

herent properties, and they have a structural, rather than a merely illustrative, function.

The analogy is equally close as regards subject matter. *Heart of Darkness* shares many of the characteristic preoccupations and themes of the French Symbolists: the spiritual voyage of discovery, especially through an exotic jungle landscape, which was a common symbolist theme, in Baudelaire's "Le Voyage" and Rimbaud's "Bateau ivre," for instance; the pervasive atmosphere of dream, nightmare, and hallucination, again typical of Rimbaud; and the very subject of Kurtz also recalls, not only Rimbaud's own spectacular career, but the typical symbolist fondness for the lawless, the depraved, and the extreme modes of experience.

More generally, we surely sense in *Heart of Darkness* Conrad's supreme effort to reveal, in Baudelaire's phrase about Delacroix, "the infinite in the finite."⁴ This intention is suggested in Conrad's title. The Symbolist poets often used titles which suggested a much larger and more mysterious range of implication than their work's overt subject apparently justified—one thinks of the expanding effect of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, for example, or of *The Sacred Wood*. This centrifugal suggestion was sometimes produced by an obtrusive semantic gap—a coupling of incongruous words or images that forced us to look beyond our habitual expectations; there is, for instance, the initial puzzling shock of the titles of two of the great precursive works of symbolism which appeared in 1873, Rimbaud's *Une Saison en enfer*, and Tristan Corbière's "Les Amours jaunes."⁵

Compared with the particularity of Conrad's earlier and more traditional titles, such as *Almayer's Folly* or *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, *Heart of Darkness* strikes a very special note; we are somehow impelled to see the title as much more than a combination of two stock metaphors for referring to "the centre of the Dark Continent" and "a diabolically evil person." Both of Conrad's nouns are densely charged with physical and moral suggestions; freed from the restrictions of the article, they combine to generate a sense of puzzlement which prepares us for something beyond our usual expectation: if the words do not name what we know, they must be asking us to know what has, as yet, no name. The more concrete of the two terms, "heart," is attributed a strategic centrality within a formless and infinite abstraction, "darkness"; the combination defies both visualisation and logic: How can something inorganic like darkness have an organic centre of life and feeling? How can a shapeless absence of light compact itself into a shaped and pulsing

4. *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Ruff (Paris, 1968), p. 404.

5. *A Season in Hell* and "The Yellow Loves" (both French). [Editor]

presence? And what are we to make of a "good" entity like a heart becoming, of all things, a controlling part of a "bad" one like darkness? *Heart of Darkness* was a fateful event in the history of fiction; and to announce it Conrad hit upon as haunting, though not as obtrusive, an oxymoron as Baudelaire had for poetry with *Les Fleurs du Mal*.⁶

* * *

HUNT HAWKINS

Heart of Darkness and Racism†

In 1975 in a speech at the University of Massachusetts titled "An Image of Africa," Chinua Achebe declared Conrad was "a bloody racist." He has repeated this charge in an article in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1980, a lecture in London in 1990, a speech at the University of Texas in 1998, and in passing references in several interviews. The original speech was published in *The Massachusetts Review* in 1977 and in a revised version in 1988 in Achebe's collection of essays *Hopes and Impediments* as well the third edition of the Norton *Heart of Darkness*. Since then it has been reprinted many times, often in conjunction with Conrad's novella. Achebe's own novel *Things Fall Apart* is also now frequently anthologized next to *Heart of Darkness*. The controversy stirred by Achebe's declaration has gone on for three decades and shows no signs of abating. It has become a standard topic for school assignments and has fostered the impression that racism is the main, or even the only, issue of importance in Conrad's work. Ironically, it has given new life to Conrad studies while tending to narrow them.

