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# **Laying Bare The Moral Dilemma of Imperial Politics:**

**A Narratological and Ideological Comparison of Francis Ford Coppola's  
Film *Apocalypse Now* with Joseph Conrad's Novella *Heart of Darkness***

## Abstract

### Laying Bare The Moral Dilemma of Imperial Politics:

A Narratological and Ideological Comparison of Francis Ford Coppola's Film *Apocalypse Now* with Joseph Conrad's Novella *Heart of Darkness*

Both Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* and Francis Ford Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now* are regarded as outstanding works in their respective field of art. Their reputation rests partly on their artistic value and partly on their preoccupation with topics which were highly relevant at the time of their publication/release. They are for the most part regarded as independent works of art and the differences in the spatio-temporal setting and in the type of adventure easily hide the fact that *Apocalypse Now* is based on *Heart of Darkness*. The fact that both works differ to a very high degree from each other makes them suitable for examining the borderline between adaptation and intertextual reference. By comparing them from a narratological and an ideological point of view this thesis aims however to conclude that the influence of *Heart of Darkness* on *Apocalypse Now* classifies the relationship between them as an adaptation.

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## 1. Introduction

Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* belongs to the literary canon of Western literature. It is like most of Conrad's works a fictionalisation of the experiences which he had gained earlier in his life when he travelled as a seaman to a wide range of distant places in the world, such as the Caribbean, Australia, South East Asia, India and Africa. Later on in his life he abandoned that profession and settled down in England to become a writer. *Heart of Darkness* is based on his stay in the Congo Free State in 1890 where he worked "for the Société pour le Commerce du Haut-Congo as a second in command and, temporarily, captain of the river steamer *Roi des Belges*" (Stape, xvi).

The novella has gained its reputation partly due to its literary values and partly due to its preoccupation with a topic that was highly contested at the time of its publication in 1899. It provides striking insights into the inadequacy of the colonial rule of Belgium in the Congo which are otherwise hardly available in publications of that time. In contrast to Conrad's fiction most of the publications in Britain that were written in the heyday of the British Empire used to propagate the benefits of expanding the empire with all means. In order to convey his insights Conrad employed besides his realistic way of writing a number of innovative narrative techniques which paved the way for modern literature. Charles Brian Cox describes *Heart of Darkness* accordingly as "one of those amazing modern fictions, such as Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* or Kafka's *The Trial*, which throw light on the whole nature of twentieth-century art, its problems and achievements" in an introduction to an edition of *Youth: A Narrative/Heart of Darkness/The End of the Tether* (Watts, "Heart of Darkness" 50).

Francis Ford Coppola, the filmmaker of *Apocalypse Now*, is like Conrad an artist who has helped to innovate his art form. He belongs to a generation of filmmakers who have contributed to change the way of filmmaking in Hollywood in the 1960s and 70s. Turning away from the classical way, Coppola and others developed a new trend called 'New Hollywood' which marked the way of making American films from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s. Coppola as well as the other American filmmakers of that generation were young and had attended film schools when they started their careers. They introduced new subject matters and a new style to the films made in Hollywood. Influenced by the European art film, which flourished at that time, their films distinguish themselves from classical Hollywood films by their emphasis on artistic values.

*Apocalypse Now* exemplifies that well. It stands out among other films due to its filmic values and due to the way how it deals with contemporary politics in a way which is comparable to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. *Apocalypse Now* was pioneering with regard to

its use of lights and sounds at the time of its release in 1979 (Monaco 349). As regards content, it revolves around the American military intervention in the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 70s. Highlighting the outstanding filmic value of *Apocalypse Now*, the novelist Michael Ondaatje says about it that it “has entered the mythology of filmmaking and become part of the American subconscious” (Ondaatje 43). He regards it therefore as a ‘classic’ work of art.

In summary, one can say that both works are, irrespective of each other, considered to be masterpieces in their respective fields of art and both have triggered an intense debate on the fictional representation of the real events that they deal with. The film historian Peter Cowie confirms that by saying in *The Apocalypse Now Book* that the film “has entered movie history as one of the greatest statements on the folly of war” and that *Heart of Darkness* “endures not just as a beautifully written, passionate work of literature, but as a coded denunciation of European imperialism” (Cowie x, 151).

Being myself more a novel reader than a moviegoer I have first read the novella before watching the movie. And to be honest, not being a fan of war films, I doubt that I would have ever watched the film if I had not been told that it is based on *Heart of Darkness*. Without being given any information it is not easy to realize that the two works are connected to each other because they do not share the same title and the novella is not mentioned as a source text in the screen credits of *Apocalypse Now*. It is therefore likely that those who are only familiar with one of the two works miss to make any connection between them.

But despite the omission of the novella in the screen credits and the change of title, there is no doubt that *Apocalypse Now* is based on *Heart of Darkness*. Coppola states explicitly in a synopsis that “*Apocalypse Now* is a retelling of Joseph Conrad’s short classic *Heart of Darkness*” (Cowie 35). Coppola’s statement does not surprise us when one takes into account that approximately 85 per cent of the stories told in films “are still being (or have been) appropriated from literary or dramatic sources” according to James M. Welsh who mentions that figure in *Issues of Screen Adaptation: What Is Truth* (Welsh xiii). Film adaptations differ, however, widely in their degree of faithfulness to the source text. Some film adaptations like *Apocalypse Now* are hardly recognizable as adaptations while others aim at being as faithful to the source text as possible.

Having read the novella I was curious how the narrative would be presented by the medium of film. My curiosity increased when I realized how far the film deviates from the novella not only with regard to its spatio-temporal setting but also with regard to the plot and the characters. While watching the film, I was baffled. *Apocalypse Now* was not at all as I had

expected it to be. It was not a typical war film and it seemed difficult to point out where there are points of connections with the novella.

In fact, the character Kurtz is the only character who bears the same name in *Apocalypse Now* and in *Heart of Darkness*. He shares many traits with the character of the same name in the novella. But he differs at the same time so greatly from the way he is portrayed in the novella that those who are familiar with *Heart of Darkness* might question whether he is still the same character or not.

One could, of course, object that the representation of characters in literature and film always differ from each other. In literature a few words suffice to evoke in the reader an image of the character whereas in film the viewer is confronted with a character in the form of a concrete person whom he/she can both hear and see. Yet, with regard to *Apocalypse Now*, the media specific differences do not account for the tension between the recognition and the disruption of the expectations which those viewers will experience who have read the novella before watching the film.

Considering the obvious discrepancy between *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now* made me think about adaptations from a new angle. I have so far approached film adaptations from a literary point of view trying to trace my personal understanding of a literary work in a film adaptation and often wondering why a source text has been altered in an adaptation. That kind of approach is still widely spread among ordinary moviegoers. In academics, however, the fidelity approach has gradually ceased to be relevant.

Brian McFarlane has contributed to that change by vehemently attacking the fidelity approach. He demands more attention to be paid to the filmic values of adaptations pointing out that film uses other narratological strategies to convey a story, such as mise-en-scene, montage and the use of several media at the same time (McFarlane 7). In an address titled “It Wasn’t Like that in the Book...” which he gave in 1999 McFarlane reproaches those who prefer the literary source text to film adaptation for “want[ing] film to be more like literature” and only valuing a film if it “approximates the precursor literary text” (McFarlane, 4). That kind of approach results, in McFarlane’s opinion, in a rejection of “something new being made in the film”, because the focus of literary critics is only on the way how their interpretations of a literary text are transferred to the medium of film (McFarlane 6).

Trying to adopt McFarlane’s approach I wonder what Coppola means by ‘retelling’ in the synopsis which I have quoted above. To be able to answer that question, one needs to consider how the term adaptation is used in general. Independently of the context, one could define adaptation as a process of changing something to become something else. In the

context of the arts one can find forms of adaptations both within one art form but also between different art forms. In view of the fact that my analysis concerns an adaptation from a novella to a film I will refer to adaptations from literature to film when talking about adaptations even if some statements taken up here might be also valid for other forms of adaptations.

With regard to the relation between films and literary sources, scholars usually differentiate between several kinds depending on the extent of the connection between the film and the literary source text. I will use the terms ‘reproduction’, ‘transformation’ and ‘intertextual reference’ to describe different levels of making use of a source text. I use the term reproduction for adaptations which intend to be as faithful as possible to the content and the structure of the source text albeit with the help of cinematic means. I apply the term transformation to adaptations which make full use of cinematic techniques to convey the story of the source text which results in a radically changed but still recognizable source text. And I use the term intertextual reference for works of art which incorporate bits and pieces of other source texts without the intention that they are recognized.

*Apocalypse Now* is definitely not a form of reproduction. The fact that the film does not aim at faithfulness becomes clear right at the beginning. The frame story of *Apocalypse Now* does not resemble at all the frame story of *Heart of Darkness*. But it seems difficult to decide whether it transforms *Heart of Darkness* or whether it uses the novella as an intertextual reference.

That question does not only concern this specific case of adaptation. The questions of how and why film adaptations deviate from the source text preoccupies today’s adaptation studies. This specific case of adaptation seems to me to be highly suitable for finding out where to set the limit between transformation and intertextual reference when dealing with films who are based on literary sources because *Apocalypse Now* differs, on the one hand, significantly from *Heart of Darkness* while it is, on the other hand, pointed out clearly as an influential source text. Based on the fact that *Heart of Darkness* is only one among many sources which have contributed to the making of *Apocalypse Now* one could argue that it is a form of intertextual reference. But one could also claim that it is a form of transformation arguing that *Heart of Darkness* exerts a considerable influence on *Apocalypse Now*.

While contemplating that dispute, the question arises where to draw the line between intertextual reference and transformation. Today’s critics who discuss films which deviate from the literary source text lean partly towards one term and partly towards the other when

trying to describe how an adaptation might succeed. But the borderline between the two terms remains unclear.

McFarlane seems to have the term intertextual reference in mind when he thinks of successful adaptations. He regards an adaptation as “successful” if it is “a radical reworking of the precursor text, a kind of commentary on its great antecedent, a new work” (McFarlane 8). According to him, one should judge an adaptation first and foremost on the ground of its cinematic achievement and only secondly as an adaptation because “the precursor literary work is only an aspect of the film’s intertextuality, of more or less importance according to the viewer’s acquaintance with the antecedent work (McFarlane 9).

Linda Hutcheon is, as far as I understand her, one of the critics who tend to regard adaptations as a form of transformation. She describes an adaptation in *A Theory of Adaptation* as “a creative and interpretative transposition of a recognizable other work or works”, which she compares to “a kind of extended palimpsest” often involving “a transcoding into a different set of conventions” (Hutcheon 33). This description emphasises three factors which might be involved either separately or together. First, an adaptation is a kind of rewriting of an existing work entailing a reinterpretation of that work. Secondly, there may be modifications due to a change of method or style in art. Thirdly, a change of medium may add further alternations based on the “material specificity” of the media concerned which refers to the different narrative modes used in literature and film (Hutcheon 34).

Both critics attach importance to the fact that a film which is based on a literary source text should be a reinterpretation instead of only “reproducing” it with cinematic means. But they differ in their degree of how far the film might deviate from the source text. Based on their above mentioned definitions Hutcheon assumes that the source text is still recognizable while McFarlane speaks of a new work.

By comparing *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now* from a narratological and an ideological point of view I hope to find out where to draw the line between intertextual reference and transformation. The first step of my analysis will be to compare *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now* from a narratological point of view in order to establish the similarities both works of art share with each other and to point out more clearly than I have done so far in the introduction in what ways they differ from each other. Assuming that *Apocalypse Now* and *Heart of Darkness* share more similarities on the discourse level than on the story level (see 2.1. and 2.2.) it seems opportune to analyse the two works as texts of equal value. I will therefore discuss the question as to whether adaptation studies might be replaced by intertextual studies. This discussion will be followed by the presentation of various



intertexts, which are at work in *Apocalypse Now*, and some remarks on the significance of different screenplays and film versions. Assuming further that *Heart of Darkness* is not merely used as an intertextual reference but that it exerts a considerable influence on *Apocalypse Now* I will trace this influence in my ideological comparison which will deal both with the narrative strategies and with the preoccupation with imperialism.

### **1.1. Adaptations from Literature to Film**

Critics who deal with film adaptations nowadays share the view that film adaptations in fact create something new out of the source text. Apart from McFarlane and Hutcheon the French film critic and film theorist André Bazin argues that film adaptations should not only represent the story of the literary source text but add something new to the understanding of the source text. He says:

More important than ... faithfulness ... is knowing whether the cinema can integrate the powers of the novel ... and whether it can, beyond the spectacle, interest us less through the representation of events than through the comprehension of them.

(Bazin 7)

Bazin's approach combines literary and filmic values. Film adaptations take into account what the literary source text is about and transfer that interpretation to the medium of film to offer the viewer a new understanding. That approach gives plenty of scope for deviations from the source text while the source text still functions as a point of reference.

When analysing deviations from the source text in adaptations across media borders one must, however, distinguish between two kinds of deviations, namely those which contribute to a new meaning and those which are necessitated by the fact that the medium is changed. The fact that critics do not always take this distinction into account when criticizing has led to a controversial debate on the similarities and differences when comparing adaptations across media borders. Kamilla Elliott presents this debate in 'Novels, Films, and the Word/Image Wars'. She claims that the interdisciplinary study of novels and films is carried out along two lines of argumentation. Some critics lay more stress on the similarities that film shares with the novel with regard to "formal, generic, stylistic, narrative, cultural and historical" issues (Elliott 1). Others emphasize the differences based on the fact that film uses "images" and novels "words" (ibid). The latter argument is based on Lessing's differentiation of poetry and painting which George Bluestone extends to novels and films. Bluestone argues that the novel

is a medium which is good in conveying concepts, symbols, mental imagery having “time as its formative principle” and that film rests on visual representation and perception “with space as its formative principle” (Elliot 2).

Bluestone’s distinction is still widely accepted among critics even if one could question, as Elliot does, “why categorizations developed for purely linguistic and purely visual arts have been applied [by Bluestone and others] to hybrid verbal-visual arts” (ibid). Elliot’s question takes the fact into account that films seldom do without words and that novels often create “visual and spatial effects through ekphrasis” (ibid). Another counterargument to the strict distinction was given by the filmmaker and film theorist Sergei Eisenstein who claimed that Western film techniques were modelled on “the Victorian novel’s attention to visual detail, empirical psychology, atmospheric close-ups, alternating omniscient and character viewpoints, and shifts from one group of characters to another” (qtd. in Elliot 4). Eisenstein might well have modelled his assessment on *Heart of Darkness* about which Cedric Watts says that “[i]n 1899, in its vividly graphic techniques, particularly the rapid montage, the overlapping images, and the symbolic use of color and chiaroscuro, ‘Heart of Darkness’ had been adventurously cinematic at a time when film – rudimentarily then was not” (Watts 1996, 52).

The fact that Conrad’s narrative style brings to mind cinematic techniques has led Orson Welles to the remark that “every Conrad story is a movie” (qtd. in Moore, 1). This remark appears to be true considering the fact that most of Conrad’s works have been adapted for film, many of them even several times. When Gene M. Moore edited *Conrad on Film* in 1997 he counted more than eighty film and TV adaptations.

Welles himself wrote three scripts based on Conrad’s works, among others an adaptation of *Heart of Darkness*, which was supposed to be shot in 1939. Considering Welles’s praise of the cinematic qualities of Conrad’s fiction it is surprising that Welles never managed to realize any of his Conrad scripts. When trying to explain this failure, Welles seems to have contradicted his earlier-mentioned statement saying that “nobody’s ever done it written” (Moore, 2).

The contradiction can, however, be resolved by taking a closer look at Conrad’s fiction. It shares, on the one hand, similarities with film on the basis of its visual appeal. Conrad has stated in the Preface to *The Nigger of the “Narcissus”* that he is “trying to achieve ... by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you see” (Conrad 2006, 1888). But on the other hand, it uses literary devices which are difficult to transfer to the media of film. Moore emphasizes above all the role of the narrator in Conrad’s

fiction, his use of irony and the complexity of the narrative layers as features which are difficult to transfer. Moore claims that the majority of film adaptations of Conrad's fiction has not succeeded in finding adequate cinematic devices to render those literary devices into film. Most of them have turned Conrad's tales into romances or adventure stories by doing without the narrator and his ironies and by reducing the complex tale into a simple tale which proceeds straightforwardly from the beginning to the end. The observation even proves to be true when looking at the film *Sabotage*, an adaptation of Conrad's *The Secret Agent* by such a skilled filmmaker as Alfred Hitchcock. Conrad's novel revolves around espionage and belongs to the political novels which he wrote later in his life in contrast to the novels with colonial settings written at the beginning of his literary career. Instead of rendering the political content of the story into film, *Sabotage* alters the content of the story and turns it into a romance; the focus is shifted from the actions of the secret agent to the affection which grows between the agent's wife and the policeman whose task it is to solve the case in which the secret agent is involved.

