

A CHOICE OF NIGHTMARES:

The Adaptation of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

in Francis Ford Coppola's Film *Apocalypse Now*

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Tutkimukseni tarkoitus on paneutua Joseph Conradin 1800-luvun Belgian Kongoon sijoittuvan teoksen *Heart of Darkness* (1899) elokuvasovitukseen *Apocalypse Now*, jonka Francis Ford Coppola ohjasi vuonna 1979. Elokuvan tapahtumat liittyvät Vietnamin sotaan 1960-luvulla. Pyrkimyksenä on identifioida kirjasta löytyviä teemoja, ilmaisutapoja – ja muotoja, joita elokuvassa hyödynnetään. Tässä apuna käytetään erityisesti kirjallisuuden elokuvaksi sovittamiseen liittyviä teorioita. Vertaan myös kirjailijan ja elokuvaohjaajan rooleja ja kyseisten tekijöiden asemaa ja merkitystä kulttuurisessa kehityksessä Conradin edustamasta modernismista Coppolan edustamaan postmoderniin ajatteluun.

Teemoista tärkeimmiksi nousevat kolonialismi, imperialismi ja sota, joka on elokuvan keskeisin lähtökohta, kun taas kaksi ensin mainittua korostuvat kirjassa. Lisäksi elokuva hyödyntää viitteellistä materiaalia, jolla ei välttämättä ole suoraa yhteyttä Conradin teokseen, mutta jolla on kulttuurinen tai temaattinen yhteys, tai joka on syntynyt teoksen vaikutuksesta, kuten T.S. Eliotin runo *Hollow Men*. Siihen ja muihin kirjallisiin, kuin myös musiikillisiin viittauksiin panudun myös.

Elokuvasovituksen luonteen määrittelyssä käytän analogian teoreettista käsitettä keskittymällä kirjan ja elokuvan välisiin yhteyksiin ja eroihin. Erityisen huomion kohteena on kirjan henkilöiden esiintyminen elokuvassa, ja miten ne vastaavat alkuperäistä. Tämän tuloksena voidaan todeta, että elokuvan tekijöiden - elokuvan tekemisenhän on aina ryhmätyötä, mikä tässäkin tutkimuksessa käy hyvin selväksi – näkemys kirjan keskeisestä hahmosta Kurtzista vastaa hyvin Conradin luomaa henkilöä. Kirjan päähenkilö ja kertojahahmo Marlow muuttuu elokuvassa Willardiksi ja ilmeisistä yhtäläisyyksistä huolimatta, on henkilön funktio elokuvassa merkittävässä määrin erilainen. Kirjan Marlow on selvästi modernismin mukainen moraalinen sankarihahmo, joka selviää valoon ihmisyyden pimeän puolen nähneenä. Elokuvan Willardin kohtalona puolestaan on jäädä pimeyteen sodan epäinhimillisyyksiin osallistuneena, vaikka hän henkiin jääkin.

Loppupäätelmänä voidaan todeta, että *Apocalypse Now*-elokuvan tekijöiden tarkoituksena on selvästi ollut kirjan teemojen analyttinen uudelleenarviointi sovitettuna Conradin teoksesta poikkeavaan aikakauteen ja sodan viitekehukseen. Elokuva voidaan siis pitää luovana yrityksenä päivittää kirja.

Avainsanat: elokuvatutkimus, adaptaatioteoriat, Joseph Conrad, Francis Ford Coppola

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1. Introduction

At the beginning of Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* (1899/1902), Marlow, "a seaman...and a wanderer too" (p. 2305) is about to tell his story to "the Director of Companies" (p. 2304) and his guests, anchored in Gravesend on the Thames, east of London, waiting for the tide to turn. At the time there was "only the gloom to west,...the sun sunk low, and from glowing white turned to a dull red without rays and without heat, as if to go out suddenly, stricken to death by the touch of that gloom brooding over a crowd of men" (pp. 2304-2305). Conrad's nameless narrator pictures darkness hanging over the heart of the British Empire of the 19th Century, thus foreshadowing Marlow's story of his journey to the Belgian Congo to work as captain of a steamboat in the ivory trade. In an Asian metropolis, 70 years later, the Marlow character of Francis Ford Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now* (1979), Willard, a Captain in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam war, wakes up from his nightmares in the first scene of the film to conclude that he is "still in Saigon", already in darkness, yet unaware of the nature of his mission to come.

The connection between the Conrad's novella and Coppola's film has been subject of debate mostly because *Heart of Darkness* was not credited as the source of the story when the film came out, and it remains so in the directors *Apocalypse Now Redux* (2000) edition of the film. The filmmakers have, however, on several occasions admitted the debt the film owes to the novella. In fact, according to Hagen (1988, 295), Conrad's name was taken out of the credits because of the disagreement between the writers Coppola, John Milius and war correspondent Michael Herr, whose series of articles about the Vietnam experience, published in *Esquire Magazine* and later as a book called *Dispatches* (1977), were the source for the voice over narration by the character of Captain Willard. It is probable that Herr felt that the mention of Conrad would have overshadowed his contribution to the script of the film. Be that as it may, there is no reason to undermine the connection between the two. On the

contrary, Coppola and his co-screenwriter John Milius clearly used the book as reference point. The production log included in the program leaflet from the first screenings of the original film and the publication *Notes on the Making of Apocalypse Now* (1979) by Eleanor Coppola inform us that the novella was a handbook for the cast as well; especially Marlon Brando, the Kurtz of the film, used his own interpretation of *Heart of Darkness* as a basis for his performance after reading it on the set on the first day he arrived, and during the shoot he made Coppola rewrite some of the dialogue to accommodate the legendary actor's vision (Hagen, 1988, 295,299).

In this thesis *Apocalypse Now* will be considered as an adaptation of *Heart of Darkness*. The aim is to identify the themes and particular features of Conrad's story used in the film and analyse their execution in relationship to the novella with references to the adaptation theory. This acquires the defining of the traditions both literary and cultural, as well as the understanding of the theoretical framework concerning the evolution of cinema; also it is necessary to evaluate the place of *Apocalypse Now* and its makers in that context. This must include the understanding of the connection between modernism and postmodernism. However, the focus is not on similarities alone but also on the different views on issues such as imperialism, morality, humanity and alienation. There is also a need to make comparisons between the roles of the author and the director from the point of view of film theory. Some of the obvious discourses in these works in question, such as colonization and war, require historical perspective in juxtaposition with the attitudes and ideas of the different eras they represent. Additionally, the film incorporates layers of intertextual material that offer other perspectives to the relationship of the film and the novella. In this work that kind of intertextuality will be treated as a point of interest. Both the original 1979 edition and the director's latest version *Apocalypse Now Redux* (2000) will be under inspection here.