In "An Image of Africa," Achebe comes close to saying that *Heart of Darkness* should cease being taught. After noting that it has been classed as "permanent literature—read and taught and constantly evaluated by serious academics," he asks whether a novel "which de-personalizes a portion of the human race, can be called a great work of art. My answer is: No, it cannot." Finally, he objects against its being "today perhaps the most commonly prescribed novel in twentieth-century literature courses." In his later interviews, however, Achebe makes clear he isn't calling for censorship. For example in 2000 he said about *Heart of Darkness*, "I am not Ayatollah Kho-

6. The flowers of evil (French). [Editor]

† Original version published as "The Issue of Racism in *Heart of Darkness*," *Conradiana* 14.3 (1982): 163–71; updated and extensively revised by the author especially for this Norton Critical Edition. Reprinted by permission of Texas Tech University Press. Notes are the author's.

meini. I don't believe in banning books, but they should be read carefully. Far from wanting the novel banned, I teach it."¹ Indeed, censorship proceeds on the assumption that readers are passive receptacles whereas good teaching should stimulate active, critical reading. In the case of *Heart of Darkness* such reading is especially important because it is such a dense, complex text. On many topics, including race, it offers views that are multiple, ambiguous, ambivalent, conflicting, and perhaps even ultimately incoherent.

Achebe is quite right that much of *Heart of Darkness* dehumanizes Africans. Conrad's narrator, Marlow, often uses frankly derogatory language in describing them. At various points in the story he refers to them as "savages," "niggers," and "rudimentary souls." He applies the following adjectives to their appearance or behavior: "grotesque," "horrid," "ugly," "fiendish," and "satanic." Achebe's 1980 article notes that the story "teems with Africans whose humanity is admitted in theory but totally undermined by the mindlessness of its context and the pretty explicit animal imagery surrounding it."² Marlow's explicit animal comparisons are with ants, hyenas, horses, and bees. Thus the image Conrad projects of African life can hardly be called flattering.

* * *

In a related point, Achebe observes that Africans are barely present in *Heart of Darkness*. In Conrad's story, none of the African characters has a name. With the exception of Kurtz's mistress, no African appears for more than a full paragraph. We do not go into the minds of any Africans to see the situation from their point of view. In fact, they barely speak, being limited to a total of four pidgin sentences. It might be said that Conrad failed to portray Africans because he knew little of their culture, having spent less than six months in the Congo, mostly in the company of white men, and without knowledge of any African language. In his novels set in the Far East, where he spent some six years, he does give individual portraits. Still, in his 1896 story set in the Congo, "An Outpost of Progress," Conrad does have speaking, named Africans. And he imaginatively creates dozens of such characters in *Nostromo*, his novel set in Latin America where he spent less than a week. So his comparative reduction and neglect of Africans in *Heart of Darkness* must have been deliberate.

Achebe has explicitly said he wrote his *Things Fall Apart* as a reply to Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*, but it also answers *Heart of Darkness*. Achebe's novel about the British takeover of an Ibo village at the end of the nineteenth century gives a comprehensive,

1. Quoted in Maya Jaggi, "Storyteller of the Savannah: Profile of Chinua Achebe," *The Guardian* (18 November 2000).
2. Chinua Achebe, "Viewpoint," *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 February 1980, 113.

carefully balanced picture of an African culture. Moreover, it provides a context for, if it does not exactly condone, some practices that Conrad presents as savage and disturbing. The human sacrifice of Ikemefuna is dictated by the Oracle. And Okonkwo has brought home five human heads from war, drinking from one on great occasions. For many years Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* may well have been the only book set in Africa that students were assigned. Thus it is important that they read *Things Fall Apart* and other works to get a fuller, more accurate portrayal.

It would be a mistake, nonetheless, to read Achebe, any more than Conrad, as representing all of the cultures and situations on the continent. Achebe's Ibo live at approximately the same time but more than a thousand miles from the upper Congo depicted by Conrad. Therefore, it would be wrong simply to see *Things Fall Apart* as the truth concealed behind *Heart of Darkness*. When Conrad visited the upper Congo in 1890, it had been devastated by both Belgian exploitation and thirteen years of Arab slaving run by Tippu Tib, a coastal trader whom Henry M. Stanley had transported to Stanley Falls (Conrad's "Inner Station"). Thus the tribes of the region—specifically, the Bangala, the Balolo, the Wangata, the Ngombe, the Bapoto, and the Babango—were a great deal more disordered and violent than tribes in other parts of Africa. When George Washington Williams visited in the same year as Conrad, he was appalled by the Belgians and became the first total opponent of King Leopold's regime. But at the same time he was shocked by the Africans. In an open letter of protest to Leopold, Williams reported that "Cruelties of the most astounding character are practiced by the natives, such as burying the slaves alive in the grave of a dead chief." He also said, "Between 800 and 1,000 slaves are sold to be eaten by the natives of the Congo State annually." Thus, although Williams denounced the cruelty of Leopold's soldiers, one of his complaints against the regime was, ironically, that it was "deficient in the moral, military, and financial strength necessary to govern."³