To render not only the action of Conrad's fiction but also the significance behind the action and the thoughts of the ones who act demands the use of unusual cinematic techniques. One film project which exemplifies this well is Welles's unrealised project of filming *Heart of Darkness*. The intention to present the story of *Heart of Darkness* entirely from Marlow's point of view resulted in the invention of the feather wipe technique (Moore, 4-7). The way in which *Apocalypse Now* solves the problem of translating the literary devices which are typical of Conrad's fiction to the cinema will be part of my narratological comparison.

In my ideological comparison I will examine why *Apocalypse Now* deviates from *Heart of Darkness* as regards content and form. There is no doubt about that *Apocalypse Now* updates *Heart of Darkness* to a contemporary setting, exchanging the colonial context with the context of the Vietnam War. But one has to ask whether that update adds a new meaning to the story. It is true that the form of colonialism which Conrad describes in *Heart of Darkness* had come to an end when *Apocalypse Now* was filmed. But imperialism has far from disappeared. It has only taken on another form, known today as neo-imperialism.

My hypothesis is that *Apocalypse Now* makes use of the link between colonialism and neo-imperialism to make a statement about current politics with the help of *Heart of Darkness*. Having a look at how the main narrator, who is an English seaman and adventurer in *Heart of Darkness*, is turned into an American mercenary in *Apocalypse Now* suggests that the film adds a new meaning to the novella. In my ideological comparison I will therefore

focus especially on the role of the narrator of the main story who plays a crucial role for transmitting the story to the reader both in the novella and in the film.

## 2. Narratological Comparison

To provide a theoretical framework for my narratological comparison I will use the concepts and terms of the American film and literary critic Seymour Chatman who has developed the idea of a general narratology for literary and cinematic texts in *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film*. In addition to that I will refer to *A Theory of Adaptation* in which Hutcheon challenges the preconceived idea that adaptations are inferior to the source text by discussing numerous cases of adaptations across all media and genres. Hutcheon's approach to adaptation studies seems to be very suitable for this comparison considering the fact that *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now* are usually regarded independently of each other and that both occupy the status of a classical work of art as I have pointed out in the introduction.

What I have also pointed out earlier is the fact that critics sometimes differ in their assessment of whether an adaptation differs from or is similar to a source text. In my opinion, one reason why critics argue differently with regard to the interdisciplinary study of novels and films is the fact that they compare completely different levels of a narrative. To avoid a confusion of different levels of the narrative when comparing *Heart of Darkness* with *Apocalypse Now* I will follow the distinction which Chatman makes. He distinguishes between two distinct levels of narrative when he defines narrative "as an invention, by an implied author, of events and characters and objects (the story) and of a modus (the discourse) by which these are communicated" (Chatman 119). He talks about 'narrative in the broad sense' on the story level arguing that all narrative texts share "the fundamental property of story" because a story, no matter how it is actualized, consists of a series of connected events (Chatman 109-110). On the discourse level, there are, however, different ways to convey a story which Chatman calls narrative modes, namely telling and showing (Chatman 111).

My narratological comparison will therefore be divided into two analytical parts. In the first part of my analysis I will compare the narratives on the story level where I expect to find a wide range of similarities based on Peter Brooks's claim that the ability to narrate "allows us ... to transfer [narratives] into other media while remaining recognizably faithful to the original narrative structure and message" (Brooks 3-4). Yet, I will also expect to encounter differences relying on Hutcheon who says that "[i]n the process of dramatization there is

inevitably a certain amount of re-accentuation and refocusing of themes, characters, and plot” (Hutcheon 40).

In the second part of my analysis I will examine how the adaptation deals with the aspect of transforming a narrative from ‘word’ to ‘image’ focusing in my comparison on certain parts of the narratives which seem to be especially challenging when moving from telling to showing. Hutcheon mentions among others the aspects of timing, point of view, interiority versus exteriority, ambiguity, symbols, absences and silences as instances where media specific differences are likely to occur (Hutcheon 52). I will use these aspects as starting points for my narratological comparison.

### **2.1. Analysis of the Adaptation on the Story Level**

On this level I will analyse to what extent the plot, the characters and the setting of *Apocalypse Now* are similar to and in how far they differ from those of *Heart of Darkness* (Chatman 109). The plots of both works of art consist of a frame narrative and a main narrative. I will however not discuss the frame narratives here because their difference is due to media specific reasons which I will address in the second part of my analysis.

The main narratives share a common plot line which could be summarized as follows: A restless protagonist is sent on a mission to an underdeveloped part of the world where he encounters the natives and the wilderness on a boat trip along a river which is surrounded by a jungle. The river and the jungle are predominant parts of the setting in both works of art. During his journey he has to stop at several places along the river where he is confronted with hindrances which affect his mental state. As a result, he questions more and more the purpose of his mission based on the observations he makes about how the other whites interact with the natives and the wilderness. At the end of the river he meets Mr. Kurtz who has spent a long time by himself at the furthestmost outpost of the whites. Kurtz’s behaviour has changed as well due to the contact with the natives and the wilderness. He seems to have gone insane in the eyes of the ones who sent him there because he uses unsound methods. The protagonist is both abhorred and attracted by Kurtz’s behaviour. Yet, comparing the methods of the other whites with Kurtz’s methods and getting to know Kurtz’s motivations, the protagonist finally decides to side with Kurtz.

From the comparison of the plots one can conclude that there are two characters who play crucial roles in both narratives, namely the protagonist and Mr. Kurtz. The protagonist is in both cases a white male person who believes that he is superior to the natives whom he will encounter during his mission in the jungle. In *Heart of Darkness* his name is Marlow. In

*Apocalypse Now* he is called Willard. Both the protagonist and Kurtz follow different professions in the novel and in the film due to the contextual difference. Marlow is an English seaman whereas Willard is an American soldier. Kurtz, who bears the same name in both works of art, is a famous ivory trader in *Heart of Darkness* and a famous soldier in *Apocalypse Now*. But despite the contextual difference, Kurtz seems to have the same kind of personality in both works. He rules the natives and is a kind of god for them at the inner station (Conrad 30). In addition to that, he is attributed in both works of art with inconsistent personality traits: On the one hand he is said to be a “universal genius” with excellent career prospects who has “moral ideas of some sort” (Conrad 30, 33, 37). On the other hand he uses unsound methods which stand in sharp contrast to preconceived ideas that those have of him who have not met him in the wilderness. In contrast to these contradictory character traits, he possesses however one quality which is uncontested in both works of art, namely his eloquence (Conrad 58).

Apart from the protagonist and Kurtz, there are three more characters of *Heart of Darkness* who have counterparts in *Apocalypse Now*. One of them is the person who welcomes the protagonist at the inner station before meeting Kurtz. In *Heart of Darkness* he is a Russian adventurer who corresponds to the American photo journalist in *Apocalypse Now*. The character is stranded at Kurtz’s inner station having no longer a driving force of his own. Still, he idolizes Kurtz and tries to persuade the protagonist to side with Kurtz. Another character of *Apocalypse Now* who is modelled on a character of the novella is the one called ‘Chief’ who suffers the same fate as the helmsman in *Heart of Darkness*. In both works of art he is set apart from the whites due to his black skin colour. Nevertheless, he regards himself to be superior because of being a member of the protagonist’s crew. Yet, his sense of superiority is crushed when he is severely hurt by a spear in an attack by the natives after having run out of ammunition. He cannot understand how he could be hurt by such a primitive weapon. He stares therefore reproachfully at the protagonist before he finally dies. The third character of the film who has a counterpart in the novella is Kilgore. He is similar to the Company’s chief accountant whom Willard meets at the first station in *Heart of Darkness*. Both Kilgore and the chief accountant keep up appearances in the wilderness. They do not change their behaviour despite the radically different circumstances in Africa and Vietnam respectively. They do the job which they are trained for ignoring the misery that surrounds them which might demand a more human approach. The chief accountant focuses only on his correct entries not caring whether a black person dies in his office or not. Kilgore behaves in a

similar way when he interrupts his plan to help an injured Vietnamese by giving him water because he is suddenly more interested in surfing.

Otherwise the set of characters of the novel matches only loosely the set of characters of the film. They differ in number and in characterization but they fulfil the same functions on the whole. The white characters stand for the average white person who is mentally affected by the contact with the natives and the wilderness without deliberately interacting with them. They lose their moral restraint in the course of the journey and shoot out of control at the natives when feeling threatened. The natives, in turn, fulfil in both works of art the function of 'the other' as described in Saïd's work *Orientalism*. There Saïd claims that the Orient has functioned for the West as a foil which helped the West to define itself by contrasting the way of being of the Orientals with the way of being of the Westerners (Saïd 2003, 1). The interaction of the whites with the natives and the wilderness and their representation as 'the other' is one of the main themes in both works of art.

Another theme common to both works of art is the interaction with evil. Apart from this there are themes which are specific to the given context. Both works of art express a critical attitude towards the social conditions of their time. The main narrative of *Heart of Darkness* is set in the Congo at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century whereas *Apocalypse Now* is set in Vietnam and Cambodia during the Vietnam War. *Heart of Darkness* criticises the colonization of the Congo. It revolves around the ivory trade revealing the inhumane exploitation and the double moral standards of the white colonists. *Apocalypse Now* criticises the American neo-imperialism as it was carried out during the Vietnam War. Dealing with the intrusion of the American army in Vietnam it mocks the American warfare and its double moral standards.

The re-accentuation of the themes results in a change of subgenre. *Heart of Darkness* meets the criteria of an exploration story whereas *Apocalypse Now* can be subsumed under the category of anti-war films. The change of theme and subgenre has consequences for the plot of the adaptation.

Despite the above mentioned similarities in the plot line, one can also detect differences. One main difference concerns the purpose of the mission. In *Heart of Darkness* the protagonist is sent to the Congo to carry out a trading mission. His task is to transport ivory from the inner country to the coast. The protagonist in *Apocalypse Now* is, in contrast, sent on a military mission to kill Kurtz, a fellow soldier, who is said to cooperate with the enemy. Accordingly, in *Heart of Darkness* the protagonist's interest in Kurtz is only raised by chance in the course of his journey when he listens to others who talk about him. In *Apocalypse Now* his interest in Kurtz is at the core of his mission. There he has a file with documents and

photos of Kurtz which he reads and looks at during his journey in order to get an idea of him. Another important difference concerns the ending of the story. In *Heart of Darkness* the protagonist intends to bring Kurtz back to civilisation. Kurtz, however, dies of natural causes on his way back. Accordingly, the protagonist has to return alone to Europe where he has to take care of Kurtz's belongings handing them over to people who had a business or family relation with Kurtz. *Apocalypse Now* ends, in contrast, with the protagonist's murder of Kurtz at the inner station which is only followed by one more scene in which the protagonist leaves the place on his navy patrol boat. Consequently, the viewer of *Apocalypse Now* is left in doubt as to whether the protagonist will meet Kurtz's family and whether he will inform others about Kurtz's behaviour.

## **2.2. Analysis of the Adaptation on the Discourse Level**

The distinction of texts on the discourse level depends on the category of signs that are used to convey the story. Texts that are 'told' use primarily words whereas texts that are 'shown' use mainly iconic signs (Chatman 111). The choice of signs has implications for the way a story is presented. Hutcheon says that in film adaptations "description, narration, and represented thoughts must be transcoded into speech, actions, sounds, and visual images" because "screen adaptations must use what Charles Sanders Peirce called indexical and iconic signs - that is, precise people, places and things - whereas literature uses symbolic and conventional signs" (Hutcheon 40, 43). Literature differs accordingly from film insofar as it can highlight details by naming them specifically whereas film abounds in visual details which are usually shown simultaneously (Chatman 39).

Due to the fact that film relies first and foremost on making something visible it is difficult for it to represent what is described to be absent or silent in literature (Hutcheon 71). Characters, for example, are never fully described in literature. The reader is only offered some details which help her or him to create a mental image of a character. The mental image, which the reader forms from the given clues, remains flexible during the course of the story's progression. That is not the case when the viewer sees and hears a character on the screen. In film the viewer's preconception of a character is fixed as soon as he/she appears visually and aurally on the screen (Abbott 109-10). Special devices in film are needed in order to emphasize certain features of a character which stand out in a literary work.

The representation of Kurtz as a character in *Apocalypse Now* exemplifies this well. In *Heart of Darkness* Kurtz's appearance is only described with the help of a few characteristics. The novel offers a brief sketch of his outer appearance. He is said to be "bald" and his head



looks like “an ivory ball” (Conrad 59). As a person he is said to be “hollow at the core” (Conrad 72). Otherwise just one quality of him stands out: his eloquence which is highlighted by comments from Marlow who says about Kurtz that he has never “imagined him as doing ... but as discoursing” (Conrad 58), and that Kurtz “was very little more than a voice” (Conrad 59). Kurtz’s characterization remains nevertheless very abstract throughout the novella. Furthermore, the reader of *Heart of Darkness* can only imagine the sound of Kurtz’s voice.

In contrast, the viewer of *Apocalypse Now* both hears Kurtz’s voice and sees him on photos and in action. This makes it difficult to emphasize a single feature like his voice. But *Apocalypse Now* finds ways to stress it. The first thing that the viewer of *Apocalypse Now* gets to know about Kurtz is his voice. The viewer hears it when a tape, containing messages from him, is played to Willard at the military headquarters. The emphasis on his voice is repeated in the scene when Willard encounters Kurtz for the first time in person. One can only hear Kurtz talking without being able to see his face at the beginning of the scene. Kurtz sits in a dark corner of his Buddhist temple while he is talking to Willard. Shots which show a black screen are juxtaposed with shots which zoom in Kurtz’s bald head. The voice is the only constant feature that remains throughout the scene. His voice gains further significance in another scene where Willard is in Kurtz’s temple, after Chef has been murdered by Kurtz, listening to Kurtz who recites *The Hollow Men*, a poem by T. S. Eliot, which can be interpreted as an aural rendering of Kurtz’s inner state of mind.

Apart from Kurtz’s voice there are two more entities in *Heart of Darkness* which are supposed to be difficult to render in film. Both the wilderness and the natives are associated with verbal silence in the novella. The wilderness in the novella is mystified and explicitly said to be silent forming a contrast to the busy and messy life at the central station (Conrad 27). Marlow says that “the silence of the land went home to one’s very heart - its mystery, its greatness, the amazing reality of its concealed life” (Conrad 31).

*Apocalypse Now* succeeds in rendering the silence of the wilderness. Even if the jungle representing the wilderness forms mainly a background as part of the setting there is one scene which stands out from this: the filming of the scene when Willard and one of his crew members leave the boat and enter the jungle to find mangoes. It captures the mysterious silence of the jungle in *Heart of Darkness*. At the beginning of the scene the imagery of the jungle reminds one of a paradise. But the putative paradise turns out to be a dangerous place when a tiger suddenly attacks Willard and his crew member.

The silence of the natives in *Heart of Darkness* is transferred to *Apocalypse Now* by representing them voiceless. In *Heart of Darkness* they are only hinted at. Instead of describing them fully, Marlow only refers to them by mentioning some of their body parts: “a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling” (Conrad 43). At the inner station Marlow does not even see them, he only feels their presence: “The consciousness of there being people in that bush, so silent, so quiet - as silent and quiet as the ruined house on the hill - made me uneasy” (Conrad 70-1) . As a result, they appear inhuman in the novella only forming a passive background for the actions of the whites.

Likewise the Vietnamese in *Apocalypse Now* are represented as passive victims. In the scene of the attack on the Vietnamese village the Vietnamese hardly act. They try to flee and offer only little resistance. There is only one scene in the film where a Vietnamese woman acts overtly, throwing a grenade into an American helicopter. The woman remains, however, anonymous. At Kurtz’s inner station the Vietnamese are totally passive apart from the scene of the ritual sacrifice. They merely function as decorative figures either standing around without showing any emotions or lying and hanging around dead. In addition to that, they lack individuality. They are staged as an indistinguishable mass.

In order to account for the fact that we understand the representation of the Vietnamese to be biased, I shall resort to the concept of the implied author. This invention accounts for “features that would otherwise remain unexplained” (Chatman, 74). The existence of the implied author, however, is often hardly felt by the reader unless it presents an unreliable narrator or its views appear to differ from the one of the real author. The reason for the ‘invisibility’ of the implied author is the fact that it remains outside the story world even if it emerges from within the text. One could understand the implied author as being equivalent to the intent inherent in the text. It is accordingly positioned between the real author, who is outside the text and cannot influence the interpretation of the text’s meaning any more when the text is published, and the narrator who is part of the discourse space of the text (Chatman 74-76). Thus stories can convey ideological world views without the reader/ viewer being aware of them. As Chatman remarks “Hollywood films disguise under the mask of ‘ordinary realism’ what is in fact a highly ideological view of the world” (Chatman 154).