2. The Concept of Auteur

There is an often repeated quote that Joseph Conrad made in 1897 in the Preface to his novel *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, a couple of years before *Heart of Darkness* was published: “My task which I’m trying to achieve is, by the powers of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you see”. His statement is almost identical to the description the pioneer American film director D. W. Griffith gave as his purpose in making films: “The task I am trying to achieve is above all to make you see”. The author and the auteur have a shared goal, in spite of the fact that the fundamental difference between these two intentions, of course, is that in cinema the understanding is gained by the aid of visual images, whereas an author has to rely solely on the verbal conceptualisation to evoke an image in the mind of the reader. However, Conrad’s sense of purpose seems, according to Spiegel, to be even more ambitious than a mere abstraction of a mental image; Conrad wants to take the reader beyond the language and the narrative to see “the hard, clear bedrock of images”. (McFarlane 1996, 3-5)

Within the art of cinema the directors of similar ambition that Conrad had for his work in literature are often called *auteurs*. Interestingly, it is the critics who have the power to bestow the epithet on a director if, by their evaluation, that person is worthy of such honour. Hence, the so-called *auteur* theory is based on rather vague premises. Sarris (1985, 537-539) makes the same observation in “Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962”, in which he articulates the three premises of the theory based on the views of the famous French critic Andre Bazin. First of all, according to Sarris, an *auteur* must be technically competent. In other words, the minimum requirement is that he or she is a good director in a sense of knowing how to direct. Secondly, the *auteur* director should possess personality that is distinguishable regardless of the concept of the film. Sarris emphasises “certain recurring characteristics of style, which serve as his signature” (p. 538). Thirdly, the most important factor is the director’s ability to

make use in an acknowledgeable fashion of the tension that is created when the material is infused through the filmmaker's personality. This is the process that gives each film that the *auteur* makes its "interior meaning" (p. 538), and makes a director an *auteur*. According to the *auteur* theory these premises constitute three circles the director must pass through before reaching that elevated state of *auteur*. However, there are no rules to the individual processes, or even to the order by which a director fulfils each premise; in some cases a filmmaker can already be an *auteur* before "knowing too much about the technical side" (p. 539).

Kael (1985, 543) understands Sarris' ambivalence towards the theory that is far from perfect but since there is no alternative, it offers some useful guidelines to film critique. She interprets Sarris "to mean that the *auteur* theory is necessary in the absence of a critic who wouldn't need it" (p. 543). Kael stipulates further that "criticism is an art, not a science, and a critic who follows rules will fail in one of his most important functions: perceiving what is original and important in *new* work and helping others to see" (p. 543). Thus, Kael places the critic to serve the same purpose Conrad and Griffith envisioned as their intention concerning their art. Therefore, the vagueness of the *auteur* theory actually leaves room for deeper analysis and insightful exploration without the rigid forms of a scientifically conceptualised formula that never works in the arts anyway, in spite of the unfortunate efforts of some misguided and conceited individuals who have crowned themselves as critics but lack dedication and sensibility to qualify.

The director is, nevertheless, the person given the responsibility of making the audience *see*, in the Conradian sense of the word, by using the medium of cinematographic language in juxtaposition with the scripted dialogue. The prime example here is the director at hand, Francis Ford Coppola, whose early catalogue of art house films such as *Rain People* (1969) and *The Conversation* (1974), and the epics *The Godfather Part 1* (1972), *Part 2* (1974) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979) have gained him the reputation of being one of the filmmakers hailed

as, in Boggs and Pollard's (2003, 76) words, one of "the new Hollywood *auteurs*". From the point of view of the *auteur* theory, there is a hypothesis already made. However, let us consider what makes Coppola an *auteur*.

As a filmmaker Coppola is academically educated at the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA), so the technical side of the art has presumably been in his control from the beginning. There is something profoundly visual in his films that would not be possible without mastering the technique. Besides, Boggs and Pollard (2003, 188) name him as one of the pioneers in the new electronic methods, such as digital technology, significantly altering the practice, as well as the theory in the process of making films. In regards of the personal style, Coppola clearly made his breakthrough with the epic films he made in the early 1970s, namely the first two parts of *The Godfather*. His stylistic signature is the effective intricate montage, in which he crosscuts two conflicting scenes, like in *The Godfather II*, the head of a mafia family, Michael Corleone denounces Satan and his works in the christening of his godchild while his "soldiers" run around killing his rivals and enemies by his specific orders. The climax of *Apocalypse Now*, in which Captain Willard kills Colonel Kurtz with a machete in a similar fashion as the natives in Kurtz's compound slaughter an ox in ritualistic manner, is a prime example of parallel editing that gives the scene a deep symbolic meaning. Another Coppola trademark is the portrayal of compulsive behaviour. Willard gets obsessed by the figure of Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now*, surveillance expert Harry Caul's obsessions in *The Conversation* turn into paranoia in the end when he wrecks his apartment looking in vain for microphones certain that he himself is a subject of surveillance, and Michael Corleone's obsession for power and complete control causes him to get rid of some members of his own family when he feels threatened in *The Godfather II*.

These examples bring to mind Sarris' (1985, 538) enthusiastic reference to an almost spiritual abstraction of a gift that he calls an *élan* of the soul that enables a director, who in

Kael's (1985, 547) words "has 'it'", to reach the "interior meaning" that Sarris sees as the highest premise of the *auteur* theory. The problem of the theory, however, is clearly visible in the case of Coppola as well. The once an *auteur* always an *auteur* aspect, as Kael (1985, 548) concludes, seems only to be explained as "a cult of personality", rather than a characteristic that would allow each film to be evaluated separately. Coppola's career is a case in point. The *auteur* has not at all been as acute in quality control, especially since the mid-1980s, as one would assume him to be according to the epithet. Another problem, as Boggs and Pollard (2003, 19) point out, is that "auteurism clearly underestimates the production conditions today, where the overwhelming need for material resources subordinates requirements for independent directorial status". Thus, they argue, reconceptualization of the styles and achievements of many directors is required because of the often-limited creative freedom. However, when a director escapes the corporate claims of commercial film industry, like Coppola did by taking the production of *Apocalypse Now* deep in the jungle in Philippines, disregarding the costs, in order to work in peace, Boggs and Pollard (2003, 22) admit that there is an "elevated auteur status" installed for the "single creative figure" of such "grandiose projects".

3. From Modernism to the Postmodern Shift

“I am *modern*”, Joseph Conrad declared in a letter he wrote a couple of years after completing *Heart of Darkness*, which, along with the novel that followed the novella, *Lord Jim*, established Conrad as an early modernist, who in those works “conducted a ferociously intense campaign against clichés of narrative, characterisation and morality (Watts 1989, 78,83). Conrad was undoubtedly aware that culturally modernist point of view meant, in Boggs and Pollard’s (2003, 4) words, “a break with time-honoured preindustrial traditions”, and the well of artistic creativity, from which he and his peers drew inspiration, was the source that would in time help to establish cultural modernism as the prevailing zeitgeist for most of the 20th Century. Even if Conrad agonized that his fate was “to suffer for being new” (Watts 1989, 78), he was determined to make his readers “see”. It is more than probable that the rise of cultural modernism was profoundly enhanced by the birth of a new mass medium, cinema.