It is uncertain to what extent Conrad may have witnessed any such practices. He made no mention of them in his Congo diaries, but he did later tell Arthur Symons, "I saw all those sacrilegious rites."⁴ Unlike most other Europeans, however, Conrad did not view such rites, even conceived at their worst, as a justification for African subjugation. In a protest letter sent to Roger Casement in

3. George Washington Williams, "An Open Letter to His Serene Majesty Leopold II," in John Hope Franklin, *George Washington Williams: A Biography* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985), p. 248 [see the selection in this Norton Critical Edition].
4. Arthur Symons, "A Set of Six" in *A Conrad Memorial Library: The Collection of George T. Keating* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran, 1929), p. 170.

1903 as a contribution to the fledgling Congo reform movement, Conrad declared,

Barbarism per se is no crime deserving of a heavy visitation; and the Belgians are worse than the seven plagues of Egypt inasmuch that in that case it was punishment sent for a definite transgression; but in this the Upoto man is not aware of any transgression, and therefore can see no end to the infliction. It must appear to him very awful and mysterious; and I confess that it appears so to me too.⁵

Conrad became a staunch, if complicated, opponent of European expansion. *Heart of Darkness* offers a powerful indictment of imperialism, both explicitly for the case of King Leopold and implicitly (despite Marlow's comments on the patches of red) for all other European powers. As Marlow says, "All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz." He declares, "The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing." His story graphically demonstrates how ugly it could get.

In his 1975 speech Achebe did not mention Conrad's anti-imperialism, but in his 1988 revised version, he concluded, "Conrad saw and condemned the evil of imperial exploitation." Conrad criticized imperialism on many grounds, one being the hypocrisy of the "civilizing mission." In "The White Man's Burden," published in 1899, the same year as *Heart of Darkness*, Rudyard Kipling posited that colonizers selflessly and thanklessly better the lives of their "new-caught, sullen peoples, Half devil and half child," coaxing them from the bondage of their "loved Egyptian night." The trope here is temporal, conceiving Europeans (and the Americans Kipling was encouraging to take over the Philippines) as adults and advanced while non-Europeans were children and primitive. This trope, which provided the chief ideological support for late nineteenth-century imperialism, derived largely from Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. Darwin did not take up the question of evolution of human societies in his *Origin of Species* in 1859, but in *The Descent of Man* in 1871, he concluded, "There can hardly be a doubt that we are descended from barbarians. The astonishment which I felt on first seeing a party of Fuegians on a wild and broken shore will never be forgotten by me, for the reflection at once rushed into my mind—such were our ancestors."⁶ The co-founder of evolutionary theory, Alfred Russel Wallace, was more explicit. In

5. *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, eds. Frederick Karl and Laurence Davies (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988), 3:96.

6. Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (New York: D. Appleton, 1896), 618.

his article "The Origin of Human Races and the Antiquity of Man" published in 1864, Wallace argues that owing to the struggle for survival and natural selection, "the better and higher specimens of our race would therefore increase and spread, the lower and brutal would give way and successively die out, and that rapid advancement of mental organization would occur, which has raised the very lowest races of man so far above the brutes . . . and, in conjunction with scarcely perceptible modifications of form, has developed the wonderful intellect of the Germanic races."⁷ By the end of the nineteenth century this view of human social and racial evolution had become firmly entrenched.