As part of the intent the implied author invents the narrator of the text who either takes on the form of a teller or shower depending on the choice of signs employed in the work of art. The narrator is part of the discourse space which entails that he remains outside the story world. Sometimes, however, the telling or showing of the narrator may be physically evoked (Chatman, 123). One way of doing this is to embed the main story which is told by a narrator into a frame

story which is told by another narrator. I argue that the main stories of *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now* are both embedded in frame stories. This gives rise to the question as to whether and how the respective frame story introduces a teller or a shower of the main story.

The frame story of *Heart of Darkness* is set in England. An anonymous narrator spends his time carrying on a conversation with other people on board the *Nellie* on the Thames which is due to depart. One of those persons is Marlow. The anonymous narrator informs the reader that Marlow differs from the others insofar as he still goes to sea not longing for home (Conrad 5). Marlow's difference is stressed by the fact that he is described as having "the pose of a Buddha", a description which hints at the significance of the experience which he is about to tell to the others in the main narrative (Conrad 7). The anonymous narrator warns the reader that Marlow's stories are not easy to follow (Conrad 6). Marlow, in turn, explains that the experience threw "a kind of light on everything about me-and into my thoughts" (Conrad 8).

The form and the content of the frame story of *Apocalypse Now* differ significantly from those of *Heart of Darkness*. Some might even argue that the introductory shots of the film do not even constitute a frame story claiming that the story is told straightforwardly from the beginning to the end. It is true that the introduction of *Apocalypse Now* lacks the retrospective aspect of *Heart of Darkness* which is a common feature of frame stories setting the stage for a story within a story and that there is no clear-cut shift from one story to another story within the narrative. I interpret the introductory shots nevertheless as a frame story because the style sets the shots apart from the rest of the film. The images and the music employed in the frame story are more symbolic than the ones in the main story. They convey clearly what is going on inside Willard's mind thereby highlighting his subjectivity. I interpret accordingly the shift from showing Willard's inner state of mind to Willard's actions in the hotel room as the borderline between the frame story and the main story.

The frame at the beginning could be described as follows: It is set in Vietnam and made up of images and sounds which reoccur in the main narrative. At the beginning, the viewer looks frontally at a beach with a green jungle in the background. After a while helicopters cross the screen from right to left and vice versa accompanied by the sound of rotor blades. Suddenly the jungle bursts into flames and the viewer hears the soundtrack *This is the End* by the Doors. The scene continues showing the jungle in grey colours with small fires burning everywhere overlapped by the face of a man that is rotating. The shot prepares the shift to the next scene which takes place in a hotel room in Saigon where the camera zooms in a rotating fan. The noise previously associated with the helicopter's rotor blades is now transposed to

the fan. The viewer can therefore infer that the previously shown shots constitute the images of a nightmare dreamt by the person who is lying on the bed of the hotel room whom the viewer in the course of the film will identify as the protagonist. The way the frame is closed at the end of the film will be taken up later when I discuss the use of symbols in the film.

Even if the form and the content of the frame narratives differ to a great extent from each other they share one feature, namely the introduction of the protagonist of the main story. Based on that, one could assume that the main narratives are presented by the protagonists themselves. The assumption proves to be true with regard to *Heart of Darkness*. There the main narrative is told by Marlow in the form of an I-narration.

In film, however, narratives are seldom told from the point of view of a single character. Bordwell argues that “[u]nlike prose fiction, the fictional film seldom confines its narration to what only a single character knows. /.../ In general, narrative films are constantly modulating the range and depth of the narration’s knowledge” (Bordwell 58). But Hutcheon calls Bordwell’s statement into question wondering whether films always have to be confined to a third-person point of view or whether “the intimacy of the first-person narrator [could] be achieved in performance” (Hutcheon 53).

I claim that Willard functions in *Apocalypse Now* as a “filter” (Chatman 146). The camera often zooms in his face, a cinematic device to address the audience (Ondaatje 45). Apart from this there are also shots which make the viewer look at the scenery from Willard’s optical point of view suggesting “subjectivity” (Bordwell 58). As examples one could mention the scenes when Willard looks out of the window from the hotel room in Saigon, when he reads Kurtz’s documents and looks at his photographs and when he looks from the navy patrol boat at Kurtz’s station shortly before arriving there. The frequent use of voice-over is another cinematic device which turns Willard into a filter. Interpreting the images, Willard’s voice-over commentaries function in the same way as Marlow’s narrative comments in *Heart of Darkness*.

But Chatman points out that the use of voice-over commentaries in film should not be confused with I-narration in literary works because “[a] voice-over may be one component of the total showing, one of the cinematic narrator’s devices, but a voice-over narrator’s contribution is almost always transitory; rarely does he or she dominate a film the way a literary narrator dominates a novel” (Chatman 134). Willard’s voice over is in fact not constantly used in *Apocalypse Now*. The scene at the beginning of *Apocalypse Now*, which shows two soldiers coming upstairs to Willard’s room, proves that one should not confuse Willard with the general cinematic narrator. Willard cannot be aware of their coming because

he is shown sleeping when they knock at his door. Another scene which exemplifies the shifts of perspective even more clearly is the assault on a Vietnamese village by the American air force. Here the viewer is confronted with the juxtaposition of shots taken from the inside and the outside of the helicopters and from the Vietnamese village before and during the attack. In this scene the narration is carried out with the help of music by the general cinematic narrator who adds another layer of meaning to the images shown from different points of view.

Music helps the audience to classify the impressions of the characters and actions which are conveyed by the images. In the scene of the attack on the village the images are anchored by Wagner's *The Ride of the Valkyrie* which is played by the American soldiers in the helicopters during the attack. The music indicates the intention of the Americans to send the Vietnamese to the kingdom of the dead. From this observation, one can draw the conclusion that the film conveys the viewpoint of the Americans even if the American warfare is criticized in the course of the film.

As this particular scene shows it is important to consider the fact that films are made up of several media, in contrast to novels, which only consist of one medium (words). And even if the visual medium is the most prominent one in film one should be aware of the fact that the aural medium, which can take on various forms, adds new dimensions to the visual medium. Hutcheon mentions with reference to Elliot that there are "many words spoken in films" and that "there are the separate soundtracks that permit elements like voice-overs, music, and the noise to intermingle" (Hutcheon 40-1).

In connection with the use of dialogue in *Apocalypse Now* one could for example mention that the American photo journalist uses partly exactly the same words as the Russian adventurer in *Heart of Darkness*. In *Apocalypse Now* he says about Kurtz that "the man has enlarged my mind" (cf. Conrad 67). In the novella he describes himself as "a simple man" which corresponds to his exclamation in the film that he is only "a little man" (Conrad 73). And there are further instances when the American photo journalist expresses the same thoughts as the Russian adventurer, e.g. when he admits that Kurtz wanted to kill him the other day (cf. Conrad 70) and when he explains that Kurtz cannot be judged in the same way as one would judge an ordinary man (cf. Conrad 70).

Another scene of *Apocalypse Now* where the music helps the viewer to make inferences is the soundtrack of the frame story. The lyrics of *This is the End* deal with the end of the world after a journey where plans did not work out. The speaker of the song got lost in the wilderness, became insane and wanted to kill his own family. The lyrics mirror on the one hand the title of the film. On the other hand, they foreshadow what will happen to Willard in

the main narrative where Willard loses himself; is on the verge of becoming insane and kills one of his own, Mr. Kurtz. That the song refers to Willard's murder is confirmed when the song is played once more during the actual killing of Kurtz.

The fact that the soundtrack foreshadows what will happen later on reveals another function of the frame story, namely that it provides clues for the comprehension of the main story. This is especially important with regard to films where the viewer is not guided by a teller and where he cannot watch previous scenes once more. The viewer has instead to make inferences based on the successively shown images. Bordwell explains with regard to films that "[t]he sequential nature of narrative makes the initial portions of a text crucial for the establishment of hypotheses" (Bordwell 38).

The fact that the viewer is usually not guided by a teller in films has also consequences for the construction of the story. Chatman says that "[t]he central problem for film adapters is to transform narrative features that come easily to language but hard to a medium that operates in 'real time' and whose natural focus is the surface appearance of things" (Chatman 162). A teller can move freely in space and time bridging the gaps with verbal remarks that explain the shift. This is impossible in film where the general cinematic narrator uses first and foremost images to convey the story. Films are said to have only one tense at their disposal, namely the present whereas novels can move freely among the past, the present and the future. Balazs, who is quoted by Eixenbaum, confirms this by saying about cinematic adaptations of novels that "[a] story conceived in verbal form jumps past many of the very moments over which cinema cannot jump. The word, the concept, the thought, exist outside of time. A picture has the concrete force of the present and lives only in it" (Eixenbaum 69). The emphasis on space has consequences for the montage of the film. Eixenbaum explains that "every subsequent segment must stand in some kind of temporal relationship to the preceding ones. It is a matter of fact that adjacent shots in a film are perceived as *preceding* and *following*" (ibid). This is not the case in literature. There time "is merely noted and the author can deal with it as he wishes, since he is narrating" (Eixenbaum 70).

Accordingly, the narration of *Apocalypse Now* appears condensed with regard to space and time. The action of the main story revolves mainly around the river. There are only a few shifts of location at the beginning which are linked together spatio-temporally. The shift of location from the scene in the hotel room where Willard is picked up by the two soldiers to the scene at the military headquarters is visually presented by a helicopter flight. Having received his mission there to terminate Kurtz, the spatial distance to the mouth of the river is covered by another helicopter flight. From then on, the action takes place along the river.

Time wise the transport from the hotel to the mouth of the river covers only the course of a day in *Apocalypse Now* whereas it takes more than a month for the protagonist of *Heart of Darkness* to reach Africa. The passage along the river takes likewise only several weeks in *Apocalypse Now* while it takes months in *Heart of Darkness*. And the only references to the past in the film are expressed by showing old photos of Kurtz. The condensation of time and place in *Apocalypse Now* becomes also obvious when comparing the linkage of the frame story with the main story. In *Apocalypse Now* both are linked spatio-temporally with the help of overlapping images and sounds to the hotel room in Saigon, where the protagonist is confronted with the images of his nightmare while waiting for a new mission.

In *Heart of Darkness*, the frame narrative and the main narrative are set in different parts of the world. The reader has to jump mentally between Europe and Africa because he is only told some episodes of Marlow's journey to Africa which is preceded by a chapter that takes place in yet another place, Belgium, where Marlow signs the contract for his mission. Apart from the spatial jumps, there are temporal gaps which are indicated by the use of temporal adverbs. At the first station Marlow "had to wait ... for ten days - an eternity" (Conrad 21). On his way along the river the passage of time is described by using the words "day after day ... Now and then" (Conrad 23). And at the central station some months pass by until Marlow has obtained the necessary spare parts to restore the steamer which has been salvaged from the bottom of the river (Conrad 25). The reader is again only offered some information about what happens during those months. In addition to these gaps there are jumps between the two narrative levels. The main narrative is frequently interrupted by Marlow's narrative comments, with which he addresses his audience in direct speech, asking them for example whether they understand his story: "[Kurtz] was just a word for me. I did not see the man in the name any more than you do. Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything?" (Conrad 32).

But even if Willard does not occupy the position of an I-narrator in *Apocalypse Now* as Marlow does in *Heart of Darkness*, the voice-over comments offer extensive access to Willard's thoughts which makes it difficult to distinguish between interiority and exteriority. Theoretically "literary fiction, with its visualizing, conceptualizing, and intellectualizing apprehension, 'does' interiority best; the performing arts, with their direct visual and aural perception ... are more suited to representing exteriority" (Hutcheon 56). I argue however that both of works of art are equally good in representing interiority and exteriority because the main story of both narratives is split into two narrative layers, one focusing on the inner journey and the other one on the outer journey of the protagonist. Marlow explicitly refers to the different layers

in *Heart of Darkness*. He distinguishes between reality and the hidden truth: “When you have to attend to ... the mere incidents of the surface, the reality – the reality, I tell you fades. The inner truth is hidden - luckily, luckily. But I felt it all the same” (Conrad 42). This quote addresses the conflict between the inner and the outer journey. On the surface Marlow carries out his trading mission while mentally he has already distanced himself from the company’s business. In *Resa och skriva* Arne Melberg comments on this by saying that *Heart of Darkness* turns the classical African expedition of discovery into an inner journey suggesting thereby that the ‘heart of darkness’ is located inside us and that the physical journey becomes a mental adventure (Melberg 79). Something similar could be said about *Apocalypse Now*. On the surface both narratives focus on events but on a deeper layer they reveal the mental change of the protagonist, which makes him aware of the inherent evil in every human being.

The question is however how *Apocalypse Now* succeeds in enabling the viewer access to Willard’s inner journey. As Hutcheon says “elaborate interior monologues and analyses of inner states are difficult to represent visually in performance” (Hutcheon 58). Willard’s inner journey can be divided into two parts. During the first part of the journey the viewer gets the impression that Willard is only a passive observer. He is neither involved in the military activities nor in the steering of the navy patrol boat. Instead, he is most of the time busy with studying the dossier on Kurtz. Shots which show his fellow crew members performing activities are juxtaposed with shots showing Willard studying. During the second part of his journey the relation between thought and action is reversed. His behaviour changes when he cannot stand the double moral standards of his fellow soldiers any more. He is startled out of his passiveness when his crew members want to offer help to a Vietnamese woman whom they have injured severely by shooting like maniacs at a civilian boat with a machine gun after having suspected weapons on the boat. Willard thinks that it is absurd to first shoot at people in order to offer them help afterwards. His change of attitude is revealed by the fact that he kills the Vietnamese woman. From then on he takes charge deciding to continue his journey towards Kurtz beyond the last outpost of the American army against the will of the other crew members.

Willard’s increase in action goes hand in hand with his growing confusion. Hutcheon explains that film possesses means of expression which can reveal a character’s inner state of mind. She says that “[c]ertain scenes ... can be made to take on emblematic value, making what is going on inside a character comprehensible to the spectator” (Hutcheon 58). In *Apocalypse Now* Willard’s growing inner conflict is among other things expressed by the increase of sweat on his face. Other means are the use of colours, lighting and fog which are



borrowed from the verbal descriptions of *Heart of Darkness*. The fog for example surrounds the boat more and more the closer Willard comes to Kurtz. The colour of the jungle, which shifts from dark green to blue to grey, and the lighting, which alternates from sunny daylight to the darkest light of the night, conveys the protagonist's difficulty to orientate himself in the unknown environment.

Apart from the fog and the lighting there are other parts of *Heart of Darkness* which reoccur in its visual detail in *Apocalypse Now*, e.g. the snags in the river, the attack on the protagonist's boat with arrows, the killing of Chief/ the helmsman with the spear, the shooting of the crewmembers at the natives and the passing by of wrecks which prove the futility of the endeavour of the whites: the wrecks of a military airplane in the case of *Apocalypse Now* corresponds to the railway-truck turned upside down in *Heart of Darkness* "lying there on its back with its wheels in the air. One was off. The thing looked as dead as the carcass of some animal" (Conrad 18).

The filming of a passage where the boat, which moves along the river cut into the jungle, is compared to a beetle might exemplify the literal rendering of the visual details from the novella: "high walls ... Trees, trees millions of trees, massive, immense, running up high; and at their foot, hugging the bank against the stream, crept the little begrimed steamboat, like a sluggish beetle crawling on the floor of a lofty portico" (Conrad 43). In *Apocalypse Now* the boat is filmed from a bird's perspective making it appear very small amidst the seemingly endless jungle.

Willard's confusion is further conveyed by the use of ambiguous elements which can be understood in more than one way. Ambiguity might first and foremost be related to the use of arbitrary signs in the form of words. However, *Apocalypse Now* succeeds in the visual and aural representation of ambiguity. One example of ambiguity which is expressed in both works of art with the help of language is the comparison of the river with a snake. In *Heart of Darkness* Marlow says that the river resembles "an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country, and its tail lost in the depth of the land" (Conrad 9). Willard uses a similar imagery when commenting on his mission: "Weeks away and hundreds of miles up a river snaking through the war as a main circuit cable plugged straight into Kurtz". The ambiguity arises from the fact that a snake stands both for danger and wisdom. Accordingly, the river brings the protagonist continuously closer to the atrocities of the colonial exploitation in the case of the novella and the atrocities of the war in the case of the film but also to Kurtz, who will provide him with a new understanding of things. The setting of Kurtz's station may serve as another example. It is staged

simultaneously with attributes belonging to heaven and hell. Images of dead bodies, fires, crosses and the dark, greyish lightning connote hell while the Buddhist temple, which serves as Kurtz's residence, and the presentation of Kurtz as a Buddha like figure connote heaven.