Because cinema as a phenomenon, especially in America, was ultimately targeted at a mass audience, the barriers between polar opposites of “high” and “low” art broke down gradually (Boggs and Pollard 2003, 6). The Hollywood filmmaking was, as Boggs and Pollard (2003, 5) emphasize, expressing “an optimistic view of human progress”, which was due to “the intricate web of modernity that includes Enlightenment values, industrialism and urbanism, liberal-capitalist ideology, patriarchy, bureaucracy, and the expansion of technology” presenting a value system of ideals approved by the architects of political hegemony and valued as useful tool, sometimes even in a propagandist manner, in preserving the status quo in the society. Thus, cinematic modernism could be seen as somewhat simplified in comparison to literary modernism. However, there were filmmakers, even in the mainstream in Hollywood, who, like Conrad and his fellow modernists, aimed to steer away from clichés to more complicated issues that provided their films a darker edge of social

realism. According to Boggs and Pollard (2003, 6), “modernism, even in the film industry, did champion some avant-garde notions, including uniqueness of the artist, cultural authenticity, and the special impact that works of art can have on popular consciousness”. The fact that these notions closely resemble features of late Romanticism is clear evidence that same ideas often reappear in cultural conceptualisations as part of something “new”. However, if we were to impose the Hegelian dialectical process on this cultural development, modernism could be seen as the thesis, while the antithesis in this framework would be called the postmodern shift.

The postmodern shift has been gradual and, as it is with most theoretical conceptualisations concerning art, by no means a clear process. In postmodern world we find it somewhat ridiculous to announce that literary modernism in England began in 1910 and ended in 1930 like Virginia Woolf and some scholars, like Faulkner (Brooker 1992, 1) envision. As a case in point Conrad, for instance, was “being new” over a decade before “modernism”. Brooker (1992, 2) offers a telling quote from Kermode: “A documentary history of the modern would have been different twenty years ago, and it will be different twenty years hence”. This goes for postmodernism as well, perhaps even more so. The postmodern shift, however, has been, above all, tightly connected to the social changes, cynicism and disillusionment caused by World War II and enhanced by the War in Vietnam and the cultural upheavals in the 1960s, particularly in the United States. According to Boggs and Pollard (2003, 6) the postmodern shift rejects and criticises modernity by pointing out contradictions, and as Hutcheon (1992, 229) clarifies, by not necessarily questioning the truth, but by asking who controls it. Boggs and Pollard (2003, 9) more or less concur with her and stipulate further: “Whereas modernism envisions a powerful transformative role for specific agencies of change (such as leaders and collectives), postmodernism...denies such agency in

its embellishment of a decentered, unstable, changing self or social identity”. Thus, the focus of a postmodernist is disorder.

During the 1940s and 1950s nearly every prominent director in Hollywood fell under the spell of film noir’s existentialist and cinematographically expressionist charms. The term “film noir” was first used by French critics in the mid-1940s of the pessimistic American crime films of the era. Noir was a prime example of postmodern shift also in its choice of source material. Detective novels of Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, James M. Cain and Mickey Spillane most definitely were not considered as “high” literature. Then again the screenwriting departments of the studios had the sometime aid of literary giants like William Faulkner, who were there to adapt those novels for the screen and to avoid bankruptcy. Noir’s influence on the new Hollywood auteurs, like Coppola, is easy to understand, as Boggs and Pollard (2003, 12) point out: “What noir portrayed as part of the dark side of daily modern life – the claustrophobia, alienation, fear and violence – has indeed emerged as a more generalized manifestation of the cycle of militarism and terrorism”.

According to Hutcheon(1992, 239), “the postmodern art accepts the challenge of tradition”; the postmodernist both exploits and comments on “the history of representation” by the use of criticism, which is channelled through parody and irony. Watts (1989, 60) discusses “the bridge between the ancient epical procedure...and the dislocated narratives of modernism” in Conrad’s works, emphasising the techniques like “delayed decoding”, which reveals the *effect* before the confrontation with the *cause*. This element of modernist storytelling is vividly effective in Marlow’s journey in to the heart of darkness in the novella, and in regards of *Apocalypse Now*, it is plain to see how Coppola and screenwriter Milius build on the tradition in a similar fashion Conrad does. Additionally, the filmmakers’ decision to add the voiceover narration by the character of Captain Willard, Coppola and Milius’ Marlow, to the film bridges Conrad’s use of narration by Marlow in the novella and the

stylistic element of voiceover narration often used in noir films. Amusingly, according to one theory the main character of Chandler's detective novels and several films too, Philip Marlowe, was named after Conrad's Marlow. This adds relevance to the film as well, in a postmodernist way at least.

Some critics and directors, like playwright David Mamet look at verbal narration in films as a flaw: "If you find that a point cannot be made without narration, it is virtually certain that the point is unimportant to the story...the audience requires not information but *drama* (Boggs and Pollard 2003, 196-197). What Mamet disregards here is that sometimes verbal narration is an important part of the point itself. Watts (1989, 79-80), calls Conrad's discovery of Marlow as "protagonist and storyteller" a technique that allowed him to include both "*limited* knowledge and *extensive* knowledge" into the story by shifting between Marlow and the omniscient narrator. This is a technique easily adaptable to film, and undoubtedly the makers of *Apocalypse Now* made a conscious choice of making the narration as part of the point, and indeed, part of the drama. According to Leitch (2003, 153) one of the reasons voiceover commentary is sometimes perceived as "uncinematic" is due to the misconception of literary texts as verbal and films as visual. After all, as Leitch (2003, 154) states the obvious fact, "films are not strictly speaking visual" but audio-visual. Therefore, the soundtrack of a film is an important part of the medium itself and cannot be overlooked. McFarlane (1996, 16) points out that because of the occasional nature of voiceover, in comparison to first-person narration in novels, the viewer is able to gain a broader picture of the character narrating by not having to trust only the person's comments on the action but being able to make judgements by what is shown as well. This kind of relation between narration and action is not often present in the novels that use first-person narration technique. Conrad, however, was ahead of his time in this respect as well.

4. The Discourses of Colonization, Imperialism and War

Structurally *Apocalypse Now* follows *Heart of Darkness*. Both are about a journey up the river, or if psychological terms are preferred, “a night journey into the unconscious”, as Brantlinger (1988, 266) quotes Albert Guerard. The discourse, however, is different. Greedy white fortune hunters, “faithless pilgrims”, in Marlow’s words, occupy the Belgian Congo, under colonial rule, “To tear treasure out of the bowels of the land was their desire, with no more moral purpose at the back of it than there is in burglars breaking into a safe” (p. 2326). Essentially, *Heart of Darkness* is an ironic portrayal of colonialism, and according to Brantlinger (1988, 262) it can be regarded as “an attack on imperialism”. *Apocalypse Now*, on the other hand, is about war. The idea of imperialism, however, is preserved in the film. After all, the U.S.A. was fighting in Vietnam to preserve its hegemony in the region and to stop communism from spreading. As a motivation, though, as LaBrasca (1988, 292) points out, the U.S. Government’s “idea of ‘our interests’ was something vaguer than ivory”. The American “pilgrims” of liberation and world domination, however, were a long way from home realising their ideals with ambiguous methods much like the colonialists some hundred years before.