There is no doubt that Conrad incorporated the temporal evolutionary trope in *Heart of Darkness*. Marlow described his journey upriver as "traveling back to the earliest beginnings of the world" and the Africans as "the prehistoric man." But rather than using this trope to support imperialism, Conrad uses it to do the opposite. First of all, he points out that Europeans don't live up to their own ideals as civilizers. In a letter to his publisher, William Blackwood, Conrad said of his project, "The criminality of inefficiency and pure selfishness when tackling the civilizing work in Africa is a justifiable idea."⁸ In the story he suggests the ideals are mere sham. When Marlow's aunt applauds imperialism for "weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways," he "ventured to hint that the Company was run for profit." The only "improved specimens" we see, such as the fireman, are parodies. Otherwise, we just see exploitation and violence. Conrad very clearly expresses his condemnation of European cruelty in such memorable scenes as the French ship firing blindly into the continent, the beating of the African assumed to have started the fire at the Central Station, the carriers found dead in harness on the caravan trail, the man with a bullet-hole in his forehead as a part of road "upkeep," the "pilgrims" shooting from their steamer, the crew not being given food, the chain-gang building the railway, and the contract-laborers languishing in the "grove of death."

In addition to pointing out the hypocrisy with which the ideals of the "civilizing mission" were espoused, Conrad may have questioned the validity of those ideals themselves. Marlow says of Kurtz's report, written while Kurtz was still an emissary of progress,

The opening paragraph, however, in the light of later information, strikes me now as ominous. He began with the argument that we whites, from the point of development we had arrived

7. Alfred Russel Wallace, "The Origin of Human Races and the Antiquity of Man Deduced from the 'Theory of Natural Selection,'" *Journal of Anthropological Society of London* (1864), 2:cxiv.

8. *Letters of Joseph Conrad*, 2:139–40.

at, "must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings—we approach them with the might as of a deity. . . . By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded."

The ideals themselves carried a hubristic arrogance. Edward Said, and before him Wilson Harris, have observed that Conrad's very style with its first-person narrators, framed narratives, time jumps, fractured sentences, and addiction to adjectives upsets the notion of absolute truths assumed by the "civilizing mission."⁹ Both fault Conrad, probably correctly, for not showing non-European resistance and not imagining an alternative to imperialism, but both applaud him for attacking European domination. Conrad likely didn't show more of the Africans because he wanted to focus on the Europeans. As Abdul JanMohamed notes, "Despite what writers like Chinua Achebe say about the denigration of Africans in *Heart of Darkness*, Africans are an incidental part, and not the main objects of representation, in the novella."¹⁰

Conrad also used the trope of evolution in *Heart of Darkness* to attack imperialism by suggesting that Europeans in colonies could slide backwards on the evolutionary scale. Kurtz is the main example. In Africa the wilderness whispers to Kurtz "things about himself that he did not know." His "forgotten and brutal instincts" are awakened. And he passes beyond "the bounds of permitted aspirations," indulging his greed and lust, placing the heads of "rebels" on posts around his house, presiding at "midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites" (probably human sacrifices), and committing the hubris of setting himself up as a god. Marlow himself feels the temptation to go ashore for "a howl and a dance" though he resists it. And while no match for Kurtz, the other Europeans have become animalistic. The uncle of the manager has a "short flipper of an arm" and the members of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition are "less valuable animals" than their donkeys.

Conrad's effective use of the evolutionary trope against imperialism, however, can still be described as racist since it continues to assume Africans are at the low end of the scale. Thus Achebe finishes his sentence, "Conrad saw and condemned the evil of imperialist exploitation but was strangely unaware of the racism on which it sharpened its iron tooth." Similarly, Patrick Brantlinger observes, "*Heart of Darkness* offers a powerful critique of at least some mani-

9. See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), and Wilson Harris, "The Frontier on Which *Heart of Darkness* Stands," *Research in African Literatures*, 12:1 (Spring 1981), 86–93.

10. Abdul JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature" in *Race, Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986), p. 90.

festations of imperialism and racism as it simultaneously presents that critique in ways that can be characterized only as imperialist and racist."¹¹ In a number of passages, however, Conrad reaches to get beyond the evolutionary trope and racism, though often uncertainly and ambiguously.