The details of the inner station in *Apocalypse Now* exceed the depiction of the same in the novella. In the film Kurtz resides in a Buddhist temple whereas he lives in a simple house in the novella. And the mise-on-scene of a crowd of people hanging and lying around hurt and dead all over the scene as it is presented in *Apocalypse Now* has no bearing on the depiction of the corresponding passage of the novella. There it is only said that the posts of a vanished fence around the house are decorated with skulls and that one of those is positioned into Marlow's direction and described as "black, dried, sunken, with closed eyelids" (Conrad 72). But there are other passages of the novella which remind the viewer of the mise-on-scene in *Apocalypse Now*. Kurtz refers to himself as a deity in *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad 61). Furthermore Marlow is mentioned in *Heart of Darkness* as sitting in "the pose of a Buddha" while telling his story about Kurtz (Conrad 7). Another passage of the novella which deals with Marlow's arrival at the Company's station connotes hell. Marlow sums up his experiences there with the words: "I had stepped into the gloomy circle of some inferno" (Conrad 19).

The usage of disparate symbols to create ambiguity in *Apocalypse Now* shows that iconic signs can be used to convey symbolic meanings despite the fact that they consist of real images (Hutcheon 70). Hutcheon explains that film can express symbolic meanings with the help of montage: "Even in film, with its naturalistic demands, editing can manage to suggest metaphoric comparison by linking disparate images together. The camera can isolate some element of a scene and bestow upon it not only meaning but also symbolic significance by its act of contextualizing" (Hutcheon 71). Montage can therefore be regarded as film's equivalent to language. Elliot states that "[t]he standard version of film history /.../ argues that montage within and between scenes differentiates film from static visual arts and forms a pictorial equivalent of verbal language, as in the novel" (Elliot 14).

There are several scenes in *Apocalypse Now* where some elements are taken out of their ordinary context and put together with other elements to gain symbolic meaning. One example is a shot at the beginning of *Apocalypse Now* where the screen is divided into two parts; one half of the screen shows Willard's head upside down whereas the other half shows the jungle in the normal position. The montage of the disparate images symbolizes that the natural order of the world around Willard is turned upside down.

The most symbolic scenes however come right at the end of *Apocalypse Now*. They reveal that Willard has understood that evil is a part of all human beings. He decides to side with Kurtz preferring Kurtz's evil based on instincts to the evil of the other whites which is based on double moral standards. The process of taking Kurtz's part is symbolized in several ways: By juxtaposing the shots of the ritual sacrificing with the shots of Willard murdering Kurtz, the viewer can infer an interrelation between the two events. The ritual sacrificing symbolizes that Willard has become as savage as the Vietnamese. Another scene that symbolizes that his soul has become as dark as Kurtz's soul is the one that shows him coming out of the temple after the murder with his face coloured dark. The last shots of the film which are part of the frame story confirm Willard's identification with Kurtz first by showing his face beside the head of a Buddha, which stands for Kurtz, and then by moving it gradually behind the Buddha up to the point where the two images overlap totally. The symbolic power of the images is stressed by the prevailing silence. The images are only accompanied by the sound of instrumental music which is frequently used in *Apocalypse Now* in connection with images of the wilderness and the Vietnamese.

### **2.3. The Recognition and the Disruption of the Novel Reader's Expectations**

One could say that, while watching *Apocalypse Now*, the viewer is torn between the recognition and the disruption of expectations concerning the narrative of the source text. The film theorist Bordwell discusses the psychology of filmic perception in *Narration in the Fiction Film*. Even if Bordwell's exposition refers to the perception of films in general and not to adaptations in particular, I think that his argumentation is nevertheless highly relevant in this case because it explains why those who have read *Heart of Darkness* before watching *Apocalypse Now* experience a distinct tension. Bordwell argues that film viewers hypothesize all the time about the story's progression while watching a film. The viewer's hypotheses are based on different kinds of information, above all on the visual and aural signs presented by the film but also on knowledge which the viewer already has before (s)he starts to watch the film. One example of prior knowledge could be the film viewer's familiarity with the source text in the case of a film adaptation. This prior knowledge enables the novel reader who watches the film adaptation to recognize certain objects and dialogues but also the overall story (Bordwell 31-3). However if the film adaptation deviates from the source text either in context or by modifying the narrative in other ways the novel reader's expectations will be disrupted because his hypotheses are partly based on irrelevant information.

The fact that *Apocalypse Now* is not only an adaptation of *Heart of Darkness* across media borders but also a reinterpretation of the story makes recognition accordingly more difficult. The first part of my narratological analysis reveals that *Apocalypse Now* shares certain similarities on the text level with *Heart of Darkness*. The theme that evil is a part of all human beings is at the centre of both works of art. The main characters are recognizable. The crucial parts of the novella's setting, the jungle and the river, are also important parts of the film's setting. And the overall plot structure is similar. But there are important differences with regard to the context, the type of adventure, the protagonist's purpose and the ending of the story.

But these are not the only reasons why the viewer of *Apocalypse Now* who is familiar with *Heart of Darkness* is torn between the recognition and the disruption of his/her expectations. The tension arises from the fact that *Apocalypse Now* takes passages out of *Heart of Darkness* and either uses them in another part of its own narrative or combines them with other elements having no bearing on the novella. The mise-en-scene of Kurtz's compound in *Apocalypse Now*, which I have described in 2.2., exemplifies the combination of different parts of the novella well. And in the introduction I have already mentioned the rendering of Kurtz as an example where the recognition of elements of the novella is partly disrupted by the representation of the character in *Apocalypse Now*. In the novella he is said to be gaunt while he appears vital and imposing in the film. Astonishing for the novel reader is also that Kurtz is represented like a Buddha in *Apocalypse Now* while that trait is attributed to Marlow after his return from the Congo in *Heart of Darkness*.

Another example of this borrowing of bits and pieces and combining them in new ways is the approach and the subsequent attack of Kilgore's helicopters on the Vietnamese village. The wide-screen shots of the Vietnamese coast in *Apocalypse Now* might remind the novel reader of Marlow's description of the African coast which he perceives from a French steamer. And like Marlow in the case of the attack by the French steamer, Willard is stunned by Kilgore's warfare. But when comparing the details of the scenes one can hardly detect any correspondences.

*Apocalypse Now* does not only draw on the passage revolving around the French steamer in connection with the helicopter attack. It also serves the scene at the Do Lung Bridge. In *Heart of Darkness* Marlow comments on the attack of the French steamer by saying: "There was a touch of insanity in the proceeding, a sense of lugubrious drollery in the sight ... enemies! – hidden out of sight somewhere" (Conrad 16). The content and the mood of the passage underlies the scene at the Do Lung Bridge in *Apocalypse Now* which takes

place, however, not at the beginning of the journey, like the passage with the French steamer, but more than half way through on the way to Kurtz.

Another aspect which startles those who are familiar with the novella is the way that horror is treated in the film. *Heart of Darkness* alludes only to Kurtz's horrible deeds without ever describing them in detail while the viewer of the film is confronted with scenes of full frontal horror, such as the mutilated corpses at Kurtz's compound and the decapitated head of one of Willard's crew members.

I argue therefore that the contextual difference and the rearrangement and modifications of passages outweigh the similarities on the story level. But that difference is counterbalanced by the similarities on the discourse level which I have pointed out in the second part of my narratological analysis. The reading of *The Hollow Men* in *Apocalypse Now* which refers with the epigraph "Mistah Kurtz – he dead" to *Heart of Darkness* is just one of the many examples that reveals that the use of words and images in the film is closely intertwined with the source text. Conrad's writing which addresses the senses with its sensual details, as I have pointed out in 1.1, forms a basis for that.

In sum, it is above all 1) the rendering of the verbal descriptions of *Heart of Darkness*, into cinematic images, which make you hear, feel and see the voice of Mr. Kurtz, the jungle, the natives, the fog and the lighting; 2) the borrowing of words from the novella in the form of dialogue and 3) the transfer of Marlow's narrative comments to Willard's voice-over which connect the adaptation with its source text. The media specific differences which usually distinguish a novel from a film are blurred in this adaptation where Conrad's 'cinematic' narrative style mingles with Coppola's literary way of filming which Eleonor Coppola addresses in *Notes: On the Making of Apocalypse Now*. There she says: "I do think Francis's film is a real step toward film as literature. Trying to include what Willard is experiencing inside as well as out" (Coppola, Notes 251).

The narratological comparison answers only the question how *Heart of Darkness* has been transformed to *Apocalypse Now*. It does not answer why *Apocalypse Now* uses parts of the story and the modus. These kinds of questions are the subject of intertextual studies.

### **3. Adaptation Studies as Intertextual Studies**

The shift of focus from the source text to the subsequent text results in treating film versions of literary texts as equal to the source text. Robert Stam takes this approach to film adaptations of literary texts. He maintains the opinion that both works of art of an adaptation should be subsumed under the overarching category of texts. He understands "the source text

novel as a situated utterance produced in one medium and in one historical context, then transformed into another equally situated utterance that is produced in a different context and in a different medium” (qtd. in Leitch 332). Stam is quoted by Thomas M. Leitch who discusses the future of adaptation studies in “Where Are We Going, Where Have We Been?”. Leitch foresees that critics who follow Stam’s line of thought will transform adaptation studies into intertextual studies in which each intertext has the same aesthetic and ontological value irrespective of whether it has served as a source text or whether it is the result of an adaptation (ibid). This approach could finally result in the replacement of adaptation studies by intertextual studies.

To be able to follow Leitch’s argument it is necessary to agree on an understanding of the concept of ‘intertextuality’ because the term has not a clearly defined meaning. Some use it to indicate that a former text has influenced the later text, others regard it as an allusion of the subsequent text to the former text while some regard it simply as a presence of a former text in the subsequent text.

The use of former texts in subsequent texts as models which can be adapted to new contexts can be traced back to the beginning of the arts. But the concept received renewed attention in the 1960s and 70s by French literary critics who wanted to challenge the concept of intentionality which maintains that the meaning of a text is determined by the intentions of the author. The French literary theorist Roland Barthes declared therefore in an article, which bears the same name, the death of the author. According to Barthes the meaning of a text resides inside the text. Barthes lowers the role of the author to the role of the scribe who only uses the existing language to write texts without carrying the writer’s intentions. The meaning inherent in the text is thus free to be interpreted by the reader.

Julia Kristeva who has worked closely together with Barthes has pursued a similar approach when she coined the term ‘intertextuality’ in 1966. She developed the concept in order to explain the presence of other texts within one text without having to refer to the intentions of an author. Her concept is based on Ferdinand de Saussure’s notion of the linguistic sign in combination with Mikael Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism. Saussure claims that the linguistic sign consists of a signifier and a signified and Bakhtin’s concept entails that all discourse is based on a dialogical exchange. Drawing on Saussure’s and Bakhtin’s theories, Kristeva argues that every text is a carrier of a plurality of meanings which are expressed by signifiers without, however, pointing to the signified; this means that texts make use of other texts in order to create new meanings without having to refer to source texts. What kind of meaning a certain text takes on in a concrete situation depends accordingly

entirely on the understanding of the reader as he/she gains from making connections to other texts. Like Barthes, Kristeva wanted to exclude the intentions of the author from the interpretation of the meaning of a text.

Kristeva's approach is, however, not unproblematic. It presupposes that readers are free to make connections to any kind of intertext. While this is true to a certain extent, it does not account for the fact that most readers, respectively viewers in the case of films, make the same kind of connection to certain texts with regard to a specific work of art.

I argue therefore that 'intertexts' are for the most part not included into a text by chance. The fact that different readers interpret a text in a similar way from an intertextual point of view suggests that readers are not entirely free in their choice of making connections to 'intertexts'. The readers are instead guided by the implied author who includes certain 'intertexts' in his/her text which the readers are free to make connections to or not.

Furthermore Kristeva's approach does consider the significance of style. This aspect is highly relevant with regard to *Apocalypse Now* as its style differs significantly from other films about the Vietnam War which will be a topic of my ideological comparison. Given the fact that Coppola has been at the hub of *Apocalypse Now* being both the screenwriter, the director and the owner of the film rights he should be regarded as creator of that style. Jack Boozer refers in *Authorship in Film Adaptation* to several scholars who claim that the influence of the auteur on a film should not be neglected. Boozer argues accordingly that the study of "generic, institutional, ideological, and cultural influences need not entirely displace considerations of key creative decisions by individuals most directly responsible for a film" (Boozer, 21).

I agree with Boozer and will therefore include the intentions of the auteur into the study of adaptations as far as they are known when discussing intertextual references in a text. The removal of intentions would cancel out the possibility of answering the question "why [an adaptation] has ... chosen to select and rewrite the source texts it has" which is according to Leitch one of the key question to be answered by adaptation studies in the form of intertextual studies (Leitch 332).

Since Kristeva does not restrict the term 'intertext' to utterances which are expressed by linguistic signs, I address another aspect which has expanded the scope of intertextual studies. She includes also manifestations in the social world or in history as texts in the study of intertextuality. I allow that the move of transforming adaptation studies into intertextual studies accordingly creates the possibility of including other forms of texts in the study of adaptations without abandoning to consider the intentions of the auteur.

Another aspect which should not be neglected in intertextual studies is the fact that a text most often consist of many other texts. This applies also to texts in the form of film adaptations which are rarely based on a single source text. They draw instead on various source texts, both visual and textual, covering a wide range of source material which includes other art forms but also other kinds of text as for example news articles or historical events (Lev 335-6).

The last mentioned aspect proves to be especially true with regard to *Apocalypse Now*. I will therefore briefly name a number of texts which are at work in *Apocalypse Now* even if my focus is on *Heart of Darkness* because it shows why *Apocalypse Now* is often regarded as a work of art on its own.

### **3.1. The ‘Intertexts’ at Work in *Apocalypse Now***

Literary texts which are especially foregrounded in *Apocalypse Now* apart from *Heart of Darkness* are T.S. Eliot’s poem *The Hollow Men*, Sir James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* and Jessie Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance*. The poem is mediated aurally by having Kurtz recite it when Willard meets him in the temple on Kurtz’s compound. Interestingly enough, *The Hollow Men* comprises itself a quotation of *Heart of Darkness*: the epigraph which I have quoted in chapter 2.3. is a direct quote from *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad 87); and the depiction of the hollow men in the poem who are opposed to the ones who have already entered the kingdom of the dead seems to be an echo of Marlow’s comment on Kurtz before Kurtz “stepped over the edge” (Conrad 88):

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. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude – and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core. (Conrad 72)

Apart from the general message of the poem on the hollowness of men there are two stanzas which are especially significant for the understanding of *Apocalypse Now*, namely the first five lines of the second stanza of part V and the final stanza of the poem both of which I will quote here:

Between the idea



And the reality  
Between the motion  
And the act  
Falls the Shadow (ll. 72-6)

*This is the way the world ends*  
*This is the way the world ends*  
*This is the way the world ends*  
*Not with a bang but a whimper.* (ll. 95-8)

The lines of the second stanza highlight the discrepancy between the idea that underlies an action and the way an action is carried out in reality which can be interpreted as a summary of the dilemma with which *Apocalypse Now* deals. The lines of the final stanza mirror the film's title and the film's ending. At an early stage of the film project Coppola planned to end the film with a 'bang' by an air strike which would blow up Kurtz's compound. Coppola changed his mind, however, during the production letting the film end with a 'whimper' as I have described it in the narratological comparison.

Weston's and Frazer's books lie on a table in Kurtz's temple. They are foregrounded by the camera which zooms in on them. *The Golden Bough* is a comparative study of mythology and religion published in 1890 which considers religion not from a theological standpoint but like other cultural phenomena; in order to discover elements which various religious beliefs share with each other. One of the legends which Frazer discusses is the ritual murder of a king by his successor. This legend is taken up in *From Ritual to Romance* which deals with the Holy Grail tradition and the wasteland motif. The kingdom of the Fisher King, who is supposed to take care of the Holy Grail, is turned into a wasteland when he is injured. This state can only be changed by the deed of a chosen hero. The story of the Fisher King is also part of the last stanza of T.S. Eliot's the poem *The Waste Land* (Eliot 2005, 1356). The connection of *Apocalypse Now* to Eliot's poem is indirectly made by using Frazer's and Weston's book, which are mentioned as influential sources in Eliot's notes to *The Waste Land*, as props in the film. One could accordingly interpret Kurtz as a representation of the Fisher King in *Apocalypse Now* and Willard as the chosen hero who can restore the land from the state of a wasteland.