The portrayal of the Americans in the film is similar to Marlow’s comments about the Roman imperialists in the novella: “They were no colonists...they were conquerors, and for that you need only brute force – nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others” (p. 2307). Marlow’s assessment of European colonists being saved from that because of their “efficiency – the devotion to efficiency” (p. 2307), contains irony of the darkest kind that is revealed a few lines later when Conrad’s narrator states: “The conquest of 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” (p. 2307). Hawkins (1979, 286-287) concurs with the

sentiment expressed by Raskin in *The Mythology of Imperialism* (1971) “that both Conrad and Marlow were so changed by their experience of the Congo that they turned against imperialism not only there but everywhere”. According to Hawkins (1979, 289-290) the colony of the Belgian Congo was quite unique because from 1885 to 1908 it was considered as King Leopold’s personal country. The King’s tyrannical inhumanity towards the Congolese and the appalling failure of administration, the result of which was social maladies like the system of forced labour to access to the wealth of the country, including ivory, opals and wild rubber, directly and indirectly caused the population of the Congo to fall by three million. Although Conrad does not mention the King directly, the practises of his rule, such as the abuse of the natives, are apparent in the novella: “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. Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest” (p. 2315). The operations run by the Company that hires Marlow are not much different from the absurdities of the military operations in the film, like the scene, in which the reluctant Willard allows his men to check a Vietnamese family’s boat on the river, and they end up shooting everybody in it because they suspect the woman is hiding weapons which she is not, just a cat.

Marlow, too, witnesses absurdities of war on the coast of Africa, where he comes upon a French man-of-war firing into the jungle and calling the Africans in their hidden camp enemies (p. 2312). Needless to say, no one would fire back. In the film, however, the hidden enemy always fires back. The scene most reminiscent of Marlow’s experience of war is the one where the cowboy-like Colonel Kilgore attacks the shoreline with Wagner’s “The Ride of the Valkyries” blasting off the speakers from the helicopters, “It scares the hell out of the

slopes [a derogatory term meaning the Vietnamese]”, he says, bombing with missiles and napalm with the sole intention of conquering an ideal spot for surfing on the coast of Vietnam. “I love the smell of napalm in the morning”, the Colonel muses, and adds: “It smells like...victory”. The allusions to the trigger-happy Americans are used in the film in the same ironic sense as, according to Erdinast-Vulcan (1991, 93), “the indictment of blindness, hypocrisy, and greed, are used against the colonizing Europeans”.

Apocalypse Now Redux even includes a scene that was absent from the 1979 version with a direct reference to colonialism and imperialism in which Willard and his crew stumble on an old French plantation on the Nung River. Just like Conrad’s book, the original film avoids clear political statements, but although the added scene is a nod towards Conrad’s world, the political frankness of the dialogue comes as a surprise. The effect, too, is unexpected but the irony of the descendants of the colonialists feeling like victims and condemning everyone from Viet Cong to the Americans is somehow fitting. The scene itself does little for the progression of the story but in the new cut it offers a welcome stop before the climax of horrors kick in. There is even a short but sweet romantic involvement between Willard and a young French widow, a casualty of imperialism, as well as Kurtz’s widowed bride in *Heart of Darkness*, the difference being that the French woman is in the middle of it while Kurtz’s bride is safe in her European home. How far away from imperialistic colonialism that actually is, is a matter of opinion. However, most importantly the added scene in *Apocalypse Now Redux* functions as a historical reminder of the framework of reasons for the war in Vietnam, and as a compressed critique of colonialism and imperialism without compromising or oversimplifying the issue. At least partly, it serves as a homage to Conrad’s vision in the novella.

In many ways the film joins in the discussion initiated by Conrad’s critics, some of whom according to Hawkins (1979, 287) interpreted that Conrad somehow saw the “idea” of

colonialism as a redeemer, in spite of its side effects. The complexity of the matter in the film is revealed the first time when the head of the French family Hubert DeMarais, after explaining that the plantation has been theirs in that part of Indochina for 70 years, states that, “it will be such until we are dead”. When Captain Willard wonders why they do not go “back home to France”, DeMarais answers, “This is our home”. So far the family appears just wanting to stay where they feel rooted but then DeMarais’ outburst reveals where their true bitterness lies: “In Dien Bien Phu, we lose. In Algeria we lose. In Indochina we lose. But here we don’t lose. This piece of earth, we keep it. We will never lose it. Never!” So, it is about French imperialism after all, albeit on the personal level. According to Kennedy (2001, cnn.com.), the battle of Dien Bien Phu in Northern Vietnam, where Vietnamese guerrillas, the Vietminh, led by Ho Chi Minh defeated the French, basically ended French Indochina in 1954. At least officially The U.S.A. supported France, its loyal ally, but the Frenchmen on the plantation in the film do not believe so. Their view is that after the World War II, President Roosevelt wanted the French out of Indochina: “Americans implant the Vietminh...Dien Bien Phu was a military mistake, a voluntary mistake. The French Army was sacrificed by the politicians safe at home”.

The view of these fictional characters is supported by Maga’s (2000, 57) assessment that “the U.S.A. strongly opposed a Vietminh military victory but did little to stop it”. Additionally, according to Maga (2000, 29) the U.S government did work closely with Ho Chi Minh and his Vietminh during the Japanese invasion of Indochina in World War II; the guerrillas received munitions from the Americans, gathered military intelligence and aided U.S. pilots who had been shot down by the common enemy, the Japanese. In the backdrop of the historical framework, the line given to the head of the French family by Milius and Coppola in *Apocalypse Now Redux* regarding the futile U.S. military campaign against the Vietnamese communist in Indochina rings true: “Maybe they [the Vietnamese] hate

Americans less than the Russians and the Chinese...[They're] Vietnamese communists. Americans don't understand". Indeed, Ho Chi Minh was a flexible kind of communist and actually believed to the American promise of freedom, and even compared Vietminh's struggle to "America's own revolutionary anti-colonial past" (Maga 2000, 30). However, the U.S. forces proved him wrong by acting not unlike the brutish Belgian imperialist in yet another foreign jungle.

The filmmakers show their understanding of Conrad's irony in regards of his idea of "efficiency" of the colonial rulers when the aging patriarch of the French family and his son keep repeating how good they have been to the natives: "When grandfather and my uncle came, the Vietnamese were nothing. We took the Vietnamese, work with them. Make something out of nothing...We always helped the people". This is the condescending attitude that not even Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* can escape from. According to Hawkins (1979, 287) Conrad deliberately depicts Marlow torn between his experiences of the colonial rule and his well-meaning British conservatism. However, as Hawkins (1979, 297) concludes, Marlow becomes aware of these contradictions with the realisation that Kurtz, the embodiment of evil, was a product of the European imperialism, as indeed was Marlow himself. The film incorporates this idea in a similar fashion to its corresponding characters of Willard and Kurtz, the products of American imperialism.

