyone who writes about *Heart of Darkness* is aware that Conrad does not explicitly state that it is set in Africa. We infer that it is in Africa because we know that Conrad was there, and because of the images he uses. It doesn't take much to also infer that the story told in *Heart of Darkness* might be set elsewhere, for example, in Vietnam. But there are things in the story that put limitations on the kinds of places it might be set. I think the story would succeed in the an inner city, for example, or on an alien planet, but it might be more difficult to pull off if the setting were Lawrence University. This is because *Heart of Darkness* invokes emotions from a particular set of imagery which are almost universally known in the west. It is the fact that the imagery is borrowed from Africa that bothers Achebe. He argues that *Heart of Darkness* treats Africa (and I quote)

"as setting and backdrop which eliminates the African as human factor. Africa as metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his peril. Can nobody see the preposterous and perverse arrogance in thus reducing Africa to the role of props for the break-up of one petty European mind?"

Achebe is saying that he is offended by the use of images of Africa in the novel. But, some of you might be asking, didn't we already establish that *Heart of Darkness* is anti-colonial, anti-imperial, etc., and that Conrad is probably about as non-racist as you can get for a man of his time, even if Marlow is struggling with these things? So what is Achebe talking about?

Let us take the analysis one step further, beyond the mere words at the surface of the story, and beyond the inner struggles of the characters in the story. Let us look now at how Conrad has used imagery in *Heart of Darkness* as a kind of shorthand of the emotions, invoking shared meanings that, in this case, have their origins in western images of Africa and of the primitive.

Images of modernity in *Heart of Darkness* contrast with images of the primitive. We can think of modernity in two ways. For one, to be "modern" is to not be savage. In *Heart of Darkness*, Africans are often savages, though at times, Europeans are savages. Europeans were savages in the past, and there is some ambiguity in *Heart of Darkness* about their status as non-savages in the Congo.

We also find images of modernity -- or its breakdown -- in the boiler laying in the grass, the piles of broken drainage pipes, and the pieces of rusting machinery Marlow saw at his Company's Station. Boats fall apart and there are no rivets to fix them. Roads just don't get built, and bricks just don't get made. In *Heart of Darkness*' Congo, the very essence of the industrial revolution rots, and the most basic structures which define the modern world are frustrated. The Europeans who try to bring roads or make bricks or fix boats are defeated, and their original purposes in going to the Congo are made futile and meaningless. Listen to this passage:

Once a white man in an unbuttoned uniform, camping on the path with an armed escort of lank Zanzibaris, very hospitable and festive -- not to say drunk. Was looking after the upkeep of the road, he declared. Can't say I saw any road or any upkeep, unless the body of a middle-aged negro, with a bullet-hole in the forehead, upon which I absolutely stumbled three miles farther on, may be considered as a permanent improvement.

Not only does this place lack a road, the most basic signal of civilization, but a dead African blocks the way. Note that it was a bullet and not a spear that did this guy in. The entire scene is ludicrous -- a white guy looking after a nonexistent road, the meaning of his mission reduced to absolute futility.

I will now talk about the Congo in the nineteenth century, and about some of the images of Africa and Africans taken home to Europe. These images have many sources. Some of them were stories about travels through Africa, and these included several books written by Henry Stanley. These books were published during Conrad's lifetime. Stanley's book *Through the Dark Continent* was published 1879, and *How I found Livingstone in Central Africa* was published in 1890. *In Darkest Africa* was published in 1891. These were popular books, and it is reasonable to suggest that if Conrad hadn't read them, he was at least influenced by the pictures they presented of Africa.

We also know that Conrad read anthropology, and apparently Conrad was very intrigued by one particular anthropologist who wrote about the Arctic. He may have read early anthropological accounts of Africa. But many of these writings which we see in retrospect as "anthropology" really came from missionaries and specialists in tropical medicine who had gone to Africa to save souls or to cure the sick or both. Many of these people came back to Europe and N. America to write accounts of their experiences. In the place in Kenya where I did my research, Quaker missionaries were the first ones to learn the indigenous language and to produce reliable writings about the culture.

I am now going to outline for you six images that came out of nineteenth century Africa. Not all of these images are specific to Africa, but together, they give us a pretty good picture of how people saw Africa at that time. A lot of these images have been passed down to us, and I expect that you will recognize some of them. In some cases, I will talk about how we have inherited these images today.

First, Africa was seen as a place of physical darkness. I think the titles of Stanley's books are dead giveaways. *In Darkest Africa*. *Through the Dark Continent*. *In Darkest Africa* cover has a picture of a continent with a black middle not a white one. Yet the middle is blank. *Through the Dark Continent* has an engraving of Stanley in a military uniform on a boat in a dense jungle. The background of the jungle is black, and the book is green. A lot of this imagery came from the tropical rain forest.