Frances B. Singh has argued that Conrad viewed Africans as evil and their evil is what has corrupted Kurtz. She maintains *Heart of Darkness* "carries suggestions that the evil which the title refers to is to be associated with Africans, their customs, and their rites" and that Conrad would have us believe Africans "have the power to turn the white man's heart black."¹² For the most part, however, Conrad makes clear that Kurtz's corruption comes not from Africans but from Europe and from Kurtz himself. Kurtz no longer has the restraints provided in Europe by policemen and gossiping neighbors. Since he is "hollow at the core," lacking internal restraints, he is susceptible to the whisper of the wilderness. The dark wilderness, as Marlow realizes by the end of the story, is not just in Africa but lurking in the streets of Brussels and hovering over the Thames. Indeed, it is cosmic as shown in a sentence in the manuscript: "The Earth suddenly seemed shrunk to the size of a pea spinning in the heart of an immense darkness." It is Kurtz who has corrupted his lake tribe rather than the other way around. At one point Conrad does suggest the Africans worshipped evil prior to this corruption. He says Kurtz took a seat "amongst the devils of the land." But the only time Conrad applies the word "satanic" to Africans is in connection with their chanting as Kurtz is being taken away. Conrad largely resists the lead of Kipling, who called non-Europeans "half-devil." He takes care to distinguish between what Kurtz does and what the Africans do, and while he finds great fault with the former, he finds little with the latter. As in his letter to Casement when he wrote: "Barbarism per se is no crime," Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* exonerates the Africans by having Marlow say of Kurtz, "I seemed at one bound to have been transported into some lightless region of subtle horrors, where pure, uncomplicated savagery was a positive relief, being something that had a right to exist—obviously—in the sunshine."

Still, while resisting the common contemporary demonization of Africans, Conrad continues to place them in the category of "savage" and "barbarian." He goes slightly further in several places in the text where he praises the Africans for their energy, vitality, and dignity. Kurtz's mistress is "superb . . . magnificent . . . stately." The

2. Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988), p. 257.

3. Frances Singh, "The Colonialist Bias of *Heart of Darkness*," *Conradiana* 10 (1978): 43, 44.

black paddlers off the coast have "a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement." And Conrad has Marlow commend the cannibals in his crew as "fine fellows . . . men one could work with." Moreover, the cannibals possess a mysterious inner restraint in not eating the whites on board even though they are starving. Thus, in a novel that is a relentless, skeptical inquiry into the basis of moral behavior, one that questions morality founded on principles or providence, the cannibals with their "inborn strength" provide one of the few signs of hope. All of these examples, however, are undercut by phrases that continue to associate Africans with the uncivilized. The mistress mirrors the wilderness. The paddlers are "natural." The honor of the cannibals is "primitive." Nonetheless, Conrad does accord them a certain respect. In contrast with the hypocrisies of Europe, they are "true" and "wanted no excuse for being there."

Conrad goes even further in a number of passages where he has Marlow recognize, or almost recognize, or struggle to recognize the humanity of the Africans. Unlike Kurtz, Marlow resists the temptation to exploit Africans. Instead he does what little he can to help by giving his biscuit to the man in the "grove of death" and by pulling his whistle so the "pilgrims" cannot slaughter Kurtz's followers. As a result of his experience, Marlow seems to overcome his prejudices enough to acknowledge the "claim of distant kinship" put upon him by his helmsman through their shared work and shared mortality. Getting to Kurtz, he says, was not worth the loss of this life. Marlow urges his audience to recognize "their humanity—like yours." But these examples are also ambiguous. Marlow can't say whether the person he hands the biscuit is a man or boy because "with them it's hard to tell." The sentence after "their humanity—like yours" consists of a single word: "Ugly." And Marlow quickly throws the body of his helmsman overboard because, amongst the cannibals, a "second-rate helmsman" might become a "first-class temptation." This wavering may be a sign of inner struggle or simply indicate ongoing ambivalence.