5. The Journey to the Darkness Adapted

5.1. The Nature of the Adaptation

In a video interview with the editor of Written By-Magazine John Stayton (WGA.org video on You Tube), the screenwriter Milius admits that he had read the novella only once in his teens and wanted to stay true to his original impression of it and never read it again. To the interviewer's comment that the story of the film is close to the novella, Milius simply states, "Of course, it's *Heart of Darkness*". He also reveals that he was encouraged to adapt the novella just because many of his colleagues told him that Conrad's story would be virtually impossible to film. McFarlane (1996, 6) agrees in general that "the modern novel has not shown itself very adaptable to film", but on the other hand, he points out that the modernist writers like Conrad, in their intention to make the reader "see", broke "with the tradition of 'transparency' in relation to the novel's referential world so that the mode angle of vision were as much a part of the novel's content as what was viewed". Thus, in principle the writers of modern literature were aiming for something very similar to the cinematographic method. Whether their stories could work in the filmed form, however, would depend on the adaptation.

McFarlane (1996, 7) quotes screenwriter DeWitt Bodeen: "Adapting literary works to film is, without a doubt, a creative undertaking, but the task requires a kind of selective interpretation, along with the ability to recreate and sustain an established mood". In other words an adaptation by necessity requires a reading or, more often in filmmaking, several readings of a novel. In the process of evaluating an adaptation, McFarlane (1996, 22) stresses that it is important "to try to assess the *kind* of adaptation the film aims to be". In the case *Apocalypse Now* it is safe to say the filmmakers never intended their film to be a direct adaptation of *Heart of Darkness* in the sense of "transposition" in the categorisation suggested by Geoffrey Wagner in his 1975 book *The Novel and the Cinema* (McFarlane 1996, 10). Even

if there are aspects in the film that fit in the category of “commentary”, which entails minor alterations of the plot, intentional or inadvertent, because of the director’s different purpose, Wagner’s last category “analogy” seems best suited for Coppola’s film because as an adaptation, it represents “a fairly considerable departure for the sake of making another work of art” (McFarlane 1996, 11).

However, it would be unfair to claim that Coppola and Milius only borrow raw material from Conrad to create something of their own, as I have already pointed out in regards of the parallelism in the discourses of colonization, imperialism and war. Milius’ rather innocent comment that the film “is *Heart of Darkness*”, reveals that the generation of postmodern filmmakers do not operate within the limits of fidelity in the traditional sense in the process of adapting original works of literature, but approach the dilemma through intertextuality, in the context of which, as Christopher Orr concludes in “The Discourse of Adaptation” (1984), “the issue is not whether the adapted film is faithful to its source, but rather how the choice of a specific source and how the approach to that source serves the film’s ideology” (McFarlane, 1996, 10). McFarlane (1996, 20) also points out that it is virtually impossible to “transfer” a novel to the screen without any interference, that is why he feels it necessary to apply the literary term “enunciation”, meaning “a coherent set of events enacted in a series of syntagmatic units, as the sum of its narrative functions”, to “adaptation proper”. Film may be lacking “literary marks of enunciation such as person and tense” but still have “the enunciatory processes inscribed” by cinematographic methods like shot angles and montages, and thus forming the whole of “expressive apparatus that governs the presentation”

5.2. The Analogue

The analogue between the novella and the film is not always clear-cut but more often than not it is easily traced. In *Heart of Darkness* Marlow has no intention of pondering his reasons for

taking that journey to deepest Africa, as Erminast-Vulcan (1991, 91-92) points out. His explanation is a vague urge to go there. In Willard's case, the motivation comes in the form of an order from his superiors, which he, being a soldier in the military, is ready and willing to obey, although the urge, or more accurately, a trauma-like obsession is there as well, since the Captain seems unable to function properly anywhere else but under fire in the jungle. His mission is to exterminate with "extreme prejudice" a certain Colonel Kurtz, whose methods, according to Willard's commanding officers, have become "unsound". In Africa Marlow hears the same kind of rumours concerning Mr. Kurtz, the Company's most valued ivory trader and a brilliant renaissance man (p. 2319). Marlow's mission is not to kill Kurtz but bring him out alive. In both cases Kurtz's conduct is bad for business. In the jungles of Congo "the lone white man turning his back suddenly on the headquarters" (p. 2327) had reportedly been sick and now the things are getting worse with "unavoidable delays – nine months – no news – strange rumours" (p. 2327). In Indochina Colonel Kurtz is too effective for his own good running unauthorised operations and winning by not listening to the "bunch of four-star clowns" that he sees are running the war with "lying morality", and charging him with murder of South Vietnamese allies that Kurtz suspected were spies. Whether he was right or not did not matter; he, too, was a "lone white turning his back suddenly on the headquarters".

Although the film is for the most part analogical with Conrad's book, there are, however, scenes that are taken more or less directly from the novella, thus drawing nearer to Wagner's category of "commentary", if not, surprisingly enough, "transposition". As Dorall (1988, 303) points out, there are several "minor parallels" in the two journeys. The most vivid of these is the death of the helmsman when Kurtz's natives attack the boat on the river: "It was a shaft of a spear that... had caught him in the side just below the ribs; the blade had gone in out of sight, after making a frightful gash; my shoes were full; a pool of blood lay very still, gleaming dark-red under the wheel; his eyes shone with an amazing lustre" (p. 2339)

Conrad's helmsman is a "mad" African while Coppola's man is an African American warrant officer in charge of the boat, by the name of Phillips, whose last dying act is to try to strangle Willard, the man whose mission, still unknown to him, is responsible of his death. The different ages are visible here; the black man of late 20th Century has risen above being a mere object in the narrative. Then again, Conrad's treatment of the death of the helmsman is unusual for its time: "I missed my late helmsman awfully"(p. 2342), muses Marlow in the novella and continues:

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. (p. 2342)

For Marlow the African has gradually turned from a useful tool to a person, albeit not quite his equal yet. Nevertheless, Conrad's characterization of Marlow's grief over a member of an "inferior race", like the black African "savages" were still commonly perceived in the late 19th century, was a profound realisation and glimpse of the change in attitudes that would eventually mean the end of the colonial rule in Africa and elsewhere. Otherwise both journeys focus on Kurtz. Marlow's obsession with him is the most important feature translated to Willard's character in the film. Marlow learns more of Kurtz's myth-like persona by listening to others and hearing rumours along the way. Willard, on the other hand, has Kurtz's dossier, which he studies with growing interest.

5.3. Chief Character Functions

McFarlane (1996, 13-14) discusses Roland Barthes' theoretical analysis of the functional nature of narratives, namely *distributional* and *integrational* functions. The former, which Barthes calls *functions proper*, are usually transformable in the context of film adaptations,

and are further subdivided into *catalysers*, which support and complement the other subdivision, *cardinal functions*, and together they form the horizontal basis for the crucial points of the story that bring forth the notion of possible alternate consequences within the narrative. Barthes' theory in mind, McFarlane (1996, 25) suggests that in order to define the nature of an adaptation, it is crucial to "isolate the chief character functions of the original". The portrayal of Kurtz is a case in point.