It seems to me that the tropical rain forests of the Congo provided very important images in *Heart of Darkness*. Marlow described the forest as follows:

The edge of a colossal jungle, so dark green as to be almost black...

or

beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings. An empty stream, a great silence, and impenetrable forest.

It happens that the area Conrad and Stanley visited is part of the only region of tropical rain forest in Africa. This rain forest region encompasses present day Zaire, neighboring Cameroon, and a piece of the coast of west Africa. The rest of Africa is mostly deserts and grasslands. Neither Stanley nor Conrad would have encountered these images of

black/green had they gone almost anywhere else on the continent. Indeed, Stanley did go elsewhere, but the language of the rain forest even appears in his writings on East Africa.

Aside from "black wool" and "black hens," Conrad fills the pages of *Heart of Darkness* with descriptions of slithering, shining blackness. I went through at one point and circled every reference to the colors of the people. Here are some examples: "black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees," "strings of dusty niggers with splay feet arrived and departed," "a whirl of black limbs," "the bush was swarming with human limbs in movement, glistening, of bronze colour."

Of course there is another kind of darkness being alluded to here. There was Kurtz's darkness -- "an impenetrable darkness." All the dark images in the book -- the black/green jungle, the black shapes that lay or splay or whirl or stare or die -- all of these allude to this other kind of darkness.

The second image that was associated with Africa historically is that of paganism. Many Bantu-speaking African societies had a multi-layered way of thinking about God and the spirit. In addition to a supreme God, traditional African religions also included a belief in ancestral spirits. These ancestral spirits had the power to act in the lives of living people, and their actions could be good or bad. Living people would do things to keep the spirits of their dead ancestors from harming them. But the notion that this was paganism was like saying the center of Africa was blank, that it was up for grabs. The African had religion, but it was African religion.

Many Christian missionaries were appalled by beliefs in ancestral spirits, which they interpreted as witchcraft and sorcery. In addition, they were appalled by other practices, including female circumcision, traditional healings which included facial scarification, sacrifice of animals at gravesides, and the pounding of drums. African religious celebrations such as funerals were interpreted as frenzied, wild-eyed dances. All these things were often associated with evil, because godlessness was considered dark and evil. For this reason, Africa was and continues to be seen as a battleground between good and evil. Indeed, Conrad uses images of flames and fire, even of Mephistopheles, to allude to images of hell.

Disease is a third image associated with Africa. The west coast of Africa was once known as "the white man's graveyard." Half the Europeans who went there died in the first year. Europeans just did not have immunity to disease that the Africans had. Yellow fever was especially problematic. It was a disease that killed adults, but was rarely fatal in children. African children would survive yellow fever and therefore ward it off as adults. But Europeans who went to Africa were already adults, so their chances of surviving a bout of yellow fever were much worse. Malaria was also rampant. Malaria is a parasite transmitted by a mosquito. The first bout with malaria is the worst, and thus many Europeans succumbed to it. Schistosomiasis is a parasite that spends half its life in the body of a snail, and the other half in the body of a human being. It enters through the skin and leaves the human body through waste products. Sleeping sickness was also problematic. I could go on and on with the list.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Europeans are plagued with African diseases. Indeed, disease is so common in *Heart of Darkness* that lack of disease is considered remarkable. The one man in *Heart of Darkness* who did not ever seem to get ill was the incompetent manager at the station. Even Conrad had been sick.

African illness was also fascinating, and numerous medical practitioners went to Africa to set up mission hospitals or to study tropical medicine. Dr. David Livingstone, whom Stanley had found in the Congo in 1871, is the archetypal example of such a doctor. He combined Christianity with healing, and developed a deep respect for indigenous forms of medicine.

Nevertheless, Dr. Livingstone felt that Africa itself had a kind of disease, brought on by the "evils of the slave trade," paganism, and "the creeping forces of Islam." Dr. Livingstone set the tone for the pre-colonial image of illness in Africa (Vaughan:57).

Albert Schweitzer was another "jungle doctor," although he was in Africa during the twentieth century. Apparently Dr. Schweitzer felt that he was "doing battle with nature itself." For him, fighting disease in Africa was fighting with the very nature of Africa. Dr. Schweitzer was also the one who said, "The African is my brother but my junior brother."

We still associate Africa with disease. Nowadays, the focus of these associations is AIDS. There was a series of scientific articles in the mid-1980's alleging that Africa was the ultimate source of HIV. These allegations were eventually refuted, not only by the lack of evidence substantiating the claims, but also through discussion of the discourse in western medicine about disease in Africa.