Another literary text is *Dispatches*, a book containing articles about Vietnam which the journalist Michael Herr wrote as a correspondent for the *Esquire magazine* during the Vietnam War. Milius has used parts of it to write the plot of the screenplay. To avoid being

sued for a violation of the copyrights Herr was engaged to write Willard's voice-over narration at a later stage of the film project. Donald M. Whaley mentions in "Adaptation Studies and the History of Ideas: The Case of *Apocalypse Now*" the following parts as 'intertexts' taken from *Dispatches*: the opening sequence which shows Willard in a hotel room in Saigon; the depiction of the photo journalist in *Apocalypse Now* who reminds one of the combat photographer Sean Flynn in Herr's book; the scene when Willard is confronted by a tiger in the jungle; the depiction of soldiers who have gone insane, the depiction of the war as being marked by drugs and rock-and roll; and the obvious references to California and its culture, above all its emphasis on surfing (Whaley, 42-3). The two last aspects are by the way beautifully caught by the songs which I have not mentioned in the narratological comparison, such as (*I Can't Get No*) *Satisfaction*, *Surfin' Safari*, *Suzie Q* and *Let The Good Times Roll*. The soundtracks highlight the intrusion of the American culture upon the Vietnamese.

In addition to *Dispatches* there are two other 'intertexts' at work in *Apocalypse Now* which concern Vietnam. These are comprised by notorious real events which took place during the Vietnam War. One is the 'Green Beret murder case'; the other is the 'My Lai Massacre'. The 'Green Beret murder case' concerns the trial in which Colonel Robert B. Rheault was charged for having assassinated a suspected Viet Cong double agent. It serves in *Apocalypse Now* as a model for the charge against Kurtz. The term 'Ly Lai Massacre' refers to the mass murder of hundreds of unarmed Vietnamese civilians, mostly woman, children and elderly people, by the US army on March 16, 1968. The murder of the Vietnamese woman on the sampan is a modified version of the 'My Lai Massacre'.

Another text taken from the social world and from history is the Japanese code of bushido which can be traced back to the Samurai and which serves as a model for the code of conduct propagated by Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now* when he advocates the use of "the primordial instincts to kill without feeling without passion, without judgement" (Whaley 46).

Other texts which are less easily recognizable are the movies *Dr. Strangelove* and *The Searchers* which according to his own statements have inspired Milius when writing the screenplay. *Dr. Strangelove* is a black comedy film from 1964 which revolves around the plan of a US general called Dr. Strangelove to attack the Soviet Union with a nuclear bomb. Kilgore shows similarities with General Jack D. Ripper in *Dr. Strangelove*. And in addition to this, one can detect similarities between the plots of the two films. Both in *Apocalypse Now* and in *Dr. Strangelove* there is a high-ranking officer who has gone insane fighting his own war, and in both films the American army sends out someone to kill him. *The Searchers*, in contrast, is an American Western film from 1956 with John Wayne in the title role who fights

with Comanche Indians. According to the cultural critic and historian Richard Slotkin, whom Whaley refers to, the film is, “a retelling of the American frontier myth”. The main connection between *Apocalypse Now* and *The Searchers* is the fact that there is a Western man in both films who can teach the fighting methods of the savages to other Westerners after having learnt them from the savages (Whaley 43-46).

Another film, which has influenced the making of *Apocalypse Now*, is, in all likelihood, Orson Welles’s project of making a film of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* which I have already mentioned in 1.1. Despite the fact that Welles never finished the project, there is sufficient script material to convey an idea of what the film would have been like. Chatman has used Welles’s script material to compare it with Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* and Nicholas Roeg’s *Heart of Darkness* in the article “2 ½ film versions of Heart of Darkness”. The latter-mentioned film is, however, irrelevant as an influence on *Apocalypse Now* since it was filmed in the 1990s.

Like Coppola, Welles planned to adapt the story of *Heart of Darkness* to a theme which was relevant at the time when the film would be shot. According to Chatman Welles intended to equate the Belgian colonizers, above all Kurtz, with Nazis and the events of the plot would have taken place shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War (Chatman 1997, 214). The influence of Welles’s project on *Apocalypse Now* concerns the rendering of Marlow’s point of view. Gene M. Moore mentions in the introduction of *Conrad on film* that Welles wanted “to film *Heart of Darkness* entirely from Marlow’s point of view” (Moore 4). *Apocalypse Now* takes a similar approach by using Willard to a great extent as a filter as I have pointed out in the narratological comparison.

Another parallel which can be detected between Welles’s project and early drafts of the screenplay of *Apocalypse Now* is the plan to use America as the setting of the frame stories. According to Chatman, Welles’s frame story would have taken place on a sailing boat on the East River where Marlow would have looked at the skyline of Manhattan considering it as “one of the dark places on the earth” while telling his story (Chatman 1997, 208). The conception of the frame story of *Apocalypse Now* was very similar to Welles’s in an early version of the screenplay except that the New York setting was replaced by a Californian setting. Willard was supposed to meet a woman on a cruiser in Marina del Rey/California in order to tell her retrospectively about “the horrors of the war” and “the darker side of human ambition” which he links to America with the comment that “Los Angeles ... was once one of the dark places of the earth” (Cowie 44). Both Welles’s frame story and the one of the early draft of *Apocalypse Now* are quite faithful to the frame story of *Heart of Darkness*. The

faithful version of the frame story did however not enter the final film version of *Apocalypse Now*. It was replaced by the one which I have described in the narratological comparison that differs significantly from *Heart of Darkness*.

### **3.2. Screenplays and Film Versions of *Apocalypse Now***

The discrepancy between the early version of the screenplay and the final film version of the frame story of *Apocalypse Now* shows that it is fruitful to include screenplays into the analysis of adaptations as Lev points out. He believes that the additional knowledge gained from the study of screenplays will help to explain “how and why a literary work was adapted” (Lev 336-7). The comparison of the early version of the frame story with the final film version shows that at least this part of the film was originally closer linked to *Heart of Darkness* than it appears to the viewer in the final film version.

Further thoroughgoing studies of the screenplays of *Apocalypse Now* would probably be revealing. But they go beyond the scope of this thesis. The fact that Milius had rewritten the screenplay five times before Coppola entered the film project in 1976 and the fact that Coppola radically changed Milius’s drafts in the course of the film’s shooting gives an idea of the richness of the material that could be studied besides the final film version (Milius 17).

At this point, I shall shortly discuss the fact that the film has been released in two versions before I will turn to the question of how and why *Heart of Darkness* has influenced *Apocalypse Now* in my ideological comparison. The first version was released in 1979 and the second in 2000. The title of the second version has the supplement ‘redux’ as a hint to the fact that it differs from the first one in so far as it has been re-edited and extended by several scenes not part of the first version, above all the Medevac scene, the French Plantation scene, and an additional scene with Kurtz at his compound. By including these scenes as well as by rearranging the chronological order of several other scenes, the second film version strikes a slightly different note. I agree with Walter Murch, the sound editor of the first version and re-editor of the second version, who says that “the new version is more humorous /.../ less fragmentary” and Willard is “slightly less passive” (Ondaatje, 43-44). But despite these changes the overall message of the film remains intact. And the additional scenes do not add anything totally new to the film but they clarify some things further.

The Medevac scene, for example, reinforces the impression which one gains in the sequence at the Do Lung Bridge. It gives the viewer the feeling that the US army is in a desolate state on the verge of disintegration. The soldiers want to get out and in neither scene are there any officers in command. The Medevac scene is a continuation of the USO concert

sequence with the Playboy bunnies at the camp of the transportation company in Hau Phat. The playmates are stranded at the camp of the Medevac scene which is almost flooded due to the heavy rain which rages there. Meeting the organisers of the USO show, Willard arranges for his crew members to meet the playmates in exchange for some fuel. The meeting highlights the absurdity of the war and the impact it has on everybody involved. There is no real communication going on between the crew members and the playmates. They talk past each other because each person is caught in his or her own thoughts. Chef pretends for example to meet Miss December even if he meets Miss May who insists on her real identity. And the other playmate who meets Lance talks about her dream to meet a nice young guy to have a real relationship with him which is simply impossible under the given circumstances. The meetings appear accordingly absurd. The same is true for the American endeavours at the Do Lung Bridge. This scene reveals the meaninglessness of the military operations of the US army. They fight against enemies which they cannot see, rebuilding the bridge every day only to have it be blown up by the enemy every night.

The added sequence at Kurtz's compound deepens the understanding of the discrepancy between the official idea behind the war and the reality which the soldiers are confronted with in Vietnam. After Kurtz has thrown the decapitated head of Chef, who wanted to call in an air strike, into Willard's lap, Willard finds himself in this added scene inside a container instead of being directly brought into Kurtz's temple. Waking up in the darkness of the container, Willard has obvious difficulties to orientate himself. After a while the doors are opened by Kurtz who sits down at the opening surrounded by the daylight and Vietnamese children in order to read articles from the *Time* magazine to Willard. The articles deal with reports on the possible victory of the US army in the Vietnam War given by high-ranking officials. Kurtz reads among others that Sir Robert Thompson has reported to President Nixon "that things felt much better and smelt much better over there" asking Willard afterwards about his opinion on that: "How do they smell to you soldier?" Willard remains silent, leaving the answer open to the viewer. But the fact that he breaks down, when trying to leave the container after his meeting with Kurtz, reveals that he cannot bear the discrepancy between the official version of the war and what he has seen on his journey up to Kurtz's compound.

Most important for this thesis is, however, the inclusion of the French Plantation scene in the second film version. It deals with the French colonialism in Vietnam thereby providing a background for the military intervention of the U.S. army in the Vietnam War. This background was probably well known when the film was released for the first time in 1979 whereas many viewers might not know about it when the film was released for the

second time about 20 years later. In addition to the historical background information, The French Plantation scene reveals a link between colonial politics and today's neo-imperialism. I will therefore postpone a presentation of this scene until I discuss the content of it in 4.6..

#### **4. Ideological Comparison**

The narratological comparison has revealed certain similarities between *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now*. But there are also a series of differences which are among others due to the fact that the film is based on a variety of texts which I have addressed in 3.1.. The fact that Coppola uses different texts which he combines in new ways reveals Coppola's approach to adaptations. In "The Power of Adaptation in 'Apocalypse Now'" Marisha Kinder describes it as follows: "He adopts someone else's material or structure, absorbs and expands it by identifying it with his own experience, and thereby transforms it into his own uniquely powerful vision" (Kinder 12). Coppola certainly does not aim at a re-presentation of the texts which he includes in *Apocalypse Now*. He wants instead to make his own statement.

Despite this approach, I discern a distinct difference between the use of *Heart of Darkness* and the use of the texts mentioned in 3.1.. *Apocalypse Now* does not only refer to *Heart of Darkness* in the form of an intertext. I maintain that *Heart of Darkness* influences the significance of *Apocalypse Now*. The subject of my ideological comparison will therefore be to trace this influence and suggest an answer to the question why Coppola has adapted a literary source instead of creating a new work of art.

To get an idea of aspects which could reveal an influence it might be helpful to look at documents which express Coppola's intentions with the film. He has expressed them in comments on the film on several occasions as for example in the following synopsis which Coppola wrote of the film:

*Apocalypse Now* is a retelling of Joseph Conrad's short classic *Heart of Darkness*.  
Set in Vietnam during war in 1968.

It is the intention of the film-maker to create a broad, spectacular film of epic action-adventure scale, that however is rich in theme and philosophic inquiry into the mythology of war; and the human condition.

... As our protagonist travels through the insanities and absurdities of the American involvement in the war, he is more and more drawn to the jungle itself, its primeval mystique and immense power. It becomes clear that the American war 'to bring civilization to the ignorant millions' is merely the extension of mercantile

colonialism and the horror and savagery lie not in the jungle, but in the American culture itself, with its powerless [sic] technology and pop culture.

... The story is metaphorical: Willard's journey up the river is also a journey into himself, and the strange and savage man he finds at the end is also an aspect of himself.

Clearly, although the film is certainly 'anti-war', its focus is not on recent politics. The intention is to make a film that is of a much broader scope; and provide the audience with an exhilarated [sic] journey into the nature of man, and his relationship to Creation.

It is the hope of the film-makers to tell this story using the unique imagery of the recent Vietnamese War; its helicopters, disposable weaponry; as well as the Rock music, the drugs and psychedelic sensibilities. (quoted from Cowie 35-6)

Another document, which comprises one of Coppola's comments on the film, is an extract of the promotional brochure which was distributed in the theatres when the movie was released. There Coppola is quoted as follows:

The most important thing I wanted to do in the making of *Apocalypse Now* was to create a film experience that would give its audience a sense of the horror, the madness, the sensuousness, and the moral dilemma of the Vietnam war, ... I tried to illustrate as many of its different facets as possible. And yet I wanted to go further, to the moral issues that are behind all wars. (Kinder 13)

Both the synopsis and the brochure reveal some of Coppola's intentions which are interpreted here as follows: 1) He wanted to make an action adventure film which should not only consist of action and adventure but also tackle philosophical questions that give insights into "the mythology of war" and "the human condition". 2) His wish to address both the effects of the war in general and in particular implies that the film was to argue on two planes. One plane was to be devoted to the manifestation about the nature and the moral dilemma of wars in general which lead, according to Coppola, to insanities and absurdities. The other plane was to deal with the protagonist who encounters the insanities and absurdities as obstacles on his journey, bringing him closer to his origins likewise marked by horror and savagery. Even if horror and the savagery are at first associated with the jungle, the film is meant to convey that horror and the savagery are actually rooted in the American culture. And he makes it clear that instead of making a film about the Vietnam War he only uses it as a concrete case to tell his story. Furthermore, Coppola points out that he wants to establish a link between the

American neo-imperialism and the imperialism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in order to stress the general validity of his statement.

While reading the written comments of Coppola it seems at first striking that he disputes the idea of regarding *Apocalypse Now* as a war movie. The film is usually subsumed under the category of war movies due to the fact that it is set in Vietnam during the war and that it deals with the problems of the American intervention in that war. But Coppola's comment makes sense when one compares *Apocalypse Now* with other kinds of war films.

In "Seriously Spectacular: 'Authenticity' and 'Art' in the War Epic" Geoff King compares it with Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* and draws the conclusion that as opposed to *Saving Private Ryan* *Apocalypse Now* does not aim at authenticity. It aims instead at representing the Vietnam War in the form of a "creative interpretation of reality" in order to explore "'universal' questions about 'good' and 'evil', the problem of distinguishing between the two, and the 'nature' of 'man'" which corresponds to Coppola's comment in the synopsis quoted above (King 288, 293-4).

To prove his point that *Apocalypse Now* interprets reality in a creative way, King mentions the first part of the frame story as an example which clearly reveals the artistic approach and the deviation from the pattern of conventional war films (King 287, 294). He says that "[r]ather than as a clearly locatable example of action-destruction, or part of more concrete representation of the horrors of the war, the opening of *Apocalypse Now* is presented in terms of Willard's uncertain subjective state" (King 294). In other words, instead of showing concrete images of the Vietnam War, *Apocalypse Now* connects an unidentifiable event of that war to the protagonist's subjective state of mind.

Tomasulo provides another argument for the film's deviation from authenticity. He explains that *Apocalypse Now* does not show the war from a contemporary perspective; it tries instead to lay bare the contradictions of the war by presenting it "from the enlightened perspective of a historical hindsight" (Tomasulo 147). It differs accordingly from the few films which were made about the Vietnam War during the Indochina conflict but also from those made after the Vietnam War which "tended to depoliticize the struggle, turning it into a test of manhood, a rite of passage, or a personal trial" thereby trying to avoid "overt commentary on the moral and political questions of the war itself" (Tomasulo 146-7).

*Apocalypse Now*, in contrast, uses the conflict in order to make a statement about the folly of the war in general (Cowie x). Cowie's interpretation of the film is confirmed by Coppola's wife who said about Coppola's intentions retrospectively in 1999 that



Francis was trying to make a kind of myth, an opera that transcends the setting of the Vietnam War. I think what he wanted to say was larger than just commenting on that conflict. He was talking about war in general, about the human experience of war, and what it does to people. (Cowie 181)

Tomasulo who discusses *Apocalypse Now* in “The Politics of Ambivalence: *Apocalypse Now* as Prowar and Antiwar Film” characterizes the film accordingly as an attempt to turn “the real-life specificity of US imperialism into an abstract and philosophical cinematic mediation on good and evil, light and dark” (Tomasulo 147). Tomasulo’s assessment of the film as a place for the contemplation of philosophical questions disqualifies the film from the genre of war films with their focus on warfare and battles. Coppola seemed to have realized this stating explicitly in the synopsis that he does not want to make a film about the Vietnam War aiming instead at making an adventure film which takes up philosophical questions.

Adventure films are closely linked to the literary genre of adventure stories of which *Heart of Darkness* is one example. To be able to find out how *Apocalypse Now* makes use of that genre and in what way *Heart of Darkness* has influenced the film, I will first present the general characteristics of the adventure genre and then point out in what way *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now* differ from the conventions of their respective genres.

#### **4.1. The Adventure Genre and Imperialism**

The term adventure story is applied to stories which revolve around the actions of a protagonist who is confronted with dangerous situations outside his ordinary sphere of life which challenge him either physically and/or mentally. Due to the fact that the actions take place outside the ordinary sphere of life, adventure stories often involve a journey to distant and exotic places even if that does not necessarily have to be so. Those who do, however, include a journey, follow a certain pattern which can be described as follows: It starts with the departure of the protagonist, who undergoes one or more adventure(s) in the main part of the story before he returns home at the end of the story.