"The volume of tone he emitted without effort, almost without the trouble of moving his lips, amazed me. A voice! A voice!" (p. 2345) "He was little more than a voice" (p. 2339). The account that Marlow gives about Kurtz's most striking feature is the essence of the character in the film too. In the original theatre edition of the film Kurtz is always in darkness and utters his lines with almost a whispering tone; the effect is astounding. The shadows and rays of light, and the close-ups make his physical appearance seem enormous. That, too, matches Marlow's description of Kurtz, "Kurtz – that means 'short' in German – don't it? Well, the name was as true as everything else in his life – and death. He looked at least seven feet long" (p. 2348). Hagen (1988, 299) points out that Marlon Brando's portrayal of Kurtz mostly relies on his physical presence thus overshadowing the psychological dimensions of the character. However, Conrad too builds much of the characterisation of Kurtz on the physical appearance: "And the lofty frontal bone of Mr. Kurtz! They say the hair goes on growing sometimes, but this – ah – specimen was impressively bald" (p. 2340). The cinematographic effects rather enhance the psycho-mythological image of Kurtz in the way that is almost identical to the novella: "The wilderness had patted him on the head, and, behold, it was like a ball – an ivory ball; it had caressed him, and – lo! – he had withered; it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation" (p. 2340). Conrad's Mr. Kurtz, however, is physically ill as well as in mentally unstable condition,

whereas Colonel Kurtz's "soul is mad" as the photographer in the film puts it. Apart from the references to ivory, and the fact that Brando's physical presence in the film is far from withered; the filmmakers' vision of Kurtz is close to Conrad's creation.

The character of Captain Willard is in the film clearly to fulfil the function of the narrator in the same fashion as Charles Marlow functions in the novella. Ironically, the decision to include the voiceover narration in the film was due to the fact that actor Martin Sheen, who portrayed Willard in the film, was physically unfit to get involved with the extensive reshoots that the director Coppola had envisioned; thus, the original script did not intend to use Willard's narration, although in regards of the novella it would have been the obvious choice, as Hagen (1988, 299) points out. Nevertheless, even if the narration written for Willard by Herr is based on the writer's personal experiences during the Vietnam War with some passages from *Heart of Darkness* as well, it matches Marlow's wry ironical commentary in the novella. "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... may be considered as a permanent improvement" (p. 2317), comments Marlow on King Leopold's colonial rule in the Congo. Willard's conceptions of the war are of parallel irony: "It was a way we had over here of living with ourselves. We cut them half with a machine gun and give them a band-aid. The more I saw of them the more I hated lies". The latter part of Willard's comment seems to be taken straight from Marlow in the novella: "There is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies – which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world – what I want to forget" (p. 2323).

The characters of Marlow and Willard also share an understanding of Kurtz. "I knew something about Kurtz that wasn't in the dossier", Willard reflects referring to his own experiences in the war in regards of the "lying morality" in the war that was run by "a bunch of four star clowns", who have the nerve to characterize Colonel Kurtz as "a good man" and "a humanitarian", and yet when it suits their interest, they send an assassin to finish him off.

Marlow, too, early on in the story makes his own analysis of Kurtz based on what he has heard: “Mr Kurtz was ‘universal genius’, but even a genius would find it easier to work with ‘adequate tools – intelligent men’...because ‘no sensible man rejects wantonly the confidence of his superiors’” (p. 2324). These examples verify the filmmakers’ understanding regarding the connection between Marlow/Willard and Mr. Kurtz/Colonel Kurtz. In both the novella and the film the narrator protagonist cannot tell Kurtz’s story without telling his own. This is, perhaps, the essential cardinal function to be considered when assessing the adaptation.

However, Hagen (1988, 297-298) suggests that “Coppola never understood the role of Marlow in the novel” on the basis that the director wanted to stay faithful to Conrad and add a deeper psychological layer in spirit of *Heart of Darkness* to Milius’ politically charged script, thus focusing on the effect that the war has on the minds of the soldiers. Then again, one might argue that Coppola did not misunderstand Marlow but instead, saw the necessity to alter the role because of the chosen framework of the Vietnam War. Hagen (1988, 298), too, admits that “some film theorist would add that Coppola’s instincts were right even if he *had* understood the role of Marlow because film redeems material reality or its immediate perception more naturally than consciousness”. Nevertheless, in Hagen’s (1988, 298-299) view Coppola could not quite resolve his problem of trying to marry Conrad’s psychological dimensions to Milius’ political episodes with Herr’s experiences of war, and hoping that by casting the right actor for the role of Willard, “the part would play the actor”. Whether that happens is a matter of an opinion. However, Dorall (1988, 310) argues that the role of Willard in the film was misunderstood by its critics: “Willard is Everyman, ourselves, deprived of our individuality till we are mere instruments of higher powers...His personality has been absorbed into Kurtz’s till he is fashioned into a tool, the necessary executioner and guardian of his victim’s reputation...Willard is no Marlow”. Undoubtedly Coppola and his cohorts were aware of the last point, since they changed the protagonist’s name. Nevertheless, the

postmodern antiheroic stance in Willard in comparison to modernist moral integrity of Marlow is again due to the film's focus on war. In the novella Marlow is an outsider, a free agent in spite of the fact he is employed by the same company as Kurtz whereas, in the film Willard is a soldier, a pawn in the game, just like Kurtz, whose remark: "What do they call it when the assassins accuse the assassin", reveals the only true moral dilemma in the film. However, there is one more character function to be considered.

The first person Marlow meets when arriving at Kurtz's station is a Russian, who is pictured in the narrative as "a white man under a hat like a cart wheel beckoning persistently with his whole arm...He looked like a harlequin." (p. 2343) This "Kurtz's last disciple" (p. 2348) is, as LaBrasca notes (1988, 290), presented in the film as "a foolish but still credible innocent...burned-out photographer who seems a virtual refugee from the Manson family." The photographer, portrayed in the film by Dennis Hopper, speaks to Willard about Kurtz, "the poet warrior", as his advocate in a frantic mesmerized state of mind. The dialogue between him and Willard is, for the most part, taken straight from the novella, where the Russian informs Marlow that Kurtz, "the universal genius" (p.2324), is "an emissary of pity, and science, and progress" (p. 2321), and had indeed "enlarged" his mind (p. 2344). The character also tells Willard and Marlow, "You don't talk with that man – you listen to him" (p. 2344), and most importantly, "You can't judge Mr. Kurtz as you would an ordinary man" (p. 2346). The character's supportive role in the story certainly counts as a chief character function. Therefore, the fact that this particular character; his actions, his words and his presence, is most strikingly simply transferred from the novella to the screenplay and into the film makes it clear that Coppola and his collaborators wanted to preserve the character's ironic and contradictory, almost comic relief kind of appearance as Willard's gateway and an introduction, if you will, to Kurtz.