Insanity is a fourth image of Africa, and it follows from the images of disease. During the 19th century, there began to be an interest in determining whether or not there was a specific kind of insanity in Africa. What would insanity look like in Africa? Would it be different from European insanity? I know from having lived in African villages that Africans do deal with mental illness very differently than we do. For example, people who become traditional healers in western Kenya experience a kind of disease for which there is no cure. This disease may last a decade or more, until one day the disease is cured by a traditional healer. Now bear in mind that this is not an illness that we define in this culture. It is an illness that may only be healed through methods the missionaries would refer to as "witchcraft." The presence of the illness and its cure are taken as signals in the village that this person is to become a traditional healer. From a western perspective, we might say that the person had been cured of a psychosomatic illness.

Mental illness became important in Africa because it began to have another form. There began to be an awareness that the African was being made crazy by the colonial encounter. Again, Livingstone's argument that Africa had a colonial disease.

Fifth, Africans were seen as primitive, savage and primordial. Savagery and primitiveness are obvious enough images in *Heart of Darkness*, so I would like to touch just briefly on this point.

There is a story from the 17th century about the Mbuti, the forest people who lived in the Congo region for 40,000 years. It seems that a British physician claimed the Mbuti were not really human. He had a skeleton in a British museum that scientists later discovered was really a chimpanzee (source: Turnbull). Stanley, however, recognized the long history of the Mbuti and had nothing but admiration for them. The tone of his admiration, though, was unconsciously condescending, as if to say, "Isn't it remarkable that these people really have a history?"

Cannibals are sometimes mentioned in *Heart of Darkness*. To my knowledge, there were no cannibals in Africa. There are allusions to cannibals in *In Darkest Africa* (vol. 1 p 115). Since it is highly unlikely that Conrad encountered cannibals in Africa, it is possible that he had learned about them from other visitors who had been under the illusion that they had really encountered cannibals. Cannibals are part of the nineteenth century imagery of Africa.

Nineteenth century social scientists such as Lewis Henry Morgan and Freidrich Engels were influenced by evolutionary thinking. Morgan was the quintessential social evolutionary thinker. He proposed that there were three stages to human cultural development. These proceeded from the least complex to the most complex. The least complex he called Savagery. The second stage was Barbarism, and the third was Civilization. Each of these was contrasted with the other in terms of marriage customs, sexual practices, and ways of getting food. Civilization was characterized by monogamy and patrilineality. Morgan's stage theory was well known in the second half of the nineteenth century.

A sixth image of Africa from the nineteenth century is that of sexuality. One contemporary author (Megan Vaughan) writes about "the 'myth' of black sexuality." A source of this myth is found in the problem of disease. The pervasiveness of syphilis in the African population led to the conclusion that Africans were somehow "sexier" than Europeans. Second, the myth of black sexuality was heightened by the presence of polygamy in nineteenth century Africa. As an anthropologist, I know that polygamy was more common cross-culturally than monogamy. In Europe, however, monogamy was absolutely the norm. Foucault and others have written that sexual mores actually became more rigid in Europe during the latter half of the 19th century. In contrast, African sexual mores seem to have relaxed with the coming of the European. At the turn of the century, women in the part of Africa I worked in were already complaining about the breakdown of the morality of the young people. African marriage customs also differed from those of Europe, and were the third cause of the myth of black sexuality. Marriages appeared on the surface to be less formalized and marital relationships were more distant. African couples who wanted to join a particular church were often obligated by missionaries to be married in the church. Otherwise, they would be living in sin. Nowadays many people blame the high HIV rates in Africa on African marriage customs and sexuality.

As you see, there are very specific images of Africa that were held in the 19th century. I am particularly intrigued by the images of disease and mental illness, and how these were interpreted by people such as Dr. Livingstone. Recall that Dr. Livingstone believed that Africa itself had a kind of pathology brought on by colonial contact. This pathology was both physical to the mental, and included a spiritual pathology characterized by primitive or savage sexuality and paganism. It was the duty of those who went to the Congo to extend a rescuing arm to Africa, to Christianize and to bring western medicine. But it was not only Africa that was diseased. In *Heart of Darkness*, the images of physical and mental disorder included the Europeans. And who was to rescue them?

Although I do not agree with Achebe's accusation that the sources of the imagery in *Heart of Darkness* stem from Conrad's own racism, the emotion and imagery in *Heart of Darkness* profit from stereotypes about Africa held during that day. As we read this novel nowadays, many of those same images are with us -- illness, insanity, sexuality, the primitive. These images are a sort of cardboard cutout of Africa, a Disneyland wild jungle ride, a Curious George story. We contain these images and use them when we construct new stories, "not as the kernel, but enveloping the tale, as a glow that brings out the haze."

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