This pattern corresponds roughly to the form of the quest narrative which the American mythologist Joseph Campbell calls ‘monomyth’ in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Campbell claims that the pattern of the monomyth, which he describes as follows, is universal and can be found in mythologies all over the world:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the

hero comes back from his mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow men. (Campbell, 30)

Campbell's description adds a crucial aspect to the above-mentioned journey pattern. The protagonist, whom Campbell calls hero, does not return home empty-handed. He brings with him the insights – boons in Campbell's words - which he has gained during his journey and which he will pass on to others after his return.

As Campbell has shown it is possible to combine that pattern with all kinds of journeys, among which Marlow's journey in *Heart of Darkness* and Willard's journey in *Apocalypse Now* can be subsumed. That is also the reason why one can detect traces of several classical narratives, which comprise an exciting journey to unknown places, in both works. One example is the *The Odyssey* as the epitome of a journey to unknown lands. Another one could be according to Whaley the part of *The Aeneid* where Aeneas "visits the underworld, the land of the dead, to consult his dead father and learn the future" (Whaley 37). Aeneas's journey to the underworld mirrors Marlow's respectively Willard's journey to Kurtz who occupies the role of a father figure in both narratives. The mentioned part of Aeneas's journey refers to another journey, namely Dante's journey through hell which is told in Dante's *Inferno*. With regard to *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now* one could interpret Marlow's respectively Willard's journey to Kurtz as their journey through hell.

Apart from the general characteristics mentioned by Campbell, one should mention that the physical journey is often linked to an interior one in modern narratives which applies both to *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now*.

Typical of adventure stories is furthermore that the reader usually identifies with the protagonist due to the fact that the protagonist is endowed with familiar traits while the others, whom the protagonist meets in exotic environments, are characterized with the help of unfamiliar traits. From this biased representation one can draw the conclusion that adventure stories are not told respectively shown from an objective point of view. They reveal only parts of the truth making deliberate use of dichotomies to distinguish the protagonist from the others in order to enhance the identification of the reader with the protagonist.

As Andrea White explains in *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition: Constructing and Deconstructing the Imperial Subject* the adventure genre became increasingly popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Great Britain due to the expansion of the empire. It is closely related to the non-fictional genre of travel writing. Drawing on the same kind of imagery and plots, both genres aimed at constructing the 'imperial subject' by foregrounding the Western protagonist

as a virtuous hero who conquers unknown lands while the inhabitants of those countries are represented as ‘the other’. Both the adventure stories and the travel writing of that time served the educational purpose of naturalizing the European intrusion into non-European countries. To achieve this purpose they were steeped in ideologies which were prevalent at that time. White explains that the adventure stories of the 19<sup>th</sup> century “argued powerfully for a particular interpretation of ... realities, [namely] that the benefits of civilization merited British incursion into” non-European countries (White 1993, 54).

The two related genres differ, however, from each other in so far as adventure stories are fictional while travel writing is non-fictional. The boundary between fact and fiction was, however, blurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when adventure stories were almost regarded as non-fictional because of their resemblance with travel writing. The approach of the authors of travel writing, who declared in their prefaces the intention to stick only to the facts without embellishing anything, was imitated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the authors of adventure stories who included documents such as “appended maps, scholarly footnotes and explanatory prefaces” and by using “real places with geographically verifiable names” for the setting in their fiction to give the impression of being factual (White 1993, 11, 42, 45).

Despite their endeavour to appear as factual as possible both the adventure genre and travel writing make use of the above mentioned narrative structure of the monomyth, also called ‘quest romance’, in order to enhance their persuasive power. This narrative structure influences the reader to perceive the protagonist as a hero whose actions are approved of by the authorities or even by a divine power.

The application of that age-old narrative structure fulfilled also another purpose in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It created a link between the imperialism of that time and the nation’s past which is narrated in a glorified way in quest romances (White 1993, 44, 62). Appealing in this way to nostalgic sentiments and taking place far away from home, adventure stories offered an escape from reality. White explains that the wish of many readers to escape from the harsh realities which prevailed in Great Britain, due to the Industrial Revolution, contributed to the increasing popularity of the adventure genre in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. She states that

adventure fiction celebrated, in its various ‘exotic’ settings, a pre-industrial past ... the nostalgia implicit in this fiction fulfilled the industrialized reader’s desires for Edenic, unspoiled beauty ... and for an arena for manly, heroic action, uncomplicated by the complex moralities of a modern, democratic world. /.../ It offered a pleasant change of scene ... and ... the Englishman, portrayed ... as morally admirable and physically courageous, decisively exerting his superiority in

sunny desert isles, wide veldts, and tropical jungles was a welcome relief ... (White 1993, 62-3)

The idealized image of the superior Englishman, which is described in the quotation, is created by asserting an essential difference between the Englishmen and the colonized natives.

This approach has several consequences. Firstly, the role of the natives is diminished in adventure stories. They function merely as props to highlight the actions of the hero. Secondly, the depiction of the natives remains incomplete. They are characterized with the help of stereotypes. Jeffrey Meyers accurately describes the interaction of the protagonist with the natives in adventure stories in the following way: There can be

no real involvement with the stereotyped native, who is important not as an individual but as an example of what the Englishman must overcome and suppress, nor with the traditional culture or the tropical setting, which merely serves as an exotic background. (qtd. in White 1993, 65).

The native functions accordingly only as a foil for the hero who is neither influenced by the contact with the natives nor by the exotic setting. Instead, he holds on to his convictions and is never tempted by the wilderness. The biased representation of the natives presupposes an agency as I have pointed out in 2.2. The same applies, of course, to the biased representation of the hero.

In *The Triangle of Representation* Christopher Prendergast discusses the way how representations are limited and how this limitation is related to the concept of vision. Based on the assumption that 'representation' in contemporary theory means 'standing for something', the question to be answered is who makes the decision as to what it stands for. An answer can be given when one takes into account the power relations which are involved in the act of representation. Provided that there are different kinds of representations, the most powerful authority will in all likelihood suppress the representation of the less powerful. When analyzing representations one should therefore focus less on what is represented and more on how something is represented in order to answer questions like "who does the representing, who delimits and controls the field of representation" (Prendergast 9).

Prendergast has derived his way of understanding representation as a deliberate act of controlling what is represented from the theoretical thinking of Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes. Foucault coined the term 'the triangle of representation' when discussing a painting

by Velazques in *Les Mots et les choses* which shows not only the royal family as the object and the painter as the subject but also the act of representing in the form of painting. Barthes has presented a similar idea in the essay “Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein” in which he rejects the idea of representation as imitation. He emphasizes instead the position of the subject who “cuts out ...delimits, and controls the field” of vision in the form of a triangle (Prendergast 10).

Both Foucault’s and Barthes’s theories are based on visual analogies which seem to be highly appropriate when dealing with works of art like *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now*; both appeal to the reader and viewer respectively by means of their emphasis on visual perception. The visual aspect and other narrative strategies of both works will be the subject of the following two chapters.

#### **4.2. *Heart of Darkness* as a Subversion of the Conventional Adventure Story**

Conrad’s fiction resembles in many respects the adventure stories of his time which is not surprising when one considers the early stages of his life and the numerous adventure stories which he has read both in his childhood and as an adult. His decision to become a seaman and to travel to the Congo can, among other things, be traced to his reading of adventure stories. One presumes for example that Conrad’s travel to the Congo on which *Heart of Darkness* is based, was prompted by having read Henry M. Stanley’s *Through the Dark Continent*. White says accordingly about Conrad’s familiarity with the adventure genre that “[b]y the close of the nineteenth century, Conrad was reading and writing out of a firmly established convention that went back at least to Robinson Crusoe...” (White, *Adventure Tradition* 64).

It is true that *Heart of Darkness* partly fits into the general pattern of the adventure stories of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It employs the journey pattern of the monomyth. Marlow leaves Europe in order to travel to the Congo where he has to deal with a series of challenges before he can come home with new insights which he tries to share with his fellowmen on the *Nellie*. *Heart of Darkness* mirrors also the imperial discourse of the time in so far as the natives are depicted in a stereotypical way in order to fulfil the function as a foil for the whites. But *Heart of Darkness* deviates also from the general pattern of adventure stories in crucial aspects.

By taking Campbell’s definition of the monomyth as a yardstick, we can see that *Heart of Darkness* differs from the conventional adventure story in that it does not present a real hero. Marlow does not act very much. He is rather an observer which is revealed by the fact that he frequently uses verbs of perception. But in contrast to conventional heroes he admits

that he cannot interpret the exotic environment and its inhabitants which he encounters. This becomes obvious in the following passage of his journey through the jungle:

But suddenly, as we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage /.../ The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us – who could tell? (Conrad 43)

Furthermore he encounters rather unspectacular forces which do not really prove his virtue; he does not win a victory, to the contrary he is deeply changed by his experiences and seems therefore not to have the power to bestow boons on his fellow men on his return.

His journey stretches itself over a long time due to delays which he cannot influence. At the Central Station he has to wait for several months to get hold of rivets in order to repair the steamer which he has to salvage from the bottom of the river. And the approach to Kurtz's compound is delayed by fog which surrounds the steamer on the river. Marlow actually makes fun of the conventions of the monomyth when he remarks ironically that "[t]he approach to this Kurtz ... was beset by as many dangers as though he had been an enchanted princess sleeping in a fabulous castle" (Conrad 52). In contrast to *Sleeping Beauty* hardly anything dangerous happens in *Heart of Darkness*. The only action that takes place in the novella which comes close to an adventure is the attack on the steamer by arrows. This is, however, hardly a real challenge if one takes into account that his crew members are equipped with more powerful weapons. The only thing which Marlow classifies as a possible danger is the despair which he perceives among the natives. Hearing their sorrowful groans he contemplates that "[e]ven extreme grief may ultimately vent itself in violence – but more generally takes the form of apathy ..." (Conrad 53). In contrast to conventional heroes, Marlow has "no particular desire to enlighten" his fellowmen after his return to Belgium. He presupposes that the people there would not understand him because they do not share his experiences (Conrad 88-9). The fact that he tells his tale to the listeners on board the *Nellie* indicates that he has changed his mind even if he still doubts whether his fellowmen in England are able to follow and comprehend his tale (Conrad, 58-9). Considering the end of the narrative his doubts seem appropriate. The director, who is the only one who says something after Marlow has finished his tale, does not react to it at all. He remarks only that their ship has missed another opportunity to depart (Conrad 96).

To understand the director's reaction one has to consider what specifically Marlow has to tell the listeners on board the *Nellie*. What they expect is a confirmation of the glories of Empire which he feels unable to give. In contrast to the rhetoric at home Marlow has discovered that the only thing that matters for the whites in the Congo is not the philanthropic idea which seems to justify the colonisation but the profit which can be gained from hunting ivory (Conrad 29). This becomes more and more obvious to Marlow at every station that he passes on his journey: The only thing that bothers the accountant at the Company's Station is the fact as to whether the entries in his books are correct. He does not care that many human beings die at the station and that the station is in a mess (Conrad, 23). The manager at the Central Station does not only accept the deaths of others, he is even prepared to hang people who interfere in the ivory trade of the company assuming that he lives in a country where he does not have to obey the laws (Conrad 31, 39-40). And despite the fact that he is officially said to be "an emissary of pity, and science, and progress" Kurtz shows himself to be the worst raider of all (Conrad 30, 68-9). Accordingly, Marlow feels unable to satisfy the expectations of his English audience. He does not dare to tell them directly what he believes to be the truth, namely that the deeds of the Empire are horrible. Instead, he evades the truth admitting that "probably I would have nothing to say" (Conrad 87).

But there is another character in the novella who dares to pronounce a judgement, namely Kurtz who is admired by Marlow for having been able to sum up the experience in the Congo with the words "The horror!" (Conrad 88). One could therefore pose the question as to whether Kurtz occupies the position of the hero in Marlow's story. Kurtz is the one who can bestow boons on the Englishman, even if his last words can hardly be regarded as a victory in the sense of the conventional adventure stories according to Peter Brooks who says that "[a]t the end of the journey lies, not ivory, gold, or a fountain of youth, but the capacity to turn experience into language" (Brooks 247).

White describes the interrelationship between Marlow's and Kurtz's stories as follows:

One shift is that there are two central white men, Kurtz and Marlow, the observed and the observer. The white man's actions could remain "deeds of glory" as long as he was their chronicler, but now Marlow, as participant and as onlooker, presents new possibilities for subversive tellings. (White 1993, 178)

In contrast to conventional adventure stories which present the actions of the hero in a positive light, Conrad chooses to present Kurtz's story by Marlow who can distort it. The tale

becomes even more complex by not only embedding Kurtz's story in Marlow's story but by also framing Marlow's story with the help of an anonymous narrator in a frame story.

Brooks has analyzed the complex narrative structure in "An unreadable Report: Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*". He compares *Heart of Darkness* with a detective story referring to Marlow's "attempt to recover the story of another within one's own" (Brooks 238). Brooks says that "Marlow's narrative plot will more and more as it proceeds take as its story what Marlow understands to be Kurtz's story. Yet Kurtz's story has other plots, ways in which he would like to have it told" (Brooks 239). The discrepancy between stories and plots which Brooks addresses is highly relevant in the case of *Heart of Darkness* because it reveals that plots do not have to correspond to the content of the story. The narrative comprises several examples which support this claim. One example is the version of the story which Marlow presents to Kurtz's Intended (Brooks 249). He is unable to tell her that Kurtz's behaviour in the Congo has differed significantly from what she imagines it to be. He feels therefore forced to lie to her with regard to Kurtz's last words maintaining that he said her name and not "The horror! The horror!" (Conrad, 86). He even tries to cover up parts of the truth about Kurtz when he retells Kurtz's story to the listeners on the *Nellie* by trying to present Kurtz's judgement as a moral victory (Brooks 249, 255).

Marlow seems thereby to fulfil Kurtz's wish to present his story in a positive light despite his knowledge of Kurtz's horrible deeds in the Congo. Kurtz does not want to acknowledge his wrong doings seeing himself only as an executor of the idea which underlies colonialism (Conrad, 85). Kurtz's moral disintegration, which is due to the fact that he cannot refrain from the temptations of the wilderness, proves how illusory is the idealism supposedly justifying imperialism. (White 1993, 174-5). Brooks argues on a more general plane that the whole idea, which should justify colonialism, is an invented fiction. He claims that the idea as a justification for colonialism is the most predominant example of a plot invention that covers up the horrible reality. He says: "The 'idea' is the fiction of the mission, which upon inspection is seen to cover up the most rapacious and vicious of imperialism" (Brooks 240). This revelation of the hidden truth behind the fiction does not at all correspond to the official rhetoric of imperialism which is supposed to be the subject of conventional adventure stories of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

White argues that Conrad subverted the conventions of the genre because, on his journeys to distant countries, he realized that the reality no longer corresponded to the rhetoric of imperialism which was spread in the other adventure stories of that time (White 1993, 108). Conrad's insights can be traced in *Heart of Darkness*. Marlow witnesses that several white



characters have turned away from the idea which justifies their colonial presence. The manager admits when talking to his nephew at the Central Station that he is tired of listening to the propaganda that “[e]ach station should be like a beacon on the road towards better things, a centre for trade of course, but also for humanising, improving, instructing” and Kurtz adds to his report to the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs the subversive remark “Exterminate all the brutes!” (Conrad, 40, 62).

Conrad invented new narrative techniques to be able to communicate these subversive ideas. Crucial for *Heart of Darkness* is the creation of a narrative technique which enables the readers to identify with the narrator of the story but at the time invites the readers to confront unfamiliar information.

The frame story of *Heart of Darkness* fulfils these requirements. Owen Knowles explains in “Conrad’s life” that

[i]n Conrad’s hands, this frame with its English narrator and audience, may initially promise detachment and security, but these both soon prove to be illusory. The frame can be complicated by Marlow’s difficulties in making meaning for a ‘decent’ English audience or rendered less secure by the invasion of the nightmarishly alien. (Knowles 13)

By having an anonymous narrator communicate with Marlow in the frame story, the conventional adventure story, usually told in the form of a monologue, is transformed into a dialogue.

The dialogue opens up possibilities for presenting disparate views within one narrative. The contradictions which can arise from these disparate views contribute to the text’s ambiguity which Conrad created on purpose in his fiction in order to involve the reader in making sense out of the story. The narrative strategy employed in *Heart of Darkness* is similar to Marlow’s strategy for presenting Kurtz’s story. Marlow tries to involve the listeners by turning them into eyewitnesses. This becomes especially clear in the passage where Marlow asks the listeners on the *Nellie* whether they can see the story (Brooks 258). But, as Brooks points out, Marlow’s appeal to vision does not change the fact that his listeners are utterly dependent on what he tells them explaining that Marlow’s “narrative depends wholly on his verbal act” (Brooks 259). The link between Marlow’s visual appeal and his verbal narration brings Barthes’s visual analogy to mind. Marlow controls and delimits the field of representation.