The most impressive steps Marlow takes toward recognition, ones overlooked by Achebe, are when he turns the tables. He imagines that Englishmen would soon clear out the road between Deal and Gravesend if African colonizers started catching them to carry heavy loads. And he realizes that in Africa drums may have "as profound a meaning as the sound of bells in a Christian country." Elsewhere drums represent savagery, and Marlow's excited response tells him he's kin to Africans because he also contains primal urges, but in this passage he sees they are kin to him because they also have reverence.

Achebe dismisses Conrad's expressions of sympathy for suffering

Africans as "bleeding heart sentiments." Specifically, he describes as "liberalism" Marlow's reaction to the "grove of death." Perhaps Marlow doesn't fully recognize the humanity and equality of the dying Africans, though his statement that he's "horror-struck" and his rage at the waste of the Belgians seem sincere enough. And perhaps one can fault Marlow for thinking of nothing better to do than hand over a biscuit and to tell his story years later to four men on a boat on the Thames. One can also perhaps fault Conrad for not doing more himself when he returned to England after witnessing the horrors of the Congo. Arthur Conan Doyle and Mark Twain both became actively involved in the Congo Reform Association and wrote books condemning Leopold. Apart from his 1903 letter to Casement, which Conrad allowed to be reproduced and widely distributed, he declined to become further involved. Casement, however, forgave him because he was deep in work on *Nostromo* and fighting an almost incapacitating despair. Casement's co-founder of the C.R.A., Edmund Dene Morel, also forgave Conrad and in 1909, after the Congo had been stripped from Leopold, declared that *Heart of Darkness*, which reached a much larger audience than Marlow's, was the "most powerful thing ever written on the subject."⁴

Racism in Conrad's time was endemic. As Peter Firchow notes, it was so assumed that the word did not yet exist.⁵ Part of Conrad's sensitivity to racism came from his being subject to it himself. To the end of his life, he spoke English with such a heavy accent that he was difficult to understand. Although in many ways an Anglophile, Conrad's sense of extreme alienation is suggested by his story "Amy Foster" in which an East European is washed ashore in southern England after a shipwreck and presumed insane because of his strange language. English visitors to Conrad in Kent recollected him as "not of our race" (22), "like a Polish Jew" (40), "the conventional stage Hebrew" (67), "simian" (96), "oriental mannerisms" (104), "very Oriental indeed" (109), "spectacularly a foreigner" (113), "an Oriental face" (115), "semi-Mongolian" (126), and "like a monkey" (138).⁶ While Conrad may have expressed some racist attitudes himself, he acidly attacked white racism in his works, perhaps most clearly in his Malayan novels where he shows nothing but contempt for white men who claim superiority solely on the basis of their skin color. One striking example is Peter Willems in *An Outcast of the Islands*. When Willems falls in love

4. Edmund Dene Morel, *History of the Congo Reform Movement*, ed. William Roger Louis and Jean Stengers (London: Oxford UP, 1968), p. 205n.

5. Peter Firchow, *Envisioning Africa: Racism and Imperialism in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"* (Lexington: U of Kentucky P, 2000), p. 4.

6. Quotations taken from *Joseph Conrad: Interviews and Recollections*, ed. Martin Ray (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1990).

with Omar's daughter, Aïssa, he feels he is "surrendering to a wild creature the unstained purity of his life, of his race, of his civilization." Later, after the love is gone, Willems cannot stand Aïssa's staring at him. He calls her eyes "the eyes of a savage; of a damned mongrel, half-Arab, half-Malay. They hurt me! I am white! I swear to you I can't stand this! Take me away. I am white! All white!"⁷

When Achebe revised "An Image of Africa," he de-Anglicized "bloody racist" to "thoroughgoing racist." We must ask, though, how thoroughgoing Conrad was. And we must distinguish degrees and kinds of racism. Whatever may be said of Conrad, he certainly did not share the most extreme racism of his time. He did not wish the annihilation of all non-Europeans. But Achebe seems to think so. In his original version Achebe compared Conrad to "All those men in Nazi Germany who lent their talent to the service of virulent racism." Achebe removed this sentence in his 1988 revision, but in his interview in 2000 when again denying the value of Conrad's work, he said, "I've not encountered any good art that promotes genocide."⁸