The most of the functions presented here so far belong to the class of *functions proper* in Barthes' terminology. There is, however, as McFarlane (1996, 13) points out, a category of *integrational* narrative functions that Barthes calls *indices*. These functions are, according to McFarlane (1996,13), "vertical in nature, influencing our reading of narrative in a pervasive rather than a linear way; they do not refer to operations but to a functionality of *being*", therefore *indices*, or at least some elements of them can only be transferred partly. In the case of *Apocalypse Now* these transferable elements include the very psychological dimensions of *Heart of Darkness* Coppola is aiming at: "Psychological information relating to the characters, data regarding their identity, notations of atmosphere and representations of place" (McFarlane 1996,13), all of which are of vital importance in the film, even to the extent that one begins to wonder why these functions should be somehow a lesser aid to the execution of adaptation. Since Conrad's novella relies on the stream of consciousness type of narration, it becomes vital for the filmmakers to find a way, which would enable them to give a material form to the psychological landscapes of the original. As discussed before Coppola's solution comes through the focus on the war, a framework that is parallel enough to Conrad's impressions on colonialism, imperialism and universal concept of creed, but also more accessible to the cultural consumers in these postmodern times.

5.4. The Horrors of Alienation

Kurtz's alienation from Western civilization is visualised in *Apocalypse Now* with hanged bodies, heads on the poles and on the ground, and with sacrificial rituals performed at his temple-like compound. All this is almost exactly according to the book: "...these heads were the heads of the rebels...Those rebellious heads looked very subdued to me on their sticks", Marlow observes upon his arrival. Hagen (1988, 300), nevertheless, argues that Coppola

struggles in his attempt to synthesize his vision of the War with Conrad's ideas of Kurtz's metamorphosis into an animalistic beast. In his view whereas "Conrad is careful to suggest", Coppola moves into the "direction of defining", which results in "isolated bigness and hollowness, in which the characters and the whole compound do not even fit into the wide screen frame. There is a slight improvement to that in the *Redux*, which contains some scenes with Willard and Kurtz in the daylight outside the temple. This would suggest that Coppola is trying to address the problem. Nevertheless, the added scenes take the film closer to the novella in the respect that Kurtz's rationale would seem to be that of a man who acts perfectly sane in the daylight and yet again lives in total darkness. On the other hand the new version distances the Kurtz character even further from the Naturalist suggestions in the novella. The essential dialogue, however, is taken from Conrad. In the novella the manager of the Company and Marlow assess the damage Kurtz's operations have caused to the company: "... 'Because the method is unsound.' 'Do you,' said I, looking at the shore, 'call it 'unsound method'?' 'Without a doubt,' he exclaimed hotly, 'Don't you?' ... 'No method at all,' I murmured after a while" (p. 2350). In the film Kurtz himself addresses Willard with the question, "Are my methods unsound?", to which Willard answers, "I don't see any method, sir." Dorall (1988, 305), however, points out, "...it is only at the climax when Marlow and Willard confront Kurtz, that *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now* part company and develop differently."

Both Kurtzes do die, Coppola and Brando's Kurtz by the hand of Willard, and Conrad's due to his illness. The famous last words, "The horror! The horror" (p. 2356), are uttered leaving us to ponder what they mean. Marlow offers his explanation in the book:

Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts, that there was something wanting in him – some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence. Whether he knew of this deficiency himself I can't say. I think the knowledge came to him at last – only at the very last. But the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. (p. 2347)

Dorall (1988, 305-306) concludes that in the novella, Kurtz is a “post-Darwinian hero...carrying the light of European civilization at its brightest” but found the animal inside him, thus revealing the horrible truth behind colonization, the culmination being the subtle hints of cannibalism. Yet Marlow voices his admiration of Kurtz: “...I affirm that Kurtz was a remarkable man. He had something to say. He said it” (p. 2357). As Dorall (1988, 309) points out, the very thing that makes Kurtz admirable is the strangely consistent logic by which he turns from idealism to Naturalism according to the realization of his true nature. In contrast to *Heart of Darkness*, as Dorall (1988, 306) suggests, in *Apocalypse Now* Colonel Kurtz’s atrocities are consequences of war. The Horrors he had seen and experienced caused him to lose faith in human kind. To Marlow Kurtz’s last words are “an affirmation, a moral victory” (p. 2357), whereas Willard, the assassin of the assassin, knows exactly what the horrors of war are. Hagen (1988, 294), however, argues that in the novella Kurtz’s last words are “a message to himself and, through Marlow, to the world”, whereas in the film Coppola aims to structure the ending of *Apocalypse Now* around Kurtz’s words by defining “the horror” “through vicarious violence”, where “judgment is self-judgment”. In that respect, Dorall’s (1988, 310) conclusion that “in Coppola’s film, unlike Conrad’s novella, there is only darkness” is a well-founded one.

Certainly for Colonel Kurtz there was only darkness; all he could offer humanity was destruction and death. Ironically, as Marlow concludes, Mr. Kurtz, on the other hand, “had something to say. He said it” (p. 2357). A journalist acquaintance of Kurtz gives Marlow a more populist view, “He had faith – don’t you see...He could get himself to believe anything – anything...He would have been a splendid leader of an extreme party...Any party” (p.2359). Conrad was, as Brantlinger (1988, 274) concludes, already mourning “the loss of the true faith in modern times” that his contemporaries refused to admit. This explains why Marlow, a man who is known to “hate” and “detest” lying (p. 2323), lies to Kurtz’s intended

about his fate by omitting the unpleasant details and making her believe that his last words were about her (pp. 2360-2362). As Daleski (1977, 74) notes, Marlow's intention was "to protect a woman, not an illusion". Willard, however, probably has no choice but to tell the truth to Kurtz's son, if he ever meets him. Neither Willard, nor Kurtz in the film had their Conradian "choice of nightmares" (p. 2351), which in a way is Marlow's passage out of darkness.

6. Intertextual Extensions

In addition to obvious intertextuality between the novella and the film, there are interesting cultural references in *Apocalypse Now* that have no direct connection to *Heart of Darkness* but represent some kind of extensions to intertextuality in the sense of related “resources”, in McFarlane’s (1996,10) terminology, which are used “to serve the film’s ideology”. There is a certain sophistication in the way Coppola makes culturally as distant sources, as far as the time frame is concerned at least, as T. S. Eliot and *The Doors* to interact with each other. There are other literary references as well lying around in Kurtz’s quarters, as Wilmington (1988, 287), LaBrasca (1988, 291), Hagen (1988, 295) and Dorall (1988, 307) all point out, like Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*; a study of the legend of the Fisher King whose conqueror replaces him, not unlike in the case of Kurtz and Willard, and Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance*; an anthropologic study of myths, magic and Christianity. Incidentally, Eliot mentions both of the books in relation to his most famous poem “The Waste Land”. Coppola, however, does not use Eliot’s “The Waste Land” but his other well-known poem “The Hollow Men”, which is inspired by Conrad’s novella, as Brantlinger (1988, 269) points out, and which begins with a direct quotation from *Heart of Darkness* as its epigraph, “Mistah Kurtz – he dead” (p. 2627). According to Dorall (1988, 307) Coppola wants to make a point by making Kurtz read the poem in the film: “Kurtz is now the sick god of his tribe, that notorious bore the Fisher King, and he desperately needs the Quester to execute him and free his paralysed people”. Unlike the legend, however, Willard does not take Kurtz’s place but leaves the already doomed compound.