He provides the listeners on the *Nellie* with two versions of Kurtz's story. One version is the retelling of his meeting with the Intended in which he presents Kurtz in a positive light, and the other version is the one in which he tells the truth about Kurtz's wrong-doings to the listeners on the ship. Brooks says accordingly that "[t]he truth value of Marlow's narrative must be in what his listener's can do with it" (Brooks 258).

The fact that the narrative lacks a final solution both with regard to Marlow's tale and with regard to *Heart of Darkness* as a whole corresponds to Conrad's attitude towards the purpose of art. He said that "a work of art is very seldom limited to one exclusive meaning and not necessarily tending to a definite conclusion" (qtd. in Chatman 1997, 210). White argues therefore that due to the fact that it conveys a plurality of meanings *Heart of Darkness* transforms the conventional adventure story into a profound moral tale (White 1993, 177).

The reason for Conrad's ambiguous style is rooted in his position as an outsider in British society. He was an immigrant from Poland who had spent a considerable time of his life as a seaman in other parts of the world before he settled down in England. Knowles who has studied Conrad's life and its influence on his works argues that the outsider position enabled Conrad to see things from different perspectives because he was

curiously suspended between linguistic and cultural traditions, now 'one of us' in his closeness to day-time English voices, now unusually mobile in his ability to cross boundaries, but at key moments challenging the very basis of what is seemingly clear and penetrable. (Knowles 3)

Conrad has commented on the cultural in-between position described by Knowles in *Letters*: "Both at sea and on land my point of view is English, from which the conclusion should not be drawn that I have become an Englishman" (qtd. in Knowles 4). Even if he tried to assimilate to the English culture he remained, nevertheless, a stranger due to his foreign background. In Conrad's fiction one can often detect a similar outsider position in his narrators. In *Heart of Darkness* this position is occupied by Marlow. He has an English identity but in a conversation with the doctor in Brussels he denies it saying that he is "not in the least [a] typical" Englishman (Conrad 13).

Before turning to the consequences of the use of ambiguity in *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now* I will point out how *Apocalypse Now* makes use of Conrad's narrative techniques in order to subvert the genre of the conventional war film.

### **4.3. *Apocalypse Now* as a Subversion of the Conventional War Film**

Conventional war films which are a subcategory of action adventure films usually focus on “visceral excitement and the thrill of violence” while characters and character development play only a minor role (Monaco 361-2). Some parts of *Apocalypse Now* fit the characteristics of conventional war films while others differ from it significantly.

In contrast to *Heart of Darkness*, *Apocalypse Now* is full of exciting and violent scenes. The most prominent one is the helicopter attack on the Vietnamese village, but one could also mention the scene at the Do Lung Bridge or the attack on the navy patrol boat by arrows. Even if the latter incident seems in its mise-en-scene to be taken directly out of the novella, it comes across to the viewer in a more exciting and surprising way because the film viewer does not get a prior warning in contrast to the novel reader. In *Heart of Darkness* Marlow and his crew anticipate an attack by the natives before the actual attack takes place and even Marlow’s report of the attack by arrows is preceded by Marlow’s anticipatory remark that “[s]ticks, little sticks, were flying about” (Conrad 49, 55).

The battles and dangers which Willard and his crew members encounter along the river in *Apocalypse Now* transform the military mission accordingly into a ‘real’ adventure. Like Marlow, Willard does, however, not take part in most of these adventures. The film contains only a few scenes in which he proves his strength. He is mostly passive during his journey towards Kurtz. He acts only overtly when he meets the tiger in the jungle and when he kills the Vietnamese woman on the sampan. Otherwise he is, like Marlow, an observer or in Murch’s words a “mirror through whose reflection [the audience is] able to watch this incredible war” (Ondaatje 44). But in contrast to Marlow, Willard exchanges his role of the passive observer with the role of the active hero at the end of the film when he kills Kurtz in order to liberate Kurtz’s compound from Kurtz’s rule and the state of a wasteland.

But Willard is not clearly determined to kill Kurtz from the beginning. To the contrary, he does not feel confident when he receives his mission. This is due partly to the fact that he is ordered to kill a fellow soldier but also to the fact that he is troubled by the experiences of the war which he has undergone so far. This becomes clear in the scene at the hotel room in Saigon where he fights against an invisible Vietnamese enemy whom he imagines to be there. He feels so threatened that he finally hurts himself. But despite these troubled feelings he cannot imagine returning to America. He is relieved when taken to the military headquarters in order to be given another task. His mission to eliminate Kurtz differs, however, significantly from his earlier tasks. In contrast to these in which he killed the Vietnamese – the ‘real’ enemies – he is now ordered to kill Kurtz, a fellow soldier. This unexpected task

makes him reflect about the war. He does not understand the charges against Kurtz because what the officials tell him about Kurtz's behaviour does not seem to differ from the behaviour of the US army.

His decision finally to kill Kurtz presupposes consequently a character development. I argue therefore that the representation of Willard's character development is at least as important as the representation of the war spectacle. The focus on Willard, the interrelationship of his story with Kurtz's story and the viewer's identification with him sets the film apart from the conventional war films even if Jacobs asks us to consider that the identification with Willard is complicated by the fact that he is "too idiosyncratic" (Jacobs 215). Jacobs bases her assessment on the fact that he kills the badly injured Vietnamese woman on the sampan in a cold-blooded way to enable him to continue his mission without further delay. This makes him in Jacobs's opinion "inscrutable and perhaps malevolent" (ibid). Jacobs's interpretation may be plausible. But the focus of this scene is in my opinion not on Willard but on his crew members. Their idea to redeem the act of injury by bringing the Vietnamese woman to a doctor highlights the absurdity of the crew's reasoning. The Vietnamese woman is so badly injured that no doctor could help her. I interpret Willard's behaviour therefore as a necessary reaction, to release the Vietnamese woman from further suffering. This reaction reveals his character development. Instead of merely obeying orders he takes his own decision in opposition to his crew members. This decisiveness is a first step towards his final decision to kill Kurtz.

Apart from the fact that he murders the Vietnamese woman, Willard possesses character traits which help the viewer to identify with him. He is an American and the viewer can follow many of his judgements, as for example his comment on Kilgore after the helicopter attack: "If that's how Kilgore fought the war, I began to wonder what they had against Kurtz" (Jacobs ibid). He is, however, not entirely like his audience. He is, like Marlow, simultaneously an insider and an outsider. Even if he receives his orders as a soldier from the generals of the US army he is set apart from the other soldiers because he does not long to go home while his mission differs significantly from ordinary military operations. Willard's off-centre position, which is comparable to Marlow's, makes him highly suitable for confronting the American audience with a critical stance towards the Vietnam War.

But *Apocalypse Now* differs slightly from *Heart of Darkness* in its approach to address the viewer. In contrast to Marlow, who tells his story to the listeners on board the *Nellie*, Willard does not tell his story to an audience within the film. Willard addresses instead the moviegoer directly in the way which I have described in 2.2.

Murch describes the effect of Willard's direct communication with the moviegoer as follows:

[W]hen Willard looks at the camera, you feel he's looking at us – at the audience – and thinking: can you believe all this? I guess it has to do with the intense subjectivity of the film: the fact that Willard is the eyes and ears through which we experience this war (Ondaatje 46).

Murch's comment that Willard is the eyes and ears of the audience corresponds to Marlow's attempt in *Heart of Darkness* to turn the listeners into eyewitnesses. *Apocalypse Now* tries to turn the moviegoers into eyewitnesses of the Vietnam War. The fact that Orson Welles had planned a similar approach to filter his narration through his narrator reveals that this approach is crucial for the transmission of the narrative. Jonathan Rosenbaum, who has studied Welles's *Heart of Darkness* script, describes Marlow's role in Welles's film project, in similarity to Murch, with an allusion to the visual and aural senses as "Narrative Voice" and "unseen hero" (Rosenbaum 28). The subjectivity of Willard conveyed by means of the eye contact and the voice-over narration contributes significantly to the viewer's identification with him. This enables him to confront the viewer, like Marlow his listeners, with unfamiliar information.

Another important aspect of *Heart of Darkness* that contributes to the significance of the story is the fact that *Apocalypse Now* has an open end. At the end of the film it remains unclear what Willard will do in the future. One wonders whether he will return to America or whether he will stay in Vietnam. Supposing that he will return to America we do not know if he will contact Kurtz's family and in case he meets them what he will tell them.

Both factors, the importance of the viewer's identification with Willard and the importance of the lack of finality, lie no doubt behind Coppola's decision to exchange the draft of the frame story which I have addressed in 3.1. with the one that is part of the film versions of 1979 and 2000. If Willard's story had been addressed to someone within the film it would have been easier for the viewer to feel detached from the content of the story. This is made more difficult when the viewer is directly addressed. In this case there is no one else who can make sense out of the ambiguous messages which are conveyed to the moviegoer by means of contradictory images and sounds. These ambiguous messages in *Apocalypse Now* manage to create the form of dialogue which Marlow has with his listeners in *Heart of Darkness*. The way in which the ambiguity derived from the dialogic strategy has influenced

the interpretations of both *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now* will be the subject of the following two chapters.

#### **4.4. The Pro-Imperialistic and Anti-Imperialistic Stance in *Heart of Darkness***

Some passages of *Heart of Darkness* may be read both as pro-imperialistic and as anti-imperialistic. The passage which deals with Marlow's preoccupation with maps exemplifies this well. Like his fellow Englishmen, Marlow is fascinated by the "glories of exploration" which spur his wish to travel to exotic and unknown places (Conrad, 8). Even if this fascination has lost some of its charm since his childhood it still motivates him to travel to the Congo. This becomes clear when he says about the Congo that "there was one yet – the biggest, the most blank, so to speak – that I had a hankering after". This remark can be regarded as a pro-imperialistic attitude (Conrad, 9). But he immediately subverts this stance stating that the Congo in fact is no longer shrouded in mystery. The blank space has been filled "with rivers and lakes and names" which have turned it into a "place of darkness" (ibid). However, what he means by 'place of darkness' remains unclear at this early stage of the narrative. It can both stand for the skin colour of the Africans and for the terrible deeds of the white colonialists.

As a consequence of such ambiguity critics debate hotly whether Conrad defends imperialism or whether he criticises it. The critics who call Conrad an imperialist argue that his works convey the imperial discourse which prevailed at the end of the 19th century while others, who call him an anti-imperialist, claim that his works subvert that discourse.

This kind of contradictory responses have marked the criticism of Conrad's works right from the beginning. The following two comments on *Heart of Darkness* from the time of its publication reveal that even at the heyday of the Empire the opinions differed considerably about what stance the novella takes:

It must not be supposed that Mr. Conrad makes attack upon colonisation, expansion, even upon Imperialism' *The Manchester Guardian's* reviewer assured contemporary readers ...

In December 1992, in *Academy and Literature*, Edward Garnett noted the novella's subversiveness, as 'a page torn from the life of the Dark Continent – a page which has been hitherto carefully blurred and kept away from European eyes. (qtd. in White 1996, 179)

The review in *The Manchester Guardian* plays down Conrad's criticism of imperialism maintaining that it fits into the imperial discourse that prevailed at that time, whereas the review in *Academy and Literature* highlights Conrad's criticism by saying that *Heart of Darkness* reveals the negative sides of imperialism.

The dispute concerning the attitude towards imperialism expressed in Conrad's works, which Edward Said discusses as "Two Visions in *Heart of Darkness*" in his work *Culture and Imperialism*, continues up to the present day. The subject that engages most critics is the treatment of the natives in the novella. White sums up the disparate contemporary standpoints as follows: "While many have agreed that in any case, the psychology of the colonialist most engages Conrad's attention, others contend that that very backgrounding of native peoples and landscapes is objectionable" (White, 1996, 179).

Chinua Achebe belongs to the second group of critics. He regards Conrad not only as pro-imperialist. He even criticizes him for being "a bloody racist" (Achebe 788). In the article "An image of Africa" Achebe discusses Conrad's way of using Africa "as a foil in Europe, a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest" (Achebe 783). His main criticism concerns Conrad's use of the African setting as a mere backdrop and the fact that Conrad depicts the African people in a dehumanized way (Achebe 788). He claims that Conrad thereby reinforces the myths which circulate in Western discourses about Africa.

Cedric Watts, who belongs to the critics who defend the opposite standpoint, has responded directly to Achebe's critique with the intention to refute Achebe's arguments. Watts maintains that Achebe would have come to another conclusion if he had taken the context into account in which the novella was written:

If Achebe had but recalled that *Heart of Darkness* appeared in 1899, when Victoria was on the throne, when imperialistic fervour was extreme ... he might have been more prepared to recognize various unconventional qualities of Conrad's tale.  
(Watts 1983, 197)

Watts rejects Achebe's assertion that Conrad reinforces existing myth. He argues that Conrad does in fact the opposite by proving wrong "the myth of inevitable progress ... the myth that white civilization is necessarily superior to 'savagery'" and "the myth that imperialism is the altruistic matter of 'weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways'" (ibid). He admits that Conrad's fiction employs clichés as part of his narrative strategy. He has to

establish them first in order to be able to subvert afterwards (Watts 1983, 198). Watts contradicts Achebe also with regard to Achebe's assumption that the Africans are depicted as inferior human beings. Watts claims instead that the Africans "are by far the happiest, healthiest, and most vital" group of people in the story. Instead of being a foil to highlight the superiority of the white men the Africans are actually used as a yardstick against which to measure "the depredations of the white man" (ibid).

I agree with Watts's argumentation. As I have pointed out in 4.1. it is a convention of the adventure story to focus on the hero and to use the natives merely as a backcloth. This often results in characterizing the natives in a stereotypical way. *Heart of Darkness* is no exception from the rule with regard to this aspect. But this does not necessarily mean that *Heart of Darkness* treats the natives worse than the colonialists even if Achebe tries to convince others of this.

There are several passages in *Heart of Darkness* which highlight the strength of the natives in opposition to the weakness of the white colonialists. Marlow praises for example the helmsman for having achieved something: "he had done something, he had steered" (Conrad 62). Taken out of context these sentences might appear ironic and degrading. But this remark must be seen in connection with Marlow's description of the futile work of the colonialists in the Congo who plan among other things to build a railway at the Company's Station. But the only work that is actually done there is to detonate cliffs which are not in the way (Conrad, 18). At the Central Station meeting a brickmaker who has not produced a single brick for more than a year even if this is supposed to be his occupation, Marlow notes also the incapability of the colonialists (Conrad 28-9).

Another passage which opens the door for criticism when taken out of its context is the stereotypical description of the cannibals. But comparing the cannibals with the colonialists, Marlow draws the conclusion that Western civilisation does not necessarily entail progress. He has found out that "[p]rinciples won't do. Acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags" the value of a human being depends instead on the inborn strength which helps a human being to resist evil temptations (Conrad 44). *Heart of Darkness* shows clearly that the cannibals possess this strength whereas the colonialists do not. This becomes clear when Marlow tells us that the cannibals give not the least impression of desiring to eat human flesh despite the fact that they must be close to starving. Their restraint stands out clearly against Kurtz's lack of restraint (Conrad 51, 72). The latter reveals the degradation of the colonialists while the natives gain the respect of the whites.



Taken in context the tale offered the reader at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the possibility to become acquainted with realities of imperialism otherwise hidden from them. Watts argues accordingly that the unconcealed version of the reality “obliges the reader to ask whether civilization is a valuable, fragile improvement on savagery or a hypocritical elaboration of it” (Watts, 1983 199-200).

#### **4.5. The Pro-War and Anti-War Stance in *Apocalypse Now***

The Vietnam War belongs to a series of wars which the US government fought after World War II in order to defend democracy and freedom and to prevent communism from spreading all over the world. However, the government lost its support on the home front during the Vietnam War when the public was informed through independent media sources about the inhuman ways of waging the war. The knowledge of inhuman warfare led to an anti-war campaign which finally resulted in the capitulation of the US army.

The scene of *Apocalypse Now* in which Willard and the other American soldiers go ashore after the helicopter attack refers to the discrepancy which existed between the version of the Vietnam War made public by the US government and the real war in Vietnam. The fact that Willard is asked by a camera man not to look directly at the camera because this would look unrealistic reveals the manipulation of information in order to present the war in a certain way.

But besides the voices of the anti-war campaigners one could also hear voices of people in America who maintained retrospectively that the war could have been won if America had fought the war with more powerful means. This stance is expressed in the film by Kurtz when he advocates the use of “the primordial instincts to kill without feeling without passion, without judgement” in order to win the war.