The almost inevitable trajectory of Social Darwinism was genocide. Darwin himself concluded in *The Descent of Man*: "At some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilized races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace the savage races throughout the world" (156). Alfred Russel Wallace ended his 1864 article by saying, "the higher—the more intellectual and moral—must displace the lower and more degraded races" (clxvix). Eduard von Hartmann in his 1869 *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, a book Conrad read, wrote that it wasn't humane to prolong "the death struggles of savages who are on the verge of extinction. . . . The true philanthropist, if he has comprehended the natural law of anthropological evolution, cannot avoid desiring an acceleration of the last convulsion, and labor for that end."⁹ And in 1894 in *Social Evolution* Benjamin Kidd observed, "The Anglo-Saxon has exterminated the less developed peoples with which he has come into competition."¹

The man in *Heart of Darkness* who writes "Exterminate all the brutes!" is of course Kurtz. He may only be referring to his lake tribe, but pretty clearly he's referring, in the spirit of the Social Darwinists, to all Africans. His statement echoes that of Carlier in "An Outpost of Progress," who voiced "the necessity of exterminat-

7. Joseph Conrad, *An Outcast of the Islands* (New York: Doubleday, 1924), pp. 80, 271.

8. Quoted by Jaggi in "Storyteller of the Savannah."

9. Eduard von Hartmann, *Philosophy of the Unconscious* (1869; London: Kegan Paul, 1893), 2:12.

1. Benjamin Kidd, *Social Evolution* (1894; rpt. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1920), p. 49.

ing all the niggers before the country could be made habitable."² Kurtz scrawls his statement at the bottom of his report for the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs as if it were the logical outcome of that project, the "exposition of a method." It's unclear how much Conrad was warning against actual genocide. He was certainly familiar with the theories of the Social Darwinists, but they had not yet been put deliberately in practice, although Europeans had already wiped out several native populations through disease and displacement. In the Congo somewhere between two and ten million Africans were killed during the twenty-three years of King Leopold's rule but not through a policy of extermination. They died through the brutality of forced labor, reprisals, and privation. But in October 1904, when the Herero tribe in Southwest Africa resisted German colonization, General Adolf von Trotha gave orders for all eighty thousand of them to be killed. Over the next two years the Germans succeeded nearly completely in doing so and a new word entered their vocabulary: *Konzentrationslager* or concentration camp. In his 1915 essay "Poland Revisited," Conrad observed that the Germans were "with a consciousness of superiority freeing their hands from all moral bonds, anxious to take up, if I may express myself so, the 'perfect man's burden.'"³ His words now seem prescient, but they weren't really. The "perfect man's burden" was simply an extension of the "white man's burden," and the genocides of the twentieth century had already begun.

The lasting political legacy of *Heart of Darkness*, more than any confirmation of racism, has been its alarm over atrocity. Its title has entered our lexicon as code for extreme human rights abuses, usually those committed by whites in non-Western countries but also those committed by non-whites and those committed in Europe. Take for example the titles of just three recent books: Jacques Pauw's *Into the Heart of Darkness: Confessions of Apartheid's Assassins*, Shari Turitz's *Confronting the Heart of Darkness: An International Symposium on Torture in Guatemala*, and Ferida Durakovic's book of poems titled simply *Heart of Darkness* about the Serbian siege of Sarejevo and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia. Durakovic thanks "Joseph Conrad, who realized long before others that darkness had a heart, and the heart had darkness."⁴ Far from condoning genocide, Conrad clearly saw humanity's horrific capacity and gave it a name.

2. Joseph Conrad, "An Outpost of Progress" in *Tales of Unrest* (New York: Doubleday, 1925), p. 108.

3. Joseph Conrad, "Poland Revisited" in *Notes on Life and Letters* (London: John Grant, 1925), p. 147.

4. Ferida Durakovic, *Heart of Darkness* (Fredonia, NY: White Pine Press, 1998), p. 109.