It is surprisingly elitist, perhaps, that none of the film theorists notice, or rather choose not to notice, the immense importance that *The Doors*’ epic Oedipal musical journey to yet another heart of darkness “The End” (1967) has in setting the mood of nightmarish psychological depths on the soundtrack of the film. It is particularly odd since the art of

cinema is, nevertheless, part of popular culture, and by focusing solely on the influences of the conventionally approved literary ‘high’ culture on the film, the writers perpetuate the old division between ‘high’ and ‘low’ that has been the target of postmodern criticism.

Nevertheless, Coppola’s use of the song adds another layer to his purpose of finding ways to include Conradian psychological dimensions in the film, and at same time enhances the hopelessness of the story. The opening montage of serene jungle, then smoke and then fire with hovering helicopters and Willard having his true nightmare in a Saigon hotel room begins with Robbie Krieger’s raga-like guitar intro before The Doors’ singer and the poet-shaman Jim Morrison utters the defining first lines to “The End” epitomizing *Apocalypse*

Now perfectly:

This is the end
 Beautiful friend
 This is the end
 My only friend
 The end
 Of our elaborate plans
 The end
 Of everything that stands
 The end
 No safety or surprise
 The end
 I’ll never look into your eyes
 Again
 Can you picture what will be?
 So limitless and free
 Desperately in need
 In some strangers hand
 In a desperate land
 Lost in the Roman wilderness of pain
 All the children are insane
 Waiting for the summer rain...

The song returns a couple of hours later with Morrison urging, “Come on baby, take a chance with us” to provide the soundtrack to the film’s ritualistic execution of Kurtz, reaching its climax of chaotic crescendo when Willard cuts the Colonel down while Kurtz’s natives do the same to an ox. It is raining and “all the children are insane”. After all, “insanity is”, as

Wilmington (1988, 287), points out, “probably a metaphor for the entire film”. In “The End” there is a murder going on as well. Although Coppola does not include the Oedipal storyline of the song, it is relevant to the psychology of the film:

The killer awoke before dawn
 He put his boots on
 He took a face from the ancient gallery
 And he walked on down the all...
 And he came to a door
 And he looked inside
 “Father?”
 “Yes, son?”
 “I want to kill you”
 “Mother, I want to...”

In killing Kurtz, Willard not only murders his father figure but in getting into bed with the insanity of the perverted military code, which demands him to do so, he, in a way, rapes the decency of humanity. Interestingly, in the original recording of “The End” Morrison’s laconic voice repeats the word “kill” over the crescendo used in the film but Coppola has omitted the vocals from the mix of the soundtrack probably because there is no need to tell the audience what they are already seeing. With allusions to the Roman imperialists, mythological ritualism and Greek tragedies, “The End” is clearly, in Coppola’s mind, a perfect companion to works of Frazer, Weston and Eliot, whose “The Hollow Men” ends with the lines, “This is the way the world ends / Not with a bang but with a whimper” (p. 2630), which resemble Morrison and The Doors’ similarly haunting view.

7. Conclusion

The Willard of the film, actor Martin Sheen hosted the legendary American television comedy show *Saturday Night Live* on December the 15th, 1979, shortly after the release of *Apocalypse Now*. In that show there is a sketch, in which Sheen plays a contract killer hired by the film company to journey up the river to the jungles in the Philippines and terminate Coppola, who has gone way over budget, and whose methods during the shooting of the film have become “unsound”. The sketch is a fine piece of comedy writing and, at the same time, not too far from the truth. According to Worthy (1996, 154) the conditions on the location in the Philippines seemed like yet another journey into the heart of darkness; there was even a guerrilla war in progress in addition to the problems with the actors, Sheen’s heart attack and the unprepared Brando, whose contract allowed him to actually veto any piece of dialogue he was not content with. Undoubtedly the improvisatory method Coppola was forced to use with Brando together with the original script by Milius and the director’s own obsession with the Vietnam angle presented him with a dilemma of focus, some might even call it partial loss of focus. Hagen (1988, 300-301), for instance, argues that the Kurtz scenes that are faithful to *Heart of Darkness* are the weakest because in the context with the rest of the film they represent “a misreading” of the novella, and thus the final result is “a failed masterpiece”. Interestingly, Hagen concludes “reluctantly” that the film would have benefited from the reliance on Milius’ adaptation of *Heart of Darkness* rather than the novella itself.

Hagen’s reluctant conclusion seems to contain echoes of the criticism that film theorists like McFarlane (1996, 37) and Leitch (2003, 163) have targeted towards adaptation study’s obsession with the idea of fidelity. Leitch’s argument that “the source texts will always be better at being themselves” rings true in the case *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now* as well. It seems valid to view the film like Dorall (1988, 310-311) as “a new creation...worthy to stand...beside Conrad’s novella from which it derives”. It is fair to say, however, that

Apocalypse Now is a loose adaptation of *Heart of Darkness*, rather than, in LaBrasca's (1988, 288) words, "little more than inspired by Joseph Conrad's novella". We must bear in mind that of all the art forms, it is cinema that most easily and most effectively plays with images, ideas, and even with ideals by stealing and borrowing in a true post-modern fashion. Film adaptations of original literary works are often transformed to confusingly unrecognisable failures with nothing to say as Dorall (1988, 301) points out. Even though *Apocalypse Now* does its share of borrowing, Hagen (1988, 296) considers Homer's *Odyssey* as one obvious source, there is an intelligent intention to rethink and evaluate the themes of Conrad's work in another era with a different discourse.

"Exterminate all the brutes!" (p. 2341), is Kurtz's message to the world in the novella. Colonel Kurtz in the film addresses his directions to Willard in a similar fashion in the note the Captain finds after killing him. Both the film and novella condemn the brute force that the empires as conquerors have always exercised. The novella's allusions to Romans are cleverly transferred to the film, in which American military machinery rampages through the jungles of a foreign terrain. Just like the Romans, or any other imperialists for that matter, ultimately they have no chance of winning because of their limited understanding of other cultures and their national concerns, as the French colonialist points out, "You Americans don't understand (the Vietnamese)". That is a valid point with current affairs as well, like America's misunderstanding of Islam and their misguided, hopeless war on terror. So, perhaps the film's bleak view of the world is well grounded. There is not much hope for individuals either, as Colonel Kurtz reflects: "Horror and moral terror are your friends. If they are not, then they are enemies to be feared". However, in *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow could have killed Kurtz but he chose not to. As Dorall (1988, 308) states: "For Conrad the world may be falling to pieces but the individual hero can remain intact, a moral force personified". In contrast, the only remotely heroic deed Willard does, after ritualistically murdering Kurtz,

is turning off the short wave radio on the boat when the military headquarters is calling him about the air strike to wipe out Kurtz's compound, which is imminent anyhow. Thus, he turns off the heart of darkness but it is only an escapist moment – there is darkness wherever he goes. In Conrad's novella, Marlow acknowledges the imminent closeness of the heart of darkness everywhere but is able to see the light, for the time being. Besides, as Daleski (1977, 55) points out, even though the darkness triumphs over the sun at the beginning of the book, there is always a new chance in the coming of the next day, and indeed, "light may come out of darkness".

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