*Apocalypse Now* makes use of Conrad’s narrative strategy in *Heart of Darkness* to address a topic about which an ambivalent attitude prevails. It uses the Vietnamese, like *Heart of the Darkness* the Africans, as a backcloth in order to highlight the inhuman and absurd behaviour of the whites. As an example one can mention Kilgore’s behaviour after the attack on the Vietnamese village. Kilgore pretends to be human giving water to a wounded Vietnamese. However, it does not come to his mind that he has caused the injury in the first place and he is quick to abandon his humanitarian mission as soon as he gets a chance to pursue his own interests which revolve around surfing. His inhumanity becomes even more obvious when he calls in an air strike to bomb a whole area with napalm to be able to surf, not caring about the large amount of Vietnamese who will lose their lives in the attack.

That is not the only scene which foregrounds the inhuman and disrespectful behaviour of the American soldiers. When they listen to loud American music and have fun in splashing the Vietnamese Willard's crew members show no respect when they pass by the Vietnamese population on the shore. The imposition of the American culture on the Vietnamese is even more emphasized in the scene of the USO show. Here the Vietnamese, standing behind a fence, become witnesses of how the American soldiers are sexually attracted by the playboy bunnies. The scene ends in chaos and fighting among the American soldiers who, having thrown overboard their common sense, are only driven by their sexual desires. The behaviour of Willard's crew members becomes even more absurd and outrightly inhuman in the encounter with the Vietnamese woman on the sampan which I have described in detail in the narratological comparison.

But *Apocalypse Now* does not only show the deficiency of the American soldiers. The military officers who take part in the meeting with Willard at the military headquarters seem to know how one has to fight the war in order to be successful. The general who gives Willard his mission talks explicitly about the two-sidedness of the human nature, saying that “[t]here is a conflict in every human heart between the rational and the irrational, between good and evil, and good does not always triumph” (Tomasulo 153). Taking only his words into account he seems to be saying that one has to act rationally if the good side is to win. But his straightforward utterance becomes ambiguous when one also takes the lighting of this scene into account. Tomasulo has made the observation that “he turns his head to the dark side” when he says ‘rational’ and to the light side “when he says ‘irrational’” (ibid). The lighting contradicts the content of his utterance. Judging from the lighting he seems to say that “the ‘dark side’ – ruthlessness – might be the rational and efficient way to win the war” (ibid). This can however hardly make sense to Willard at this point because he has just been ordered to eliminate Kurtz who is condemned for his ruthlessness which is officially described as ‘unsound’ methods.

How thin the borderline can be between officially sanctioned and officially condemned ruthlessness becomes clear in the subsequent scenes with Kilgore in which the superiority of the American army is foregrounded. The way in which the attack on the Vietnamese village is filmed might encourage the viewer to take a prowar stance. Tomasulo describes the filming of the helicopter scene in a fitting way as an “aestheticization of [the American] violence” by the “use of wide-screen, low-angle long shots of helicopters in tight formation flying up from the horizon into the arising sun” which “creates a grandiose, romanticised, and even heavenly

aura of battle that changes destruction and death from acts of horror into Armageddon-like sights of awe-inspiring beauty” (Tomasulo 149).

This prowar stance is, however, counteracted by the fact that the American soldiers attack innocent schoolchildren who gather on the village square in their neat white clothes shortly before the attack. These children do not at all correspond to the stereotyped image of the Vietnamese enemies which is propagated by the US government. Yet antiwar feelings which might arise do not last long; the impression that the people of the village are peaceful has to be revised when a Vietnamese woman destroys an American helicopter with a bomb shortly afterwards.

Eventually, however, the ambiguity of the helicopter scene is replaced by scenes which are less ambiguous. The American warfare seems to be marked by failures. Willard’s crew encounters more and more chaos in the American military camps along the river. No one seems to be in command and the crashed American military airplane proves the fact that the seemingly superior Americans can be defeated despite the propaganda in the official media (cf. the scene of Kurtz’s reading of newspaper articles to Willard described in 3.2).

As a result, *Apocalypse Now* can be regarded both as a prowar movie and an antiwar movie. Tomasulo explains that the ambiguity of the film has led to different interpretations:

On the one hand, *Apocalypse Now* has been read as an antiwar statement because many scenes depict the absurdity and outright lunacy of America’s Vietnam politics, as well as the machinations of high-level military commanders. On the other, certain elements of its content and style work against this dovish reading. For instance the title, *Apocalypse Now*, seems to emphasize the destructive, prowar side of the film, derived as it was from the antiwar slogan “Peace Now!” Yet it is also possible that the title is an ironic warning of the ultimate dangers of extended conflict. (Tomasulo 149)

Similar to Watts’ question with regard to *Heart of Darkness* the viewer of *Apocalypse Now*, confronted with an unconcealed version of the madness and the absurdity of the Vietnam War, has to ask whether a military intervention is an adequate means to promote freedom and democracy. This question introduces the moral dilemma imperialism ultimately puts to the test.

#### 4.6. The Moral Dilemma of Imperial Politics

A discussion, which attempts to find a definite answer to the question as to whether *Heart of Darkness* and *Apocalypse Now* are for or against imperialism and the war respectively, will miss the point. For in fact the significance of both is that they hold an in-between position.

Candrea describes the in-between position with regard to Conrad's fiction as follows: "Conrad's fiction explores the benefits of embracing the values and commitments of a particular culture as well as the inevitable limitations and drawbacks of doing so" (Candrea 318). That means that Conrad's fiction partly speaks for the universality of certain values while at other times it defends liberal values. Candrea argues that it is due to this in-between position that Conrad's fiction is today as relevant as it was at the time of its publication, because "it calls our attention to a dilemma that continues to characterize contemporary political debate" where liberal ideas clash with supposedly universal ideas (ibid). Candrea in fact does not discuss the Vietnam War to make her point. She refers instead to the Iraq War. But her statement is equally valid for any conflict where one nation tries to implement supposedly universal values in another country by force.

In *Culture and Imperialism* Saïd deals with the present relevance of imperialism. He expands the scope of his earlier work *Orientalism* by including also "European writing on Africa, India, parts of the Far East, Australia, and the Carribean" in order to "describe a more general pattern of relationships between the modern metropolitan West and its overseas territories" and to shed light on the problem, that the European imperialism of the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century "still casts a considerable shadow over our times" which has been neglected in discussions about the significance of 'imperialism' (Saïd 1994, xi, 5). He defines imperialism as "thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you do not possess, that is distant, that is lived on and owned by others" which he distinguishes from colonialism in so far as the latter does not only aim at controlling distant countries but also aims at the foundation of colonial settlements on distant territory (Saïd 1994, 9).

Even if many people in the Western world agree that the European imperialism of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century has come to end with the decolonisation after the Second World War, it is important to realize that it still influences the present (Saïd 1994, 7). This is also true with regard to the United States even if they were not involved in the European colonisation of the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century. Saïd discerns parallels between the European colonisation and the American imperialism. He claims, with reference to Richard Van Alstyne's *The Rising American Empire*, that America "was from the beginning founded upon the idea of 'an *imperium* – a dominion state or sovereignty that

would expand in population and territory, and increase in strength and power” (qtd. in Saïd 1994, 8). That intention resulted in practice not only in the gain of North American territory and the subjugation of its native people but also in the intervention in foreign countries in order to maintain American interests. The Vietnam War is one example of so-called American neo-imperialism. The Iraq War mentioned by Candreva is another example and there are even more recent examples, such as Afghanistan and Libya.

These interventions are always accompanied by a twofold propaganda. American politicians propagate, on the one hand, “American ‘greatness’ ... hierarchies of races ... and perils of *other* revolutions” and excuse, on the other hand, American interventions overseas with the argument of “doing good, fighting for freedom” (Saïd 1994, 8f). The strategy brings to mind the ideologies which supported the colonization of the rest of the world by the European empires in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The French Plantation scene, which is part of the second version of *Apocalypse Now*, provides a link between European colonialism and American neo-imperialism. It is an elaboration of Marlow’s remark about the existence of white colonialists in the jungle in *Heart of Darkness*:

Sometimes we came upon a station close by the bank, clinging to the skirts of the Unknown, and the white men rushing out of a tumble-down hovel, with great gestures of joy and surprise and welcome, seemed very strange – had the appearance of being held there captive by a spell. (Conrad 42f)

In *Apocalypse Now* the French rubber plantation of the de Marais family emerges unexpectedly out of the fog when Willard and his crew members pass along the river. The ruined landing of the plantation stands in sharp contrast to the colonial splendour of the mansion to which Willard and his crew members are invited. The French family lives there as if the French colonial rule were still to exist. They show off their wealth and French culture in front of the eyes of the Vietnamese who work for them as servants. Apart from the fact that they defend themselves with weapons when Willard and his crew members arrive at the plantation, one can hardly believe in the scene at the plantation that there is in fact a war going on in Vietnam.

During the dinner Willard asks the family why they have not returned to France after the end of the colonial rule in Indochina. This question initiates a political discussion between the French men while Willard functions again as an observer. The conversation reveals that

the de Marais family feels different from their compatriots in France whose attitudes towards colonialism have changed. In contrast to the compatriots, the de Marais family is prepared to fight for their plantation because they regard themselves as the owner of the land, which they colonized 70 year ago.

The scene does, however, not only provide a link to French colonialism. It also provides an explanation for the American involvement in the Vietnam War and a comparison of this war with the French Indochina War. De Marais explains that the implantation of the Vietminh, an organization that led the struggle for the Vietnamese independence from the French rule, is actually the fault of the Americans because they invented the Vietcong, a guerrilla force that fought with the help of the North Vietnamese army against the South Vietnamese and the United States (Encyclopædia Britannica Online). And he claims that the Vietnam War will not prevent the Vietnamese from becoming communists; according to him it will have the opposite effect. Another member of the family hints at the general validity of de Marais's conclusion by repeating the words of an American diplomat in Saigon: "Look. Yesterday, it was Korea. Today, Vietnam. Tomorrow Thailand, the Philippines ... then maybe Europe." The comment reveals that military interventions lead only to new wars whose actual, but not overtly discussed, purpose is to prevent communism from spreading all over the world.

De Marais warns Willard that the Americans might make the same mistake as the French in Dien Bien Phu, where the French lost the decisive battle in the French Indochina War, by underestimating the enemy (ibid). He foresees that the Americans will be defeated in the Vietnam War and that afterwards all whites will have to leave the country preventing them from 'cooperating' with the Vietnamese. However, what the French men at the dinner table regard as cooperation, is for the viewer a form of oppression.

How well de Marais can predict the future becomes clear when he gives reasons for the French defeat. These reasons can be directly transferred to the American defeat in the Vietnam War. The wars were in both cases accompanied by student protests at home and the government had, as he says, "put the army in an impossible situation where they couldn't win." This conclusion can however only be drawn in hindsight by the viewer of *Apocalypse Now*. De Marais at this point did not know how the Vietnam War would end.

Interestingly, de Marais distinguishes his fight for remaining in Vietnam from the Vietnam War fought by the Americans as is evident when he says to Willard: "I will see if your men need any help to ... repair your boat so that you can go on with your war." He makes this distinction because he thinks that the Americans have no right to be in Vietnam in

contrast to his family. However, the viewer of the film can probably not detect any difference when comparing the effects of colonialism with the effects of neo-imperialism.

Both kinds of imperialism are justified by an idea even if the formulations of the idea have changed over time. They can be subsumed under the form of conquest which Marlow describes in *Heart of Darkness* as follows:

The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. (Conrad 7)

The discrepancy between the conquest and the idea behind the conquest is a central aspect of *Heart of Darkness*. The novella criticizes from a liberal standpoint the universal approach of imperial politics but it does so at the expense of the native people whom it humiliates on racial grounds. Candreva describes this clash as follows:

On the one hand, [Conrad's works] show the falseness and the folly of the Europeans' attempts to impose their ideals on other peoples in other places. At the same time, as many have noted, Conrad's critique consistently draws from a racially charged vocabulary that is intertwined with a number of racist assumptions, including the designation of Africa and of Africans as primitive, savage, uncivilized, and dangerous. (Candreva 318-319)

*Apocalypse Now* uses a similar narrative strategy. It reveals the madness and absurdity of the American intervention in Vietnam which pretends to bring freedom and democracy but instead brings death, destruction and the imposition of American cultural values. Nonetheless this is shown from an American point of view which results in the representation of the Vietnamese in a stereotypical way.

This in-between position is in no way a mistake. It is part of the intention of the two works and it is calculated to make the reader and viewer respectively aware of the fact that in judging self and others, (s)he resorts to different sets of values.

*Apocalypse Now* however goes further than *Heart of Darkness*. It does not only reveal the dilemma of imperial politics but, in so far as it ends with Kurtz's murder by Willard, also tries to make a statement directed at future generations. As I have pointed out in 2.1. this murder is not part of *Heart of Darkness*. It is derived from the story of the Fisher King as mentioned in 3.1..

This murder together with the title of the film seems to signify to me that imperial politics have no future. This message is however not clearly expressed in the film. The narrative of *Apocalypse Now* shares with *Heart of Darkness* the ambiguity and the lack of finality as I have pointed out in 4.5.. It is up to each viewer to make sense out of the ambiguous messages.

## **Conclusion**

It has been the goal of this thesis to analyze Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* and Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now* to distinguish an adaptation from mere intertextual references. The high degree of deviations which occur, when comparing Francis Ford Coppola's film *Apocalypse Now* from a narratological point of view with Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness*, on which it is based, render this example highly suitable for this investigation.

Several aspects pointed to the fact that *Heart of Darkness* may be regarded merely as an intertext of *Apocalypse Now*: The film is generally regarded as an independent work of art; it differs significantly from *Heart of Darkness* in its spatio-temporal setting and in the type of adventure; *Heart of Darkness* is not mentioned in the screen credits and many other sources are invoked.

But if one pursued the idea to regard sources merely as intertextual references one would challenge the whole concept of adaptation. One would in fact cancel out the significance of the meaning of the source text for the meaning of the adaptation. But as this thesis shows the significance of *Heart of Darkness* is highly relevant for the meaning of *Apocalypse Now* both from a narratological and an ideological point of view.

Even if one can detect differences in the use of the various sources at work in *Apocalypse Now* the thesis shows that they are used intentionally. While some sources only influence parts of the film, *Heart of Darkness* contributes significantly to the overall structure and narrative strategy and thereby to the total meaning of the film. The invention of the implied author and the specific style which is employed in *Apocalypse Now* are of high significance to the film. Examples of the invention of the implied author which can be found in both works are the biased representation of the natives and the representation of the endeavour of the whites as futile. As regards style one can point out that *Apocalypse Now* does not aim at an authentic representation of the Vietnam War. Instead the film wants to raise moral questions regarding wars in general by conveying the reality of wars in an artistic way.



The distinction between an inner and an outer journey of the protagonist and the subversion of the adventure story with its use of ambiguous messages in *Apocalypse Now* are part of the narrative strategy derived from *Heart of Darkness* in order to raise moral questions. The viewers who are not familiar with the narrative strategy of *Heart of Darkness* will probably miss this intention and interpret *Apocalypse Now* as a conventional war film focusing mainly on the depiction of the war spectacle and less on Willard's character development and his specific role as an observer. This would result in regarding Willard as a soldier among his peers who simply conveys his personal experience of the Vietnam War. And the viewer could in this case remain detached from Willard's story.

Another aspect which would get lost if one regarded *Heart of Darkness* merely as an intertextual reference would be the significance of the frame story. As I have pointed out in 2.2., even for the viewer who is familiar with *Heart of Darkness* it is difficult to discern the borders of the frame story. One can therefore assume that the viewers who do not expect a frame story will interpret the narrative of *Apocalypse Now* as a tale told straightforwardly, starting with Willard when he receives his mission and ending with Willard when he has carried out his mission. The narrative would thereby lose its complexity and its lack of finality which is together with the transmission of the ambiguous messages crucial for the viewer's engagement. This engagement is derived from *Heart of Darkness* by transferring Marlow's role as an observer to the passive Willard who guides the viewer with his voice-over narration.

Furthermore *Heart of Darkness* also contributes to the significance of *Apocalypse Now* from an ideological point of view in so far as it brings to mind the negative aspects of colonialism which are comparable to the negative aspects of neo-imperialism. Presupposed that one is familiar with both works of art one can easily detect parallels between the deficiencies of the whites and conclude that the negative aspects entailed by imperial politics are universally valid. And the viewers will become through the identification with Willard witnesses of the reality of the Vietnam War as opposed to the official propaganda which will make him/her aware of the moral dilemma of imperial politics. *Apocalypse Now* taken on its own hints only at the fact that colonialism has been succeeded by imperialism. But it does not point out the negative aspects of colonialism.

The comparison of the possible interpretations based on the assumption that *Heart of Darkness* is regarded either as an intertextual reference or as a source text of an adaptation shows that the meaning of *Apocalypse Now* would be clearly diminished if *Heart of Darkness* was merely an intertextual reference.

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